



### Text Version of Audio Story: Goodling

So many times I had driven past their house just on the way to here or there, and so many times I thought: One of these days I have to stop and see those nice folks.

Those nice folks, Mr. and Mrs. Goodling, were our neighbors when I was growing up in McAlisterville, and then they sold their house and built a smaller, more modern, ranch house about a quarter of a mile or so out the road. This time I was driving past and saw Mr. Goodling there working in the yard. I turned around and went back. I pulled in, and he looked at me as if to say, “*Who are you?*” I said, “*Hi, Mr. Goodling.*”

It had been a lot of years, I had changed my looks. I was grown up now. But when I smiled and said, “*Hi, Mr. Goodling,*” he lit up in a surprise realization that it was that mischievous neighbor kid from so many years ago. “*Nelson you just have to come in and see Mrs. Goodling.*” She was peeling potatoes at the sink. She was just as surprised to see me as Mr. Goodling was. I knew Steve would come up in the conversation if I visited, and I guess that’s why I hadn’t stopped before when I was driving past — their little boy, Steve.

It was back 1973 or 74, he was nine; I was eleven. Steve rode his bicycle onto the road in front of our houses. He must not have been looking. He was killed instantly. It was an awful, awful, awful day, the worst ever for our neighborhood. As a family, we sat down to talk, to try to figure out what we could do to help our neighbors, the Goodlings. When you live in a small town, neighbors are more than just neighbors. I don’t know how to describe it, but they are. What could we do to help as a family? Every idea we came up with just seemed so empty, so void of a fix, so meaningless, considering the tragic circumstances. My Mom decided she would make a large sandwich platter so that it would be at least one meal Mrs. Goodling wouldn’t have to think about for all the out-of-town family now gathering at the Goodling home.

As a family, we offered our condolences. We offered our home. We offered ourselves in any way we could. We told them *anything at all that you need*, and again, it just seemed like everything we offered was of no real help. We felt as if we were coming up short. We felt as if we were letting our neighbors down when they so desperately needed us. On my visit all these years later, Mr. Goodling and I sat at the kitchen table, and Mrs. Goodling stood at the kitchen sink peeling potatoes, and we talked about it. We talked about that awful, awful day.

*“Steve would be 36 if he were alive today,”* Mr. Goodling said.

The Goodlings talked about how they worked at moving on with their lives.

*“You never get over something like that, but you have to keep going, anyway,”* Mrs. Goodling emphasized. And then Mr. Goodling said, *“And you know, Nelson, your parents were so good to us,”* and he went on and on about the little things my family did.

There we were all those years, ashamed of ourselves that we, as a family, couldn't find something big to do to help these folks, when all they really needed were the little things neighbors do for each other, the little things that make neighbors more than just neighbors.

From somewhere behind the radio with the music of Johnny X, I'm the American Storyteller.