

# VILLAGE VIEW

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Establishing your own niche when you first move into a settled community can be a challenge. New communities attract a majority of young families; where everyone is a newcomer, all face the same problems whether school needs, flooded streets, inadequate municipal services, or zoning regulations. A sense of belonging is quickly forged in these circumstances, bonds of friendship are formed, and relationships grow.

Just as new communities attract young people, settled ones appeal more to older couples. To the recently retired, quiet stability promises freedom from hassles. Sometimes, though, that stability makes more difficult the process of assimilation.

Not only do retirees, many of whom change their residences at the same time they change their working status, break ties with the business world, but they also withdraw from a familiar and comfortable circle of friends and neighbors.

Once the new home is chosen and the move made, finding a place in the new community takes time and effort. It is, however, an opportunity for rewarding experiences. Little thought, at first, is devoted to socializing. Early weeks in a new house are busy ones; furniture arrangements, color schemes, garden care, and getting organized fill the hours. After those details are completed, however, appetite for social contacts develops. Desires for companionship and compatible friends encourage most newcomers to seek stimuli beyond their own dooryards.

Conventional paths to making new friends, such as church attendance, local politics, fraternal organizations, and volunteer service are good avenues to pursue; extra hands, fresh ideas, willingness to contribute are always welcome in such groups. Golf, tennis, chess, or bridge clubs are also integrating elements offered in most communities. No new resident need feel neglected if playing competitive games is enjoyable.

Not everyone, however, wishes to make the necessary commitment of time and effort to any of these activities; some are jealous of personal time, have work that demands

long hours of solitude, such as painting pictures, writing poetry, composing music, or other goals best achieved while alone. Still, those people, too, need outside interests and occasional contacts with others of like persuasion.

In a Sun Belt state like Florida, the vast majority who now call it home came originally from other parts of the country. The same is true of communities on Cape Cod. People moving into the area bring with them their habits and interests from home; they form new chapters of Elks, Lions, Masons, and Moose; they start new Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, and they join organizations already here such as historical societies, library associations, garden clubs, and hospital volunteers.

Newspapers print calendars listing rock and gem club and orchid society meetings, benefit card parties, educational lectures, suppers, brunches, films, dog and cat shows, seminars on subjects ranging from "balanced living" to "batik and acrylic design" to "coping with cancer." The local daily carried all these in the past week. There is no dearth of activities among which to choose.

The notice that caught my attention was the County Writers' Association; the first meeting I attended was in January. Three people had gathered before I walked in and a dozen more came later. Among the early arrivals was a lady in a wheelchair, accompanied by her daughter. I soon learned the younger woman runs a carnival; I'd never before met anyone connected with a carnival. The encounter stirred memories of childish dreams I once harbored of running away to join the circus.

Another of the trio was a potential new member, like me; she had recently sold a short story to the *Reader's Digest*. Both she and I were warmly welcomed by members of the association.

Later I discovered among those present were a lady who, although no longer young, is an avid scuba diver and a poet; a sociologist working on a professional paper; and a couple of retired gentlemen. One is mid-way through a full-length novel; the other specializes in short stories. There were also a writer of mysteries and science fiction, an author of children's stories, a creative writing teacher who conducts classes for gifted children at a nearby school, and another poetess.

The group meets twice a month and, in addition, offers a workshop for members who want extra help. At regular meetings, after a short business session, members read current work-in-progress; following the readings, critical comments are made by other attendees.

Suggestions for changes may range from word usage to theme development, from sentence structure to style. Praise and encouragement are important elements of this critique;

helping with titles, opening and closing paragraphs, or revision of the entire plot becomes a group effort. Writers rapidly develop thick skins but find their skills improve as they incorporate suggested changes.

At workshops, assignments are given and between meetings the work of each participant is reviewed by the leaders who recommend changes, possible markets, and analyze how well the current assignments were fulfilled. There is nothing compulsory about assignments, of course, yet each writer makes an attempt to come prepared. Editors handing out assignments to writers demand specifications to be met.

For me, the Writers' Association answers a need to be part of this community without committing many hours of my time. I gain skills, help other writers improve their work, and enjoy the company.

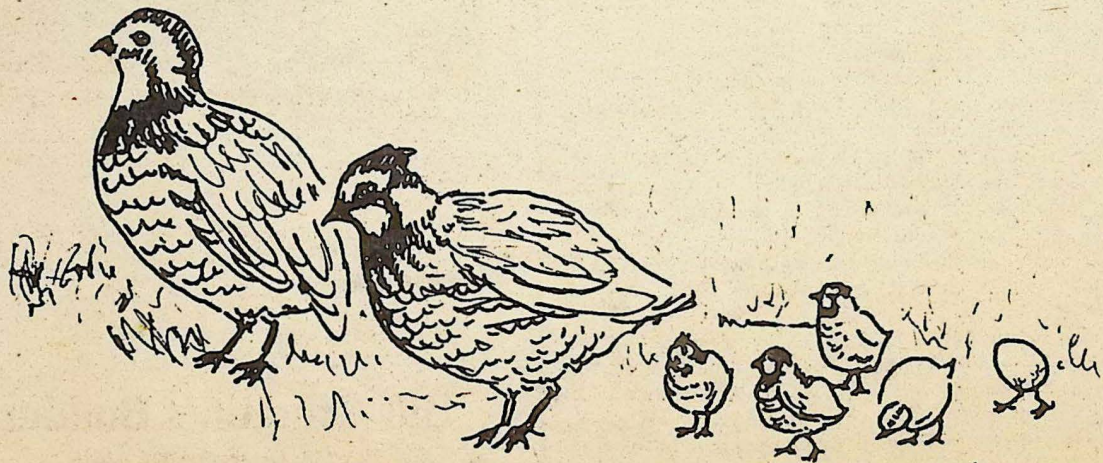
Were you to think about moving to a new neighborhood, you might hesitate, fearing loneliness after dropping out of your established circle. Joining a writers' group might not appeal to you at all. You might prefer playing shuffleboard, pitching horseshoes, going to dog races, joining a yacht club, surf fishing, taking classes at a community college, belonging to an amateur photography group or drama club, or bird-watching.

Whatever your inclination may be, you will find people who share it and who are hospitable. You can be as active as you wish, as selective as you like, give a little or a lot of time; the choice is your own.

Just one word of warning: the initiative must come from you. Nobody will rush to your door the day after you move into a new community to urge you to attend a meeting, try out for a play, or join a church choir. No matter how diffident you may be about taking the first step, if you want your own place in the community, you must make the first move. Go to church, attend a meeting, offer your services, extend your own hand in friendship.

Yesterday while window shopping I was happy to meet one of the women who belongs to the Writers' Association. As we chatted, she mentioned she sometimes has lunch at a nearby restaurant. Picking up her cue, I suggested we meet there someday soon and visit over lunch. She responded enthusiastically, explained her grandchildren would be visiting this coming week, but when they had gone, she would be delighted.

I'll call her next week, after her company has departed. Perhaps we will become friends as well as acquaintances; perhaps not. Either way, we shall enjoy a pleasant lunch and each of us will forge another link with this community.



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