**TRQ\_Neighbors.mp3**

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**Speaker 1** [00:00:25] If you have something to say, you're a podcaster. Head over to Acast WSJ.com to get started for free. Hi, Vanessa in Casper. This is Jordan in Denver, Colorado. I live in a big apartment complex right downtown. I've been here for the past three years. And though I've started to recognize some faces in the elevator or male room, it's mostly an anonymous community. One evening, about two years ago, I did get a knock on the door, and when I opened it there was a woman wearing an apron and she said, Hi, my name is Ping. I live next door. It's my birthday. We're trying to light candles on my cake. Do you have a lighter we can borrow? We kind of laughed together and I grabbed a lighter for her. And then over the next half hour or so, I could hear just sounds of birthday happiness and joy. Next door it was clear Ping had a family. I got another knock a little bit later. She was returning the lighter and she brought me a piece of chocolate cake with strawberries. And this time Ping was accompanied by her little one. Emma We stood and chatted for a little while. Ping was asking me all sorts of questions about myself and just being super friendly and Emma was becoming enthralled by my black cat named Percy. Ever since then, our relationship has been super friendly. We stopped to chat in the hall. We frequently exchange baked goods. They have invited me over to share meals with them. The family being ping her husband and then Emma. We've received packages for each other when we're out of town. Back at the start of the pandemic, when we were all cooped up inside, I had them over to do a little kid friendly dance, exercise video in my living room, and then I just helped this Chinese-American immigrant family navigate the waters of enrolling their daughter in kindergarten here in Denver and help them understand Emma's virtual school work set up this year. It's been a super valuable relationship, and as a single woman living alone in a big city, having this connection with my neighbors has not just made me feel safer, but it has just really improved my quality of life. Ping is so kind and inquisitive and giving. She inspires me to be those things too, and I've just loved living next door to her and her family. So anyway, I just wanted to share that with you. Thanks.

**Speaker 3** [00:02:35] I'm Casper ter Kuile.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:37] And I'm Vanessa. Zoltan.

**Speaker 3** [00:02:39] And this is the real question.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:57] Kasper I love Jordan story because it's like the platonic ideal of what that moment could have been. This could have gone. So the other way of like. And then our next door neighbor started knocking every day. And now I get trapped in the hallway talking to them. But instead it's like this beautiful, wonderful thing that came out of this small neighbor interaction.

**Speaker 3** [00:03:20] And I love that Jordan shared that, you know, she feels safer just by knowing someone who lives next to her, at least from what we know. It wasn't that she felt super, you know, in danger or anything before. But just just the kind of psychological ease that we have when we can recognize and know the names of and just have a basic chit chat with the person who's living.

**Speaker 4** [00:03:38] On the other side of the wall.

**Speaker 3** [00:03:40] That's so lovely. Thank you, Jordan.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:43] Yeah. And it makes sense that we feel safer when we know the people next door, right? We can. I mean, we can not only ask them for a lighter or a cup of sugar, but we can say to them, Hey, I'm going out of town for a few days. Do you mind? Just like keeping an eye in case my house starts flooding, right? Like these things really do make our lives better if we're in relationship with the people who, as you say, like we share space with in such an intimate way.

**Speaker 3** [00:04:12] Well, it sounds that Jordan and I live in pretty similar kind of living situations. I live in Brooklyn in an apartment building, and there's about 25 units. And we moved in just under two years ago when we came down from Boston. And I didn't know anyone in the building, and I've never lived in an apartment building like this. So it was kind of a little bit intimidating. Also feeling very cool.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:34] Because everybody knows that apartment buildings are cool.

**Speaker 3** [00:04:38] But the overarching feeling that I had when we moved in was kind of the way in which this place is designed to be place less. Right. The walls are all white. Everything is, man. You know, there's there's no attempt by the landlords who are distant in any way to cultivate connection between people who live here. And in fact, I think they probably want us not to know each other because then we'd report things to each other about, oh, are you having a problem with the water? Yes, me too. Let's organize as tenant to pressure the landlord. Right. There's incentives from people in the building to keep us apart. But as we moved in, you know, I was trying to make small talk, just like Jordan and peeing. And as I was engaging people, I realized that, you know, generally there was an openness from people to meet one another. So after a couple of weeks, I thought, you know what we could do? We have a shared roof. Maybe there's an opportunity to invite everyone to meet one another at the same time. So I floated this with the most chatty neighbor I had met Sarah, and she and I both thought this was a great idea. And so we asked the building manager if it was okay to, you know, slip notes on the people's door. And he said no.

