

BE GENEROUS AND DO GOOD

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

Honoring Communicare



Since its inception by Community Outreach Partnership in 1985, Communicare has made a significant impact in Philadelphia. Because of your dedication, vulnerable elders received the support and care they needed to age in place with dignity.

Today, we have important news to share regarding the evolution of Communicare, which we hope brings clarity to all involved—including you.

Communicare came under the umbrella of Episcopal Community Services in 2016—and perfectly complemented an existing senior support program called Dolphin Companions.

Both Communicare and Dolphin Companions share a mission to provide companionship and support to the elderly community. While Communicare is committed to providing the service to people in their Center City homes, Dolphin Companions are visiting people in residential facilities throughout the five county region.

To better promote these services to both seniors and volunteers, ECS has decided to merge the two into one single offering by the name of Dolphin Companions.

While the name is changing, it is important to honor the impact Communicare has helped us reach in Center City.

In this special edition of Be Generous and Do Good, interviews, stories, and pieces written by volunteers celebrate the work of this program.

We want to thank you for your continued support—and for the energy and the friendships you have and will create with seniors across the region. In your service, you have shown that friendship truly has no age.

Thank you for all that you do.

In Faith,

David Griffith

David Griffith
Executive Director

John Randolph

John Randolph
CORP co-founder
ECS Board of Trustee

HISTORY

Have you ever wondered how the Communicare program got started?

We spoke with Maris Krasnegor, the co-founder of Communicare, to get a little more insight as to how it all began.

Decades ago, Maris and Susan Hale lived in the Philadelphia community and were members of Trinity Memorial Church (TMC).

As Maris recalls, Susan felt something needed to be done to provide more support for the elderly in the Fidler Square neighborhood as many did not have nearby family support.

They asked themselves: "What can we do?"

Louis Temme, the director at TMC at the time, was a great proponent of community health. He was a perfect addition to their team of three, and they worked to create the beginning of the program that we now refer to as Communicare.

Maris was the head of the senior center in Roxborough and had previously taught textile classes to seniors. She figured it would be a natural fit to take on the part-time role of volunteer coordinator.

She would visit elders in the community to find out what they needed and worked to find a suitable volunteer that had a similar personality and interests.

While many of the early volunteers came from TMC, the program continued to grow to include those in the surrounding community. The goal was to not only provide one-on-one support, but to have intergenerational relationships form between pairs.

"There are all kinds of people in this world—many of them are simply wonderful—and it will be a pleasure on both sides," Maris said. "This program offers the opportunity to get to know an interesting person with a lot to share and learn from."

We thank Maris and the team for creating this meaningful program.



SPOTLIGHT

Helene Barr was a volunteer with Communicare since its beginning.

