

Community is something we all seek. It's curious where we find it

The early morning gang at the USM lifeline gym is punctilious about making it. Not making it, like in Olympics, or becoming a CEO in corporate America, or making it on American Idol, but just making it. To the sounds of "Hey, you! Didn't come yesterday, aye? You goofin' off again?" they arrive. Some trying to make it for the opening of the door in the morning, to some who arrive leisurely, content in the knowledge of it being like it was the last time when they were here; full of friends, laughter and good natured ribbing. It's the only community for some, but a rounded whole all in itself, replete with spirit and quiet determination.

Community: it's curious where we find it. From the tongue clicking San tribes of Africa to the salt collecting caravans of Tibet to the interwoven networks of families in India to the sororities and fraternities of America to the USM Gym, it exists as a living, breathing entity that feeds the spirits and the souls of the people who belong to it. It takes care of its members; nourishes them, watches out for them.

All over the world, people live clustered in villages, towns, slum colonies and cities; a testament to the spirit of community. Sometimes it exists underground; figuratively and literally, like the subway dwellers of New York City who live in its underground tunnels. Above ground the gleaming skyscrapers maintain their own communities stratified by economic levels and the many arterials radiating out from the city communalized sometimes, by countries of origin, or race.

Arts, crafts, music, sports, academia, parenthood - a common bond pulses through each of them, bringing people who share the same interests together, forming and reforming groups, continuously reshaping their format, evolving, changing, maturing and sometimes, dissolving and starting all over again.

None of these communities exist in isolation as one single unit separate from others. They all intersect and move through each other seamlessly. Within a school community, live the communities of teachers, of school-friends that might last a lifetime or who in a few moments of togetherness form joyful memories that would last for ever, and of parents who come together as a result and form bonds of friendship with each other.

How sad it is to be lonely in a crowd? To be an orphan in a world full of parents. To be left out because of skin color, or religion, or language barriers on a blue-green planet that explodes with colors on contact. To be unlinked in a networked world?

Yes, there are those intrepid climbers who make it alone to the top of Everest, and those early pioneers who broke ground for the waves of immigrants who followed them to America. There are those courageous few, who stand alone sometimes, for their convictions and those that choose to navigate the world all by themselves in a hot air balloon or a boat. But for every successful launching, there exists a firm foundation built by many hands.

But what about the forced armies of the child soldiers in Congo, or the gun-toting male and female soldiers of the Maoist rebels of Nepal, or groups of people that divide along ethnic lines ready to kill one another? What about the Shias and the Sunnis, both Muslims, fighting each other? What about the Crusaders of the past? And what about those, of the present? Does there breath a certain organism resembling a community in each one of them too?

I shudder to think, for to me the word means to come together, to commune, in peace. It is something that brings joy, comfort and help. It's something that empowers and motivates, much like my Gym where a member feels comfortable chatting and exercising on a treadmill with their oxygen tank plugged in.