**Speaker 4** [00:05:43] And so what we were allowed to do was.

**Speaker 3** [00:05:46] To kind of put up a sign in the elevator. And I was like, Okay, well, we'll work with that. And we just said, Hey, come join us on Saturday afternoon. You know, bring something to share, will be up on the roof. And this is pre-COVID. So, you know, everyone was very comfortable congregating. And listen, did I love everyone who showed up?

**Speaker 4** [00:06:03] Absolutely not. You know where these people that I.

**Speaker 3** [00:06:06] Would seek out as friends.

**Speaker 4** [00:06:08] Also? Probably not.

**Speaker 3** [00:06:09] But did we have pleasant interactions that have really paid off? Yes. We ended up learning about a cool local restaurant from one of them. We played board games with two of them. And then when COVID hit, our first bubble was with our neighbors upstairs. And so the four of us would get together for dinner for the first couple of months, and that meant so much to me to have that connection. But over time people have moved out. That kind of level of interaction has decreased in part because of COVID, and now more than half the building has changed, you know, within within two years. So the question that I'm bringing is, should I invest again in hosting a kind of neighbor get together? Sarah has moved out a bunch. The people that we liked have gone. This is a transient building, so people are going to keep moving. And now that I've lived here for a little while, I found other friends in the city. And so the value of these neighborly interactions has kind of decreased. And also, you know, sometimes I do get caught in conversations in the stairway and 20 minutes maybe is a little long.

**Speaker 4** [00:07:11] Or you get pulled into other people's problems with the water that I actually don't really care about. And so is.

**Speaker 3** [00:07:19] It worth it to invest in a whole new set of relationships with people that I know are going to leave in another year or two and that I, I don't really need, even though in a kind of idyllic world maybe I know would be good for me.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:33] Success where it sounds like maybe one of the real questions that you're getting at here is this is an ethic that I hold. I want to be a good neighbor. I want to be in conversation with my neighbors. I want to be able to organize tenants. Yeah, but I don't really enjoy it on an interpersonal level and I'm not sure that I need it in my life. So. Although there's this value that I hold, it's a value that's external to me. It's not something that actually materially improves my life or that I enjoy.

**Speaker 3** [00:08:07] Yeah, and that was a really helpful distinction in my brain as I was thinking about this question was that I have always put the relationship with neighbors in the same category as friends. Right. Like, is this person fun to hang out with? Do we have shared interests? Do they make me laugh? And most of the time, the answer is no. Like I'm judging people I happen to live with or next to on a chart that I would usually have for kind of seeking out a deeper friendship. And so in my mind, it's like, Oh, maybe I need a different kind of chart. Like, Is this person trustworthy? Would I be comfortable with them having keys to my house just in case I get locked out?

**Speaker 4** [00:08:44] Or do they have tools that I need? And do I have.

**Speaker 3** [00:08:47] Tools that they need? It's a it's a different type of relationship. And I feel so practiced at that, having been raised in a context where frankly, neighbors were often more of a nuisance than they were friendly. And so it's just a very different kind of relational type that I feel very inexpert in.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:06] I mean, that makes total sense to me. This is not the kind of relationship that in the West we covet or train ourselves to invest in, right? We move away from our families. There is the advent of the suburbs so that we could all be more and more isolated. As you said, your apartment building is, to a large extent, designed to keep you all separated from each other. So it sounds as though you are actively trying to subvert something that like goes against the tide of culture. And then you're like, But I don't want to swim this hard.

