



Something of myself

To give others what I need and want myself is the simplest and most fulfilling way to live and give meaning to my ordinary life and my relationships.

By RAYA NOVAK- LIVING CITY MAGAZINE- 2011, OCTOBER

AFTER RETIRING WITH MY HUSBAND TO South America five years ago, I began to experience a sense of isolation owing to my inability to master the Spanish language. The majority of my social interactions remained rather superficial and a sense of lack of self-confidence began to grow. This undermined unity in my marriage and trust in my faith. This situation, however, stimulated a serious quest for understanding what I was supposed to do with my life. Later, I came to appreciate how strong the need for deeper relationships had become and how important it was to my overall well-being. This led to our decision to return to the U.S. and my native English language.

After our arrival in Colorado, I started searching for the “perfect place” and the “right people” with whom to establish new relationships. I was delighted to find so many possibilities — senior recreation centers, photography clubs, home decorating classes and charitable activities at the local parish. However, it soon became apparent that while I could easily become involved, much of this “bus-i-ness” might not lead to the vitality and fulfillment that I sought, as a famous song say, “looking for love in all the wrong places.”

After finding myself repeatedly saying “no, not this” for almost a year, I realized that most of these activities were focused on achieving something *for myself* rather than giving something *of myself*.

Eventually, I came to understand that this “something of myself” was potentially the love of God within me. The desire simply *to love* became much more important than where or whom I loved. Knowing that this was God’s will, it became easier to trust he would continue to teach me the art of loving.

I now work with the pastoral ministry department of my parish, listening to and empathizing with the experiences and feelings of others, and teaching about God’s immense love for everyone.

I befriended a 39-year-old woman who is blind and disabled. We met spontaneously last winter on a snowy day in a local Social Security office. I offered her a ride home and we exchanged telephone numbers. We speak regularly on the phone and often try to meet from time to time. However, making these kinds of arrangements often poses a challenge for me, as she is very particular about where she will go. She primarily prefers tea rooms where she can enjoy rich and expensive pastries, while I would be quite content inviting her to my home for a simple lunch. So despite my own preferences, and in order to love her, I frequently must seek creative ways to empathize with her needs in this regard.

I have also just completed training to become a volunteer with our local County Youth Protection Agency. I have enrolled in their mentoring program, where I am expected to provide “love” and to help instill “self-esteem” for a youth in foster care. Since I have no personal parenting experience, I welcome this. It is an opportunity to put the Gospel into practice.

Finally, I am involved in a program sponsored by our local city council and a coalition of local churches to promote “The Art of Neighboring.” In the hope of unity, I took the initiative to invite the chairperson of our governing association to our first neighborhood picnic, since many of our neighbors are currently dissatisfied with the current rules. I also offered to accompany another neighbor door-to-door to find the person who recently filed an anonymous barking dog complaint against her.

I am discovering that to give others what I myself need and want is the simplest and most fulfilling way to live. It gives meaning to my ordinary life and to all of my relationships. I also believe that the renewed sense of self-esteem and purpose that I experienced as a result of this discovery is a confirmation of what Jesus described when he said, “Whenever you did this for one of my least brothers, you did it for me” (Mt 25:40).