**Won’t you be mine?**

Won’t you be my neighbor, or not? Recently I’ve had two separate experiences with individuals having to be transferred to medical facilities down in the valley and they both shared the same concern. They each were concerned with who would be able to take care of something back at their house while they were gone. One had a dog that needed care and the other simply needed someone to go by their house to make sure things were shut off and the house was locked up properly.

It’s a strange world we live in these days. We can live in a neighborhood and not even know who lives next door. We can live in a neighborhood and not even have our neighbors phone number to call in case of an emergency. How does this happen?

Remember the days when everyone knew everyone? We played outside until one of the neighborhood moms yelled that it was time to go home. We not only knew our neighbors, but we did things with them. We borrowed a cup of sugar and a ladder. Our parents had happy hours together while us kids played some more.

It saddens me that this kind of neighborhood cohesiveness is so rare to find in today’s world. Super close neighbors who check on each other and who pay attention to activities happening in the neighborhood.

There still are a few neighborhoods that are like this, with long time neighbors who care enough to know each other and even still do things together. But overall, most neighborhoods are not like this anymore.

I realize that here in Estes Park, the weather isn’t conducive to playing outside all day long. I also realize that families are now required to have two working parents in order to even pay the bills.

This means that we aren’t home, and when we are home after work, school and activities, we are busy with family things. It’s true, we don’t have the time, energy or interest in visiting with neighbors. It’s not a criticism, it’s a fact of life.

It takes some very special people to be neighbors worth coming home to. Having friends whether they are neighbors or not is essential to your health and mental wellbeing.

Friendships are mostly good for your health, we’ve all had those that aren’t good for us, but that’s not what I’m talking about here. Since the turn of the century there has been a decline in friendships, according to Gallup data and other sociology studies. It’s mostly being blamed on how isolated our world has become.

“Any amount of increase in our social isolation would be bad news, because friendships aren’t just about fun, fellowship and emotional health. Having friends can improve physical health too,” says Yang Claire Yang, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina. “One’s social life matter above and beyond what we already know about the ‘quick fixes’ of diet and exercise on health.”

Friends extend your life.
Friends make you generally healthier.
Friends help keep your mind sharp.
Friends influence you for better or worse.
Friends increase our sense of belonging and purpose.
Friends boost our happiness and reduce our stress.
Friends help in times of loss, illness or injuries.

“People with a big social group tend to be more at peace, which leads to better health,” says Tasha R. Howe, PhD, associate professor of psychology at Humboldt State University.

Margaret Gibbs, PhD, professor of psychology at Fairleigh Dickinson University says “Male friendships are more about helping each other, like mending the lawn mower. Women’s friendships tend to have more emotional content; listening to friends’ stories and coming up with helpful solutions.”

As I was researching for this article, I came across a Mayo Clinic article that was explaining some ways to meet potential new friends. Of the eight suggestions, it wasn’t until the last one that suggested that you take your dog for a walk and meet your neighbors. All the other suggestions (which were also good) suggested places in your community; churches, volunteer, starting a new hobby and attending community events.

Neighbors are friends. Friends are health.

How about we get to know our neighbors? Won’t you be mine?