

Thank you so much for considering me for this scholarship award. The past two years I have been volunteering at Holy Redeemer Hospital and at St. Joseph's Manor, the adjacent nursing home. My junior year in high school I worked at Gloria Dei assisted living facilities as a server. I surrounded myself with nursing home residents for much of my time because I am very interested in going into geriatric medicine or some type of geriatric therapy. I still volunteer at Holy Redeemer and St. Joe's.

Additionally, in sixth grade, for my Bat Mitzvah, I was required to do a service project. It was a long time ago but it was where my interest in the elderly began. I chose to work at a local retirement home. I was paired up with a blind, 96 year old resident named Ana (very close name to mine, so immediately we had something in common). I spent every Friday after school with her. My Bat Mitzvah project required me to do this for six months. But over time, she and I had spent so much time together and I had enjoyed it so much, that I continued past my required hours, until she passed away almost a year later. Every Friday she thought of things for us to do together. She actually wrote a book but never finished it, so sometimes she had me read it to her (and at the time I didn't really understand the plot and language because I was only in 6th grade) and sometimes she would have me write down some of her continuing ideas. Other times she would have me help her organize her tapes for her. Some of them were musical tapes, others were books on tape because she could not read. No matter what her mood or condition, she knew when I was coming, and always offered me a can of ginger ale and we spent about an hour or and hour and a half together weekly. I remember saying to my mom on the way out of the building once, "you know, I always seem to drag my feet coming in here, but it makes me so happy, I'm always smiling when I leave."

In spending time with Ana and other residents, I learned about their lives and experiences. The elderly residents are so pleasant to be around. They are people who really appreciate what others do for them because of their struggles with daily tasks. For example, when they have trouble wheeling themselves and I ask them if they want a push, their faces light up. Not everyone is peachy, but it varies by day and mood. I find it interesting to learn their personalities and stories by spending time with them. I find

myself smiling a lot when I'm around them, and I'm more of an outgoing person because it is a welcoming atmosphere. Everyone says hi to everyone, no matter if you are a volunteer, worker, or friend. The residents really make it effortless to feel part of their community. I hope to be able to volunteer in college. I am doing a federal work study program, and I hope to be able to volunteer at a local hospital, nursing home, or therapy unit to continue learning more.

In sixth grade, my mom was the one who suggested to me that I do my service project at an elderly nursing home. My grandfather, who lived with us at the time, was already running discussion groups there, mostly discussing "Getting Old." My mom thought that it would also be a good place for me to volunteer my time. She thought bringing a youthful person into a predominantly older environment would bring zest to it.

I realize now that there was a large gap in between when I volunteered in sixth grade to now where I currently volunteer. I think it was partially because I was looking for a new place. But I know it was mostly because up until a few years ago, I wasn't ready to look. A lot of life altering events happened in between my volunteering in sixth grade, and my volunteering in eleventh and twelfth grade.

My grandparents moved in with us when I was about 5 or 6 years old with the intention that my mom, my brother, and I would help them as they aged. But it turned out that my grandparents were the ones taking care of my mother through her chemotherapy treatments. So for most of my life I spent time with my grandparents and watched and tried as best I could to help my mom through her battle with cancer.

My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was four years old. It was controllable at the time, and she lived with it for nine years. But when I was in middle school, her cancer progressed and got out of control. She stopped responding to treatments and died when I was thirteen years old, when I was in 7th grade. The period after, of about two years, were the most difficult in my life. My mother was a tough competitor against her cancer. Even though my time was cut short with her, she taught me most of the things I know. The important lessons that I keep with me and that I

continue to apply to my life. But after she died, my grandparents moved to Kalamazoo (yes, it's a real place in Michigan) where my mom's sister and family live, and my dad moved back after having been out since my parents got divorced when I was four, and I was in the middle of transitioning to a new school (Murray Avenue).

Even though by my junior year in high school I was well adjusted and involved in Lower Moreland, I still felt like I was missing something in my life. When my grandparents moved out, it was quite a shock to not be around older people everyday. They were a huge part and influence in my life. I heard through a friend that a local hospital has a retirement home attached to it and that she volunteers there and really likes it. It was on Sunday mornings, and the only thing I had on my schedule was sleep. But in high school, who needs it? So I scheduled an interview and began volunteering. I realize that my mom had taught me about being compassionate and donating my time to others, and that I hadn't been doing it.

When I began volunteering, I remembered that satisfying feeling that I get when I donate my time to helping others (specifically the elderly). Through volunteering and working at retirement homes, I not only helped the elderly and spent time with them, but I partially gained back that smiley feeling that being with them gives me. The feeling I had when I used to live with my grandparents and volunteer with Ana. Even though my grandparents can never be replaced, I can spend my time with the elderly by volunteering. And I can take the lessons and advice that my mom gave me and channel them positively towards that community. I can also say that my time with my mom was short, sure. But my time with my mom was that meaningful and the wisdom that she gave me continues to positively impact my life all the time. My family is why I volunteer.