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SENIORS

Sharing, Caring Is Her Lifestyle

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Dorothy Buxton grew up with the tradition that when things were tough in your family, you became a member of someone else's family. Family meant sharing, loving and, when necessary, sharing the children.

That tradition is still with her in the way she lives at the Alternative Living for the Aging community in West Hollywood, and the way she spends her time with the lost children of Los Angeles.

Buxton, 66, a native of Oklahoma City, arrived in Los Angeles as a teen-ager after spending a year in segregated Phoenix.

"Coming from an environment of separate schools and upstairs seating in movie theaters, Los Angeles was such a wonderful mix of people," she said. "We all had the same struggles, but we were encouraged by our parents and grandparents. That's why I think older people need to be around young people. Look at all that wisdom and knowledge young people would be getting."

Buxton's third grandchild was born last month, and she has been spending much of her time recently helping out with her daughter's family.

But sharing the love means just that, and Buxton is not one to wait to be asked before she gets involved. She has been volunteering at the Central Juvenile Hall in Watts.

"These are pretty stressed young people," she said. "They're self-protective, but if you spend time with them you can get through. I talk with them and ask them questions like how did you get into dope, and so many answer that their mothers sent them on errands to buy drugs. These children are 'without'—without mother, father, family. One young man broke down and said that no one had taken the time to take care of him. I feel they are entitled to be nurtured, cared for and loved."

Buxton thinks that we are all here for a purpose. She thinks everyone has talent, but she says she hasn't figured out what hers is.

"Whenever I look up at the universe, I think it is completely in order—it's mankind that's out of order. I know there's a purpose and that I will be guided to it," she said.

She remembers the day she was guided to the Schutrum-Piteo cooperative community, the newest of five cooperative complexes established by Alternative Living for the Aged, all on the Westside. She had just retired from her job as an administrative assistant for Kaiser Permanente and was living with friends when she saw an ad in The Times seeking healthy older people who wanted to live alone in a supportive community.

Alternative Living for the Aging began with an idea that Janet Witkin, a young sociologist, had in 1977 of roommate-matching for older people. The resulting communities, Witkin says, assist older people in staying independent and having a



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Dorothy Buxton is committed to sharing love.

support network at the same time.

Buxton agrees. "We're all very friendly," she said. "We look after one another without crowding one another. There are 16 apartments, and a majority of the residents are Russian immigrants who do not speak English, so the rest of us help them to live. We translate letters, decipher phone bills and use a lot of sign language to communicate. It's very important that everyone's point of view is understood. We help one another so we can maintain our personal lives and still be in a community."

Buxton lives in a single apartment with a cathedral ceiling, pale pink carpeting and a full kitchen. All of the apartments face a common courtyard with a fountain and benches.

"I think I've done well—not monetarily, but in every other way," she said. "Life has been a challenge. I was taught that most things go your way and things that don't you learn from. This is my year. I'm going to learn how to use a computer and I'm going to volunteer at a library and read stories to young children. Sometimes I think I am in a kind of relay race where my running performance is fueled by love and I keep passing the baton on to someone else."

For more information on Alternative Living for the Aging, call (213) 650-7988.