

## CHANGING THE WORLD ONE MAN OR WOMAN AT A TIME

There's times that I just sit and wonder what the world's a comin' to. What with all the thunderin' and lightnin' and earthquakes and floods and all. It seems odd that some folks go so much without water that their crops all wither up and die while folks a lot like them, but in a different place, are up to their necks in so much water that they wish that they could find a spigot somewheres and shut it off for a while. It just seems that everything in the whole world is in commotion, a shakin' or a dryin' up, or a soakin' somewhere or another.

And it's not just the storms that's changed neither, it's the people too. They've changed a whole lot since I was a kid. It used to be that when you went up to a house and knocked on the door that the folks would invite you in and talk to you a bit—kinda friendly like; but now, unless they know you well enough, if they talk to you at all it's out on the porch with the hot sun a bearin' down on you or the frost nippin' on your nose. Why just the other day some women came to my door to give me some tracts that she said would help me be a better man and when I invited these ladies to come in out of the cold they didn't want to do it. They said they'd rather just stand out in the cold to talk for a minute or two. What's folks comin' to?

Now it's the same thing with neighbors. If you talked with Afton Mackie (she's 90 years old now) she'd tell you that neighbors was special people back when she was growin' up—good friends maybe. Why they'd even visit with you when they got a chance. Maybe it was over the back fence, or out in the field, but a lot of the time they'd just come to the door and ask if you had time to sit and visit. And if you ever got in trouble you could count on your neighbors to help. They didn't have to be asked, they just knowed somehow, and showed up to help you out. It makes me a little bit sad to watch Afton's eyes mist up and leak out when she tells that that she doesn't have any neighbors any more—oh, there's people that live all around her—but they're not neighbors, they're just strangers that live near by, And because she can barely walk she can't be a neighbor to them either. It's a sad world.

The telephone hasn't helped much either. It used to be that you used the telephone to get closer to folks; but now it seems like the telephone's just another way to push people away, what with all the fancy things they've got it to do. When I was a kid it was just like talkin' to somebody up close, only you couldn't see them; but now they've fixed it so that a feller can look at the telephone and read who it is that's on the other end; and if they don't want to talk to you they just play like they're not home and let their answerin' machine take a message that's hardly ever returned. It's got so that the telephone is just one more way to draw yourself back into your own little world where other people can't bother you much.

The problem with all this, it seems to me, is that we're all missin' out on a whole lot of happiness. When your hair gets gray, and your joints begin to complain when you try to use them, you realize that the things that are really important are a whole lot different than you thought they were. Take 'things' for example. A lot of folks think that havin' a lot of things around—houses, cars, clothes and maybe other expensive junk—makes you happy; but if you'll look in a closet—any closet or drawer—you'll discover a lot of things taking up space that you don't use any more. You thought they were important once, but now they just gather dust. A lot of what you thought you couldn't live

without has become just so much expensive junk that you once thought would make you happy—and did it? And the answer's almost always no, What makes a person happy is family and friends and real honest to goodness neighbors.

Here's one example I remember; My mother, Olivia, was as fine a woman as ever walked the planet and she did a whole lot of good things in her life. She raised 12 kids and helped to raise a few more than that, she worked hard in the Church and stood up for what's right in the town we lived in. She did a lot of good things. One day I asked her to pick out the one thing—the one thing that she thought was the most important among all the things she'd owned or experienced in 85 years, and her answer was instant—she didn't even have to think, even for a moment, quick as a wink she said: "Family, hands down, no contest!" And then she told about her family and friends and all the good things they done. It was a sweet moment.

And so what should be done about all of this pushin' other people out of our lives, or not includin' them in our circle of friends? It sure can't be changed by makin' new laws and pushin' people into doin' it—they have to be led.

Maybe if I could get a little bit better at making people feel important, or helpin' them out when they need a helpin' hand. Maybe if the things I do could nudge other folks to do a little more that way themselves, we'll all feel the joy of it and it can swell up until more and more folks are a doin' it.

But I've learned one thing in my long and adventurous life—the only one I can change is ME. Oh maybe in can influence my wife and kids and neighbors some; but mostly I can only change me.

Do you think it's possible for only one fellow to start a worldwide revolution by simply changin' the guy that's lookin' back at me out of the mirror? If it is, it will make a lot of people happy; and if not I know of one who'll be a lot better off.