**Speaker 3** [00:09:39] Yeah, that feels absolutely right. Like, I think there's a responsibility that maybe I hadn't fully lived into as a student, for example, and really thinking about who do I live next to? Not just a passive responsibility of like, don't be a bad neighbor, right? Don't play music too loud. Don't and don't do all those things. But also an active responsibility of like, well, if you're moving in somewhere or if someone has just moved in, it's my responsibility to go and introduce myself and welcome someone or offer if there's anything I can help with. And I do feel that Paul, in part because it felt good when we hosted that first rooftop gathering, you know, about a third of the building showed up. So I didn't get to know everyone, but I had a sense that when I walked around the corridors that this was a place that I belonged in, in some way. Like I wasn't a stranger in the building because I was familiar with some faces. And I could be like, Oh, that's where Katie and Joan live, or That's where David and Sarah. And that gave me a sort of sense of ownership over the place, even though I obviously don't own my apartment, let alone the building. But it meant that I wanted to tidy, you know, the staircase when it was looking a little dirty. Or it meant that I felt confident saying to the landlord, You know what? You promised all sorts of stuff in this basement. None of it has happened. Why do you buy us a ping pong table? And they did after about four months of me pressuring them. Right. And I wouldn't have done that if I didn't know my neighbor, George, also like ping pong. Turns out George just moved out. So now the ping pong table is just me in the wall. But there was a sense of agency that I developed because I knew those people that made me happier. But it just also costs a lot of time and effort.

**Speaker 2** [00:11:15] So your question is, do I throw this rooftop party again? But it's also I don't really want to, but there's a value to it. I don't think it's really worth that value anymore because I have these other friends. But is this something that I just think is important enough that I'm willing to put the effort in, even though it's not going to behoove me? I mean, the real question is like, what relationship do I want to have with my neighbors? Yeah, what do I owe them?

**Speaker 3** [00:11:43] Yeah, that's exactly the real question. Like, I know I want to do this more and I guess I'm trying to figure out like, is hosting another rooftop thing this summer as posting things outside becomes a little easier in times of COVID. Like, is that the right next move or should I, you know, just double down on the people that I do know now and not worry so much about the folks moving in?

**Speaker 2** [00:12:05] Okay. So that's really helpful. So what is the first text that you have brought this week?

**Speaker 3** [00:12:11] So the first text that I brought is this wonderful book called Community by Peter BLOCK, and it's honestly one of my favorite texts to think about community with because it's very, very practical. Peter BLOCK, who lives in Cincinnati, he's a long time resident there. He's very involved in the local community. And he, among others, is an advocate of this approach to thinking about relationships called asset based community development ABCD. And what that essentially means is that when you look out into a neighborhood, instead of thinking about the needs of people who live in the neighborhood, which is usually how social services will think about it, right? This is a low income area or this is a food desert. These are all ways of looking at what communities lack and the frame of asset based community development is to say, Well, what? Is here. Like, what are the gifts that this neighborhood has? Maybe it has a really rich music scene. Maybe this person knows everyone on the block and has a great understanding of the relationships in the neighborhood. Maybe there's fantastic murals that are here. Who knows what it is? If I bring that kind of asset based community development model into my context, obviously I'm not running a social service. But, you know, in the moments when I have looked at my neighbors as what they can do, kind of like Jordan's voice mail. Turns out that someone who lives a couple of floors above me loves to bake. And so we have exchanged a couple of, you know, a slices of cake. Someone else worked at a company that I was trying to meet someone at, so she was able to see if she could make an introduction. There are all of these potential gifts or shared interests that you can build on. And I would never have known that if I hadn't asked about, you know, what do you like to do in your spare time or what something that you're passionate about and only asked like, What do you need from me as a neighbor? Do you know what I mean?

**Speaker 2** [00:13:56] Caspar I love this idea so much that BLOCK is offering, and I also love that you're like, I'll do the party, but like, what can you do for me? And you come and hang stuff. Are you tall? Let me do an asset read of you and then I'll decide whether or not to throw a party.

**Speaker 4** [00:14:14] That makes me sound so awful. I can bring you ping pong. You know, I have gifts to offer.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:20] I mean, I think the next logical move is to put a sign up sheet in the elevator that says, What can you bake for me? But jokes aside, I think that that is a really lovely way to look at people, to wonder about yourself, what gifts can I give, and also what gifts do other people have? Rather than saying, Nah, it's Mr. Green and he is going to talk to me in front of the mailbox. It's like it's Mr. Green and he's going to talk to me in front of the mailbox. And also, he was a mailman for 30 years, and he served his community in this meaningful way. Or even just like, what about at your party instead of like. Hi, my name is Casper Nametags. It's like, hi, I love to garden, right? Or Hi. I make really great balloon animals. Hi. I care a lot about spreadsheets and you can, like, learn about each other's gifts. And I'm not saying so. You can go around exploiting each other, but it feels nice to share the things that you're good at. And that's like a better conversation than like, Hi, I'm Vanessa. I am a podcaster. Like, who wants to hear that about me? But if I'm like, Hi, I'm Vanessa. If you get a puppy, I can probably help you train out because I raised the best dog in the world. Like, I just think, like, that's going to be more interesting to people.

