

Loneliness myth exposed

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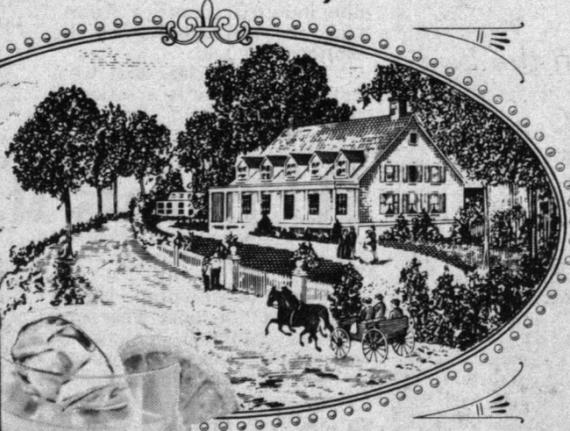
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by the staff of Student Help

Loneliness is a universal experience; despite this, it is surprisingly hard to admit to. We fear that others will mock, or be embarrassed and "turned off" by our disclosure, that we will be considered ungrateful. In addition, the media push an image of "normality" that does not include loneliness, intensifying our feelings that we should not be lonely. We would like to banish the myth that loneliness is for "social rejects", and explore it in the open.

It is impossible to define adequately a word as subjective as "loneliness". It is NOT synonymous with "aloneness". We disagree that it should be described as a disease or epidemic. It is an absence of something, a yearning, a hunger. It is alienation from self, others, society in general. It is isolation - social or emotional.

If being human involves being lonely, loneliness is nonetheless a more apparent problem in this century than ever before. Studies highlight the fact that young adults experience it more acutely than any other age group. It is normal to feel excluded, unloved, alienated, and bereft of anyone to talk to in any new environment, and the University of Alberta is a large campus. Therefore, you are not unusual if you are lonely. This article offers no "miracle cure". However, some ways of dealing with loneliness are more constructive than others.

There are few of us who could honestly say we have no expectation that others (or another) can take our loneliness away. Man is a social creature, and we do depend on other people to satisfy some of our needs. Believing that someone else can "solve" our loneliness for us, however, is asking the impossible, and can doom a potentially fulfilling relationship. Relationships, even intimate ones, enhance life; they cannot be its substance and solution. Our relationship with ourselves is the most important we will ever form.

It is important to recognize that being alone does not have to be a negative experience. The word "solitude" expresses the positive side of aloneness. When used creatively, solitude is productive, reflective, re-

juvenating, healing. It is essential if we are to come to know ourselves. In fearing aloneness, equating it with loneliness, and burying it in passive sensory stimulation (T.V., radio) and distraction, we throw away the chance to discover this. Practising enjoying our own company adds both to how much we enjoy others, and what we have to offer them. What we are "missing" when we feel lonely need not be someone else; often, it is harmony with ourselves.

This is not to say that loneliness cannot be shared within and lightened by friendship and social involvement; simply that by holding our expectations of others so high and our self-esteem so low, we cheat both ourselves and those with whom we want to be close.

Intense or chronic loneliness sometimes leads us to behave in ways which worsen the situation. If we bombard an acquaintance with our need, we may cause alarmed retreat, which we see as rejection. If we are over-cautious, fearing rejection and exposure, people may see us as uninterested or cold. In both cases, the remedy is: listen to others, really listen. Do not use what is said as a point of departure for your own monologue, stifling the other person's views and personality with your own. Ask interested questions - draw that other person out.

While intimate friends can be expected to listen to our pain sometimes, acquaintances can not. Friendship takes time to develop, but while popularity is available only to a few, friendship is available to everyone. Conflict and disappointment are part of any long-term relationship, but they are lessened if we don't expect the unachievable.

Joining a group of some kind can alleviate social isolation to an extent. Volunteer work can help us come to terms with our own need, and to balance giving and taking. Working at appreciating solitude benefits everyone. It is encouraging to learn that self-esteem increases continuously from the late teens into old age!

For those who want to know more, we recommend two books: *In Search of Intimacy* by Carin Rubenstein and Philip Shaver, and *The Loneliness Factor* by Ronald Rolheiser. Or drop by our office at 250 SUB. 432-4266.

Bombers to get bail?

VANCOUVER (CUP) — The five people charged in connection with the B.C. Red Hot Video bombings must wait until March 1 before finding out whether they will be granted bail.

The five lower mainland residents face 17 charges each, including car theft, sabotaging a B.C. Hydro substation and robbing a grocery store of \$53,000 on Feb. 1, 1982.

The defendants' lawyers asked for an adjournment of the Feb. 21 hearing until March 1 when they will present their case for bail.

The five are Brent Taylor, 26; Gerald Hannah, 26; Ann Jansen, 29; Juliet Belmas, 20; and David Stewart, 25.

Since the start of the hearing Justice Byron Baston has ordered a ban on the publication of evidence related to the case.

The courtroom was packed with more than 100 supporters and the families of the five, reporters and undercover police. Supporters stood when the defendants walked into the courtroom, and cheered loudly when they left holding clenched fists in the air.

Supporters held a rally at the courthouse before the hearing to support the defendants' right to a fair trial, and to protest the media's coverage of the case and police harassment of Vancouver's alternative community.

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