

UPFRONT

By MURRAY DUBIN

The lion of Logan

THE REAL ESTATE agent never mentioned that Mary Cousar and her family would be the first blacks on her block in Logan. It was 1968. "There were Jews, Italians, Ukrainians on the block," Cousar recalls. "The first summer it was bad. The other children wouldn't play with my children. Some of the older residents were nice to us; some didn't speak to us at all.

"I remember a little Jewish kid named Paul Glazer. He had been away for the summer, I think, and he came back, and he introduced himself and started playing with my kids. Then some of the other kids started playing with my kids. . . . I'll never forget Paul Glazer."

Today, her block is predominantly black, and what Paul Glazer did for her on North Camac Street, Cousar is trying to do for everyone in Logan. Roaring her defiance of racism — especially black toward Asian and Asian toward black — she has become the lion of Logan, the multi-cultural champion of one of the city's most diverse neighborhoods. "You have to improve your own community," she says. "We're all busy, but you have to make time."

She has made time. She has fought against drugs and decried violence by blacks against Asians. "If this had happened to a black family, then every group in the city would be up here protesting," she said in 1984 after several beatings in Logan. "But these Asians, they don't have anyone to speak for them at all."

She helped start the Logan Multi-Cultural Task Force, which brings together residents of different backgrounds, and the new Logan Cultural Arts Program, which brings together Asian and black youngsters. "The black and Asian communities are isolated from each other. What I want to do is get these groups, especially the youth, to-

gether . . . and make sure they get to know one another."

She is on the board of the Fellowship Commission, Fellowship Farm and the Anti-Defamation League ethics committee, and is the coordinator of the Shared Friendship Program of the Cambodian Association. She has won awards from the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the city Human Relations Commission. "People usually go up and down in community work, but she's very con-

They were mother figures."

Life isn't perfect. She is 49. She has been divorced for years. She finally fulfilled her dream and went back to college two years ago, but it didn't work out. "It was too much for me. My blood pressure got too high."

She is continually frustrated by neighborhood people who refuse to volunteer or who insist on getting paid. There are constant ego skirmishes between this one and that one in the community-activist business. She is always seeking financing for the multi-cultural task force.

She is as blunt as a brick and not at all afraid to speak out against public officials who aren't doing their jobs well enough.

Of Leah Gaskin White, the executive director of the Human Relations Commission, she says, "She talks to people, not with them." Of Bennie Swans, head of the Crisis Intervention Network: "Bennie's . . . spilling over into too many things."

She is critical of the "negative interaction" among the human relations agencies.

There was a time not too long ago when "they were all waiting for each other to be killed off."

But she understands how the system works and knows who to call and when. She understands that on her block of Camac Street, whites were afraid of falling property values when a black family named Cousar moved in. And today, black and white families are afraid for their properties as more and more Cambodians and Vietnamese move in.

It has come full circle. Everything's changed. Nothing's changed. She has just gotten a job with Swans doing race relations work. Finally, someone's paying her to do what she's done for nothing all these years. Mary Cousar is still out on the street. Working. □

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sistent," says a human relations pro. "She weathers the storm. She is really for real."

She has just taken her two youngest children — she has four — out of a mostly white desegregated elementary school in the Northeast and enrolled them in a black and Hispanic neighborhood junior high. "The neighborhood schools need good kids, too," she explains simply.

She came here from Wilmington, N.C., in 1956. Her childhood was ugly. Her parents couldn't care for her, and she grew up with foster parents. When they didn't want her, she moved in with the mother of her foster mother.

She lived near Temple and went to business school. Then she worked at a candle factory and met immigrants for the first time. "They were older women. It was a very positive experience for me. They worked with me, encouraged me to go to college.