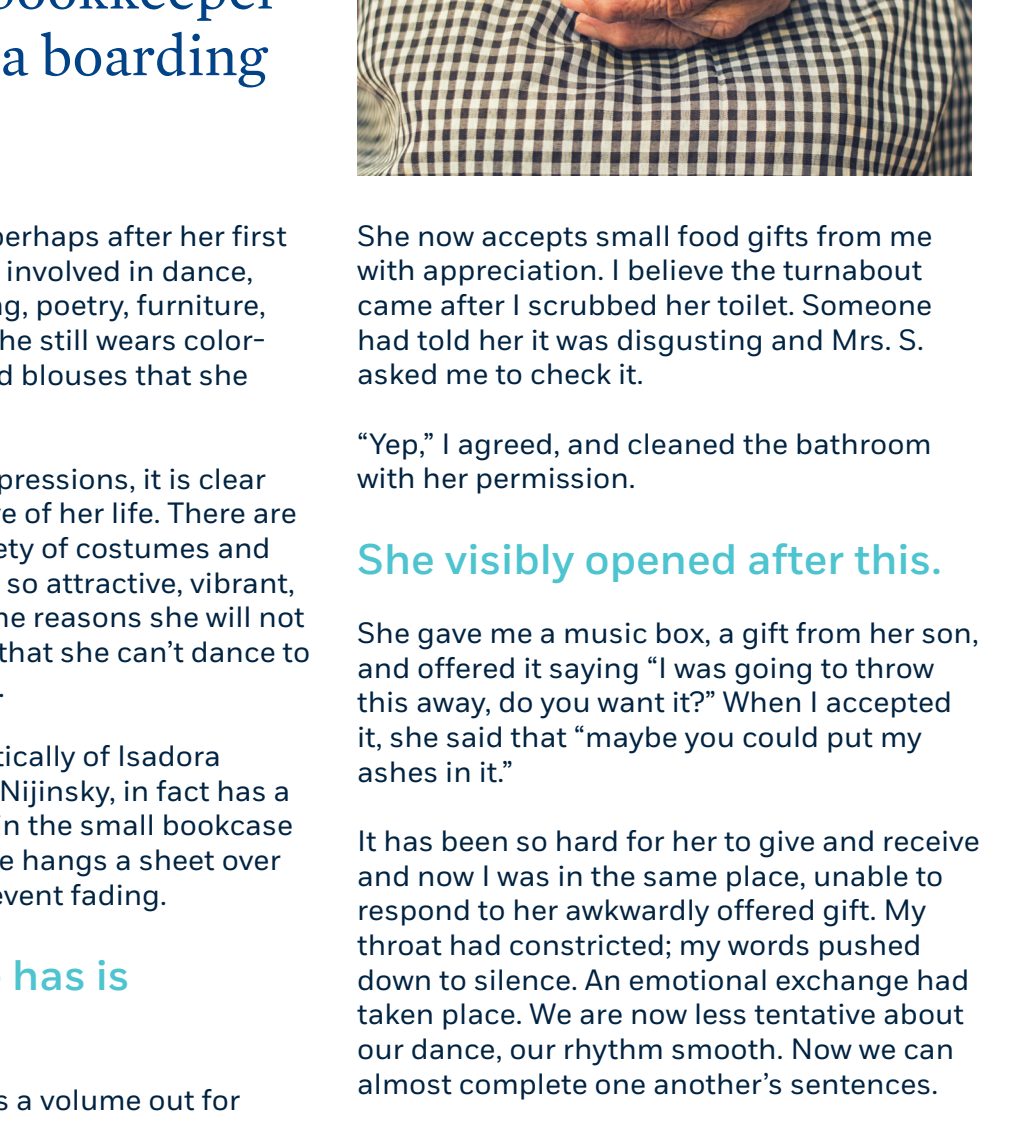
She was a mental health therapist and figured that the skills from her professional life would translate well to helping others in the community.

She became friends with Maris, the co-founder of Communicare, and praises her to this day. "Her incredible ability to match a client with a volunteer was uncanny!" she said.

Helene's journey with Communicare, and similar programs, has come full circle.

Later in her life, she recognized that she needed some assistance with a few of her weekly errands. Reluctantly, she requested needing a volunteer but "it was very hard for [her] because it meant something that did not feel good".

"It made life not only easier, but richer!"



Despite being hesitant at first, she ended up being paired up with an incredible volunteer who became one of her very good friends.

"[It] made life not only easier, but richer!" Helene enthusiastically recalled.

Just as she struggled when first asking for help, many other seniors feel similarly when their independence is compromised.

Her main point of advice is that even if a client asks for help, they may still resent it, and these feelings may come out negatively in the way they approach the volunteer, but she emphasizes that volunteers "shouldn't take it personally!"

Given Helene's position of having served as a Communicare volunteer, and now having a companion of her own, she has a unique perspective to offer those interested in volunteering with this program.

80+

VOLUNTEERS PAIRED WITH THE PHILADELPHIA REGION.

Volunteer Helene Barr has a passion for writing and poetry. She wrote a few pieces during her time as a Communicare volunteer, drawing inspiration from the relationships she formed. Here are two of her works.