**Speaker 3** [00:15:34] Yeah, I love that idea. Okay, let me come back to that because I want to read you the exact quote that I want to pick for our conversation today. The essential challenge is to transform the isolation and self-interest within our communities, interconnectedness and caring for the whole. And we begin by shifting our attention from the problems of the community to the possibility of community. So that that final bit is really key, that we begin by shifting our attention from the problems of community to the possibility of community. And that really resonates with me because it tries to shift the sense of like, Oh, these people aloud or those people have a dog and boy, is it not trained. And it wasn't for about four months.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:15] I kind of helped them like.

**Speaker 3** [00:16:17] It drove me insane. I would record clips.

**Speaker 4** [00:16:19] Of this dog so I would have evidence of how annoying it was. So not paying attention to the problems, but paying attention.

**Speaker 3** [00:16:27] To the possibility, like playing Mario Kart together as we did with our COVID pod. That takes some intentionality. And it also means that, as you said, you have to actually know what people's gifts are. And I think maybe that's something I haven't paid enough attention to or I haven't asked enough about because I've kind of just judged people on what they shared, which is like, I work in this field or I do that job, and frankly, those are not my fields and I'm not that interested in them, you know what I mean?

**Speaker 2** [00:16:54] So it sounds like you're just on board with this. Like throwing this party had a lot of rewards and it lives up to this value. And like, maybe you want to tweak the way you did it a little bit, but like, I'm just hearing a lot of positivity about this experience, and it sounds like you're pretty sure you're going to do this again.

**Speaker 4** [00:17:14] Yeah, I am. But also not. Is this the group of.

**Speaker 3** [00:17:20] People that I want to dedicate like a number of hours to every week? You know, I really feel differently about it now than I did at the beginning of moving here because we didn't know a lot of people, certainly not in our neighborhood. Now, I have a bunch of friends that I can go on walks with or who I know live nearby. So if I really needed something, you know, I could knock on their door. And so I don't know if I'm willing to really be the person who every year invests in making the effort to get people together, because that becomes kind of draining after a while. So I feel I feel hesitant about really that leadership. Role in a way maybe that I didn't a year and a half ago.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:01] And I think that's totally fair. You are in a different place now than you were a year and a half, two years ago. Right. Like you, as you said, you have these other friends in your neighborhood. You didn't realize that this building was going to, like have such a high rate of turnover. You thought you were investing in community in a way that it turns out that you weren't? I think it's completely reasonable to say, do you know what? That was a lot of work and it was nice, but like, I'm still reaping the rewards and nobody has come forward and offered to throw this with me like nobody else is saying, Oh, that was so fun. Can we do it again? Like it would just be you putting forth this effort. So I think it's totally fair to say this isn't how I want to spend my time. I'm busy. Does that feel reasonable or do you still want these people in your life in some way?

**Speaker 3** [00:18:51] I mean, I feel like COVID was such a stark reminder of the importance of locality. I mean. We were not necessarily in the same boat, but we were in the same storm and we were literally in the same building. So it mattered a lot if people were bringing people over without the rest of the building knowing. Right. It mattered a lot if people were wearing masks while they were walking through common spaces. It just mattered so much more about how people engaged with one another. And I think it became it certainly for me it was easier, at least in those first 3 to 6 months because we did have a little pod with people who lived in the building. And so it's the possibility of community. You only really see it in action when you need one another. And so most of the time maybe I don't need them and they don't need me. But then at other moments, right. Rebecca Solnit talks about this in the face of disasters, it's actually when people are most generous and most helpful to one another, especially at a neighborly scale. And so if I hadn't invested in that upfront, right, of bringing people together, I would never have been in a pod for those early months of COVID. And that made such a difference to me. So I don't want to describe it as risk management or like, you know, is the input worth the output? That feels icky to me. It's about like an ethic and a potential. A potential, yeah. The possibility of community. Like it could be so beautiful and who knows what will happen in the future. And wouldn't I be glad that I would have done this even if they're not my bestest friends, you know?

