

A Good Neighbor

Good neighbors are of inestimable worth. Such was Lawrence Karst. He and his wife, Jan, lived directly across the street from Lola and me for years. They were always friendly, always cheerful, always encouraging. They watched the house for us when we were gone on trips, and they picked up the mail and newspapers to hold until we returned.

When asked for it, they gave good counsel. We always knew they wanted the best for us.

And their yard! It was the pride of the neighborhood. Dressed in his signature overalls and carrying a cigar, Lawrence presided over the lawn with a passion that dictated no weed dare enter, and no grasses get any taller than the standard that he set.

With great anticipation, we always awaited the spring and summer growing season. Lawrence was a master when it came to growing tomatoes. He had the plants lined up in a neat row, near the street and right behind our mailbox. He generously shared those rich, red fruit delectables with his neighbors, and, oh, were they tasty. We eagerly plopped them on grilled hamburgers, and sliced them for salads. Lawrence, it was plain, derived great joy from knowing that his tomatoes were a hit up and down Belmont Circle.

Things just weren't the same for Lawrence when Jan, the love of his life, died a few years ago. Suddenly, the lawn didn't hold much attraction and the tomatoes didn't appear in their stately row. He channeled his zest for life into his children -- including Laura, the little girl we watched grow up to become director of human resources at Bradley Memorial Hospital -- and his grandchildren, who were his prized possessions.

Lawrence died Tuesday at the age of 75, and a part of me died with him. The legacy he left, for Lola and me, was the good influence of a good neighbor.

And it challenges me to ask: What can I do to follow his example?

--Beecher Hunter