

## BLOOM WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED

By Donna R. Jensen

As the last strains of music faded on the stereo, peaceful silence filled our living room. How clean and sweet the little ones were! The moonlight filtered down on them through the window as they lay on bedrolls across the floor, in chairs and on the couch...eleven of them. They ranged in age from three to eight, boys and girls. Upstairs my three children slept in their rooms.

They were my neighbors in a 42-apartment government housing project in a small community in Pennsylvania. It was Saturday night and the children had come from all around the courtyard, freshly bathed, in their P.J.s with bedrolls and clothes for church in the morning.

Allyson, my fifteen-year-old, and I had gone from apartment to apartment inviting children and adults to come to church. The adults weren't interested but many would allow their children to go. After several weeks of good intentions and unkept promises, I decided that the only way the children could make it was if I'd have them come Saturday night.

This meant a commitment of our Saturday nights and would require the co-operation of my children. There was no problem with Allyson or April who was eleven. Thirteen-year-old David was another story.

Struggling with his self-image and embarrassed by where we lived, he did not identify with our neighbors. After a lot of discussion, he did agree to let us do it and found himself joining in on many of our activities.

They came at 8:00 P.M. We made a craft, had a snack, and then gathered in the living room to sing choruses. After settling into their bedrolls, I told them a Bible story. As they drifted off to sleep, we listened to Christian music tapes sung by children.

How different these children were in appearance and demeanor through the day! Weather permitting, they played outside from dawn until nine or ten at night. They must have been cleaned up from time to time through the day, but rarely did you see them that way.

They learned early to fend for themselves. For the most part they settled their own quarrels. One morning, the angry screams of a little girl, barely three, drew me to my window. She didn't need my help... An older boy was pushing her down the sidewalk at a high rate of speed on her big wheel. Coming to the end of the walk, he let her go with a shove that sent her up an embankment, where she toppled over.

Jumping to her feet, she gave him a verbal lacing with language that would have blistered paint!

I had not wanted to take my children there to live, but after my husband and I separated and he left for Arizona, I had no other choice.

The apartments themselves were very nice. What made it so unpleasant was the bad language that bombarded us on all sides.

Stumpy, the step-father of three of the children living there, would go running across the parking area and up to someone's door yelling obscenities as he went. You'd have thought he was going to kill someone! An exchange of epithets would follow, but no blows were ever exchanged.

My door was standing open one summer day when Stumpy went through one of his tirades. So startled was I that I jumped at his first beller. Surely this was it! Whoever he was unloading all that on would punch him!

I stepped up to the screen door to see if I would need to call the police. My heart sank as I saw him yelling at his eight-year-old daughter! The problem? She had asked permission to ride a friend's bike. It took all that yelling and swearing to say no...

As I stepped back from the screen door, my movement caught his eye. Embarrassed, I believe, that someone who openly professed Christ was a witness to his behavior, he turned his attack on me. It literally made my knees buckle! He yelled, "Move out!! You don't belong here, you...you... **C-h-r-i-s-t-i-a-n!!!** Drained, he stormed into his apartment.

Tears streamed down my face. My stomach was tied in knots... waves of nausea swept over me. Now I knew what it felt like to be that little girl!

Shutting the door and locking it, I paced through my apartment, grateful that my children were not at home.

What should I do about this, Lord? I asked, still sick at my stomach. I was reminded of Paul's admonition to apologize to those who have "ought" against you. I couldn't imagine facing Stumpy, let alone apologizing to him!

After much prayer and a cup of tea, I sat down to write a note of apology.

Stumpy,  
  
Whatever I did that  
offended you, it was not my  
intention to do so. Please  
forgive me.  
  
Donna

I believe my apology kept a barrier from rising between us. We never became friends but we were able to speak.

As Sunday mornings dawned, a holy quiet replaced the brawling of the night before. Happily, the children arose, clearing away the bedrolls so that we could get through.

Preparation for church was a joint effort: fixing hairdos, buttoning buttons, tying shoe laces, cooking the French toast, pouring the milk, grabbing Bibles, and dashing for the bus that came for the fifteen of us.

Over a period of several months, Jesus began to manifest Himself in the lives of the residents of the Project. Some reverence for the things of God began to appear. There was less negativity. Parents came over with questions. They bought Christian music tapes for their children. They borrowed and discussed my books.

On the playground new sounds were heard. Amid the swearing and name calling a little girl sang, "Jesus Loves Me", as her swing lifted her high into the air.

