

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 33- It's Time to Get Neighborly!

Welcome back to Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. I'm Julie, and I teach people just like you how to live a Simple Life.

One aspect of living a Simple Life is the necessity of creating a strong bond with your neighbors.

With the advent of the Internet, society has seemed to lose touch with the old-fashioned sense of neighborliness. Not as much coffee is poured, the dining room table is either used only at mealtime or as a receptacle for mail, schoolbooks, and stuff we are just too tired to put away. Coffee klatches, conversations over the fence, and neighborhood picnics are a thing of the past. We all too often use the excuse that life is just 'too busy' to stop and enjoy each other. Instead, we spend most of our free time on the internet chatting with strangers or watching television.

Surprisingly though, the Internet seems to have broadened our neighborhood in a sense. Through the course of social media, I have met some wonderful people who live multiple states away, but I would definitely consider them my neighbors.

Gary lives in Wisconsin, yet he serves the position of neighbor when he gives me encouragement in my writing and shares his own thoughts and stories. Rae lives in Pennsylvania, and we have been neighbors through the written word as pen pals since 2009. I have no idea where Sharon and Margaret live, but we get together most mornings for coffee through a Facebook group. These two are supportive, willing to share recipes, and can quickly provide a laugh or two.

Although the Internet can broaden your world and provide you with an opportunity to meet new people, it can also cause you to lose touch with your real neighbors – the ones who live next door and down the street. Sitting behind a computer or having your face buried in a cell phone while texting is one of the quickest ways you can isolate yourself and lose touch with what is truly important in this world. And one of those important things is your neighbors.

Being neighborly is quickly becoming a lost art. It takes time and effort to become a great neighbor. But given the opportunity, it is well worth it to step away from technology or the tv, break out of isolation, and take the time to visit.

Let me guess. You think this podcast isn't for you because you have no idea who your neighbors are. You may recognize them by sight, but don't know their names. The best you can offer is a passing wave or a smile and nod of the head in acknowledgement. Or maybe you do know their names but are so busy you haven't seen or spoken to them in weeks.

But here's the thing. Your neighbors are more important than just someone to share a quick conversation with or as a resource for swapping recipes. There are some very real benefits for not only getting to know your neighbors, but also being an active participant in your neighborhood and community.

First, let's look at the health benefits. There are studies that have shown having strong relationships with your neighbors can improve your mental, emotional, and physical health.

Neighbors come in all different shapes, sizes, backgrounds, education levels – and every one of them come with a unique set of opinions. By interacting with your neighbors, you are able to first, stave off loneliness and isolation. This helps us to improve our feelings of inclusion, happiness and contentment with who we are and the world we live in.

These visits also act as mental calisthenics. When we participate in a conversation, we have to first hear what is being said, then we have to process it and work to come to our own conclusions. Some conversations teach us something new. Others give us a different perspective. And still others give us a chance to share our own knowledge.

From an emotional standpoint, conversations with our neighbors may offer emotional support. Their words offer encouragement, support, and in some cases, praise. Through their words, our confidence is boosted. And if the conversation is lively, you may get a good dose of that 'old-fashioned' medicine called laughter.

The physical health benefits come in all sizes. First, you have to walk outside to visit. This may be a short walk to the fence, or a bit longer to reach a home at the end of the block. It takes physical effort to mow the lawn of a neighbor who isn't home or is physically unable to do the work. Or you can truly exert your energies by helping to build a larger project – kind of like the Amish do when raising a barn.

And those health benefits don't just apply to you personally. They also improve the health of your community, and even society as a whole. When neighbors gather together in groups, you learn things. It's quickly spread throughout the neighborhood when someone is ill and needs assistance.

A healthy community works together to create change. This may be as simple as a neighborhood watch group to help to keep your homes safe. It may also mean a stronger voice to create bigger changes.

A strong community can get things done, such as better lighting in a dark neighborhood, playgrounds being built for local children, supply the labor on a Saturday morning for cleaning up litter, or even pulling together to make major changes that are needed. One thing I learned early in life is the squeaky wheel gets the grease – and a community who has joined together can squeak really loudly!

Several years ago, a neighbor's home caught fire. We live in a rural area, so the smoke and flames could be seen for quite some distance. Before the fire department even arrived, neighbors had gathered, pulled water hoses to aim at the flames, moved items from the yard, and brought food, water, and blankets. Afterward, everyone continued to bring food, supplies, and even furniture to get them by until they could get back on their feet. Now THAT is a neighborhood and community pulling together to take care of one of its own!

If you are in a situation where you don't know your neighbors very well, the first step you need to make is to introduce yourself. There are several ways you can do this.