**Speaker 2** [00:20:24] Yeah. And when Ping went over to Jordan's Ping thought that she was borrowing a lighter, but it turns out that she was starting a really meaningful friendship, both for herself and for Jordan. Right. Ping has brought so many gifts into Jordan's life. And so it sounds like you also just want to be open to the possibility of that. Like if I throw a rooftop party, I don't know, maybe my new best friend is on that roof. I mean, I just want to say that, like, again, it does not sound to me like it's about this one party. It's about this value that you have, that the Peter BLOCK value of the possibility of community. And like maybe these people aren't going to be your best friends, but maybe they are and like maybe you're going to make this amazing connection or maybe you're going to be able to help somebody else through a difficult time. And even if you don't enjoy throwing the party and nothing good comes from it, you are committed to this possibility of what community can be, and that is the gift that you're giving. And so you are saying, I'm going to throw this party because that is my gift. And I'm throwing this party as a gesture to the belief that all of you have gifts to offer to. And it's sort of this like hopeful act of saying, I believe in the possibilities here and here's my asset, here's my gift. It's this party.

**Speaker 3** [00:21:45] It's making me think differently about this question to have rather than thinking, Oh, should we host this thing again? Like, Is it worth it? And instead, think about it as every summer I host this and if other people want to host something else in addition, or if other things come of it, great, right? But it's really independent of the outcomes that I'm trying to drive towards. And it's more about like wherever I live every year I will host something that brings people who live there together that feels actually much like psychologically easier because I'm not looking for something to happen like that. Pressure is kind of off me. And if people don't come, they don't come, you know, that's fine. But I have fulfilled the kind of ethical commitment that I feel I have. That's really helpful.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:29] Right. That was your gift. And so this is just something that you now do, right? You donate to campaigns, you cycle places instead of driving for environmental reasons, and also because you refuse to learn how to drive and you host an annual party and you build it into the systems of your year, you put it in your budget, you put it in your schedule months ahead of time. You I know you like you have a basic format for the flier and you use the same one every year and you put it up in the elevator, right? Yeah. And you can make it totally your own. It can be like a Shirley Jackson themed party where one person gets sacrificed every year.

**Speaker 4** [00:23:10] And luckily.

**Speaker 3** [00:23:11] The host is not ever the one put in.

**Speaker 4** [00:23:13] For that, you know, for the lottery of who is sacrificed.

**Speaker 3** [00:23:19] Oh, that's what story is terrifying.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:43] Okay. Casper So you brought this great book, Peter Bloks book community. What is the second text that you brought?

**Speaker 4** [00:23:50] I brought. Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:23:53] I brought Game of Thrones and I could have brought the book, but I actually want to bring the TV series where we're getting to know the world of Westeros and we're getting to know, you know, the different families. And really central to the first season is this character of Ned, who is the Lord of Winterfell, a city in the north. And he has these lovely children, one of whom is Iya. And the scene that I want to point us to is where he is teaching how who they are. You know, this is a story he tells again and again. Each kind of noble house has a saying and a sigal. Right. Like all of this great imagery. And he's reminding I this this younger daughter, he says, you are a stark of Winterfell, you know our words and the family is the family stark. And she responds by saying the words of the house, which is winter is coming. Right. This famous phrase from from the Game of Thrones series.

**Speaker 5** [00:24:45] Look at me, you're a stark of Winterfell. You know how words.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:54] Winter is coming.

**Speaker 5** [00:24:56] You were born in the long summer You've never known anything else. But now winter is truly coming. And in the winter we must protect ourselves. Look after one another.

