

## **The Cast of Ordinary Times**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

When a family is famous, its story plays out in history books. When a family is infamous, its story is chronicled in bold headlines and viral tweets. Because my family is neither, I find my own history played out in the pages of a lowly address book

Remember them? Before our increasingly smarter phones became the repository for all our contacts, so many of us had handwritten books with the names and addresses of friends and family scribbled in them. Perhaps they were books with alphabetical tabs to direct us to the addresses we sought. Perhaps they were small 3 ring binders so that pages could be added and moved as the need for new space arose. As an avid letter writer, I was excessively excited when I finally knew enough people to justify having an address book of my own.

To this day, I cherish this old fashioned volume. Its pages hold the names of those nearest and dearest – the all-star cast of my ordinary times. When I flip through it I see the history of my life and those whose lives are intertwined with mine. It is filled with the names of those into whose care God so lovingly entrusted me – and whose care was entrusted to me.

There are the names of my earliest friends, listed first under their parents' home addresses, then at addresses for dormitories and first apartments and then the suburban homes where they now dwell. There are the names of those who once occupied a single line, until I added the name of a spouse when two became one – and then added the names of their children in the margins as two became three or five – or eleven! Sadly, there are also places where two names that once occupied a single entry were divided into two as they grew apart.

There are particularly adventurous people who seem to change addresses as often as I change shoes and who, thus, occupy more than a single page. There are multiple addresses for those in religious life and in the military whose commitment to serve, in such different ways, carried them to far flung parts of the world. There are the names of teachers who let me know how to reach them decades after I sat in their classes. There are the names of students who sat in my classes and, years later, are no longer students but family friends. There are the multiple addresses for loved ones who, as they aged, moved from a large home, to a smaller apartment, to an assisted living home, and then, full circle, into their child's home.

There are the names of doctors who cared for me and my family through the medical misadventures of the past decades. There are also the addresses of the parishes and the people in them where I found strength and sustenance in the places I have called home.

In the ranks of family, there are now addresses for five different generations as my peers – once the youth of the family – now find ourselves moving further up the line as the family grows and new generations enter the world.

My address book has all the sloppiness of crossed out addresses and arrows inserting the names of new people and changed names. This jumble is exacerbated by attempts to add the proliferation of multiple phone numbers. Not long ago, a family of five had only one phone number listed in my book; now one person I know has five phone numbers!

Yet, as the pages of that book show the changes, additions and movement of so many who are close to me, there is one thing I do not do: I never cross out a name. There are phone numbers I do not call anymore, and addresses to which I no longer send letters or birthday cards. These are the numbers and addresses of those who have passed from this world. While everything else is updated and corrected as years go by and circumstances change, I do not want anyone's name to disappear from the book. Each and every one of them played and continues to play a unique and irreplaceable role in my life. So, their names remain in my book, just as they remain in my heart.

In a seemingly insignificant and sloppy way, the journeys of my loved ones through this life are captured, imperfectly, in this humblest of history books. Throughout the year, there are many opportunities to remember and celebrate those who are making or have left their mark in the world. Yet, in the pages of an old address book are the cherished records of those who are making or have left their irreplaceable imprint on my heart.

It is sometimes all too easy to take for granted those whose lives and loves are intertwined with my own – lives and loves that are a sacred gift from a generous God. But this shabby book is a reminder that in the gift of life's great drama, a beloved cast has always filled my ordinary times.

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