

“Fresh Vegetables”

I have always been thankful for the luxury of fresh vegetables in the middle of winter. I never knew they would do more than enrich my table, but one night they enriched my entire life. I had stopped in to pick up some items for supper and was hurrying, so the tiny lady in front of me at the grocery's exit forced me to slow down. It was a bit icy as I hurried from the store, so I took her bag of groceries and offered my arm as she tottered toward the car idling close to the entrance. In the long seconds it took to get from the warmth of the bright store over the slick ice and into the car, I learned that this was her monthly chance to get out of the house and purchase groceries. Her driver, a former neighbor, now drove from her retirement community in Towson to tend to this childless 88 year old widow when she could.

It took just a few more seconds to get Mrs. Mallon safely ensconced in the warmth of her Good Samaritan's vehicle and scrawl my name and phone number on the back of the grocery receipt. I went home to whip up dinner and entertain my children with the tale of the little old lady with the cherubic smile whom I had just met.

I often wondered about her and wished I could check in on her... so when I received a message from her neighbor, I was relieved. She gave me Hazel's phone number, and our friendship began. From occasional calls that expanded into occasional visits, our relationship deepened until my children and I were making regular Friday stops at her home that spring. We sat in her back yard while the kids did yardwork, and brought her cat food to help with the twenty feral animals which relied on her. We listened attentively to tales of 'her kitties,' each of whom she had named and loved.

By the next year, with kids in sports and trips to the beach, we lost regular contact and it became months between visits. Then that August, we called on her birthday and she cried, telling me that she had just been sitting there feeling very lonesome and our call had brightened her day. That night, we took her to the local Mexican restaurant where, on her 88th birthday, she had her first-ever taco! We marveled at the can-do spirit of a woman who welcomed us into her life with such joy.

By the next year's birthday, we were visiting her in the nursing home where she was recovering from a shattered arm sustained when she tripped over the horde of cats on the way to feed them. The nursing home attendants kept coming into her room to sample the cake and compliment her lovely grandchildren. She corrected the first few folks, but after that, she just smiled and agreed that indeed, she DID have a lovely family.

How can I impact the life of a senior citizen? I can be impacted BY her... I can be family.