

What Saint-Exupery Saw

Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900 – 1944) was a French writer, journalist and pioneering aviator. Among his writings, he was noted for his beautiful little book *The Little Prince*, but he also wrote stories about flight.

He was one of the first professional pilots. He flew the mail in North Africa before World War I. He wrote a marvelous book about flying, entitled *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

In it, he drew an analogy between flying and the human spirit. He said, “That is what we are born for. Our spirits should fly. Be free, soar, take risks and achieve great heights.”

Saint-Exupery said he experienced that kind of exhilaration when he flew, especially at night, over the deserts of Africa. Once, when he came back to France, he took a train up to Paris and sat opposite an old peasant couple in one of the compartments. He said he was shocked at what he saw. Their appearance was old, defeated and tired.

As he watched them, he imagined what they looked like when they were young. He pictured them falling in love, the man bringing gifts of love to his beloved, flowers and candy. She being flirtatious. Them getting married and looking forward to a wonderful future together.

But looking at them in that moment, seated across from him, he considered that they were like lumps of clay. “Into what terrible mold were they forced?” he thought. “What marked them like this? What machine has stamped them? What is it that corrupts this wonderful clay from which we are created?”

Saint-Exupery could see in their outward appearance that the inner spirit had died. It showed. Our experiences can shape our appearance.

Like Saint-Exupery, our associates in Life Care and Century Park see, on a daily basis, people who are in advanced age. Through interaction and conversation, they seek to see them not just as they are, but as they once were – vibrant in love and life, engaged in raising families, involved in meaningful work, proud in accomplishments.

Through compassion, care, social events, entertainment and activities that benefit the mind, body and spirit, our associates strive to return them once more to the *joie de vivre*, as the French put it: the exuberant enjoyment of life.



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And they do it very well, thank you!

And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun (Ecclesiastes 8:15 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter