

Be a Big Brother

I am writing this holiday season with two special appeals to my fellow men. I want first to share some of my thinking that prompts these appeals.

Growing up as males in this society, we got hurt, I believe, in specific ways common to us all. Though it is our inherent nature to be loving, expressive and to wish the best for everyone around us, we were pressured into also being fearful, stoic and competitive. From the moment we saw it as "un-male" to stay close to our mothers, we began feeling a particular isolation and loss not experienced by most of our sisters. Some of us may have found nurturance available from our fathers, but often not enough — as our fathers were operating under the effects of that same isolation since the time of their own childhoods. Hoping to end this chronic loneliness, we (those of us who ended up heterosexual) developed obsessive feelings about women — giving them a mystical power over us that they, in their heart of hearts, did not welcome. Only from them, it seemed to many of us, could this lost nurturance be reclaimed. (It is this very power that is used over us in advertising; in this sense, it is not just women being exploited in ads with sexual overtones). Thus do certain men in our midst, confused and angry about something that was denied them long ago, become so desperate and fearful as to take a woman's life from her. And so my first appeal is to encourage all men to open up this "baggage" and safely dispose of its contents, using whatever therapeutic resources you find accessible. One thing that helps is to expect more from our relationships with other men. I think that we got so accustomed to feeling isolated, we lost track of the importance of relationships, particularly within our own gender. We have everything to gain.

Almost every day we read more disturbing news about the state of young people. My year in the Holyoke public schools was a "crash course" in the topic. Often I would say to myself, while attempting to learn from a particular boy why he needed to dis-

rupt my class on a regular basis: If only I had some quality time with him on weekends; what a difference that would make. And so finally I followed through and became a Big Brother volunteer. I do it because I'm a social change activists, because I love young people, and because parents (especially single mothers) deserve enough space in their lives to realize their postponed personal goals. But the most important reason I get together with my nine-year-old friend is what it does for me — those of us who aren't parents have generally forgotten a lot about what it means to play.

But now I ask my fellow men: Why aren't there more of us doing this? You give a boy a few hours each week and it changes his life. What could bring more satisfaction than that? The same boy who gives headaches to his fourth-grade teacher is a whole different story one-on-one. Big Brothers/Sisters of Franklin County has a long waiting list of boys whose mothers have been thoughtful enough to enroll them in the program. I've met a number of them, all delightful. If you don't already have children, I ask you to consider the possibility of making the decision, as my wife and I have, of not having them — instead making room in your life for some of the many children already out there not getting enough attention.

We are a global family; and only when enough of our children get the loving attention they deserve will we have a population that can set the world right. If you'd like to hear more about my experience as a Big Brother, give me a call.

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