

# House Fire

One night we woke to commotion. Phil's house, a high set wooden Queenslander next door to us, was alight.

The fire brigade came with its lights flashing and siren blaring. We stood on the street with Phil and his family, watching what was unfolding.

In the middle of this the neighbour on the other side opened up his window and asked what was going on. Pretty self explanatory I thought, but filled him in, and said we were hoping the house could be saved. He said "Oh", and closed the window.

I just didn't get it. Wouldn't you at least ask if everyone was ok. If they needed anything, like a place to stay the night, blankets, a hot drink? They were watching their house burn and didn't know if it could be saved. Wouldn't you be concerned for them? Even if you weren't the best of friends, don't people get together in times of crisis? I just couldn't get my head around it.

Thankfully only the kitchen was badly damaged and they didn't lose all their possessions, but still a significant event for the family of 4 – they lost a lot and couldn't move back in for some time. Over those weeks we didn't see the unconcerned neighbour, no phone call, no nothing.

However, the lesson that came to me a few weeks later wasn't about being there for each other. The lesson came with the realization that so often I'm not there for myself. So often there is something happening inside of me and I'm not able to provide care, or concern. I often know something is happening but just close the window and get on with other things. Or I stay in the safety of the house next door and call down advice, or berate myself that I should or shouldn't have done something. I often live in that part and I don't know how to ask if everything is ok, let alone come down to the street, be in the space of not knowing what is going to happen, but still provide comfort to myself. So often, I have no idea that I could do that, let alone how.

That was 10 years ago, and I'm still learning the lesson, still discovering how to notice that sirens and smoke means that maybe I need to do something. Still learning how to be concerned, how to walk down those stairs and be there. It's not so much that I have the part that doesn't do this, it's learning to engage and develop the part that can so I'm not left alone.

And you know, I've also realized that I'm so often not there when I need encouragement, or to celebrate the good times, to be curious, or even just to hang out and spend time together. There is a whole world of being there for myself waiting to be discovered. Some lessons have so much to give...

What about you?