

My Somerset Life

A diary by Brian Snellgrove

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The benefits of meeting in small groups

At heart I am only partly a group person though I do encourage networks and networking and have created a few in my time which has been a great privilege. This morning I attended a small group in the welcoming home of a family from South Africa. Françoise kindly made a gluten-free apple cake which all enjoyed. Apart from three couples the rest of the gathering were people living on their own.

It is interesting to see how people cope when they live on their own either from divorce or a spouse having departed this life. I noticed in the conversations that it is very therapeutic for people to share their problems.

One lady was talking at length about her eyeglasses and saying that she woke up one morning to find that her vision was severely deficient. She finds that under certain circumstances the Vision returned to normal so clearly there is a long term problem which is the dysphasic condition between the working of the two eyes.

Added to that is the problem of aging. She had varifocals which she was advised would take two weeks to get used to. As a varifocal person myself I would say that four weeks is nearer the mark. What was of Interest is not so much the subject matter is the fact that she felt comfortable with talking about it in depth and being listened to.

The same woman talked about when it was most appropriate to call in plumbers and electricians and builders when the financial constraints on her were quite severe. That is the problem with one person living in a single property.

I know that 800,000 people in the UK have not claimed income support but perversely the powers that be ask no less than 245

questions so I would understand people giving up as an early stage especially those who are not used to form filling and computers.

We had another lady with two teenage children who was a single parent. She felt that she was not supported by her ex husband. She said things like 'you have to do your best' and 'I don't want to cry in front of the children' but she also admitted that the previous weekend she had felt a failure as a wife, a mother, and a human being.

This caused her to break down into tears for which of course in the English way caused her to profusely apologize for in spite of my explanation that crying and indeed laughing is the very good pressure release mechanism given to us by our creator.

One thing led to another and when the hostess of the meeting entered the room she asked if she could go for a walk with her to talk about her situation. I noticed that she was far more embarrassed about her crying than we were embarrassed as observers. I said that the damage is caused not so much by the crying but by holding it back but I think that was lost on her so busy was she in describing her situation.

We had also discussed the value of allotments and community gardens and I said that if everyone had a allotment or garden space there would be far fewer people suffering from mental disorders because of contact with nature and communication with fellow allotment or garden holders

The point is that we may all gather and start in the true British way with talking about the weather, the state of the country, and the state of our health but once the atmosphere of trust has been created we turn to other things that are more important for us, which are things that have been on our mind and about which we have not been able to share with other people.

This was in my opinion the main value of the meeting for me and why I will be attending these meetings most Saturdays as a good way of starting off the weekend. You don't need a vast amount of resources to care or love. Creative listening combined with love is one of the greatest healers and the worst thing in the world is to feel that you are the only one that experiences such and such a condition

There is no need for shame about supposed failures, it is part of the human condition.

As a person with a partner I tend to forget how difficult it is for the single, bereaved, divorced person to manage especially when there are children involved. I count my lucky stars and give thanks. I could be in that position one day.

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