

The Lonely in the Crowd

Years ago, the press carried a heartrending story of a young father who shot himself in a tavern telephone booth.

James Lee had called a Chicago newspaper and told a reporter he had sent the paper a manila envelope outlining his story. The reporter frantically tried to trace the call, but was too late. When the police arrived, the young man was slumped in the booth with a bullet through his head.

In his pockets, police found a child's crayon drawing, much folded and worn. On it was written, "Please leave in my coat pocket. I want to have it buried with me."

The drawing was signed in childish print by his daughter, Shirley Lee, who had perished in a fire just five months before. Lee was so grief-stricken he had asked total strangers to attend his daughter's funeral so she would have a nice service. He said there was no family to attend, since Shirley's mother had been dead since the child was 2 years old.

Speaking to the reporter before his death, the heartbroken father said that all he had in life was gone and he felt so alone. He gave his modest estate to the church Shirley had attended, and said, "Maybe in 10 or 20 years, someone will see one of the plaques and wonder who Shirley Ellen Lee was and say, 'Someone must have loved her very, very much.'"

The grieving father could not stand loneliness or the loss, so he took his own life. He felt it better to be dead than to live in an impersonal world.

How many James Lees are there in the communities where we live? They don't wear signs saying, "I'm lonely ... will you help me?"

Let us be alert to the people we encounter, offering them smiles, encouragement and hope.

And in the work of Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home, such behavior is everyday business.

– Beecher Hunter