

# Being Imperfect Together – 02-05-15

## Connections That Make a Difference

By Helen Gennari, MSW, LCSW

It was one of the darkest times of my young life, a warm September day and the first month of eighth grade. I walked across the schoolyard among the clamor of children running with energy not fully dissipated with a fifteen minute recess that I had spent sitting in the nearby church. I felt no connection with anyone. I was twelve years old and carried a family secret that no one must ever discover. This barred me from ever forming relationships with any of my classmates.

Half way across the yard, I felt a gentle arm wrap around my shoulder as Sister Adlebert, my teacher, smiled down on me with her warm "How are you doing, Helen?" I wanted to turn and throw myself into her arms. I remember how sad and alone I felt and how much I needed that hug. I smiled up at her. "I'm fine, sister." That single moment, when I felt her care, sustained me through heavy times of isolation, and is still alive in me today. I have passed that hug on many times since, each an act of connection and concern.

My life has evolved within the context of relationships that have taught me, through pain and through joy, that living is all about relationships and feeling connected, being a part of other lives, something beyond me. Who I am becoming is discovered through these connections that come in a variety of forms and degrees. My connections with the people in my life are enhanced by my relationship with nature: the trees, the animals in my life, the stars and yes, the Universe.

A gentle embrace, a smile that encourages, a word of comfort, a greeting to the stranger at the grocer, a cup of tea offered, a silent presence that holds another's pain, a compliment, mutual laughter, a shared hymn or anthem~~these are simple experiences of connection that can change us.

I invite you to consciously create a space within your own attentive heart at least once a day, through word or gesture, to feel your shared connection that allows caring energy to flow through to another person or some part of nature.

*Helen Gennari is a retired Licensed Clinical Social Worker/Psychotherapist who leads discussion groups with seniors at the Shepherd Center, does workshops at Woman's Place, is a mentor, and an accompanier with the L'Arche community. Her first book is soon to be published. Her passion~~helping people connect in ways that make a difference.*