

Cul-de-sac Connections

Neighborhood bonds can last a lifetime

by: Julie Costakis, mom of 3

▶ In our early twenties, my husband and I built our first home near the border of Carmel and Westfield. Construction, landscaping and eventually furnishing our nest became a focal point. Heavily absorbed in our individual careers, we paid little attention to what lay beyond the property line. As the months flew by, we observed other homeowners sharing an appealing camaraderie. Neighbors who chose to turn off the hedge clippers and engage in conversations were rewarded with ever-deepening friendships. It began to dawn on us that our home had less to do with bricks and cedar siding, and everything to do with people and relationships.

In time, providential circumstances led a new friend to my back door and shortly afterwards, another to my front door. Within days, our trio expanded to include a roomful of twenty-some-things. For the next eight years, we navigated our life journeys alongside one another, sharing both joyous occasions and devastating losses. Our spouses forged friendships and together we strengthened our faiths, marriages, families and livelihoods. Children became best friends, classmates, teammates and camp buddies. Yet without a willingness to open my door and my heart to neighbors, these precious experiences and strong friendships might not have blossomed. The depth we are willing to engage with others and the time we invest to develop friendships can be life-altering.

In cities and suburbs across this country and throughout the world, close bonds are formed as neighbors walk together through the ups and downs of life. Nothing knits people closer than shared experiences – and raising children is one where support is vital. These are spontaneous, vibrant days accented with raw authenticity when juggling the early years of marriage, parenthood, demanding careers and what we in the suburbs often believe is the race to get ahead. In today's world, where extended family members are scattered across the globe, neighbors help to fill the void.



When one in our group shared plans to move out East for a new job, I felt the first tear in our carefully woven fabric of friendship. Eventually, others “needed” bigger homes for growing families. Most of us have remained in or near Hamilton County and occasionally gather for coffee. We resume our friendships right where we left off, yet the loss of proximity once enjoyed is profound. Gone are the spontaneous treks to my friend's back door, children gathering in the cul-de-sac for an Independence Day parade and backyard movie nights. Nothing compares to comfort arriving at your doorstep in the form of a hot meal or a warm hug. Nearness to those with whom you have navigated life makes all the difference.

Recently I visited with the friend who had moved to New England. Despite their multiple moves through the years, she explained they have yet to find a community even remotely similar to the warm culture they enjoyed in Hamilton County. Reflection has taught me the importance of recognizing such experiences as more than steps along the path to the final destination. They are a destination in themselves. Those early years of living on that memorable cul-de-sac are the ones my family would revisit without hesitation. The relationships we nurture and memories we create become the gemstones, rather than the stepping stones, of this wonderful adventure called life.

Check out Julie's new blog "Postcards to Parents" on the Hamilton County Family web site at www.hamiltoncountyfamily.com.