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Meet my neighbors – who are just like your neighbors (a bit eccentric)

You see your neighbors most every day. You chat with them often and probably socialize with them occasionally. All of which makes it relatively easy to categorize them into one of the groups described below.

I've lived on a suburban cul-de-sac in Virginia, a sandy road on Cape Cod, a shady boulevard in Connecticut, a quaint piazza in Italy, a busy avenue in Wallingford, and a dead-end street in Ballard. But no matter where I live, I seem to have the same neighbors. And I'll bet you have most of them, too. Surely you know ...

The Yard Fanatic. No sooner has the groundhog seen its shadow than the Fanatic is out with his shiny lawnmower and gas-powered edger (does he lease them? Spend the winter polishing them?). In the fall he removes leaves with a blower, vacuum cleaner, and, if necessary, tweezers. I once saw him tenderly arranging a patio chair cover over his garbage can to protect it from being dented by hail.

The Car Collector. Every neighborhood has a car aficionado whose hobby has veered out of control. Currently I live next door to a seven-vehicle fleet that includes a scooter, a Jeep, a Leaf and a vintage Jaguar. That's a big improvement over my Wallingford days when I shared a driveway with a dude whose ramshackle garages and overgrown yard were home to a dozen rusting hot rods on blocks. The first time I saw smoke pouring out from under the eaves of his garage, I dialed 911. No cause for alarm – it was only the annual Testing of the Engines.

The Semi-Professional Decorator. There are vehicles in front of this house, too, but they're all making deliveries. Sears is installing a range and Dania is dropping off a living room set. On quiet days, FedEx arrives with lamps, rugs, and linens. Don't tell anyone, but I once rescheduled my summer vacation to be able to attend the Decorator's annual yard sale.

The Mysterious Neighbor. I've never met this neighbor, but I've seen him (or is it her?) three or four times – a nondescript middle-aged person scurrying from a nondescript vehicle into the nondescript house that always has all of its nondescript curtains drawn tight. Contractors arrive in unmarked vans. Is this an alien? A relocated witness? Then, one day, the Mysterious Neighbor is gone.

When I was growing up on Cape Cod, the kids would dare each other to sneak into the Mysterious yard at night and peer through the windows – until my friend Bobby saw what he claimed was a body in the basement, hanging from a noose! Years later, I met the daughter of that Mystery Neighbor. When she mentioned that her dad had kept his spinal traction equipment in the basement, the “noose” episode was explained.

The Enormous Family. They could not possibly have that many children, could they? Perhaps relatives are visiting? Does the house extend several stories underground? My niece, who plays soccer with one of the kids, reported that she ate dinner with Enormous Family three nights in a row before an aunt wondered aloud if she was one of theirs.

The Crazy Cat Lady. This stereotype is so well known, I barely need to describe her. She has at least four pampered felines, and they're all excavating (or worse) in your garden.

The disturbing question, of course, is which neighborhood stereotype are you?

I'll admit that when I first owned a house, I went through Yard Fanatic and Decorator phases; now I'm dangerously close to Crazy Cat Lady status. And when I lived in Italy, I got to be the Mysterious Neighbor.

Down at the espresso bar they're probably still talking about that night in late October when their Mysterious Neighbor appeared on her balcony carrying a mysterious object. She set down what looked like a large, hollowed-out squash, carved with crude eyes, a nose, and a mouth, and lit inside with a flickering candle. It was obviously a signal to alien spacecraft – and a successful one. A few nights later, she was gone.

