

She Died Alone

In October 1993, in the town of Worcester, Massachusetts, police found an old woman dead on her kitchen floor. This was no ordinary discovery -- she had been dead four years. Police speculated she died at age 73 of natural causes. That's when her bank transactions ended.

How can someone be so cut off from relationships that no one even notices when he or she dies?

To some extent, it was a mistake. According to the Associated Press, four years earlier, neighbors had called authorities when they sensed something might be wrong. When the police contacted the woman's brother, he said she had gone into a nursing home. Police told the postal service to stop delivering mail. One neighbor paid her grandson to cut the grass because the place was looking rundown. Another neighbor had the utility company come and shut off the water when a pipe froze, broke and sent water spilling out the door.

To a great extent, though, it was not a mistake.

One friend from the past said, "She didn't want anyone bothering her at all. I guess she got her wish, but it's awfully sad."

Her brother said the family had not been close since their mother died in 1979. He added, "Someone should have noticed something before now."

The woman had lived in her house in this middle-class neighborhood for 40 years, but none of her neighbors knew her well. "My heart bleeds for her," said the woman who lives across the street. "But you can't blame a soul. If she saw you out there, she never said hello to you."

As this neighborhood shows, a spirit of community only results when all of us reach out to one another. Relationships take effort. That's what we are out to demonstrate everyday in the centers of Life Care and American Lifestyles, and in the work of Life Care at Home.

--Beecher Hunter