

Give thanks for great neighbors

MUSCATINE, Iowa - When buying a house, many work to find one in the "right" neighborhood, but rarely does anyone know exactly what the new neighbors will be like. It takes only one experience with a mean/crabby/nosy/lazy/snobby neighbor to make you appreciate those with whom you can live peacefully near without incident. It also makes it even nicer when you find out there are people who live close by that you can trust and love.

Maybe we should have an annual Good Neighbor Day to commemorate all those who have enhanced the quality of our lives just by being themselves and living close enough to visit in slippers.

But sometimes it's hard to say what makes a good neighbor. Is it someone who keeps a constant and vigilant eye on your house and lets you borrow their cool stuff? Is it the family who

keeps an immaculate lawn, only owns dogs who don't bark, and drives quiet vehicles?

Personally, my definition of "good" neighbors includes those who are willing to keep my extra sets of keys because I often lock myself out. It also helps if they have children responsible and broke enough to want to mow my lawn sometimes.

Luckily, I discovered a family willing to do both when I moved across the street from the Lear family more than a decade ago. Over the years, I've been able to watch the three Lear children grow up. In the young days, Callie and Margaret were not only in my third-grade class, after school they were always there to "help" me with any home project I may have been attempting. Aaron was old enough to sometimes mow my lawn and respectful enough to help me move heavy objects without laughing at

my wimpiness.

Perhaps my favorite part of living across the street from this active family is getting to have corner conversations as we yelled across the busiest intersection in town about how things were going. Randy and Julie are devoted parents and have maintained chaotic schedules for as long as I've known them, yet they always had time to say hello and ask how things were going in my world.

PERSPECTIVE



The Good News

Amy Meyer

Sometimes we even found time for longer conversations that would catch us up on each other's lives, often leaving me with a needed pat on the back

or nod of encouragement about whatever challenge I was facing. Over the years, Julie and I have laughed a lot at her kids, our lack of housekeeping abilities, and the crazy twists of the world. Sharing a little of the Lear life often left me smiling.

Yet, sometimes weeks go by without much communication between us. We don't remember each other's birthdays and I'm not sure we've ever exchanged baked goods at the holidays. I've never felt it was because we didn't think we deserved warm cookies at Christmas, we just understand that our most common trait is that we always try to do too much. But we never feel forgotten.

Over the years, I've witnessed the changes in their family like a stalker who cares. From my porch I've watched them load up for endless numbers of Margaret's softball games, add a kiddie pool to the back yard

when Callie became a mother, and watched Julie cringe as Aaron pulled up on his new, very loud, motorcycle. I've seen firsthand how fast kids truly grow up and marveled at how this group of vastly different people was bonded in their common dedication to each other.

I can't remember exactly when Julie told me about Aaron's cancer but it was a teary, corner conversation that lasted a long time. It had already been a year of many challenges and changes and my heart couldn't accept the facts that my head was trying to understand. Doctors were saying that although it was good the lump was found, there wasn't much other good news to share about the future.

April's shock led to surgery in May and then again in July. Chemotherapy started soon after, lasting until September. It was the longest and the shortest

summer of the Lears' lives. Finally, the fall brought the blessings of a new season and a new beginning. Despite all the original medical pessimism, in October the doctor officially declared Aaron's body free from cancer.

The good news is that Aaron is back on his obnoxiously loud bike and the comings and goings of the Lears have returned to their chaotic normalcy.

And they're all thankful. This Thanksgiving will undoubtedly be a holiday unlike any other the Lears have celebrated in the past. Hopefully, Aaron's story of struggle and recovery will remind us all to appreciate the precious power of life, families, and good neighbors.

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