How the Walls We Build Can Be So Limiting *for the Ones We Love...*

Catherine Nelson, Ph.D.

Karla, Frank and their six-year-old son, Joey, come from a small farming town where everyone knows almost everyone else. Karla and Frank grew up in the town and each of their parents live there, too. They know the likes and dislikes of their neighbors and other locals, and they all have their different values and beliefs. However, the residents have experienced many kinds of crises—storms, floods, even forest fires over the years, and everyone comes together to help each other out. They have learned the value of working together and sharing limited resources in time of need.

Frank graduated from the state college in Clarkston. He is now a hard-working accountant and would like to start his own business someday. He learned a lot about Clarkston, and he feels there will be a better opportunity to increase his business skills and explore different business opportunities. Karla is a graduate of the same college, and she too has plans for her career in education. They have decided to move to Clarkston. Karla is staying at home to raise Joey and help him get established in the new school system. She has a part-time job on the Internet, and her work is easily transferable to the new location.

Karla and Frank bought a nice older home in an established neighborhood. It was a Monday early in August when Karla, Frank and Joey moved into their new home. Joey wanted to play, and he asked his Mom what to do. Karla had seen a little boy next door, so and she suggested Joey go knock on the neighbor's door and see if the boy could play with him.

Their next-door neighbors, Walt and Mary, have lived in Clarkston for many years. They have a six-year-old son, Jimmy, who is starting first grade. He likes to play baseball. Mary is a part-time volunteer at a nearby rest home and she works several afternoons during the week. Walt owns and manages a body shop for cars and trucks. He works long hours and often works six days a week. His business has a good reputation in Clarkston.

Joey followed his mother's instructions. Jimmy and Mary opened the front door and in minutes, Jimmy and Joey were playing outside catching baseballs. It was a good match, and the two boys became friends. Mary went over to meet her new neighbors. Frank was at work, but Karla welcomed Mary, and the two of them enjoyed their time together. Mary provided helpful information about local churches, the public school, stores, etc. At the end of the week, when Walt was home and had time to relax, Mary told Walt about the new neighbors, how happy Jimmy was to have a new friend, and how much Mary enjoyed talking with Karla. They decided to invite the new family over for a barbecue in their back yard. Karla and Frank were delighted to get to know their new neighbors even more.

The next afternoon, the new neighbors arrived and immediately, Walt and Frank were talking. Mary and Karla had each made different dishes for dinner and the two boys were playing outside. As the evening progressed, the topic of local politics came up, and Walt asked Frank about his party affiliation. Walt was disappointed and concerned to hear that Frank and Karla were members of the opposing party. As they talked, Walt discovered that Frank and Karla had several different opinions and beliefs about the next upcoming state election. Frank was interested in Walt's point of view, and he listened respectfully to Walt's ideas and priorities, but it became clear that Walt was not interested in learning about other

perspectives or political positions. The dinner ended early, in part because Walt was annoyed and becoming angry. Frank and Karla were disappointed and took Joey home.

That night, Walt told Mary that he did not want to have their son playing with Joey any more. He did not want Mary to be visiting Karla, and he did not want to have anything to do with Frank. Jimmy was very disappointed when he found out that he could not play with his new friend and Mary was upset about Walt's mandate. She talked to Walt but she could not change his mind. Mary loved her husband, and she accepted his sometimes-stubborn decisions, especially when it had to do with politics.

School started, and Jimmy and Joey were in the same first-grade class. They often ate lunch together and enjoyed each other's company at school, but Jimmy never told his father. There was a new elementary-school baseball coach, and both boys were excited. They heard he had been a baseball player in the minor leagues years ago. The boys each asked their parents for permission to sign up for baseball prac-tice after school. Frank and Karla fully supported Joey playing baseball with the new coach. However, Jimmy ran into a problem. Walt knew about Ron, the new baseball coach, and he refused to give Jimmy permission to be on the baseball team. Walt had seen Ron on the opposite side of the street when there was a recent march for the new water-supply regulations, which Walt's political party was against. Ron was a member of the opposing party. Jimmy was heartbroken and in spite of Mary's efforts, Walt would not change his mind.

At lunchtime, the two boys talked and Jimmy shared his disappointment with Joey, who was sad for his friend. Joey made it a point to tell Jimmy what he was learning about baseball from the new coach. Several of Jimmy's other friends were on the baseball team, too. When the school day was over, Joey stayed for baseball practice. Jimmy would go home and bicycle on the street by himself. One day, Jimmy was practicing a new trick on his bicycle when he lost his balance just as a motorist was driving by. Fortunately, the driver was not going fast, but the side of the car did hit Jimmy as he fell down on the road. Karla was working outside and saw the accident. She ran over to Jimmy, called the police and an ambulance. She stayed with Jimmy until the medics came and took Jimmy to the hospital. He had a mild concussion and some bruises, but he was okay.

Mary was on her way home when Karla called, and she was so grateful that Karla had helped her son. Mary called Walt, and he was relieved that his son was safe. That evening, Walt and Mary walked over to Frank and Karla's home and thanked Karla. Frank and Karla invited Walt and Mary into their home, but Walt declined. He said he had a full day at work and wanted to be with his son.

When they came home, Mary talked with Walt and asked him to reconsider his unwillingness to get to know Karla and Frank. Walt would not change his mind. Jimmy and Joey continued their friendship in school but only in school. Mary and Karla had joined a women's organization, and they talked a lot before and after the meetings. Frank and Walt never became friends. Each couple continued to vote with the same political party they had been members of for years. Karla and Frank made many friends in the community as the years went by, but they often wished they could have been friends with their neighbors next door. ■

Catherine Nelson, *Ph.D. has a counseling practice in Bozeman with many years of experience working with individuals and groups. She has taught at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and is a certified Pathwork Helper. She offers workshops on personal transformation and energy healing and is available for individual sessions. Call Catherine at (406) 585-8025. E-mail to: cnhobbit@gmail.com.*