

EPISODE FOUR

TAKE CARE OF YOU

**AS I
AM**



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FILM SUMMARY

In Bologna, Italy, a woman named Raffaella Monterosso lives a beautiful life. In this episode, she invites us to come visit Bologna, not for the famous porticos or delicious tortellini but simply because she is there. Raffaella reflects on the difficulties she is facing. She has Down Syndrome but that is not what is worrying her. Instead, she is greatly challenged by her aging father. In her attempts to accompany him, she finds it difficult to accept his disability.



"MY FATHER IS GROWING OLD AND I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT."

-Raffaella Monterosso

FILM THEMES

- **Who is disabled?**

The viewer may or may not be quick to notice Raffaella's distinctive features that indicate that she is someone with Down Syndrome. Because Raffaella refers to the difficulty of accepting her father's disability, one is given the impression that she is not disabled. She is captured doing household chores and playing sports. The reality is that although Raffaella is a person with a disability, she does not experience her disability as a difficulty. However, when she is confronted with the physical immobilization of her father and his increasing dependency, she expresses how challenging it is for her.

- **Aging Parents**

The need to care for ones' parents in their old age is universal. The natural order of things is that parents take care of their children when the children are young and children care for their parents when the parents are old. Of course, there are many circumstances that may affect this scheme. Disability may be

a factor that makes a child less capable of caring for their aging parent, however, with Raffaella that is clearly not the case. She observes that she lacks patience but her actions at the end of the film portray a deep awareness of the needs of her father and an active patience with his emerging physical disabilities.

- **Interdependence**

Throughout the film, Raffaella refers to how her interactions with her father have changed since he began to slow down. She remembers going to football matches. Her joy was not tied to the outcome of the game but instead it came from being with him. Raffaella says, "I need him and he needs me." She reveals how her deep love for her father comes not from what he can do but his presence. Similarly, in her desire for patience and in their exchange at the end of the film, we see that her father also needs her presence.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Raffaella talks about finding it difficult to cope with the physical disabilities that her father acquired in his old age. Due to age, accident, or illness, some people acquire disabilities over the course of their life. Do you have a personal experience of witnessing someone you love become less able? What were some strategies you used to cope with their new needs?
2. The opening shot is of ripe grapes and raisins that have dried on the vine. The director intended this as a kind of foreshadowing. What could it mean that these grapes are found on the same vine? Did you spot any other images that offered insight into the themes of the film?
3. In the beginning of the film, Raffaella talks about how she feels something profound when she meets people. She says she thinks it is God. Have you ever had a mysterious feeling? How do you explain it?

BEHIND THE SCENES

The final moments of the film were choreographed by Raffaella. The director asked her, "How would you like the film to end?" Raffaella's answer was so specific and beautiful, the L'Arche community reached out to her family to see if it was possible to film those moments. This was a particularly challenging feat because, unbeknownst to Raffaella, her father was sick with cancer. He was in and out of the hospital and had to cancel the filming appointments 3 times before his health permitted him to come. When they finally had the time together, Raffaella led her father through the scene she had imagined. Two weeks after the filming, her father passed away. That exchange of tenderness at the end of the film were Raffaella's last with her father.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

Raffaella said there is nothing she can do about her father growing old but she does a very powerful thing by choosing not to let the obstacles inhibit her relationship with her father. Disability can be acquired through an accident, it can emerge as people age, and it can be something a person is born with. The responses to disability, to age, and to illness vary greatly. What does it mean to choose to build or preserve relationship when disability changes how we interact with each other?