Comms Matter (Communication across generations)

Just by a show of hands, how many of you know what loneliness is? Be it a dictionary definition or general meaning. It is probably along the lines of social isolation with no one around you, but what if I suggested a different meaning?

In a CNA article they define loneliness as this, “the state of distress or discomfort that arises from a gap between one’s social connection and actual experience of it". Makes sense right? If you can’t connect to the people in your group while they all seem to be on the same page, you would feel disconnected from them even if you see them in class every week.

The same article reports that 40% of elderly are reported to be lonely, this has the equal detrimental effect on their mortality as smoking and cardiovascular disease. It did not matter if they were living alone, in nursing homes or even with their families the elderly were still feeling this social disconnection from people around them. So how can we change this?

Well, the simple answer would be talk to them more, but for some it is not that easy. Just another quick show of hands how many of you are able to converse in the dialect that your grandparents use? I think for the majority of those in our generation we aren’t able to speak in dialect, well I’m sure we all know a couple hokkien phrases but we probably shouldn’t be saying those to our grandparents.

For me personally, I always found it daunting to have conversations with my grandmother. She would sometimes switch from mandarin and start speaking in hokkien to get her point across and I would have absolute no idea what she just said, and all I would be able to respond with was endless amounts of head nods and “ah and ohs”. My grandmother would always comment to my mother that I was the quiet one out of my brother and I and I thought that would just be how it is.

But I wish I could have changed that, I was fortunate enough for the first 19 years of my life to not have experienced any loss of loved ones but that changed in January of this year when my grandmother passed away. Since then I started to think, that I should have put in more effort in connecting with her, even doing the simple things like talking about her day asking her what she had for dinner, or even just showing her pictures of what I got up to in Shanghai.

Well for me it’s too late, but hopefully for some of you it isn’t and I hope with this I was able to inspire another quiet sibling to take the first step to connecting mores with your grandparents.