**Speaker 3** [00:25:08] The reason why I chose this, first of all, because I love Game of.

**Speaker 4** [00:25:11] Thrones and I wanted to bring it in here. But I also think it has real.

**Speaker 3** [00:25:15] Wisdom because it's actually teaching us about the limitations of this kind of possibility, about the limitations of community. Not everyone can be part of the same family or the same city or the same the same clan in some way. And so that's that's what Ned is teaching it. And I think it's so interesting for her as a character to be saying this, to be learning this really as a girl at this point in the series. Because for those of you who who know the Game of Thrones story, she really goes through this fascinating journey of literally becoming No. One. She trains to become this anonymous assassin. She has to give up her name, her title, her history, her personality. And yet at the end of the series, she reclaims them. This becoming No one was not sustainable for her. It was not right. Ultimately, she becomes and reclaims this the central identity of being a member of the Stark family and the words of the Stark family, Winter is coming. So as I think about me as a neighbor, I'm like, Yeah, I can welcome everyone. And like, you know, I can knock on everyone's door and everyone can have a key. This story really says like, no, like you have to choose. Are you in or are you out? Like, are you part of this group? Are you not? And so it feels like it's pushing me to think about what are the priorities of my relationships? Am I a neighbor before a friend? Am I a partner before a neighbor? Like, how do I make a hierarchy of the commitments? Because that that gets really complicated.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:42] And because, like winter is coming, bad things are on the horizon, right? Not everybody should be trusted with the key. And not only should not everyone be trusted with the key, if you give everyone a key, if you become No. One, if you lose your identity and your boundaries, then there is no lock, right? If everyone has a key, the lock isn't an effective lock. And so I think what you're really dealing with is this sense of limitation, that winter is coming. There's only so many relationships that I can have. I value neighbor relationships, but I have to choose. There's a hierarchy I have to own. The fact that I'm a stark. I can't be no one. I can't be everyone. And so I have to start making some real decisions. I can't be everything to everyone. And Caspar, I just wonder if this is like not what you have time for or interest in. Now, I can totally see you in Shawn one day. I know that your hope is that you'll be able to buy a house one day, and when you feel more rooted in the community, if you're going to feel more invested in these relationships and more excited to invest in the relationships of being a neighbor. But you're in this in-between space right now. You're in this like nobody aria space where you're not a stark at home and you haven't reclaimed your identity. You're not ter Kyle of England, you know that the Turkle that you grew up with and you're not her, Kyle. This is the house that I am setting up your turkey. All of this, like, bland apartment building. I'm like, that's not a neighborhood that you really care to invest in that much.

**Speaker 4** [00:28:23] AI This is really helpful.

**Speaker 3** [00:28:25] I hadn't even seen that temporal element to it. That sense of like, the world will not always be this way. And that feels very true to me. You know, we signed a two year lease originally and we're now figuring out we'll probably sign another two year lease, but there is not a long term commitment to this building. At all, certainly not a long term commitment to these people. You know, there are dear, dear friends like you that I would much rather be living next to. You know, that would be so much better. And for one reason or another that I abandoned you and moved.

**Speaker 4** [00:28:54] To New York.

**Speaker 2** [00:28:56] And to be clear, when we were neighbors, when we did live near each other, we did have each other's keys.

**Speaker 4** [00:29:02] We did.

**Speaker 2** [00:29:03] And so I think that you might return to that space in your life again, where your neighbors are also your friends because you've lived with them for many years. Right. You didn't give me your key the first year we knew each other. It was like the fifth year we knew each other. And those relationships require investment. So I think that you'll be in that place again.

**Speaker 3** [00:29:22] Yeah. So this sense of like how long the commitment is for like this, this kind of temporal element I hadn't thought about. But that's so true in this quote as well.

**Speaker 2** [00:29:30] Yeah. And I just really do wonder if when you put down roots, you're going to be thinking about this totally differently, that it's going to feel like you really want to know the gifts of your neighbors and you want to invest in getting to know them. And you really want to share your gifts with your neighbors.

**Speaker 3** [00:29:46] You're so right. Like, if I knew I was living somewhere, I wouldn't just be hosting like a drinks thing once a year. Like, I would be so much more engaged, you know, even at a, like, local political level, I hope I'd be much more engaged. I do feel like that question of my own commitment to a place is really wrapped up in this. And then on the other hand, I'm like, Well, that's ugly. What a thin way to skate over life. You know, I might never buy a place like who knows what the future holds. Why wouldn't I do that now?

**Speaker 2** [00:30:14] Yeah, maybe that future won't come exactly as you're picturing it. But regardless, looking at your present right now, these things aren't easily doable. You are in a building that is designed to keep you all separate. It is admittedly very cool, but like it is designed in a certain way. I just think that it's okay to accept the present that you are in and the limitations of that present without without it necessarily being an excuse. It's just like this is the life that I'm living right now. Right now I am not ter Kyle of this building, I'm sure Kyle of other commitments.

