

Mending Mailboxes

By Evan

Recently local press has been saturated with letters and articles reporting on bouts of vandalism. Mailboxes have been smashed, fences destroyed, and car windows shattered. The message is clear: undisciplined teenagers are on the loose. It’s Lord of the Flies in our town, according to the local press.

This reporter finds it frustrating that the newspaper brims with articles about teenagers knocking down mailboxes, and there are no articles about teenagers repairing those mailboxes. I offer this story, then, from an insider perspective, because at least in my family, I am the one who is given the task of restoring our battered mailbox to its rightful shape.

Last week our mailbox was smashed. The next afternoon, I bundled myself up, and headed out for the all-too-familiar chore. I lugged the contorted mailbox from the side of the road to the garage, hammered it back to some semblance of its original shape, put new stickers on it announcing our postal number.

Then I trundled everything out to the road, stuck the stand into the collection of stones that form our informal pedestal, and then found some new stones to prop up the mailbox until it was upright.

I only wish I could mend the reputation of teenagers like I mended our mailbox.

When a mailbox is smashed somewhere in this town, people immediately think what local resident, Mr. Thomas, confirmed in an interview. “Today’s teenagers have no sense of right and wrong.” In a survey of ten local adults, six of them agreed with this claim.

Across this town, there are hundreds of teenagers who go through life making small acts of kindness that prove Mr. Thomas wrong.

Check out a book at the library, and notice the unsung teenager who is quietly shelving books. Wait in line at the grocery store and notice the young person who asks as politely as possible, "Paper or plastic, sir?"

Go to the football game and witness the sea of orange as teenagers demonstrate school spirit.

Learn about the teenagers from town who travel to New York in the middle of the night to distribute blankets, hot chocolate, and food to the homeless.

Look into your own home and the homes of people you know and you will see young people working on their schoolwork, emptying the dishwasher, feeding the dog, cheering up a younger sibling.

Bring your son or daughter to the rec center, and notice that teenagers are there, volunteering, as they volunteer in nooks and crannies across this town and this country. Nationwide, teen violence, dropout, and arrest rates are all down. While civic engagement, school attendance, and achievement are all up. Research shows that teens, as a group, are actually more productive than they have ever been.

The history of America is a history of stereotyping and prejudice. In this land that promises each person the opportunity of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, prejudice happens too often. People are judged by complexion, class, gender, and age. We need to remember that we must remain committed to being part of the solution.

Let's be careful not to draw conclusions about an entire generation of young people based on the behavior of a few miscreants.