

A Project In Friendliness Changes Attitudes Of Hostile Neighbors



Front view of the home (top left) as it was when it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Shelby Steele, would discourage persons without stout hearts but the Steeles pitched right in (top right) on their rebuilding plan. At lower left are couple's twin sons, Claude and Shelby, Jr., and right is view of modernized building as it is today.

By MABELLE S. PERRY

When Mr. and Mrs. Shelby Steele moved into 15323 2nd ave., in Harvey (Phoenix) Ill., the immediate neighbors weren't too friendly, not being used to mixed marriages.

Claude and Shelby Steele, the six-year-old twin boys of a white mother and Negro father, had played with white and colored children before, but in their new neighborhood, they learned new words, and experienced a new attitude.

"Go home, Nigger boy," was a

command they had never heard before.

"Who are we to play with, Mommy?" was a question they never had to ask before. While hostility grew among the neighbors, a party was being planned by the Steeles.

The house was in pretty bad shape when they moved in. Weeds in front of the house had grown 6 or 7 feet! No paint had been on the house in 18 or 20 years. A few boards on the side were warped from age and the sun. Steps were falling down. However, the foundation of the house was good and the Steeles decided to fix it up.

Invitations were sent out to friends and distant neighbors to "COME TO A WORKING PARTY," but bring overalls, hammer and paint brush.

About 20 people white and colored came and proceeded to cut down the bushes, hammer down the siding on the house, and paint the house. Neighbors looked on, but said nothing.

As dusk began to fall, the "working party" fell to eating baked beans, spaghetti, salad, weiners, potato chips, and chocolate cup cakes that Mrs. Steele prepared.

By this time, a few of the hostile neighbors came around still not speaking very much, but they couldn't resist Mrs. Steele's wonderful cooking!

"Party" Lasts Two Weeks

When all the food was gone, and it disappeared quickly, the group began singing around the fire in true weiner-roast style. The "working party" was so successful that the Steeles decided to have another the following week-ends, until the house was finished.

Three coats of paint was necessary before the thirst of the doors was quenched. By that

time the thirst of the hostile neighbors was also quenched.

After witnessing the sincere, ardent work done by both white and colored workers, their curiosity could stand no more. They wondered where the Steeles got such wonderful friends and why should they help so eagerly on a house they wouldn't live in.

They discovered that many of the friends were members of the

Baha'i faith from Chicago and Phoenix, Ill., and some of the others were also interracially married. This opened the eyes of the neighbors.

There is no longer the hostility. The children no longer have to play alone. Mr. and Mrs. Steele would like to finish off the third floor of their house for any family regardless of race, really in need and are willing to give assistance to the project.