**Speaker 3** [00:30:55] But well, I'm really saying like I am a tech Kyle of Tequila ville, right? Like I'm saying that actually my commitment is not here. It's to people like you and friends and family that I already have those strong commitments to you and none of those people are here in this place. And so it feels like what Game of Thrones points me to, if I read it as such, is that my primary commitment isn't to this place, it's to these other people who are who I have a closer relationship to.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:24] I guess I just think that that's fine and totally fair. Like we are allowed to say, I have little kids right now, so my kids are my highest priority. We put our marriages even on the back burner during those years and then the kids get bigger and you're like, Oh, like we need to reinvest in each other different moments in our lives. Call us to different things. And even if it's not something as like acutely pressing as your kids, we're just so loud to want to value certain commitments more than others.

**Speaker 3** [00:31:59] Yeah. And is that even the right way to think about it? Like, the way I've always thought about it is like family, friends.

**Speaker 4** [00:32:06] People I would see on the street.

**Speaker 3** [00:32:07] Or maybe like family friends, like work, acquaintances like professional network and then neighbors. So neighbors have always been kind of pretty low on the list, honestly. And I, I feel like I'm not the only one. You know, there's lots of statistics out there, like 65% of Americans don't know their neighbors. Right. Like, I think there's a lot of people struggling with this. So my first question is, like our neighbors, should they be kind of on the outer rung or should they be low on the list? But then secondly, like, is that even the right way to think about this question? Is it more that like the first rung should be 50% family, you know, 40% friends, 10% neighbors. Right. That might be a different way to conceptualize this. That feels different from how I'm doing it at the moment.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:49] I mean, there's one question of like, is there a different paradigm? But also, like, there's certain friendships that are really important to you one time and then they get less important and then they get important again. Like it's not like even those quote unquote levels are static. And that can be true of neighbors, too, right? First of all, some of your neighbors move in and out. And second of all, you can be really close to them and then you get busier and you don't need to rely on them as much.

**Speaker 3** [00:33:21] That's so funny because I'm suddenly remembering back to my first year of college where my best friend really certainly in that first year of college, and she stayed a great friend throughout those years we lived together is the girl who I lived opposite. You know, we had very little in common, but Kathy and I got on like a house on fire and we had a great time. And after college, you know, we've stayed loosely in touch, but we're not close friends now. Like it was a relationship of proximity that really worked. Like we lived well together. So I think about that time is one that was really shaped by my literal neighbors in the corridor, and now there's much less of that or there has been. So that that feels definitely true, that it could change. And, you know, who knows when I'm in my older years. Right. And you may be less able to get around easily the people that you're close to physically, again, take on a really important kind of role in your life that that makes a lot of sense to me.

**Speaker 2** [00:34:15] Okay. So in our first section it felt like the conclusion we came to in conversation with Peter Black's community is I'm going to make this commitment once a year. I'm going to throw a party. People are going to come. They're going to share their gifts. I'm sharing my gift. It's not about the results. It's about the process. All this, like, beautiful harmony, hippies singing in fire circles. And now you're like, Do you know what? No. Like, winter is coming. The world is constantly changing. This is a value I hold, but it's not a value that I feel like I can really live up to right now. Not in a way that's meaningful to me. And so I'm not even sure if I want to throw the party. It would just be like a gesture toward a value without me really loving up to the value in the way I want to of getting involved on a political level. And, you know, not just knowing the people in my building, but knowing my whole neighborhood and that you're not in that season. So I'm wondering, maybe it's a good time to put these two texts together and let those two things be in conversation with each other. So what snippets of text do you want to pull and have us put next to each other?

**Speaker 3** [00:35:19] Yeah. So I'm going to go for the possibility of community from Peter BLOCK and then rather than winter's coming, I'm going to go for, you know, our words from Game of Thrones.

**Speaker 2** [00:35:30] OC Oh, I love it. Okay, so what comes to mind for you when I read these two together? The possibility of community, you know, our words.

**Speaker 3** [00:35:43] The thing that's striking me is that I have thought about community in those hierarchies, right? Like this is the first priority and that's the next priority. And then neighbors come in kind of at the end of the race. And I actually think that I've been doing that wrong. And I should think about community as a much more mixed ecology of people, right? Like we really feel belonging when we have people who are close to us and people we recognize in the local cafe or supermarket. That's one of the things I learned from COVID for sure, is like not having any of those tertiary friendly faces that I don't even necessarily know the name of. But I see them on the train, on the subway every day. That still is part of what an experience of community is like. And so I want to shift my thinking from that hierarchy to a sort of like a garden metaphor, right? Like you have your rose garden that takes lots of attention and care and pruning and and, you know, love. And then you have some wonderful.

