Neighborin' (Best Of)

The art of neighborin' is a concept foreign to most city folk. Urbanites can live beside each other for years without ever sharing pie or its recipe. The folks next door are just people to keep up with.

It's not even called a neighborhood any more...it's "the hood." Although all too often in the big city, that is more apt to describe the residents therein.

In fairness, being a good neighbor in the country is easier simply because of space. The distance buffers the piano lessons, fire crackers, barking dogs and family spats. But even though you can't hear your neighbors fight through a thin wall there are still ways to keep up with what's going on with them: you can still eavesdrop, just by sending the kids over to play for the day.

It's been my experience country folk don't borrow sugar or milk as much as city people would lead you to believe. They are more apt to borrow water when the well runs dry or colostrum when the cow does. Neighbors think nothing of borrowing a tractor, but even the best machine can't replace a good neighbor.

Folks in the country "lived together" before that meant what it does now. Out of necessity if nothing else. When it came time to brand the calves there were never enough competent ropers so ranchers traded help. Even today there still aren't enough good "heelers," if you don't count the dogs, that is.

In the country we live by the honor system where wayward calves and kids are shown the way home. A good neighbor admires your calves, and says so, but he doesn't steal them.

Country folk have a long standing tradition of helping one another. Before there were phones, when someone got sick a neighbor would tell a neighbor and so on down the line until the doctor was found. What started out as scarlet fever might become a difficult child birth by the time the Doc was told. If he was too late you shared a community cemetery.

If your barn burned down a new one would be raised and if for some reason you couldn't harvest your crop, a neighbor would do it for you. You didn't need food stamps because the neighbors had a garden.

Still today, if there's an emergency it's probably the phone next door that rings, not 911. Even if "next door" is three miles away. When a mountain lion or a bureaucrat is prowling the neighborhood a good neighbor will send up a modern day smoke signal.

He'll call to inform you that you did have a water trough overflowing or a hard calving cow. But not any more because he just happened to be in the neighborhood and took care of the problem.

The key to being a good neighbor is courtesy. (There's a word you don't hear much any more.) It means you don't run your bulls next to your neighbor's heifers. If your wandering dog has become a nuisance in the neighborhood you get rid of it. If some fool starts a fire on your place you light a back fire and burn your own grass so the fire won't spread to your neighbors, because they'd do the same for you.

To an urban dweller this may all seem like strange behavior for folks who are actually competitors, producing the same product. But we don't look at it that way. Good neighbors would rather have your friendship than your money. It's a higher quality of currency.

When city folk escape to the country, neighborin' is the first thing they should learn. But they don't. Instead they build a big fence and get a mean dog. They might as well have stayed in town because neighbors are what make the country a decent place to live.

In the country we realize if everyone just treated the folks next door a little better the rest of

the world would take care of itself.