



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Getting Closer

One of the problems accompanying urban living is we live so close together we never get to know each other. For years I had a next door neighbor who lived in an entirely different world from me. Our teenage daughter would feed their fish and dog when they went away for weekends. I spoke to him when I went out in the morning to pick up the paper from the driveway, wisecracked when I saw him fixing his car in the carport, and shouted greetings over the backyard fence if one of us was cooking with charcoal. But I never knew them, even though our bedrooms were only 35 feet apart.

Urban living does that.

In the rural days the fellowship between neighbors, who might live 15 miles apart, was often deep and real. You'd see each other once a week at church or the market, or the grange meeting. But if there was a new baby, or a sickness, or a need,

the "neighbors" came in to help. Let a new family move into the community and join the church and they could expect a "housewarming." The pantry would be filled with good things to eat, the women would hang drapes and the men would chop wood or mow the pasture. By the end of the day everyone was just that much closer. If a family needed to build a new barn, 40 men might show up on a Saturday to "raise the roof." The lady folks would fix a huge dinner and then, after the work was done, everybody would join in a big square dance in the new barn.

But we don't live like that anymore. If you have a flat tire in your driveway you have to call the service station, because your next door neighbors will drive right by you on their way to work. And why not? You're strangers. If you build a new church building you have to hire it done. How many churches, in this urban age of specialties and fast

living, are built because the doctors, lawyers and bankers take off early from their jobs and give many hours to spreading tar on the roof or tacking carpet in the foyer? It's easier to hire it done. As a result, though, we don't know each other.

Last Saturday I took part in an activity, which, if it continues, could help reverse that trend. Our church had been given seven acres of land to be used as a missionary retreat center. A simple appeal went out last Sunday. We need men with chain saws, rakes, axes and machetes to clear the ground. Sixty men showed up. The women came, also, some to swing an axe, some to help with the lunch. There were a lot of tired bodies at sundown, but something far more important than clearing ground took place. People, some of whom lived across the street from each other, others who lived 20 miles away, got to know each other. It was worth the blisters. Maybe there is hope for us yet.