

Dear friends and family,

Vincent Xarhadjizamtheopoulos laid in his nursing home bed, unable to walk, and showing signs of dementia. When I introduced myself, he looked up and said in a weak voice, “You want to hear a joke?” I said, “Sure.” He muttered something that I didn’t catch. I knelt down by his bed to hear what he was saying. He said, “Just take a look in the mirror.”

He shot me a sidelong glance and a grin. I chuckled and told him it was nice to meet him. I asked him how he was doing and whether he liked the nursing home. He responded, “I’ve never had it before.” I stared at him perplexed. “You asked if I liked the nursing home. I’ve never had it before. Does it taste good?” I burst out laughing.

Vince is a long-time friend of A Simple House. Former missionaries Jim and Heather Bechard met him in 2009 at church. At the time, they were unmarried and working for the ministry. They befriended Vince, and last year, Jim became his power of attorney. Vince passed away in February, and he left a lasting mark on our community. We have a seven-dollar bill with his face hanging on the wall. Around the house, there are a few mugs Vince made with the names of different missionaries. One of the mugs has two upside-down eagles with Clark’s name on it. This was supposed to be a joke, but the punch line is known only to Vince.

At Vince’s funeral, people gathered to pay their respects. Most people who showed up had befriended Vince randomly. Some were employees Vince talked to while shopping at Walmart. Some were church friends who knew Vince from his daily Mass attendance. Still others were people who Vince approached out of the blue and asked for their number. Each of these folks could attest to Vince’s zany character. Each one of them had a story that made the other say, “Yep. Sounds like Vince!” For a man who had no family, the church was full. I was asked to be a pall bearer, and the others carrying the casket were as unrelated to Vince as I was. When we took Vince to the cemetery, Air Force soldiers draped a flag over his coffin and fired shots. We ended the service with a dinner at a Mexican restaurant.

I visited Vince almost every week. On one occasion, Vince was huddled on his bed, half naked, and sobbing. His adult diaper wasn’t fully on him, and he had been left to lie in his own waste. When he tried to communicate with me, it was difficult to understand him. He confided in me that the staff had told him he would never leave and would die in his bed at the facility. Even before this, I had qualms about the place. I never saw an employee check-in on him, and some days I visited with him for over two hours. I hated the conditions in which he was living. Jim and Heather affirmed my



misgivings, and we filed a report describing neglect and abuse. I suspect that Vince's situation is a common plight of the elderly poor. Despite the suffering that Vince was experiencing, there was not a single time that Vince didn't throw a joke my way.

Vince grew up in different orphanages. When he turned eighteen, he joined the Air Force and was deployed to Japan. After the military, he worked at a warehouse, and developed a love for collecting flashlights. At some point, he changed his last name from Evans to Xarhadjizamtheopoulos (because he liked the Greeks). He tried to change his name to something with twenty-seven characters, but a judge told him he could only have twenty-one. When he was in his fifties, his life changed when he met his friend Jenny.

Jenny was a twenty-year-old waitress at a local diner. Vince was a regular at the diner, and he got to know her. Much of what Vince learned about her was tragic. She suffered from mental illness and had been in a cycle of abuse for years. She had a child by her father, and she was still living with him.

Vince's solution was to marry her. She said yes, and they moved in together. The marriage succeeded in stopping the abuse and provided her with some stability. The marriage was not a romantic relationship and ended in divorce. For the next thirty years, Vince lived in an apartment close to Jenny. Together, they raised Chihuahuas. Vince and Jenny made plates with the dogs' names and dressed them up for special occasions. Sometimes, Jenny and Vince wore matching shirts. When Vince was in the nursing home, Jenny would bring the dogs to visit him. They remained lifelong friends. To the end, Vince loved Jenny.

In his final days, Jim and Heather were ready to move Vince into their home. He never agreed to the arrangement and other factors stood in the way. I wish Vince could have spent the rest of his days in a better environment where he would have been cared for properly. Though his faculties were failing, his faith and love for Christ was strong. I prayed with him at every visit, and he always shared the following prayer:

“As I was walking out one day, I went up the hill and saw three men hanging on a cross. One of them looked down at me, and said, ‘Vincent, I love you and Jenny. If for the two of you, and the two you alone, I had to die, I would out of love, suffer and die on this cross for your salvation’ At that he raised His eyes to heaven, then bowed His head and died.”



Vince at his 90th birthday party.

He spoke this prayer as if it were a memory or story, something he had witnessed. When he would say it, he would begin weeping halfway through, clutching my hand. Whether this was a holy vision or something composed by Vince is hard for me to say. It clearly came from a deep place of love for God. Leaving, I would gently remove my hand from his, and say goodbye. Each time I left, it felt like I was witnessing the final breaths of a dying man. Eventually, there was a final parting, and I remember telling him goodbye for the last time. "You have to go?" Vince asked. "Yes, Vince, I have to go." He responded, "Make sure you flush." I walked out to the hall. I saw him wave at me one more time from his bed before I left, and I waved back.



Vince's 90th birthday party.

On the day Vince died, I found the following words from the Gospel of John, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live." I find comfort in these words. Please pray for the repose of the soul of Vincent and for those who loved him. Once again, thank you for your continued support of our ministry, and I hope you all have a Happy Easter season!

In Christ,

Nick Mitchell *with fellow missionaries Mary Brug, Tim Casey, Nash Crosby, Sadie Facile, Ben Friedman, Lina Gannon, Clare Merante, Clark Massey, Carissa Moyna, Julia St. John, Chelsea St. Peter, Riley Thoma, and Margo Wernel*

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Easter in DC



St. Francis University helped us host an Easter party.



Ministry friends joined us for Easter Sunday Mass and brunch.



Our Capuchin friends helped us with a door-to-door outreach.



Nash and Tim delivered gifts during another door-to-door outreach.



Spring in KC



Missionaries got creative with Easter Bible studies by using eggs with items in them to help explain the Passion. One friend's child loved the eggs.



Missionaries and college students hosted meals for friends living in homeless camps.