

Over the Back Fence
For Friday November 14, 2008
Approx 650 words

Autumn leaves
By Alva Wood

Sam Burkholder has a lot of trees in his orchards. The leaves all fall off, every autumn.

Isabella Adams, Sam's next door neighbour, doesn't have anywhere near as many trees. But she lives downhill and downwind from Sam. So a lot of Sam's leaves end up in her yard.

"Why can't you keep your leaves on your side of the property line?" Isabella demands angrily.

"Well," Sam drawls, "I tell them to, every year, but they don't seem to listen to me."

Isabella likes to think of herself as a good citizen. She dutifully rakes up all the leaves, including the ones that drifted in from Sam's orchard, and stuffs them into clear plastic bags. She piles the bags at the end of her driveway for yard waste pickup, so she can buy their composted remains back next spring as OgoGrow.

Sam just runs his tractor over the fallen leaves and liquifies them with the rotary mower.

Unfortunately, he usually does it at first light in the morning. Sam tends to go to bed as soon as Jeopardy is over, so he wakes up early every morning.

Isabella stays up late to watch the CTV news with Lloyd Robertson. She doesn't really care much about the news, because it's almost always bad. She kinda dozes off, imagining Lloyd's dulcet tones murmuring sweet nothings from the second pillow on her bed.

So Sam's early morning mulching activities don't do much for neighbourly relations either.

Sam does try to mend relationships a little by giving Isabella a box or two of his apples. Not the best apples, of course. He's not about to hurt his wallet. Farmers have a hard enough time making a living without giving marketable apples away.

In return, Isabella usually bakes Sam an apple pie or two. She freezes the rest of her pies, and thaws them for church bake sales.

Sam also has a row of walnut trees, down near his property line. The trees produce nice fat walnuts. Lots of them. Some years, when growers in China or Washington State dump their excess apples into our market, he makes almost as much selling walnuts as he does apples.

Perhaps it's his increasing age, but this year, Sam was late harvesting all the walnuts. Then all the leaves fell off in a rainstorm and it was just too much work rooting around among all those soggy leaves to gather walnuts, so he left them.

The other morning, he took his tractor out to mulch the leaves.

When he got to the hidden walnuts, the spinning mower blades launched those hard-shelled nuts out the discharge chute like bullets from a machine gun. Each time he went up the row, the nuts spattered against the side of Isabella's house.

It takes Isabella a couple of passes to realize where the sudden rat-tat-tat on her walls is coming from. Then she erupts from her front door, in her pink chenille housecoat and bunny slippers, hair going every which way, looking like something that would probably raise Lloyd Robertson's rumble at least an octave if he'd been on the spare pillow, just as Sam goes past the walnut trees again.

Isabella shows remarkable agility bobbing and weaving to avoid the hail of walnuts.

"Sam Burkholder," she screams over noise of the tractor, "if you damage my house, I'll make you pay for it!"

"Fair enough," Sam retorts over his shoulder. "I'll send you a bill for the walnuts."

"Walnuts?" says Isabella to herself.

Sure enough, walnuts. And most of them already cracked open for her. She gathers up a couple of baskets. This time she makes pecan pies for the bake sale.

"No one's going to know the difference between pecans and walnuts," she assures herself. "Not after I add some extra vanilla, sugar, and chocolate."

She even gave a walnut pie to Sam.