

7/29/06

Haifa... A City On A Hill

by
Tom Holbrook

Those who have lived in Greenbrier County, WV for any length of time have heard of the “rift” between the Eastern and Western ends of the county. Many say it has always been that way and will always be that way. Management vs. Labor... Owners vs. Workers... Coal vs. Agriculture... Union vs. Non-union... a seemingly endless list of differences has divided the county for years on end. The annual meetings between rival East and West football and basketball teams have resulted in fantastic games and, also, fantastic fights between fans.

When consolidation of the county’s schools began, on all levels, it was predicted that there would be a blood bath with students from heretofore rival schools fighting everyday; children’s learning would suffer because of the trauma associated with going to a new school; children would suffer because of having to travel 2 hours each way on the school busses and children would suffer just because, well... just because children would suffer. Needless to say, it wasn’t the students who were the problem but the parents who had carried forward the animosity and hatred shown by their parents in the past toward rival schools. We found out, however, that once students were allowed to co-mingle without angry parents around to remind them daily how much the kids should hate each other, genuine friendships were formed with former rivals and cohesion within the communities in question began to take shape.

Will absolute peace and total absence of mistrust become a reality between the two ends of the county... only time will tell? We do know it will take a bucket load of patience and understanding to give it a chance. I’m betting that the good people of Greenbrier County will overcome the problems and platitudes of the past and enjoy a period of peace and tranquility if given the opportunity.

For those who can remember the world famous Hatfield-McCoy feud between the West Virginia’s Hatfields and Kentucky’s McCoys, which is but a memory now, you realize that even the most violent of relationships can be made peaceful by getting rid of those members creating the ruckus and allowing those with a desire for peace to take charge of the situation.

People all over the world are saying it is impossible for “those people over there”, you know... Jews and Arabs, to live in peace and the two peoples will never be able to peacefully co-exist in the Middle East.” Well folks, the people who say this don’t know what they’re talking about and there are plenty of examples of friendly co-existence between Arab and Jew.

Haifa, Israel is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. sitting high on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, with a bustling seaport and economy it reminds one of San Francisco, CA with steep streets going straight up and high rise condos dotting the skyline. Haifa is the main area of Israel now under attack by Hezbollah terrorists. BBC News said this about the town and its inhabitants in a recent news release... “In contrast to other towns in Israel, where mutual suspicion tends to keep the two peoples apart, Haifa is renowned for the harmonious relations between its Jewish and Arab citizens. Here Arabs - who account for just under 10% of the city's 250,000 inhabitants - work and live together with Jews as equals, a unique model of Arab-Jewish coexistence in a land torn by religious discord.”

When traveling to Israel in April I asked our Palestinian bus driver, who is also an Israeli citizen, if he has difficulty living in Israel being a Palestinian. He emphatically said “NO!” He said he has every right that the Jewish citizens have and besides being employed with the same company for the last 25 years, he said the nation of Israel provides him with health insurance, a growing retirement plan, great schools for his children and all the rights and privileges of any other Israeli citizen. He said the Israelis are a hard people, attributable to their constant struggles with the enemies without and within, but they are fair. He asked me, “How long could you remain soft and nice if you knew thousands of people surrounding you had vowed to see your destruction in their lifetime?” I felt his sadness in admitting it is his people who are the bad guys in this whole scenario.

The conflict boiling over right now in Israel and Lebanon should not be allowed to be cut short with an arbitrary cease fire, leaving conditions as they were before this latest outbreak of violence. The troublemakers and rabble rousers must be found and eliminated, or at least disarmed. Hezbollah and Hamas leaders who have instigated this recent blood shedding should be punished with prison or execution and the citizens of both countries be allowed to establish their level of peaceful existence with each other. It can and will happen if we stop trying to solve this challenge with political correctness and take the bold steps necessary to allow it to happen.

Think on this... look around where you live at those good friends and acquaintances of ours who came here from Lebanon, Israel and other hot spots in the Middle East. We attend community club meetings and activities with them... we socialize and party with them... we argue peaceably with them... and we laugh at their stale jokes as friends should... in short, we live in harmony with them as human beings should. We do it because we want to. Others in the world could do the same, if only they wanted to.

#

