A Heritage Lost:
What is the Cost?

Back before we could whizz around in cars, we were, by necessity, connected more by geographical proximity than today. We tended to stay put, day to day, and generation after generation. We were baptized, married and buried in the same community, and the same church, as generations before us. We could no more choose our community than we could choose our families. This was brought home to me as I studied the genealogy of my ancestors. We were anchored, physically and socially, and the community of our birth shaped who we were, and what we became, much more than it does today.

I suspect this loss of an anchor, a place, and an identity shaped by a place and its people, has been central to the identity crisis so many young people experience today. Young people used to see themselves as a son/daughter, member of an extended family, part of a family economy or traditional family trade, and a member of an established community with deep roots of tradition and geography. As these young people grew to a adulthood, the family and community prepared them and made a place for them, perhaps as a worker on the family farm, an apprentice in the family's trade, or as the wife of a young man from a neighbouring family.

Young people in those times did not experience being a face in a mass of peers who, from an early age, all competed on the same crowded playing field for success and recognition, whose efforts were graded on a curve, and whose future was not only for them to navigate largely unaided, but was also to a significant degree at the mercy of forces beyond their control.

Those days exist beyond the memory of most people alive today, but it is possible to know what has been lost. If you ask, many would tell you that something is wrong, that somehow our children are growing up without the stability, nurturing and support they need, despite the myriad government initiatives developed to help "youth at risk". Because no program can replace what our children need to flourish: stable, loving families, communities rooted in time, place and tradition, and a culture that endures and is passed down from generation to generation.

If you want to see what the product of 80+ years of increasing societal fragmentation looks like, just look to the gender-confused, disaffected, rootless child-adults now preparing to enter the workforce.