

Where Have All The Neighbors Gone

by Wendy Miller

Last week, Xbox One, the latest incarnation of Microsoft's gaming console, was unveiled to an excited audience of industry insiders and devoted gamers. But all I felt was fatigue. It seems every conference or presentation I attended hinges on the latest, greatest piece of technology that will help me connect with other people, the "social" aspect. But anytime I look around during a presentation or meeting, my colleagues and friends are exclusively interested in their screens. Even at lunch, most of us attempt to make conversation here and there but our primary focus is paid to our phones. Where is the monumental platform or device that we'll unite us? Because it seems to me that with every new update, we only seclude ourselves from others.

If we aren't forced to get to know someone, a fellow colleague, your wife's friend, etc., why should we? Its true, never before have we've been able to reach so many people simultaneously at what seems to be an ever faster speed, seemingly rivaling real-time communication. But at the same time, as we rely on our digital networks more and more, what happens when we run out of soap or get a flat tire? Its human nature to rely on those around you in time of need. Hell, its human nature to want to have a beer with your neighbor on the weekend. But as we speed towards our supposedly hyper-connected future, I fear that few of these relationships will begin. Even as so many of us, Angelenos especially, identify ourselves by the neighborhoods we live in, how many of us know our neighbors or ,better yet, would befriend them?

It isn't difficult to imagine a world where all our interactions are siphoned through some network. By network, I don't mean something that would have kept Orwell up at night. But between my Facebook page and every other application that seems so easily integrated, I feel less and less interested in face to face interactions. Why try and interact with someone in the real world? On Facebook, I can interact with everyone I know at the same time. Of course, this is an exaggeration. Certain interactions are predicated by having at least two human bodies in the same physical space at the same time. But with every new revolutionary IT breakthrough, the number of these physical interactions will continue to decrease.

What happens on Saturday night when my wife is baking a cake and realizes she doesn't have any sugar? The obvious answer is she goes to the store. But when it happened, I thought about what my mother would did in the face of similar cooking crises. She didn't go the store; And she didn't ask my father to pick some up on his way home. Instead, She'd coolly walk about ten yards across the street and ask our neighbor, Susie, if she could borrow some. It dawned on me then that these kind of interactions have become increasingly rare. My wife and I live in apartment complex and aside from our roommate, we have no daily or semi-daily interaction with any other tenant. What's the point? All our friends are at our beckon call, twenty-four/seven.