

The missing middle

The middle class has gone missing in this country. In America today it seems like we have the super wealthy and we have the poor, with the middle class nowhere to be found. People are either living in million dollar mansions or in appliance cartons, with many of the homes of the middle class tied up in foreclosure or bankruptcy.

We have become a nation of extremes. You're either making millions in stock options or you're on unemployment and food stamps.

Far too many middle Americans have been downsized and outsourced and their American dream has been turned into a nightmare. If you travel the middle of the road these days you'll either get run over by a Hummer or slowed down by a foreclosed Ford with only five years of easy payments left. The good old middle class American family car has been declared a clunker.

The middle class has become a niche market. We shop at Neiman Marcus or Wal Mart. Thrift stores are springing up everywhere. People either want their merchandise so dirt cheap it can only be made in China or so exclusive that only they can afford it. Main street has been "boxed" out as Mom and Pop had to close their doors years ago. You are either in, or you're out. A "stakeholder" or dispossessed.

Many have chosen to hide in gated communities, protected and out of sight from those who live in a barrio or tenement war zone. You either belong to the country club or mow the grass and change the sheets for those who do. Weeds are growing in the yards of the empty homes of middle class America. The grass roots have gone fallow in this country.

You are either connected or unplugged, Wi-fied or out of the loop. You're part of the privileged class or begging for quarters. We are even divided by those institutions that should unite us. On one hand we have religious zealots willing to kill for their God and on the other we see Wall Street heathens who only worship the almighty dollar.

If you watch TV or listen to airheads on the radio it seems like everyone is either a militant vegetarian or on the Atkins diet.

According to the evening news we have either become a nation of gun toting militiamen, or socialists out to destroy our democracy. Our founding fathers would be so ashamed of us.

We are out of whack. Divided by privilege, philosophy and cold hard cash. Senior citizens in their golden years are trying to survive on interest from their CD's paying one percent while young folks are trying to pay off their overpriced educations with credit cards at 15 percent interest. Regular folks can't get ahead. Where is the balance?

Modern day sports, where you are either a winner or a loser, are a good example. We idolize the player who hits the grand slam and barely notice the ones who got on base. Our colleges bend every rule to field football teams that will please the rich alums.

But average isn't good enough. Mediocrity or a losing record gets a coach fired, and so we graduate athletes who can't read and pay coaches more than the teachers at the same school whose purpose is supposed to be education, not entertainment.

We clap only for the American Idol or The Biggest Loser. Only the best, or worst, will do. The problem is we can't all be the best. Some of us have to be average. In the middle.

No where is our dysfunction so obvious as in Washington DC. Millionaire Congressmen are divided to the left and to the right with no one willing to meet in the middle. The only thing our leaders seem willing to compromise is their integrity.

Do I dare say that I think it's okay to be average in this country? It's all right to be in the middle. To place family values over a bigger paycheck and to soften our ideals a bit so that we might all agree on a common course.

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

The idea it's alright to be in the middle is as American as the Mississippi. Sadly, economically and philosophically, we are as "equally" divided as the cookie your older brother tore in "half." Make no mistake, that's where our true greatness as a nation lives. In middle class America.