

GOOD NEIGHBOURS CAN'T BE PURCHASED – JUST APPRECIATED

Nearly half a million Canadians scrawled signatures on house purchase agreements in 2010. Average purchase price, according to the TD Bank: \$350,000.

Home buyers' willingness to part with these shackles is influenced by options like affordability, square footage, and proximity to schools, shopping and recreational services. However, a house's true potential for living enjoyment is ultimately tied to a single and yet unlisted factor. To determine this, we must look beyond the walls and fix our gaze upon those who live next door -- neighbours.

Yes, many move into their dream home only to awaken to nightmare neighbours who party into the wee hours, own canines who view your lawn as personal dumping grounds or shovel their snow onto your driveway.

Conversely, good neighbours cannot be purchased, just appreciated.

Becoming such a *neighbour extraordinaire* is an easily attainable goal. Far from complex, the endeavour begins with elementary lessons gleaned in the hallowed halls of kindergarten.

First, share. This ancient concept is a novel idea for many. Modern society salutes individual accumulation of personal effects to the detriment of communal living. I'm not talking about moving into your neighbour's spare bedroom, but rather about a basic willingness to share what we possess.

On our street, three households utilize a single riding lawn tractor. Whoever uses it fills it with gas. Mechanical issues are discussed and repair costs shared. If a lawn needs mowing, it frequently gets clipped -- even if the home owner happens to be away.

We share tools, lawn chairs, even a coffee perk this summer when a couple of guests in our backyard morphed into a crowd. Shared possessions lead to shared lives; and that's downright enjoyable.

Second -- and every child has heard this one more than once -- be nice. This is not rocket science. It's about calling "Good morning" across that great divide called a driveway. It's about noticing when another needs a hand unloading groceries or an extra set of eyes while backing up the RV. Niceness is the bridge by which we begin to step into relationship.

Next, clean up your own mess. Strewn garbage and greasy used engines on the front lawn are more than unsightly -- they are a statement of disrespect. You may own the property, but everyone else

is affected by your clutter as they drive or stroll by. Such eye-pollution is bothersome. Good neighbourliness is awakening to the fact that dwelling in a proverbial bubble is unrealistic; our decisions affect others.

Which leads us to another lesson valid in both kindergarten and neighbourhoods: Say you're sorry when you hurt someone. Living near another will always provide opportunity to eat humble pie. It's not a matter of *if* something happens, but *when* -- the Toyota next door is dented by the teenage driver who happens to share your last name, or your feline, Fluffy, is prone to peeing on your neighbour's prized petunias. Yes, the possibilities for shipwrecked relationships are endless as must be our determination to courageously deal with each as it arises.

Finally, remember that warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. It's always the right time to rediscover the lost art of hospitality. Sipping a beverage and munching cookies with a neighbour is an investment that pays ongoing dividends. After all, it's the one perched across from you who may very well determine whether your house is, in reality, a palace or a prison.