

There are people in that other world out there who care

You've read most of the news. And most of it is bad. The daily newspaper brings you a stew of crime, gloomy economic figures, seasoned with personal tragedies, all of it ladled on a bed of war or threats of it. Tonight on the tube, you can get samples of the same stuff from your favorite personality boys or girls. It doesn't make the menu any better.

I've always been troubled by my profession's absorption with this wretchedness. It can't be helped. We can't ignore the latest horror in the holy lands of the Middle East, the troubles in earning our daily bread or another transgression in Woodlawn.

Let me assure you, however, that there is another world out there.

There are people who care about their fellow man and do something about it at the expense of their energies, their time and often their pocketbooks. These people are the volunteers in our communities who help in a hundred and a thousand ways. They are rightfully being honored this week.

At the University of Maryland Hospital yesterday, it was Recognition Day with Nancy Brown, director of volunteers, presiding over a thank you lunch for some of their volunteers.

She and her staff gave out special badges and pins. They keep track of the total hours that a volunteer gives, which may not be the best way to judge contributions that people make. But you can count hours. No one has yet figured how to add up generosity, or how to measure tenderness.

Overall, the news is good. The number of volunteer hours is increasing at this inner city hospital that can be difficult to reach. In 1975, the hospital had 37,000 hours donated. In 1980, the total went up to 62,000. Last year, it was better than 73,000. And Nancy Brown reported that this March, volunteers put in 4,000 more hours than the previous March. Perhaps bad times bring out the best in people.

The lunch ran long because the hospital didn't want to miss anybody, not the senior citizens at Rodgers Forge and Violetville who knit and contribute baby caps so no infant goes home with a bare head, not the Har Sinai ladies who make stoma bibs, those small, airy scarf-life creations that fit around the neck of patients who have had their larynx removed, not any of the super-stars of volunteering who have given thousands of hours of their time.

Raymond Fallin, the short smiling octogenarian who volunteers in the cafeteria, was on hand to sing a spiritual. "He does everything and never says, 'It's not in my job description,' " his boss commented. He's done everything in 4,803 hours.

A couple of days a week, Louise Lawrence arrives at 5.30 a.m. at the hospital to help



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mainly in the information areas and the blood bank. She has reached 2,445 hours. This doesn't include her weeks spent volunteering at Baltimore County General Hospital.

The list of these champion givers goes on, Ann Virginia Rasmusen, 2,637 hours, Diane Moriguchi, 2,491, John Schmidt, 3,257, Katherine Roberts, 3,533, Lucy Smith, 3,996, Gladys Stump, 4,989. Well, you get the idea.

Many of the volunteers work full time. They are like Karl Grosche, who operates a commuter train. But in the Cancer Center of the hospital, he is the Peanut Man who relieves tensions in the intensive care ward with his railroad stories.

Many couples volunteer together. Eric and Ella Mae Hoover come down from Westminster to help out.

Volunteerism, it is said, isn't measured by what you get of what you give but what you become. Yes, but there is that intangible and heart-filling reward that the volunteers get when they know they have helped someone ill and alone. There is a letter from the lady who had cancer, her larynx removed and therefore could not speak:

I am having a second chance at life. God took something from me but has given me something in return. I have learned so much and you, you gave me so much love when I needed it. Your friendship and faith! I remember when you used to walk through my door—my whole day would change. Here was somebody who really cares—you would be surprised how much that helps. I needed you so much yesterday—I cried all day and night and looked at your flowers and thought of you. With a serious illness, friends and family find it difficult to be around but you understand and care. I need you so much . . . Please don't forget me."

The volunteer didn't forget. She visited the lady at a nursing home, brought her spring bulbs. The lady died. But she died knowing that there were people in that other world out there who cared.

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