

# TAKING TIME

by Rebecca Escott

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For Lehigh County



### It's a Small World

Since 1994 is International Year of the Family, I've been thinking globally all year long. But recently, I was reminded just how small the world really is. My husband has been traveling to Middle Eastern countries. I've been working with Latinos here in the Lehigh Valley. And over the weekend we visited with friends who have returned from Turkey. It seems each day I make a connection with another country or culture.

Even in rural areas, families are experiencing out global society. My husband proudly brought me a gift from his lat-

est business trip—Mango Tang® We both love mangoes, and he wanted to show me how Tang® took on an international flair—instead of orange Tang®, they drink Mango-flavored beverages. Well, the funny global joke was, that although the labeling was printed in Arabic, the production line proudly stated, "Made in White Plains, New York." It is a small, funny world.

In the future families will build even more cross-cultural connections. You can help your children and grandchildren feel confident and comfortable in these situations by the actions

you take. Sometimes I find myself stumbling for a response when a child asks a question about someone else. These moments can be awkward for any adult.

Clyde Ford, author of *We Can All Get Along*, stresses the importance of discussing ethnic differences with children. "Children are fascinated with their bodies and the bodies of others. They are naturally attracted by people with different skin color, hair texture, and other different physical characteristics." Our response can teach them either to be comfortable with differences or to fear them.

For example, what is an appropriate response to a child's, "Why does Miyoko speak funny?" Instead of responding, "Miyoko can't help how she speaks. Let's not say anything.", try "Miyoko doesn't speak funny. She speaks differently than you do. She speaks Japanese because that's what her mom and dad speak. It is okay to ask ques-

tions about what Miyoko is saying, but it is not okay to say that her speech sounds funny because that can hurt her feelings."

Or how would you respond to a child's query, "Why is Jamal's skin so dark?" Rather than avoiding the issue by saying, "His skin color doesn't matter. We are all the same underneath.", briefly explain that Jamal's skin is dark because his mom and dad have dark brown skin. "There is a special chemical in our skin called melanin. If you have a lot of melanin, your skin is dark. If you only have a little, your skin is light."

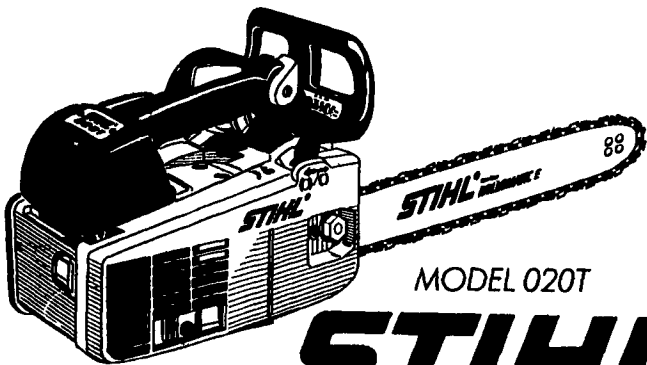
If you are from a community that has very little ethnic diversity, read books to your children that tell of different cultures. Also discuss the topic in advance of a visit to Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, or New York City. When exchange students visit your school, get to know them. Take advantage of cultural festivals in your area. The Lehigh Valley, where

I live is rich with these festivals—Highland Games, Puerto Rican Fairs, Slavak Celebrations. I am richer because of the friendships I have with my Sicilian, Puerto Rican, Pennsylvania Dutch, and Chinese neighbors. Research shows that the more experiences we have with people of different cultures, the more likely we are to view these individuals positively. In small, everyday ways, you can become more comfortable and help your family to be more comfortable in a diverse community.

Having the ability to work together, to understand each other will not be found ready made. It takes time to create these skills. Yet these skills are critical for many people in their jobs and as they interact in their neighborhoods. You can be a part of the process as you spend time with your family and friends around the dinner table, at your place of worship, in schools, and at the playground.

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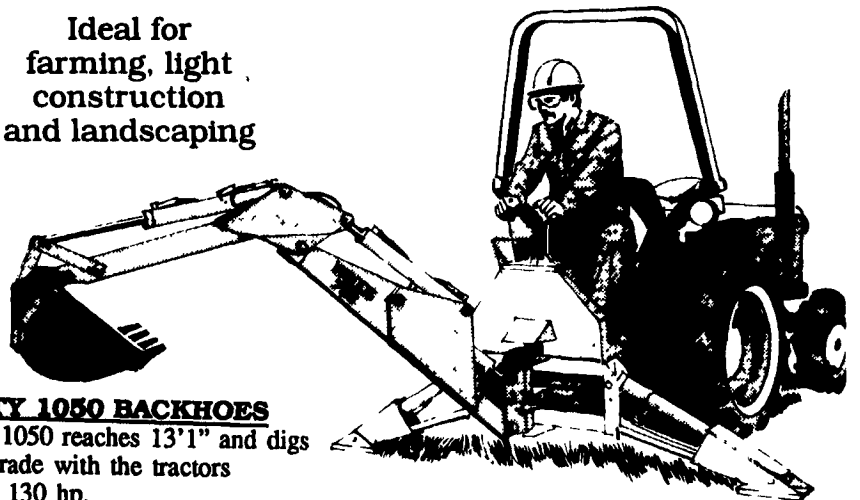
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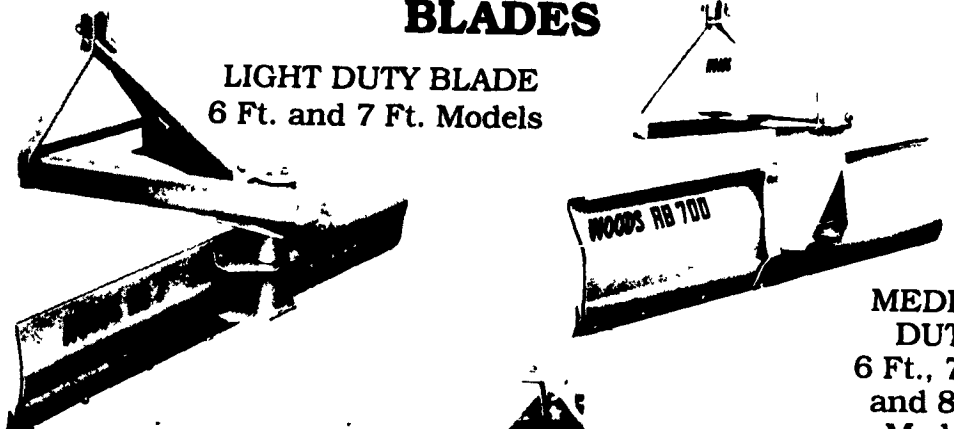
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