

Blessed Are Those Who Have A Hand to Hold Full of Warmth

Social isolation and loneliness are the next big public health concerns. While all age groups experience these, the elderly are more susceptible. According to the University of California San Francisco, more than 40% of older Americans experience loneliness. The rate almost doubled during the first few months of the pandemic because of lack of social interaction, stay-at-home orders, and not being accustomed to technology. The most common factors for social isolation and loneliness are separation from their children, death of a loved one/companion, poor mobility, and low income.

I moved to the U.S from India last year right before the pandemic began in March 2020. Being home-bound for the longest time in an unknown country and having no in-person contact took a toll on my health. Fortunately, I had my husband with me all along. It is far beyond imagination what the older generation went through in those hard times.

Luckily, I am part of a younger generation that is more tech-savvy in this fast-moving world. We have our gadgets and smartphones to entertain us but what about the elderly? Most of them barely manage to make calls. As everything went remote and the use of technology increased, the elderly were victims of this technology. Many do not have email addresses, and some are not interested in getting one. Those who have ongoing court cases face difficulties to familiarize themselves with Webex and Zoom calls. Some of them have no one to help. Just because we do not hear from them on the internet does not mean we forget them.

The elderly who have financial problems face more challenges. For example, it's difficult for them to manage day-to-day finances and with the increased use of online services, they are more vulnerable to frauds and scams. Women are more likely to live in poverty than men because they spend most of their lives as caregivers. As a result, some work even after retirement to feel a sense of security.

It is only when we see low-income older adults in senior centers or at home that

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we realize the injustice they face every day in navigating financial and medical problems.

Retirement is treated differently by every individual. Some older people look forward to retirement as they can indulge in hobbies that they could not pursue in their earlier lives, whereas others are scared to get old and live without any support. We often forget that we are aging too and the only things that the elderly need are love and care.

It is time, especially after the pandemic, that we care for those who once cared for us. The well-being and mental health of the elderly need to be taken care of because lack of social interaction affects some of them severely.

This is where the law has an integral role to play. With the help of the law, we can focus on assisting them and improve the legal aspects of their lives.

I studied law in India and was looking for volunteer work here in the U.S. when, fortunately, I found an opportunity to intern with Metro Volunteer Lawyers (MVL). It has been five months and it has been an amazing experience. Serving the community and being able to provide access to justice to those in need is truly a pleasure.

I have always had a special place in my heart for the elderly population as I lost

a set of grandparents at a very early age and there was not much I could do for them because of our busy lives. In India, we have a joint family system where most children live with their parents all their lives. Quite often, three to four generations live under the same roof and it's a very different feeling to share life experiences. In situations like these, the elderly feel less lonely and have less to worry about.

I stayed with my grandparents in India and with my extended family for a couple of years. Today when I am miles away from home, I cherish those beautiful memories. I feel blessed to be able to talk to them often, but sadly sometimes not all senior people have families, or if they do, they may not be on good terms with them.

I hope that we all can lend our hand to the aging community and show them some love and care. It is a tough job, but definitely rewarding and life changing. Blessed are those who can spend some time with their grandparents, they give us insight into the world we've never lived in.

For example, I had the opportunity to assist MVL's Power of Attorney Program, which helps the elderly get a financial POA, a medical POA, a living will, or a declaration of disposition of last remains. MVL does a presentation where we educate seniors about the documents. If they qualify for our program based on

income, we execute their documents at our workshop.

While attending the presentation, I got a better understanding of how their world is different than what we are living in today. At the workshops I shadowed volunteer attorneys assisting low-income seniors.

At one meeting, I was amazed to see how the client had no concerns about her children having access to her bank accounts. This contrasts with my experience with MVL's family law programs where I see people engaged in property and spousal support conflicts during a divorce.

Another senior I met with was very friendly and so full of life. He did not want to burden his daughter with the funeral expenses and made sure that it was taken care of from his will. After signing his documents, the way he shook

his hands with me, I felt a different kind of warmth and it was a very memorable and touching experience.

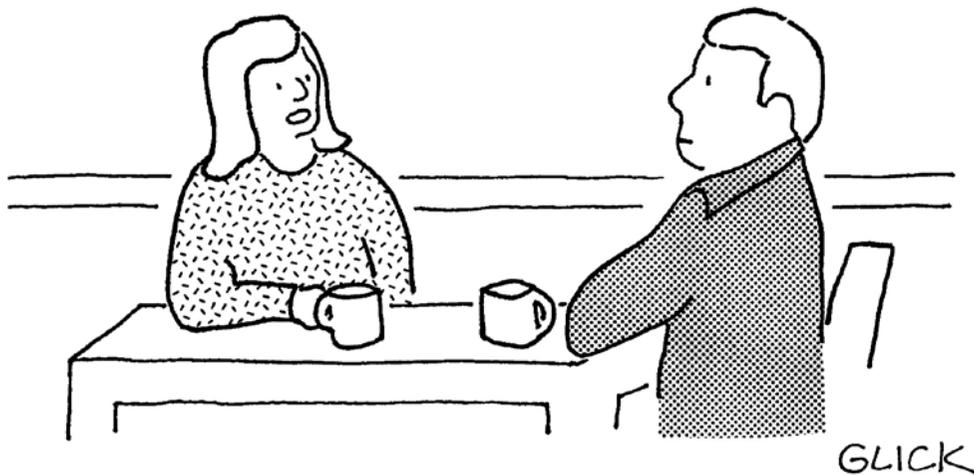
It is important that we stand for them, show a little kindness, compassion, and especially help the low-income groups. MVL's pro bono services assist them so they can live with dignity and assurance. By helping the elderly with their legal issues, we bridge the gap and help a vulnerable group of our society.

Blessed are those who have some childhood memories with the seniors, re-live them again. As attorneys you can do pro bono work through MVL. More holistically, you can spend time with your family and bring some happiness to their lives. Seniors offer wisdom, warmth, and wacky tales, but you should give without expectation. They are not a burden nor an obligation, but a treasure. ●

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She supports the staff and lawyers at MVL in both administrative and research opportunities. Ms. Shah enjoys civil law and is interested specifically in elder law, Wills and estate law and Bankruptcy law.

The Problem With Having An Intellectual Property Lawyer For A Boyfriend



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