

“Letter of Anna”

Community of Sant’Egidio

ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME TO CONQUER LONELINESS

Read the letter and send us your endorsement via email to vivaglianziani@santegidio.org or text/call +1 646 644 3996

I have always tried not to be a burden on anybody. Certainly, I did not want to be a burden to my grandchildren, who already have their own children and to whom I gave the apartment where I lived before coming here. I chose to leave it to them. What would you have done?

I am 82 years old. I’m not that old, but I couldn’t stay alone in my home any longer. Sometimes I forgot to take my medicine, some mornings I just couldn’t manage to go out and do the shopping and so I made my decision: a residential nursing home for the elderly, where I can be with other people of my own age, nice people. Everything paid for, everything guaranteed, no need to make the bed or to cook and no burden for anybody.

Leaving my home was not easy. It’s one thing to talk about it, but it was another thing to actually do it. Still, in the end, I managed to do it. For a while I didn’t get to sleep; I felt out of place. The furniture, the linen, the plates, the photographs on the wall, the smells, the noises, and the pots: when you have them, life seems normal. But when you are so quickly without all these things that you have known all your whole adult life, you feel a bit lost and empty, no longer fully yourself.

It hasn’t gone too bad for me here, in this new residence. The food is acceptable. The place is clean, and in theory, there is a nice garden. I say “in theory,” because in the meantime my health has deteriorated somewhat and without someone to accompany me, I can’t make it out into the garden. All in all, there are pleasant enough surroundings here, but this new life is foreign and overwhelming. The old, simple joys and day-to-day tasks now require so much to accomplish them, much more than I can do independently.

Things: It used to be so simple buying batteries for the radio, paper handkerchiefs, fruit juices, and the newspaper. Errands: I never gave much

thought. However, now, I only get these things from time to time when my grandchildren come from afar. They live far away. I cannot ask them to come any more often than they do. And I miss the interactions with store clerks and grocers, the little “Hellos” and “How are you’s?” that accompanied each of these outings.

Glasses: Everything becomes complicated here, though certainly through nobody’s fault. My glasses broke when they fell off my bedside table, and I spent many weeks trying to find someone to get them fixed for me. Without them, spending my time reading and viewing old cards and pictures – one of the few ways to pass my time - became impossible.

Time: After a while, you forget what day it is, because each day plays out the same as the last one. It is as if there was nothing to wait for, to countdown in anticipation of the hours until that moment arrives. Even something as simple as viewing a favorite TV show becomes impossible. There is only one TV on our floor, shared by many, and everyone wants to watch a different show.

To be honest, maybe the thing that begins to trouble me most is the fact that nobody, for days, even weeks, says my name. If there is no-one who says your name, you begin to wonder if you are still a part of this larger world of ours. In my loneliest hours, I sometimes wonder: will I end up forgetting it too?

So, I said to myself: I must be proactive. What can I do to be a part of this larger community beyond the walls of my residence? How can I feel like myself again? I can be a friend. What’s more, a faithful friend; I have always been good at that. If you are looking for a friend, come and visit me. I have time; you will not disturb me. I am interested in what is happening in the world, and I would like to listen to your stories, to speak to you. I said to myself “An hour of time.” Yours and mine. To become friends, to be needed by somebody. In the face of loneliness.

Anna