

## **Box Project Member Testimonial**

Annie and I started being Box Project sisters around 1970. At that time, I was living in the Bronx and many of my friends gave me clothes and household goods that I could send to Annie. I also sent food. I worked in the high school and when they cancelled the home economics classes, they gave me all the cooking supplies to send to Annie. One time, Annie got a job as a maid, but she needed white uniforms to work. The boys at the high school had some money they had collected and wanted to do something good with it, so they gave it to me to buy Annie 3 uniforms for her job. Annie was always the perfect person, she answered every letter, acknowledged every box, was always thankful for whatever I did and I was always wanting to do more. Her letters were long and cheerful. No matter what misfortune fell into her life, she was always thankful to God for any kindness he showed her.

In one of her letters to me she said, "How much it means to have someone who doesn't really know you, give of their time, money, thoughts and prayers. It proves that they are giving all that God has asked of them because without love they would never let it become their concern."

Annie told me so much about what its like to be poor, so it helped me have a better understanding of the problems and what it takes to help. Over the years, Annie's children finished school. Some got jobs; some went into military service. So many times, God directed me to send something and it turned out to be just what she needed. Both of our lives changed over the years. Things were hard for me for awhile, but then Annie was there encouraging me. In time her daughter, son-in-law and 2 grandchildren came to live with her and things got better for her. It was very hard for her to get permanent disability even though she was crippled with arthritis. Many times, if I sent her something she could not use, she would give it to a neighbor and she was so happy to be able to give to someone else. Annie's granddaughter, Jessica, was able to graduate high school, then college and now she is getting her masters in rehabilitation counseling. She has a bachelors degree in psychology. She also worked a part time job while attending college. It is good to see that her course in life will be helping people too. She talks to her grandmother every day, so there are strong family ties. Jessica told me that someday she would like to be a Box Project sponsor too! Wouldn't that bring it full circle?

All the years I was with Annie, I had never called her - we always wrote letters. I loved her long letters about her feelings on life. I saved them because there is so much wisdom, love and understanding in her heart. So now, we talk on the phone, and on email, and once in awhile a letter. She still says she likes the letters the best.

She and her family always thank me for what I did for them, but I don't think it was so much. I often wonder was it enough. But I think the best part was that it was constant, a little bit here, a little there. And to her, every thing mattered.

What I got out of it is the satisfaction of knowing you helped someone because you could. That whatever you did for some one else, you did because of your love for them and God. God asked us to help our neighbors and we did not turn our backs. In all I did, I never felt poorer for it. I never missed a meal or regretted anything I did. It seems it always came back to you somehow. I think Annie is a stronger person than me, as she lived through some terrible hardships and never

complained or used it for an excuse to give up on life. We have shared our lives for more than 30 yrs. I am thankful to God that she and I have been friends for all these years.

Barbara S., New Jersey

*Update from Barbara S.:*

My life changed many years ago. I was matched with my dear friend Annie and her family over 35 years ago.

At that time, I lived in an apartment in the Bronx and Annie lived in a shack in Mississippi with her 4 children and her parents.

Time went on. Annie's father passed on, and her son with Cerebral Palsy also died. As to her children, some went into the service, some to other jobs.

I moved to New Jersey and had problems with my now ex-husband who was abusive and drank. I divorced him and my life was in a mess. At that time, I could no longer send boxes, but Annie stuck by me, with comforting and sage advice. In time my life got better. Annie's mother passed on and Annie's grandchildren lived with her and helped her, as did her children.

I don't even remember what things I sent to Annie over the years, but she tells me it meant a lot to her family. So I will have to take her at her word. I have saved Annie's letters, some from as long ago as the '70s. Now and then I re-read them and recall that time. Perhaps we have been good for each other--each there when the other needed someone.

So today, which is my 65th birthday, I opened the front door to find a box from UPS with a California return address on it. Who could this be? What could it be? It was a beautiful sculpture in the African tradition. The tag reads, "She is a wise woman with a gentle countenance... gives thanks to the lord and offers him the very best of all she has". I think the giver chose this piece and meant those words for me. Who sent it? It was from one of Annie's daughters. The card just said "thanks for all the help you have given to my family".

Although I have written and spoken to another of Annie's daughters who lives with her, I have not heard from this daughter since she was little. So this gift was such a surprise, but so appreciated. A few hours later came a knock at the door. It was an arrangement of flowers, a candle and a balloon from Annie and her family in MS. All of this attention for me! I was in tears.

A 35-year relationship. It has been a gift to me to have Annie in my life. Who can say who got the most out of it? I say me. Especially today.