We need more visiting in the world

The 1970s were certainly economically challenging times for our country.

We went from a recession to stagflation to high unemployment and high interest rates.

Time has a way of easing pain, but it sure seemed like a kinder and gentler version of an imperfect world compared to today. Tensions are high. Unity seems like a billion eye blinks away.

But in the 1970s we had what my late grandmother Cecile Hardie called visiting. It was a very informal process, but involved three specific steps.

Step one: Turn off the TV.

Step two: Turn on the coffee pot.

Step three: Start visiting.

Sometimes visiting was a few folks sitting around the kitchen table holding conversation. For larger groups or special occasions, the couch in the living room – or what Grandma called the “davenport in the parlor” and other seating areas were utilized.

The coffee was boiled, so it was hot and strong, the perfect lubricant for socialization. With the TV off, there were no other electronic devices – I can’t imagine what Grandma would have thought about smartphones – to divert your attention.

As a young child, I learned the value of sitting, listening and not interrupting. It was a chance to listen to adult conversation. We were free to wander off after a while to seek more childlike diversions like running around outside, but I came to realize that visiting seemed to be therapeutic for the adults.

After Grandma died in 1979, the social visiting epicenter in the family became the kitchen of her sister-in-law Sara Clair’s house. There was a beautiful oak circular kitchen table with feet of carved lion heads. That’s where we’d sit and sip the same strong boiled coffee or super sweetened Tang for the younger folks.

As I grew into adulthood and preferred coffee over Tang, we would bring our own children to visit Aunt Sara. They too learned the importance of visiting and heard some of the same stories.

As a child, I thought that everyone who visited were very much alike, since many were relatives. Of course I learned later that we all had our differences and didn’t believe all of the same things – spiritually, politically or morally. The table was a microcosm of life.

Despite our differences, we could still sit down and visit. We didn’t come to the table to argue about differences but to focus on what united us. And hear some country wisdom.

The turning of the seasons. The planting of the crops. The daily chores. The growing of the garden. Thankfulness. Gratefulness. The simpler things in life.

Aunt Sara died in 2004 and the visiting days went with her. The family had grown with more extensions and some splintering. The matriarchs that were the glue were gone.

Today I wonder about the state of our greater world. Divisions are the norm. Political storms constantly rage. Anger and bitterness fuel the fight and there is constant pressure to pick a side.

I wonder what would happen if we put on the coffee pot, invited our leaders to sit down, set aside their partisan prickliness and listen to each other. Then we would invite folks from all walks of life into the conversation.

Naturally we’d need someone like Grandma to set the tone and enforce the rules, but I think we would soon find that the conversation would take us down a common path.

Perhaps folks would realize that our politics may be worlds apart but the things we care for more like family, our children and a better future for our grandchildren could bind us together.

Maybe we’d talk about the turning of the seasons, the simpler things in life.

They too could learn from some country wisdom.