

## Next Door

By Frank Hof

As told to Marilyn Cramer

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We lived next door to the same group of "I call them kids" for the last 15 or 20 years. My family and I have a very special place in our hearts for three of the adults who lived in the group home next door. Even today one of the guys always asks how my daughter Jill is. He always asks how my dog Chelsie is too. He asks for my phone number and I give it to him just in case he's going to call me. We go through that exercise every time I see him and that's good!

There was a time when I invited one of my neighbors over to help me build my deck because he likes to build. He's quite a carpenter. My neighbour and my wife were pulling out the nails from some old boards. My neighbor was very capable of doing this to the point where he had to show my wife how to do it. It was priceless!

What really strikes home, are the things that didn't happen. These are the things that you really miss. What reminds me of this is one of the other gentlemen who lived next door. It seemed like it didn't matter what time we came home he would greet us on his front step. He would walk out the door and we would have the same conversation over and over again. And when it didn't happen I missed it!

Some days I got frustrated but then again when it didn't happen I really missed it! The conversation would go like this. "Hi Hank, did you work today? Yup! Are you working tomorrow? Yup, I work tomorrow. How about you? Yeah, I work tomorrow." That was the extent of our conversation every day for 15 years. So they were really interesting times.

My neighbors got a new roommate and he got to be really friendly with me. He spent a lot of time with me. He would come



over to have a drink of pop quite often, so we got to be really close. It got to the point where he was always over and I had to figure out how to change that.

I had some company over and my new friend came over. He was knocking on the window as he usually did and asked if he could come in and I said no. He left and stood in front of the window bawling his eyes out. I had to go out and tell him not to do that. That was not what I wanted him to do.

So he stopped crying. It was really a tough situation, but a good learning for both of us

Then there was one of my friends who had a habit of just walking into the house. So I told him that he can't just walk in, that he had to knock. So the next day he knocked on the door and then walked in. So I had to explain that after you knock you have to wait until someone answers the door to let you in. I learned that in the future I had to be very specific and it also shows you that my neighbors were are smarter than you think.

The experience of living next to them was really good for my family. My kids have a different attitude and understanding. We had some really special relationships. My child got to the point where he knew what one of the neighbors (who didn't speak) was saying. My son would interpret for him and I don't think he was making that up because of the response. Our neighbor would just light up because my son understood him. My kids learned that they were lucky with how capable they are and they would never put a handicapped person of any kind down.

Since I have moved the neighborhood isn't the same anymore. People don't get the chance to really meet their neighbours who live in the group homes anymore. Being part of a community is not just me inviting my neighbors over but my neighbors inviting me over too. Having such wonderful neighbors has left a positive mark on my life and I really miss my next door neighbours, my friends.