

# Neighbors Hall of Shame and FAME

By Carol G. Stratton

One thing I love about the South -- the neighborly ways. Used to be the whole country was interested in those residing near their homes but with Internet, television, iPods, busy carpooling schedules and dual incomes, neighborly has become a lost art in many parts of the country. Fortunately, the slower pace in North Carolina allows neighborly to continue. I've created a memorial to my best and worst neighbors. **Let's get the Hall of Shame folks announced first.**

- The neighbor who sent my young son home for saying, "**Crap.**"
- The kids next door who decided to target practice the side of our house from their bedroom window, with a large slingshot and heavy objects. Aluminum siding never recovers from these wounds.
- Their parents who denied their darlings could dent anything.
- The neighbor who sent us an anonymous poisonous note saying our dog was "bothering" her little puppy and she'd send the authorities to our house if we didn't tie up our wild beast. Written about the meekest dog in the world!
- The next door neighbor who removed, hosed, and reorganized his garage every weekend. Actually this man turned out to be a pretty good guy; he just made us look bad.

**Now, onto the Hall of Fame.** I've always had more of these generous, kind and fun-loving souls. Winning a place in my Hall of Fame may not be an award all aspire to, but I need to give recognition to those who have shown great hospitality and friendliness.

**An Angel in Disguise** -- Years ago I moved into a new town far away from my family. My husband traveled a lot and one weekend I found myself in bed with the flu and no husband. With three children, ages three to six, flying through the house, my spirits sunk lower as the toy piles rose. On my emergency runs to the bathroom, I'd survey the rug covered with legos, car race tracks, potato chip crumbs and dried up playdough. I whimpered a threat to the oldest boys who seemed to be tormenting their younger sister by calling her a "Whopper Sandwich." Even in my fevered state I thought they could come up with a more ferocious nickname, but the insult worked. She was in tears. Over the roar of fighting I heard a muted buzz. I thought it was the doorbell. Truth be told, we hadn't had many visitors so I wasn't sure what it sounded like. The door opened and a vision of loveliness, a dark haired young woman stepped inside. Hands full with candy for the kids and chicken soup and magazines for mom, I thought, Was this the Welcome Wagon Fairy? How did this woman know I was sick? I vaguely recall meeting her once but to this day I don't know how she knew I needed chicken soup and companionship.

**A Woman with a Sense of Humor** -- I met Marian in another neighborhood. I had shown up at her doorstep to find out about a Brownie meeting and she immediately ushered me into her house. Her merry eyes grinned at me as she said, "I thought I saw you the other day driving your daughter to school. Weren't you the woman with the pink and yellow hair curlers? Haven't seen that since the sixties when I was young. I figured I'd like anyone who has the nerve to wear curlers in the car." I cringed. Then I thought about it . . . I like this gal! She had a sense of humor and four children to match my own. She put me at ease right away.

**A Friend Collector** -- Lanie had a strange accent I couldn't place when she brought cookies over to us when we moved in. I found out she grew up in South Africa where everyone knows all their neighbors. I loved her down to earth personality and her little 18 month old son who studied my every move with his thoughtful eyes. She took it on herself to include me in many of her daily excursions: did I want to go to the park, had I been to the new Italian restaurant, would I like to go to a program at church? Many times she showed up on my doorstep with a flower from her garden or some South African Red Bush tea. One of her friends told me, "Lonie's hobby is collecting friends." Now that's a worthwhile vocation!

**A Generous Cook** -- My neighbor Patty loved to cook and would call me over to sample some new recipe. Soup simmered on the stove as she surveyed her cache of frosted cookies. Her frosting art put Martha S. to shame. I swore an oath to secrecy as she wrote out her prize winning sugar cookie recipe and gave me a crash course on rolling out dough. She, the Barefooted Contessa of our neighborhood always had the coffee pot brewing. And best of all, she always had leftovers she sent my way!

*My neighbors all shared one thing in common: time. They decided to take a slower course in life that could occasionally fit in a drop-in neighbor. None had perfectly groomed houses or completely obedient children. But they had the gift of neighborliness. It's an art we need to continue to cultivate as our American culture spins out of control. It's what makes for memories. And you might even end up in my Neighbor Hall of Fame.*