

Nana Anna

Father Stan Kolasa, on March 16, 2011, shared with us a story about his mother. It is a story of valued roles.

When his mother Anna was only 45, her husband died, and she told herself that her life was over. She lived on, living for her children. Then all but one of her children died before her, and she told herself that her life was over. She lived on, living for the many nieces and nephews, daughters and sons of her sixteen brothers and sisters. Then she grew apart from them, too, as all of her sisters and brothers died before her.

Mama Anna was all alone now, so despite her infirmities and her increasing dementia, her only surviving son, Stan, invited her to come to live with him. He was a priest in the Bahamas. At age 87, Anna moved from Long Island, where she had lived all of her life, to a different country, a different climate, a different culture. Anna could speak English and Italian, but all of Father Stan's adult parishioners spoke Haitian Creole. How could Anna be other than all alone? She told herself her life was over.

Father Stan was assigned to say the Mass at five parishes each weekend. So that she would not be left alone, Anna came with him. After Mass, as Father Stan met with parishioners needing him, Anna joined the Sunday school classes. The little children, who were learning English, gathered around her, and she told them stories. Perhaps it was the dementia that brought her to tell the same stories over and over again, but of course, little children love hearing the same stories over and over again. Soon, every week the children would come running and surround her, shouting, "Nana Anna, tell us a story!"

After two years with Father Stan, Anna became ill. A week before she died, she spoke to her son with tears in her eyes. She asked him, "Do you remember how I cried when you told me you wanted to become a priest? I was not crying because you were becoming a priest; I was crying for the grandchildren I would not have. And I'm crying now, too. I am crying out of happiness, because I did not know you would have so many children."

So, who was Anna Kolasa to those dozens of little children, newly arrived (both they and she) in a new country, a new culture? On Anna Kolasa's gravestone is inscribed, "Nana Anna."

Jack Yates
YatesSNS@aol.com