**Speaker 2** [00:36:37] I'm like a thorny flower that you really don't get caught on.

**Speaker 3** [00:36:42] I actually only a garden with honest varieties.

**Speaker 4** [00:36:46] So you're doing just fine, right?

**Speaker 3** [00:36:47] But it's a different image for me to think about cultivating a garden of relationships rather than like, I don't know, some sort of like sales.

**Speaker 4** [00:36:55] Spreadsheet of like these are your.

**Speaker 3** [00:36:57] Targets. Like that just feels so icky. So that feels really clear coming coming from those two sentences together like that. I know what community is like and it is that richer ecological experience.

**Speaker 2** [00:37:10] Yeah, in some things they're going to be really easy to grow like potatoes, right? Like and you just put one in the ground. And my understanding is that then you get like ten other ones and like some are beautiful, you know, roses with thorns and some things you like let lay fallow for a little while, right? Like some friendships. I love this garden metaphor that you're bringing us. I think it's. It's such a richer metaphor than a hierarchy and. Yeah. You need, like, soil diversity, right? And new things don't grow during certain times of the year. It's just a really rich way to think about relationships. Okay, so that gets to the end of your question. But the question is like, are you going to throw this party this year? Like, what does that mean for your strategy?

**Speaker 3** [00:37:57] So I think the thing I want to commit to is not necessarily I'm always going to host a party once a year, forever, but as long as I live in this building, that is what I'm committing to. I will change. The world will change. Where I live will change. But for now, I know I'm living here. I know there are 20 units that have people in them in this building that I can invite by putting an invitation in the elevator. And that's something that I can do and I want to do, and I have a responsibility to do. That feels really clear.

**Speaker 2** [00:38:25] But also I just want to say, you don't have to. This is not your job, right? Like you did not get elected to this position. You don't have to do this.

**Speaker 3** [00:38:35] Well, thanks. I guess I was thinking like I have a gift for bringing people together. I've learned that. And so if I think about giving my gift as a responsibility, then that's what I can offer, you know? So I'll I'll take your point. It's a gift. But I also believe in the you know, that we should all try and give our gifts as best we can.

**Speaker 2** [00:38:57] And I. Caspar, I'm looking forward to your gifts. What? What are you going to give me?

**Speaker 3** [00:39:02] I accept baked goods of all varieties.

**Speaker 2** [00:39:05] And for some people, it might not be a gift that you want to receive, like loud music at two in the morning. Some people bring, like, saltwater to the ocean. You know, it's nice that you're trying, but it's not quite helpful.

**Speaker 4** [00:39:18] That is my favorite pitch. But, yeah, I bring you this gift. Ocean Mighty. Yeah, it's salt water.

**Speaker 2** [00:39:28] Well, Caspar, thank you so much for bringing this question. I think that how to be a good neighbor is an important thing for all of us to be thinking about. And so I really appreciate you bringing this question to us today.

**Speaker 3** [00:39:38] Well, thank you so much, Vanessa. This is really clarifying. And I'm going to start making a list of date options and talk to some of the people I do know here, too, to get it moving. And thanks to Peter BLOCK and George R.R. Martin and the team behind Game of Thrones. I loved it for so many years until I really didn't.

**Speaker 2** [00:39:56] Until Starbucks gate.

**Speaker 4** [00:39:59] You've been listening to.

**Speaker 3** [00:40:01] The real question. We can only make this show thanks to your support. So if you have the means to help us out, please check out our patron. Patron Dot-Com Rail Question Pod. You can also follow us on Instagram and Facebook at Real Question Pod and Twitter at the Real Q Pod.

**Speaker 2** [00:40:17] We're not sorry production. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman. Our music is by Nick Bohl and we are distributed by Acast. We want to thank Jordan for her great voicemail and hello to Ping and her family. And we'd like to thank Julia Argy Nicki Zoltan, Meghan Kelly, Molly Baxter, Stephanie Paulsell and all of our patrons. Thanks so much, everyone. And we will talk to you next week.