

Mr. God Bless

BY MARY BUCKLEY

A special gift of aging is the opportunity to become, as May Sarton put it, "more myself than I have ever been." The letting go of standards set by others is one of the beauties and at the same time one of the hardest parts of growing old.

As director of social work at the DePaul and Mount St. Vincent Retirement Home and Nursing Center in Seattle, I had the privilege of seeing some persons of imperturbable serenity enjoy the fruitful experience of aging and the stages of transition it brings. But of all those I knew who embraced their last years, Allen will forever remain the most special.

Residents and workers at Mount St. Vincent called him "Mr. God Bless." A retired successful businessman, he and his wife had taken an apartment in the DePaul retirement home when they were in their early eighties. For years, while he was able, he would stop by every room on one of our nursing home floors—and there were close to 75 rooms—to say to each resident, each morning, "God

Ms. Buckley, now retired, was director of social work at the DePaul and Mount St. Vincent Retirement Home and Nursing Center (now the Mount St. Vincent Retirement Home and Nursing Center), Seattle.

It was clear that Allen truly longed for God to bless everyone. To him, offering the greeting was a vocation, a service to God. The many hours he spent wheeling patients to and from Mass in the morning and rosary in the afternoon were another part of Allen's vocation.

"These are the most blessed days of my life," he told me once. "When the body falls apart, the spirit has room to grow."

After suffering a stroke, Allen moved to a light care unit of the nursing center. But he valiantly remained independent, bearing the burdens of a limited life not only for himself but for his increasingly confused wife.

After her death, he continued his quiet routine of Mass, meals, rosary, and daily blessings. However, speech became increasingly difficult for him, and once, when I was encouraging him to engage in some activity, he retorted: "You

don't know how much I don't know." But Allen knew well how to flow gently with what some call the downhill side of life. After he died, the sound

bless you." Another person delivering the same message in a different way might have sounded either intrusive or mechanical, but Allen was so gentle and so humble that many residents came to look forward to his daily greeting.

of his words remained in our halls. I knew of no one more prepared to step out of this state of being into the new life—this man with the gentle hand who softly touched so many lives. □

