

The rapid technological advances of the modern world have rendered all but obsolete many of the practices of our fathers and mothers. Communications have changed as much or more than anything that touches our lives. Politicians who used to move from one country store to another, talking to scattered handfuls of people, now speak to millions via television.

Even the conversation over the backyard fence has felt the influence of technological progress. At least you might think of it that way after listening to a couple of sessions of WPTF's *Ask Your Neighbor* program. The show, aired every weekday morning, draws listeners from the same people who a generation ago meandered next door to while away a few minutes with the neighbor borrowing a cup of sugar or a recipe.

But radio has added to the housewives who used to visit. Truck drivers, traveling salesmen — anyone near a radio over half the State — can join in the conversation. They do, and the results are interesting. Charles Gaddy, who has conducted the big neighborhood get-together since its inception, gives us an inside look at how it's done plus recounting some conversational highlights.

Hello Charlie!

BY CHARLIE GADDY

9:25:00 am ... The day's mail is delivered to my desk, and I begin to scan it while Bill Jackson and Wally Ausley hold forth with the waning minutes of "Gabfest" in the adjoining studio.

9:30:00 ... Move quickly for the studio at the first stroke of "Emphasis" ... (I need every second now to get ready) ... exchange greetings with Bill and Wally ... Bill rises from the control board and I move in.

9:30:30 ... Place telephone and its special speakers in broadcast position.

9:31:30 ... Engineer calls "35" ... meaning that today the delay mechanism will carry that many beautiful seconds of protection.

9:32:30 ... Move switch into position for broadcasting on Channel 2 while "Emphasis" continues on Channel 1.

9:33:00 ... Have one last gulp of hot coffee.

9:33:10 ... Open mike switch and give station break ... punch button for theme song ... (This must be exact! Because of the delay, we open "Ask Your Neighbor" 35 seconds before "Emphasis" ends in order to make the programs meet on the air. Confusing?) ... theme ends with my greeting, "Good Morning ... this is Ask Your Neighbor."

Actually, to this moment, my work day has been strictly routine. The next

56 minutes will not be. I recall discussing the format of the show some four years ago with WPTF program director Graham Poyner, who suggested that we do a telephone show which avoided the controversial issues of the day. Something friendly, he said... indeed, neighborly. We have tried to guide the program in that direction, and, thanks to our listeners, have virtually achieved that kind of mood.

In the old American tradition of neighborly conversation over the backyard fence, a "happening" begins to unfold ... (a distinguishing difference being that our fence encircles half the state via 50,000 watts, and the "neighborhood" potentially numbers in the hundreds of thousands).

A distraught housewife in Raleigh wants to know how to get a kitten down from a tree. A rural Wake County citizen wants to know how to keep people from dumping trash on her property. A professor at N.C. State University wants to surprise his wife with some old-fashioned tea cakes and needs a recipe (he is besieged by calls, and ends up with over 30 recipes!). A travelling man wants to know what will remove alcohol stains from a wool sweater, and a listener in Wake Forest wants to know the date she should mow wild onions" ... so they



will bleed to death while the signs are in the heart."

Unusual requests? Not at all, for the "Ask Your Neighbor" audience. Try these ... How cold can a cat get? Where can I find a 16 inch slop jar? Where can one obtain fresh goat's milk? Can a coed at Campbell College successfully grow mushrooms in her dorm, and do the neighbors think her roommate would object?

In the "how do you get rid of" department

A squirrel in the attic ...

Birds in the chimney ...

A rat in the springs of a couch ...

Neighbor's dogs in the shrubbery ...

Mildew in the closet ...

Moles in the flower bed ...

A woodpecker on the eaves of the house ... (an N.C. State student so candidly answered this one, we began using our delay mechanism the very next day.)

Fun! Yes, there's plenty of it on "Ask Your Neighbor." Some months ago a lady gave a recipe for pancake batter over the air. Erroneously, more than likely, she gave twice the amount of milk needed for the batter. The resultant calls were hilarious. I particularly remember one lively caller ... "My Lord, honey! ... when I poured that pancake batter on my griddle, it ran all over the top of the stove ... then off the stove all over the kitchen floor. Then when I tried to mix enough flour with it to make it thick, I had enough batter to fill a bathtub ... What a mess, Charlie!"

During school vacations, the children add immeasurably to the humor of the show. One youngster's urgent call was a request for help in removing paint from a rug before his mother got home.

During one of his guest appearances on the show, the colorful and glib Lou Bello was almost at a loss for words when a woman caller chirped, "Lou Bello, I saw you on TV the other night, and you are the cutest thing I've ever seen!"

With all its frivolity, the program

often uncovers human suffering, as well as frequent acts of human kindness. For instance, I routinely read a sad letter from a relative of a teen-aged girl from rural Wake County. The girl had fallen during the summer while "helping put in tobacco." Having been paralyzed from the waist down by the fall, she understandably had gone into a deep and serious state of depression. She did, however, indicate an interest in piano lessons. The family could ill afford a piano, and the letter from her relative was to try to obtain any kind of old discarded piano. A week or so later, I learned that a well-known piano dealer had heard the show that day, and had delivered a brand new piano to that home with the request that his name not be publicized.

Recently, a male hospital patient called and began what was to be a bright and cheery conversation. While discussing his hospitalization and his loneliness, he was brought to tears. The "neighbors" responded by sending him great numbers of cards and letters.

A small boy from Wake Forest called to say he was old enough to join the Boy Scouts and asked if anyone could let him have an old scout uniform. Two hours later, a man who had been travelling near Lillington when the boy called the program, stopped by the station, handed me a twenty dollar bill, and asked that I find the boy and get him a brand new uniform. I did ... and the boy turned out to be the typically endearing red-haired, freckle-faced, all-American-type, who was simply resplendent in his new "scout suit"!

A truck driver called for help for a burned-out family in Wilmington, because he once faced the same tragic desperation in his own life.

The stories are too numerous to continue, but they provide me, personally, with a renewed faith in man's innate desire to be helpful and neighborly. The modern-day agnostic would find his negative philosophies badly bent by the kind acts, words, and deeds un-

leashed through "Ask Your Neighbor."

The show has prompted a number of projects, many of them involving me directly. I was encouraged to make a record, and even more recently, publish a cook book of recipes exchanged over the show during the past years. Both recording and book have been well-received.

Due to some amount of rapport we have established with the travelling man and woman, a "roadrunners" club has been founded that now boasts a membership of several hundred from several states.

Responding to an appeal during the Salvation Army's Building Fund Drive, the "neighbors" completely paid for two pews in its new chapel.

When I have the opportunity to meet some of my listeners, the two most frequently-asked questions are: How do I keep from laughing at some of the funny calls; and how do I keep from getting upset or angry at some of the callers, particularly the ones who take so long to say what they want to say, or those critical of me or the program. My answers to both questions come readily. If it's funny, I laugh. To the latter question, I attempt to understand the mood of the caller. (If the calls are not profane or otherwise unsuitable for the program, they are aired.) Further, I believe that age carries with it some privileges. Therefore, my older listeners are, in my opinion, entitled to a little more time than the rest of us in order to get said what they want to say.

When all is said and done, the show is fun for me. The abrasive confrontations come in small doses, and the delay mechanism, used to reject unsuitable calls, has only been employed by me a half-dozen times in four years. Besides, I enjoy the great privilege of friendship with hundreds of people across the state, most of whom I shall never meet, but whose lives have crossed mine in a bond of friendship created and sustained by a radio program called "Ask Your Neighbor."