



# City of Cambridge

21.

IN CITY COUNCIL

December 15, 1997

COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU  
VICE MAYOR BORN  
COUNCILLOR DAVIS  
COUNCILLOR DUEHAY  
COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO  
COUNCILLOR REEVES  
MAYOR RUSSELL  
COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN

RESOLVED: That this City Council go on record expressing its thanks and appreciation to **Derrick Z. Jackson** for his excellent column (attached) with a delightful description of the benefits of (Cambridge) neighborhoods; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to **Derrick Z. Jackson** on behalf of the entire City Council.

In City Council December 15, 1997.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

*D. Margaret Drury*

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury  
City Clerk

# In praise of good neighbors

## DERRICK Z. JACKSON

A recent letter to the editor made the blunt declaration that parents should consider themselves islands unto themselves. The writer said: "I do not have any children. If I did have children, I would consider it my job to care for them — either through staying home with them or hiring a private facility to take care of them."

"I would not expect my neighbors to drop their interest and responsibilities in order to do it for me. . . . No government has the moral right to force me to be responsible for my neighbor."

My first response to this is that we need to deduct 50 points for silly declarations by people without children. My wife and I when we were childless were guilty of this crime. One time we were at a Chinese restaurant, watching a family with an infant in a highchair. The child threw so much white rice around that the floor below looked like the Bonneville Salt Flats.

When we have children, we whispered to each other, they'll never eat like that. Right. Our family photos are full of our children with oatmeal, chocolate, juice, and spinach smeared all over their faces. The floors below them, depending on the color and the texture of the food and drink, have resembled either the salt flats, the Great Lakes, or the Grand Tetons.

My second response is thank God for neighbors. We have had the great fortune of living in neighborhoods in Cambridge where human beings, in the midst of very busy lives, still care for one another in ways that many people in America lament are lost. Within a few hours of moving into our house six years ago, Eleanor and David and Larry and Ann said hello. Jack and Chuck popped their heads over the back yard fence. Then came Daphne, Cosmo and Cathi, Peter and Joyce and Cathy and Louie.

This made us feel better about our move because the neighborhood we left had friends so in touch with children that when we adopted our first child, Fay and her two children, one of whom was also adopted, waited over the fence to greet his arrival. Upon the birth of our youngest son, Fay and Dave, Susan and Adam, and Chris and Tana made meals for us (a tradition we carry on with other families). Adults whose children were either much older or long gone, such as John and Cynthia and Philip and Phylis, gave our children books and toys.

On our current block, despite the fact that we physically see our neighbors too little, the chit-chat still evolves into neighborly favors of watching mail, feeding

pets, handing down toys, exchanges of tools, gifts of outdoor plants, and amicable dealings over renovations that temporarily destroyed neighbors' plants. It evolved into informing one another if anything odd had happened that day as well as surprise snow removals by Cosmo and his snow blower.

It evolved into help when parenting got rough. When I told Louie that our oldest son was a handful, he offered to let our son work on a couple of school vacation days at his pasta shop in the North End. Matt, a baker a few blocks away, had our son come in and help out in his shop. Lilly, a new neighbor, gave him a shot at being her personal snow shoveler.

Our son came back with triumphant tales of making ravioli, grinding coffee, and a better understanding that food is not something the Jetsons pop out of a computer. A couple of weeks ago, after our first snowfall, our son shoveled the snow without being asked. That was the first time that ever happened. I cannot help but think that the value Lilly placed on his work back then played a role in our son valuing the work now.

During Thanksgiving, we think a lot about our relationships to our nuclear families. But many of our friends say they live on blocks where they barely know any neighbors. In our case, we have been so blessed, the list goes on to John and Joanna and their daughter Jenna, who was one of the most patient baby sitters we have ever seen. Aylette has doted on the boys with books and exotic head-dresses.

Lastly, there is Ian. For the last two years, Ian has walked our youngest son to school. Our youngest son looks up to him like an older cousin. What is so touching is that even though Ian, a seventh grader, is about to become an adolescent, he always greets our son with a hug and walks down the street with his arm slung over our son's shoulders.

I do not presume to know what kind of world the letter writer who doesn't need neighbors envisions. It may be possible to raise a family with no help or nourishment from neighbors. It may be possible to be a neighbor without ever doing a thing for your fellow citizens.

More likely, that is a world where rugged individualism is an excuse for selfish isolationism. When I see an Ian walk down the street with my son, I see the reason why neighbors are neighbors in the first place. That child, that son of a neighbor, is well on his way to understanding that part of being human is displaying the ability to drop your self "interest." No doubt the world will be soon taking a very positive interest in him.

*Derrick Z. Jackson is a Globe columnist.*

**We can still care  
for one another —  
and many of us do.**

Boston Globe, Friday Nov 28, 1997 pg A27

undergraduate... the best access to graduate and... which lead to the more senior and higher-paying positions in society.

Although career prospects for liberal arts majors are very promising in the longer term, certain non-liberal arts

tial investment in undergraduate... making a living and to a productive career proud father of an English lit major.

#21

Joseph Short is president of Bradford College in A

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Derrick Z. Jackson is a Globe columnist.



21.

12/2

KT

(attached)

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expressing its thanks and appreciation  
to Derrick Z. Jackson for his excellent  
data column <sup>with all</sup> ~~is~~ a delightful  
description of the benefits ~~and~~ of  
(Cambridge) neighborhoods; and be it further

Resolved: SEC



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Consent Order #21

R-1514  
1513

Councillor Triantafillou re: Appreciation  
to Derrick Z. Jackson for his excellent  
column with a delightful description of  
the benefits of Cambridge neighborhoods.

In City Council December 15, 1997

**ORDER ADOPTED**