

# Our Elders

## Lest We Forget

First in a two-part Series  
By SHARON DARNIEDER

The elderly have run most of life's gauntlet. They've borne the bruises of youth, the scars of middle age and the blows that come after reaching 65. What's left?

"Life," says Anthony Kalmbacher, 82. "I couldn't be happier than I am right now."

For some, like Kalmbacher, life means as much, if not more than it ever did when they were 20. For others over 65, life's value has disappeared, lost in clouds of sickness and poverty and they wait patiently for the end.

However, if the elderly interviewed for this article are any indication, those who don't care about life are a minority. Despite any infirmity, none are bored and some are even active outside their home, in parish senior citizen clubs or other groups.

Anthony Kalmbacher is an optimist.

"I don't feel like 82," he says enthusiastically. "I feel like I'm 21!"

Active all his life before he had a stroke 2 1/2 years ago that paralyzed his left side, he doesn't spend his time feeling sorry for himself now that he can't get around anymore.

For recreation he watches TV and reads the newspapers. He loves to watch baseball.

"I used to play when I was younger," he explains.

Like many senior citizens, Kalmbacher and his wife Irene, 77, own their own home and have lived in it for 31 years. Their two daughters never married and still live with them.



Mrs. Assunta Di Nicola

Neither of the Kalmbachers goes outdoors anymore. Both are Catholics and have been members of St. Ambrose for about 45 years. They still receive Communion at home, but don't attend Mass or other parish activities.

Mrs. Kalmbacher says their neighborhood, on the fringe of the city, hasn't changed much over the years "although many of the families that used to live here have moved away."

Growing old hasn't bothered either of them and she feels bad about her age "only because I'm not as quick as I used to be." She has arthritis.

Kalmbacher, a retired clothing cutter, has big plans for the future. He's planning on celebrating his 100th birthday in a few years and he's not worried "because I know I'll make it."

Where's all the despair and listlessness most people associate with old age?

It's missing from Herbert Wilting's life too.

Wilting, 80, is having a lot of fun now that he has become involved.

President of St. Charles Borromeo's Senior Citizens Club, he says the activity "put me on my feet again. I need action and the more I get the better I feel."

He's feeling great these days as he plans events and participates in activities with the other 41 club members.

The time not spent with the club is used for gardening. During the warmer months the small garden in front of his neat, one-bedroom apartment is ablaze with color.

"I sold my home a year and a half ago and I've never regretted it. But before I took this place I made sure I could have my garden," he added.

Even though he tries to keep busy, Wilting experiences one of the elderly's most common problems — loneliness.

"The only time I feel sorry for myself is when I'm alone," he says sadly, "especially on Sundays. I wish someone would come to see me then."

His wife died 11 years ago, and his only son doesn't live too far away, and visits as often as possible.

Every Monday Wilting hops in his 1967 Oldsmobile 88 and takes off to visit his son, daughter-in-law and their four children.

He used to be a member of the Greece Golden Agers, but now he can't go anymore because he just found out he lives across the street from the Greece boundary line.

He's angry about that.

"Why can't I join their club if they can come to senior citizen functions in the city?" he says, puzzling over the situation.

Wilting, whose varied employment history includes clerical work, buying for department stores, banking and painting and paperhanging, is grateful for his good health. He's never been to a hospital.

He describes his arthritis, sinus condition and Parkinson's disease as "problems, but they don't keep me down."

Wilting isn't the only one who finds his involvement in senior citizen's clubs has added a lot of spice to his life.

Lucille Isaac, 61, is starting her involvement with senior citizen activities early.

"I try to be 'young' old," she explains mischievously.

Interviewed while helping with the monthly meeting of St. Peter and Paul's Senior Citizen Association, she explained that she had belonged to the parish as a girl, and had only recently rejoined.

She retired at 55 1/2 from her job at Rochester Telephone but says she's never been bored.

"All through my life I've been interested in people and many other hobbies," she said. "In fact, I don't have quite enough time to get as involved as I'd like."

She took care of her mother up until a year ago when she died, and then sold their house and moved to an apartment.

One of the first ones involved in St. Peter and Paul's senior's group, she "enjoys it very much."

Mrs. Assunta DiNicola, 79, is typical of many older people still living in the heart of the inner city in homes they've owned for many years.

A member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, she attends daily Mass despite the arthritis in her legs and tries to come often to parish senior citizen events.

Mrs. DiNicola was born in a small town near Rome.

She has lived alone since her husband died in 1952, but a daughter-in-law lives above her and other children live elsewhere. Mrs. DiNicola keeps herself occupied with cooking and baking (her favorite pastime), reading and watching TV.

She also visits other older people in the community, some of whom can't get around as well as she can.

Is she afraid of the neighborhood?

"Nobody bothers me," she says. "There's nice people here," she says in heavily accented English.

However, she does take the precaution of not carrying a purse when she goes out for walks during the daytime.

Another elderly Italian couple living in the area around St. Francis Xavier expressed similar sentiments.

They still go to church every Sunday (they are not Catholic).

"I'm careful if I go out in the daytime," said the woman, who wished to remain anonymous. She's 85 and her husband's 96.

Despite their age, both are in good health and are happy living where they are.



Anthony Kalmbacher and Sister Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ, pastoral assistant at St. Ambrose.

With the exception of Miss Isaac, who plans on applying for Social Security next year, those interviewed exist on savings, Social Security, and some receive help from children.

These are some of the elderly then. Those who still live in their own homes, who still try to be independent and who get along as best they can.

Careful, frugal, religious, they enjoy life.

**NEXT WEEK:** Because many of the elderly still cling to the parish where they've lived for most of their lives, some parishes have done a lot to help those in their area. In the second part we'll take a look at some of them.



Herbert Wilting

### K OF C BOWLING TOURNAMENT

The New York State Knights of Columbus 13th annual bowling tournament will be hosted by Trinity Council, Webster, on the weekends of March 23-24 and 30-31 at North Park Lanes, 711 E. Ridge Rd. Councils interested in competing should contact the Council at 82 E. Main, Webster, N.Y. 14580, or the tournament director, Donald Boehm, at 716-872-6183.

Dr. Peter Pellitieri of Rochester is state chairman.

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