

A true sense of community doesn't come via phone, fax or Fedex
[NORTH SPORTS FINAL, C Edition]

Chicago Tribune (pre-1997 Fulltext) - Chicago, Ill.

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Date: Apr 26, 1991

Start Page: 23

Section: PERSPECTIVE

Text Word Count: 508

Document Text

Sally Ruth Bourrie lives in Chicago.

Not long ago they toasted Studs Terkel. I went because I'm a huge fan. But by the time the evening ended, I was thinking less about Studs Terkel and more about what it is exactly that my generation seems to be missing-and looking for-so desperately.

Baby Boomers are obsessed with being connected. We fax, Fedex and "beep" each other. We keep our answering machines on and our modems up.

No other generation has traveled so often and such great distances. For me and my friends, hopping on a plane is as much a part of life as hopping on the "L." Our "community" has no geographical boundaries.

Studs' toast made me rethink all that. Software and fiberoptics are poor substitutes for the human heart. And maybe what we need isn't so much to connect as to belong.

Studs' "toasters" were mostly over 60 and mostly from Chicago. They talked in shorthand-Haymarket, Algren, Bughouse Square. Words filled with history and ideology and style. A transplanted Chicagoan, I got only part of it.

What I understood completely, though, is how being of a place is so much more than where you hang your hat. It's not just trodding the same land and streets as other folks who happen to live where you do. It's sharing a past and an outlook, people and experiences on a daily basis, not grabbing moments between catching planes.

Because being a citizen of the global village isn't enough. Sure, we must all take care of our planet and its people. We must all live our lives with conscience-clearly, that's what Studs' life has been about. But even working for the good of our planet's billions isn't tangible enough to keep our hearts filled up.

No bulk of good works or reaching out and touching someone long distance can replace sharing a cup of coffee at the kitchen table. Or shooting the breeze over the back fence. It's these small, daily things that keep us grounded.

I chose Chicago after having lived in many other cities. I liked how people here are down to earth, yet sophisticated. And it's gorgeous, both architecturally and in its unspoiled lakefront.

That's all I knew about the city, and it was enough to keep me coming back until I decided to stay. But it wasn't until I saw decades of friendship up on that podium the other night that I got a clue about how a city, or whatever place one calls home, can nurture a person for a lifetime.

So it was with irony and a big, "Duh, hey!" that I remembered the toast was being sponsored by the Center for Neighborhood Technology. No wonder. That's what they're all about, improving people's lives at the local level, believing that from small things large ones can grow.

Maybe it's time, then, to try to get to know my neighbors. To become more knowledgeable about what's happening in our city government and why.

To take a walk by the lake-and leave my beeper at home.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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