

Fences

Harold needed fences—so did everyone else, he believed. Good fences make good neighbours, no matter who your neighbours are. Although he felt a bit lonely.

Harold had a physical fence around his house—wood-appearing plastic pickets—but he also had a metaphorical fence around himself. At work he was polite but few intruded—they sensed his invisible fence. Same with family, even his wife. Fences kept Harold himself, he believed. Although he felt lonely.

He had no problem with fences, despite what the hints of people around him. The problem was other folks had not sufficiently built their own fences. He had to help them. Loneliness was natural. Fences were a gold standard. He urged friends with houses to build larger fences, perhaps tall green hedges no one could see through. For those in apartments, he suggested a police-crossing roadblock protecting their front doors—on the inside, so the doors could be opened, say, for a pizza delivery.

Occasionally, Harold felt more than lonely-isolated. Even with his wife and two children. He did not understand—his life was close to perfect. Yet they complained his distanced himself from them, and everyone. He could not believe fences were somehow injuring him. So, one morning, Harold tore down his personal fences, kissed his wife, hugged his two children, and walked past his white picket plastic fence, excited at creating a new life for himself.

At work, for the first time, he invited colleagues to talk about their personal lives. He learned many lived in soap operas. Others had dogs and fish tanks. He even had lunch with two of them. Harold got little work done that day, at least the official kind. However, he left refreshed. Tired but refreshed. They saw him as he was—even if some were disturbed at his aggressive nature.

All that connectivity left him worrying about others—a new feeling. He wondered what he could do to help them. When at home he opened himself up and showed his wife who he really was. In a week, she left him. The kids left with her.

He built hedges around his house, avoided talking with colleagues, had learned fences make lousy neighbours—but too late not to feel very alone. Sometimes what you learn ain't what you want to get.