

## Fences

My dad quoted Robert Frost's words to me: "Good fences make good neighbors," after I whined that kids in new neighborhood were prone to using our basketball court and Rainbow playset without our permission. Our last house had a fenced yard and we were unaccustomed to the constant kids trespassing on our property. "We just want to keep our kids safe. These kids are so much bigger," I justified to him.

So we began researching fences: what kind of fence is best? Picket, privacy, chain link? I had always admired the grace of picket fences - how they seem to enclose, yet still invite the neighborhood to see what was inside their gates. A privacy fence would protect us from unwanted kids climbing and swinging freely on the monkey bars. Plus, maybe if they couldn't see the playset, they wouldn't know what they were missing. And practical chain link incurred the least expense but was definitely the ugliest.

Several weeks into living in our new home, we still hadn't decided. One afternoon, I glanced out of the window. At least 10 kids swarmed the playset. They were balancing precariously on the top of the monkey bars, calling "Land Ahoy!" from the pirate ship platform, and flying on every swing - pumping their legs, trying to touch the sky. My face red, I took a deep breath and marched outside to tell them to scram.

"Mommy!" In the center of the trespassers, I saw my daughter, the smallest and shyest of my children. "Come meet my new friends!"

The next time I talked to my dad he asked what type of fence we had chosen. "None," I told him, explaining that we felt like the fence did more to divide and separate our neighborhood. My dad assured me that a fence would still allow the kids to come in with our permission but that we would have better control over our property. "No thanks," I replied. "We'll take it on a case by case basis. Besides, it's not like we put in the swing set anyhow. It just came with the house."

In the past, the divide between el Norte and our southern neighbors in Mexico was a legitimate fence, at least where it was marked. You can still see it in some parts of the southwest.

It's made of wire and has large spaces between the strands. Much like a picket fence, it allowed our neighbors a nearly uninterrupted view of the landscape. However, the barbed wire that spanned the top was there to protect against predators that threatened the safety of the livestock that roamed free across the ranchers' lands. The new border fence, was built in 2006 thanks to the Secure Fence Act. It looms just ten feet from the remains of the historic one. This "fence" offers less ambiguity about what and whose entrance it seeks to bar.

Last week we visited the New Mexico wall with a Border Patrol Media Relations agent: Joe Reyes, a third generation Mexican-American. He, and his colleagues take their jobs seriously, patrolling our southern border from all who wish to enter, predator or not. Every 30 minutes an SUV drives by, anticipating trespassers.

The wall in New Mexico is imposing. Eighteen feet of steel bars dominate the otherwise barren landscape in the most southern part of our country. It's difficult to imagine someone trying to navigate the terrain in a quest to follow their rainbow-hued American Dream. But this so-called fence still allows a view. You can see the mountains from the most northern part of Mexico as the shadows illuminate their crevasses and peaks - shades of salmon changing to rust to deep coffee as the hours change. It's beautiful. In Nogales, Sonora the sister city of Nogales, Arizona, the fence, which is actually a wall, is made of 30 feet tall solid metal bars; yet the Nogales side is adorned with murals and metal artwork documenting the tension between the two nations. Elements of beauty interrupted by a protectionist desire to keep our property safe.

So when I turn on the TV and hear the chants of "Build that Wall!" at rallies across our nation as President Trump spouts rhetoric, I'm reminded of the deep desire I had to protect my children and my home. Fences are man-made. They stem from a deeply human desire to secure what is yours.

And then I recall the lines in the middle of Frost's "Mending Wall".  
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense."

Our nation has gone through many boundary shifts, acquiring lands, people, languages, professing to be inclusive, but scared to open our borders. We have room for the neighbors to come over, but we don't know them. They are bigger, scarier, unknown to us. But we must remember that we didn't earn this Rainbow. We didn't build or buy it. We just inherited it with the house.