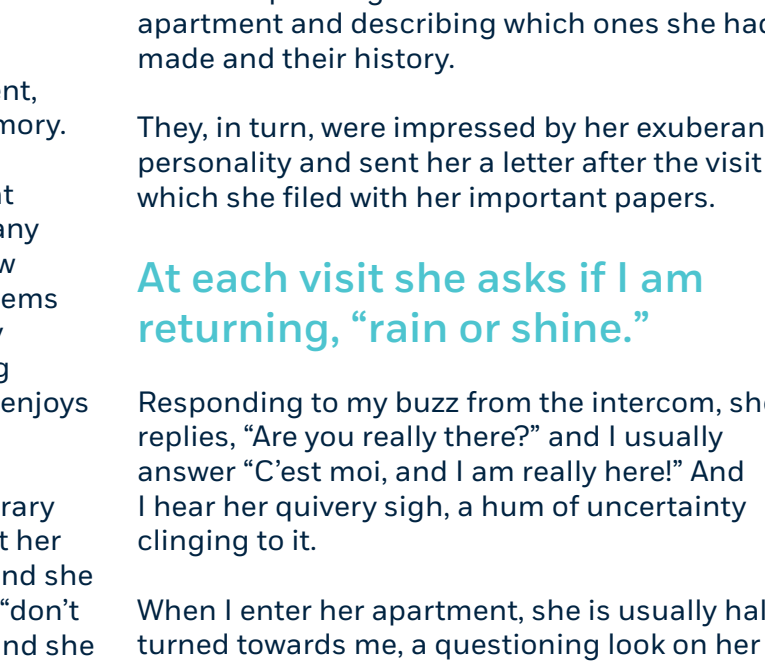
LAST RESPECTS

by Helene Barr

Seven dark haired heads bowed to a sparrow of a woman resting on red velvet, wrapped in a jeweled vest, dark glasses cloaking sightless eyes now open to the light.

She determined her life by large and small leaps. Opinions stone clad, views narrow but heartfelt. A tiny force, strength her will to make her world.

We agreed to disagree about politics and religion. She swallowed hard to insure a breath in her darkness. Family was her comfort, her irritated joy, the way with us all.



Minute, groomed, sparkling, clear on who she was, sensed the hospital rush was her last, and she whispered "please, no nursing home, it is time."

Seven dark heads bowed, their tears her reward, my last goodbye, a final clouded gaze at past and future.

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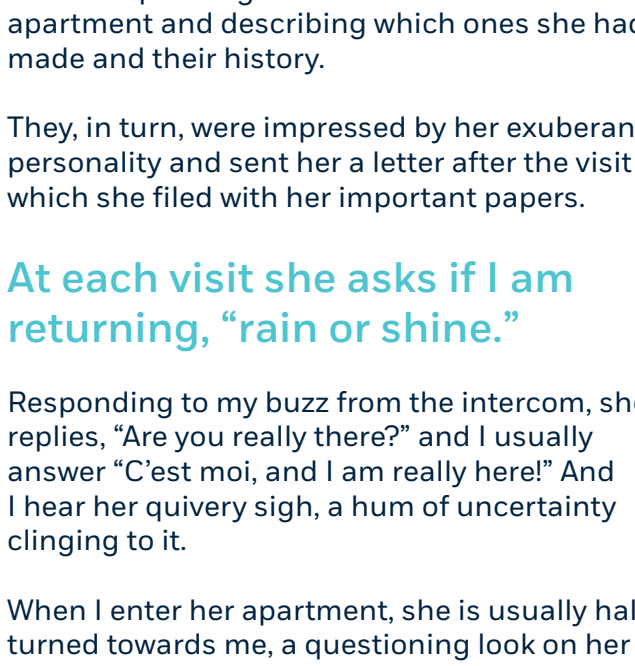
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She now accepts small food gifts from me with appreciation. I believe the turnabout came after I scrubbed her toilet. Someone had told her it was disgusting and Mrs. S. asked me to check it.

"Yep," I agreed, and cleaned the bathroom with her permission.

She visibly opened after this.

She gave me a music box, a gift from her son, and offered it saying "I was going to throw this away, do you want it?" When I accepted it, she said that "maybe you could put my ashes in it."

It has been so hard for her to give and receive and now I was in the same place, unable to respond to her awkwardly offered gift. My throat had constricted; my words pushed down to silence. An emotional exchange had taken place. We are now less tentative about our dance, our rhythm smooth. Now we can almost complete one another's sentences.

Recently, after reading a nature poem to her and discussing the images and the feelings they evoked, I confessed that I liked the smell of horse manure.

She clapped her hands, grinning, "I can't believe it, but I guess I'll have to since you said it first. I love that smell too. My father used to collect the manure to put in our garden and I would sniff the full buckets."

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As I prepare to leave, she walks me halfway to the door, anticipating our goodbye hug and kiss. I do not embrace her, for fear of giving her my cold, and she takes a few backward steps murmuring through narrowed lips "Do you think you'll be better next time?"

"Sure," I say, as I close her door and stand there silently, imagining her face without my kiss, patiently waiting for our next visit. ❤️

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She and they enjoyed their visit immensely. Mrs. S. became animated when showing them the paintings and furniture in her neat apartment and describing which ones she had made and their history.

They, in turn, were impressed by her exuberant personality and sent her a letter after the visit which she filed with her important papers.

At each visit she asks if I am returning, "rain or shine."

Responding to my buzz from the intercom, she replies, "Are you really there?" and I usually answer "C'est moi, and I am really here!" And I hear her quivery sigh, a hum of uncertainty clinging to it.

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