First, next time you see them outside, stop by and tell them who you are, and indicate which house you live in. Offer words of welcome. Let them know if they need anything, you are close by to help. If they are working in their garden, offer to pull a few weeds while you visit. If they decline, offer help in the future if they need it.

Here in the South, we rarely go to visit empty-handed. Normally, we would carry a plate of cookies, a loaf of homemade bread, or even a cake or pie. When introducing yourself to a new neighbor, nothing says welcome like something fresh from the oven.

And yes – I can read your mind. You are wondering about food allergies. You may take a plate of cookies to a new neighbor only to discover they are diabetic. This is a perfect time to ask them if there is something they would like better and let them know you will replace their goodies soon with an appropriate item. First, you learn a bit more about them. And second, you now have an excuse for a second visit.

The best rule of thumb is to keep the first visit short. Give them the pertinent information – who you are, where you live, names of family members (especially children). Ask the pertinent questions of them – their names, if they have family or children, and then let them know if you can help in anyway, to let you know. This is also a good time to invite them by for a visit to your home.

If you (and they) are at home during the day, offer to host them for coffee one morning, or for a glass of lemonade in the afternoon.

Once you get to know them better, offer to introduce them to other neighbors. One good way to do that is to host a neighborhood gathering for a meet and greet. Better yet – make it a potluck!

Here is one tip that may help when introducing yourself to a new neighbor. Design an old-fashioned calling card and hand it to them when you stop by.

A calling card can have as much or as little information you want to offer. The simplest is one that just has your name. For a new neighbor, you may want to add an address and phone number. Anything else, such as a website, email address, or social media information really isn't necessary. That can wait until you know each other better.

Another handy calling card to have is one for your pet. This one would give a bit more information – the animal's name, address, and who to call to clean up if he or she drops a 'gift' off in their yard.

You may think calling cards are outdated, but in reality, they are the best way to introduce yourself to a new neighbor. If you aren't sure how to design one, check out the link in the show notes – I have a blog post that will help.

But what if you don't have new neighbors, and you already know everyone? Then now is the time to strengthen those bonds.

There are quite a few ways to be more neighborly. First, choose one neighbor and invite them over for coffee, an afternoon visit, or make it a family affair and have them over for dinner. Even if you don't have children, invite theirs as well. Getting to know the kids in the neighborhood can be beneficial. You can help keep an eye on them, assist in a time of emergency, or allow them to become familiar enough with you and your family to run to for help. And teenagers are always looking for a side job or two, so you may just have some extra hands available if needed.

Another way you can be a better neighbor is through an annual or semi-annual gathering. In the spring you can host a neighborhood picnic. In the fall, have a potluck. One fun thing to do is to have a progressive dinner.

You can also take that idea a step further and organize a Holiday Walk. Talk to your neighbors and choose a time when they will have the whole day available sometime after Thanksgiving and before Christmas. Then using the Progressive Dinner idea, start at one house to visit, see their decorations and maybe enjoy a cup of hot chocolate and a cookie or two. Then everyone moves to the next house on the block.

The time spent at each home doesn't have to be long – maybe a half hour or 45 minutes. The purpose is just to strengthen the bonds you have as a neighborhood and enjoy each other's company.

Those bonds will come in handy, too. Think about your elderly neighbors – especially those who don't have family nearby. Knowing them better gives you a chance to check up on them. I recently heard a horrifying story of an elderly woman who had gotten very ill, but it was three days before someone stopped by to check on her. Having neighbors who care can reduce the fear of that happening.

Elderly neighbors often live on a fixed income. A hot meal, a plate of cookies, or someone offering to do a few chores can give them some needed relief.

And stopping by for a visit – or inviting them to your house for a meal – can reduce their feelings of isolation and loneliness. You can also offer to take them to run errands. And if you can do this, add another level of fun to the dreariness of shopping – once a month treat them to a meal out. That bit of fun will not only benefit them, but you as well!

Are you ready to have a stronger better neighborhood? Then maybe its time to be a better neighbor. Design a calling card and head out to introduce yourself. Fix a pot of coffee and invite your neighbor to come sit and talk for a bit. Step up to the plate and host the first annual Neighborhood picnic.

You might be amazed at the broadened horizons you will find, and the fun you will have. Take the time today to rejuvenate the lost art of being neighborly, and make it at least a weekly, if not daily, occurrence. Stop the cycle of busyness in your life and hang over the fence and chat with your neighbor.

You may just have a better outlook on life when you do.

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. 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 33.

If you have questions or just want to stop in for a neighborly visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. 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