

# *Living a Simple Life* with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

## **Episode 21- Bring Back the Neighborhood Picnic**

*Welcome to Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. Thanks for stopping by! Grab a glass of Lemonade, pull up a rocker and join me for conversations about living the Simple Life. Go ahead. Get comfortable and settle in for a good visit. It's time to relax and enjoy!*

Welcome back to the porch! Pull up a rocker and visit for a while. You must have been reading my mind. I was just thinking back to the early days and how folks spent a lot of time with their neighbors on a porch. The porch wasn't just a cool place to shell peas. It was also a place for conversation.

Back then, everyone tended to stay close together. You knew all your neighbors, and they knew you. If someone needed help, you showed up and got busy. If you were the one in need, you would find your neighbors standing on the porch waiting to do what was necessary.

But it wasn't just troubles that brought neighbors together. It was also a need to socialize and have a bit of fun. Occasionally, the neighbors would all get together for a 'meal on the grounds' – which is just another way of having a picnic. Tables would be heavy with food, kids would be running around playing games, and the adults would have a chance to visit and catch up with each other.

It was a great time, and a perfect way to escape from the workload. Today, not many folks do that anymore. They are too busy running here and there, and their schedules are so overloaded no one seems to know if they are coming or going. There usually isn't enough time left over to stop and spend time with the neighbors.

When I was a kid, the neighborhood picnic was a gathering everyone looked forward to all year. We held it every summer in our backyard. Daddy fired up the grill and cooked his famous hamburgers. Everyone else brought the rest. And then we moved, most of the other neighbors did too, and the neighborhood picnic went by the wayside. That was a sad time for all of us.

When we first moved to the farm, we met a few of our neighbors, but not all of them. Ayn lived around the corner and was one of the first ones we met. We forged a bond and friendship over our desire to live a Simple Life.

One afternoon she and I were sitting at my dining room table enjoying a coffee break, when the topic turned to community gatherings. It was sad to us those get-togethers seemed to be a thing of the past. So, we decided to work together to make something happen.

Several months later, we co-hosted the 1st Annual Social Springs Community Chili Cook Off. We created invitations, did the planning, talked a few folks into judging and got a few fun prizes for the winners.

The best part was we had the opportunity to get to know our neighbors a little better and helped to strengthen the bond between us. It was a blast, and we ended up having it for several years. Then life happened, folks got busy, and once again this neighborhood get-together just fell by the wayside.

Recently, Ayn and I talked about trying to revive it again and make it even stronger. Our thoughts are to simplify it and maybe have just a neighborhood picnic.

Community isn't just a fun aspect of living a Simple Life. Having a strong bond with your neighbors is also important. These are the people you live with and learn from. They are the ones willing to help in a crisis and depend on you to lend helping hands when needed. And they are also the folks who are willing to take the excess eggs from your chickens off your hands and bring you a bag filled with excess produce from their garden.

Having a neighborhood gathering is the icing on the cake. This is where you forge stronger bonds with the people living closest to you. Through conversations, you might just learn a new way of doing things. It may be the case of giving advice on something you are good at. Gather a few women together, and you will have enough recipes swapped to keep you in new meal plans for a year.

While the women are talking, the men are more than likely discussing the pros and cons of different gardening practices, where the fish are biting, or how to fix a tractor that came 'uncranked'.

Celebrating your neighbors is a perfect excuse to have a neighborhood gathering. And what better fun than to have a neighborhood picnic? It may take a little time, effort and planning to put it together, but it is well worth the effort.

The first step is to find a neighbor who is willing to help you get it organized. In my case, Ayn is ready and willing.

From there, it's a simple matter of deciding the format. You can do a focused gathering, such as our Chili Cookoff. In this case, put the word out and ask who would like to compete. For those who don't, they can bring the 'fixings', as we call them. This includes the chili toppings, bread, salads, side dishes and desserts.

Your focus may be simple, such as hot dogs and hamburgers. If this is your plan, you can either ask one or two neighbors to contribute to the burgers and dogs, or supply that part yourself. Everyone else can bring the condiments, a relish tray, buns, chips, and other offerings. For those neighbors who don't cook but still want to contribute, ask them to bring paper goods or even an outdoor table and chairs.

Once you have determined what you are going to do, set a date and time. When Ayn and I were working on the first Chili Cookoff, we quickly discovered that there wasn't a single date and time that worked for everyone. So, we ended up choosing a date that worked best for us. What we soon found out is this was something most everyone wanted to attend, so they adjusted their schedules anyway.

The next step is to send out invitations. You may choose to just call everyone and let them know, but some people have a tendency to forget things. An invitation can be hung on the refrigerator as a reminder.

The invitation doesn't have to be fancy. We printed ours off on the computer. It simply told them what it was, the date, time, and location, and what contributions would be appreciated. We also added a phone number for RSVP's, so we could keep track of who was coming and what they planned to bring.

When asking for contributions, it helps to keep a list. This way, you can somewhat keep everyone from bringing a dessert and no side dishes. Even with balanced contributions, there are still things you will need to provide. Having a contribution list helps you with your own grocery shopping and preparations for the gathering.

The day before or the morning of the gathering is when you need to start getting ready outside. If you have a large crowd coming, you will need to make arrangements ahead of time for tables and chairs. For us, we were able to borrow them from the Church at the end of our road. Or you can ask the neighbors if they have card tables, picnic tables, and extra chairs you can use. Another option is to have a BYOC – Bring your own chair.

And be sure to have a few sturdy tables for all that food. If space is an issue, you may want to have a separate table for the desserts. Another option is to keep them in the house, and once the meal is finished, you can replace the empty trays with plates of delicious cakes, cookies and other desserts.

And don't forget the homemade ice cream. A picnic just isn't the same without it. You can make Vanilla ice cream and have bowls of toppings set out so each person can create their own Sundaes. If you are truly ambitious, make strawberry, chocolate, and vanilla, and offer banana splits. Or use a fresh summer fruit, such as strawberries, peaches, or blueberries and make a flavored variety. Any way you scoop it, fresh homemade ice cream is sure to be a popular dessert.

Once the food is consumed, you may find that folks are enjoying themselves so much they aren't ready to go home just yet. That's the time to bring out the entertainment. If you have folks in your neighborhood who play musical instruments, consider having a jam session. You can also clean off the tables and set up individual game ports for card games, checkers, chess, or other board games. Dominoes is also popular.

You may also consider a game that everyone can play. Bunco is a great option, but you do need four players per table. Traditionally, Bunco is played with 3 tables, but it probably wouldn't be too difficult to add a few more.

Having a Neighborhood picnic is one of the fun ways to incorporate the past into your modern-day Simple Life. It helps you to become an active part of the neighborhood. It's a break from a busy life and helps you slow down for a bit. You can also leave your worries behind for a few hours. With all the conversation, fun, and laughter, there is a good chance you will leave feeling better than you did before you got there. That is, unless you overdosed on all that good food and delicious ice cream. If that's the case, then just head home and sleep it off. You'll feel much better in the morning.

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand, or get a transcript for this episode, just visit my website at [www.thefarmwife.com/podcast](http://www.thefarmwife.com/podcast). That is the Resource page for this podcast and I have it set up by episodes to make things easier to find. To help you out, this is Episode 21.

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If you have questions or need some help getting your own neighborhood picnic organized, stop by for an email visit at [thevirtualporch@gmail.com](mailto:thevirtualporch@gmail.com). I have a few more ideas and a lot of recipes I can share.

And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

*Julie*