



food

There is a photograph on the wall at my workplace of an older man at his front door that stands at the end of a long, grey hallway. He laughs and watches a young woman who is crouching as she reaches into a red knapsack filled with hot meals. She looks straight at him; they are laughing together. The newspaper article with which this photo appeared – about “shut-ins” needing help in the winter – does not accompany the photograph. We discarded it. It was the wrong story.

To the journalist, an elderly bachelor in low-income-housing receiving meals-on-wheels was a sentimental story. To a social worker, he is a patient in need of health-care administered by professionals. As a statistic, he represents a growing trend of isolated urban elderly. As a person, M. Lachance*

was funny and warm and wouldn't let you leave until you had discussed last week's hockey scores.

He died suddenly in hospital, as we learned from his sister with whom we had previously been unacquainted. She thanked us for being in her brother's life over the last four years. “He had so many people in his life,” she said, a little surprised.

The people she referred to include the thirteen staff members and one hundred-plus volunteers – mostly under thirty – who give their time and energy to cook and deliver meals by bike, car or foot for Santropol Roulant, an intergenerational meals-on-wheels organization located in Montréal, Québec. Since 1995, we have used food as a vehicle to break social and economic isolation between generations

and to strengthen and nourish our local community.

The work we do at Santropol is also part of an emerging narrative about family, connection and the ties that bind. These are not the traditional ties through marriage, bloodlines, and obligatory or contractual responsibilities. A new set of relationships is forming between unlikely people, strangers who touch one another's lives – and become lifelines. –VR

*name has been changed

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