

A Rising Tithe

by Margot Knight

In the 1989 film, *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, a woman in therapy moans, “Garbage. All I’ve been thinking about all week is garbage. I mean, I just can’t stop thinking about it.” You are reading a magazine by women for women. And let’s face it, we worry. And these days we worry a lot — about our children, about spouses being laid off, about domestic violence.

The patient is overwhelmed. She is paralyzed by the enormity of bad things she feels powerless to fix. I feel that way when I hear Carol Wick of Harbor House talk about domestic violence. When Brent Trotter of the Coalition for the Homeless talks about families and veterans with no place to call home, much less home. Now I generally have a 2-minute “Ain’t It Awful” rule — two minutes to whine but then move on. Smile. Talk about the desirable future state. Some days it all feels like a drop in a deep, dark bucket.

The currencies of creativity and optimism are valuable but nothing beats the green kind. The price tag on homelessness? \$50 million a year for 10 years. We’re in our third year and we’re not making a dent.

I racked my brain about how to handle how damned unsettled I felt. A few years ago, I settled on a solution. Rather than thinking about what *other* people should do, what could *I* do? And that led me to something our foremothers and forefathers did regardless of their personal circumstances. They did it (and I use the term deliberately) religiously. *Tithe*. According to Wikipedia, a



tithe, from the Old English, is a one-tenth part of something, paid as a (usually) voluntary contribution.

What if we entered into a pact with our community to tithe for its needs? Seventy percent of us currently donate to a religious organization — 80 percent to non-religious ones (according to a study on social capital, available at the metrocenter.ucf site) but our gifts are modest ones, rarely exceeding \$500. A couple of years ago, the Social Capital Survey reported that that 85.9 percent of us

were satisfied with our financial situation, though I suspect that percentage is lower now.

So, if you don’t have money to spare, how about tithing some time? Volunteers are always needed everywhere. Short-term projects, long-term commitments. One-shot deals. Go. Alone or with your family. Share whatever resource you have to help the lives of others.

Let me take this eleemosynary equation one step further. The collective income of all Central Floridians is over \$70 billion. And we all have the same 24 hours in our days. Ten percent! Imagine that kind of money or time to further the well-being of others?

Your church, temple, college, United Way, the Philharmonic, the Coalition for the Homeless, the Sierra Club and, yes, perhaps United Arts (hey, our souls need nourishment, too). I’ve made my list. Give to one or give to a dozen. Give because it feels good. But give.

Caring for someone else is a way of caring for me. Sure it feels good but there’s a little enlightened self-interest going on too. Taking care of others today means taking care of my son and his quality of life in the year 2050.

A rising tithe of treasure or time. That floats my boat and raises everyone else’s at the same time.

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