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### People with Experience

Volunteer work is all about helping others and feeling good about one's self. I did both of these when I spent time at Ravenwood in Waterloo. I spent a total of three days there, during which, a lot transpired. I got to make arts and crafts with friendly residents, dance with a stranger that I had just met, and spend a day with a lady who changed my life.

The first day was nice to get to know everybody and to become familiar with what I was helping out with. As I walked in the warm lobby from outside, the only things I knew were that this was an "old folks home" and I was helping with their entertainment activities. Robin, my temporary boss, gave me my first task of retrieving those who wanted to come to arts and crafts. As I proceeded down wing A, surrounded by nurses in scrubs, I realized that most people were taking naps. Asking those few who were awake if they would like to come down, I learned that many of them were very mobile in their wheel chairs. I pushed those who couldn't move so easily, and enjoyed the small talk while we walked towards the once-a-day entertainment. Most of the conversations consisted of them asking who I was, and telling me how nice my red hair looked. This reminded me of when I was younger and how the old guys at the nursing home would call me "Red" and pat the top of my

head. I always did feel special for having red hair around old people. One lady in room G-06 commented on how her brother had the same red hair.

This lady was the last resident that I brought to the big cafeteria, full of round tables and chairs pushed together in order to seat a dozen or so old folks. Cheap paintings and small black speakers accompanied a large clock mounted on the wall. The residents were very talkative towards me. I guess they don't get a lot of young people to see very often. They asked about my life, and I talked to them about moving out and going to college. You could see each one of those residents was remembering when they had youth. I felt bad in a way. I had my whole life in front of me while theirs was winding down. It made me appreciate the time that I still had. I left Ravenwood after a day of arts and crafts having learned an important lesson; be grateful for the time you have been given, because someday you will miss it.

I showed up a few days later, and was given the same task from Robin; gather the residents. This time however, there was a man and woman who came to perform songs. They sang once a month for Ravenwood and everybody there loved them. Because of this, a lot more people decided to come down to the cafeteria and hear them play. Loretta, the lady from room G-06, told me, once again that she loved my fiery red hair. She was the last resident, just like the day before, and there were no more spots for her in the cafeteria. So, I took her to the back left table and sat with her. We made pleasant conversation about her life as a young girl, her daughter, and of course her dog. She would sporadically hum along to the melody of the song and tilt her head back and forth. I enjoyed sitting with her, but Norma had other plans for me. Norma gathered enough courage to ask me to dance. She looked

about 70 years old and still had short, dark-grey hair. She moved around with a cane and was always friendly towards me when I was around. I frantically explained to her that I didn't know how to perform what she called the 3-step, but she insisted that I could learn. I walked up front with Norma in the lead and turned to see 30 sets of eyes staring eagerly right at me. Norma started the dance while I looked down, tripping over my inexperienced feet. As I finally started to get the hang of it, Norma threw in some dramatic spins as she floated around the dance floor. The song, which felt like ten minutes long, came to a close and she thanked me for the dance. After leaving Ravenwood for the day, I thought back and was really glad that I had accepted Norma's offer to dance. I learned that life gives you chances to do new things. I consciously made a pact with myself that I will capitalize on more chances, even if I'm a little embarrassed.

The first two days were memorable, but the third and final day was by far my favorite. Robin was gone and no activity was scheduled for the evening. I was told however, that I could head over to room G-06 and hang out with Loretta. She loves company and because I already knew her, I felt comfortable seeing her. I walked into her small crowded room and saw Loretta sitting in her black wheelchair. She had thin white hair that reached the bottom of her ears and hugged close to her scalp. Her glasses were gold and skinny, and they sat on the tip of her nose. She wore a thin, baby-blue sweater that covered the crucifix necklace hanging lightly from her neck. A large, colorful, crochet afghan was continuously present, set upon her petite lap. The baby-blue slippers she wore matched her sweater and brought the whole outfit together. Loretta was 99 and only days away from turning

100. She probably weighed less than her age, yet she was very outgoing and enthusiastic.

During our chat, she warned me not to marry a whore who I couldn't trust and don't ever cheat on my wife. The topic quickly shifted to the importance of church and family. Old people were not in fact old; they just had plenty of experience. She informed me that the only good thing her "god damn ex-husband" did was make her beautiful daughter. But the most important thing Loretta did was reminding me of my grandma. Even though my grandmother didn't have a sailor's mouth like Loretta, they both told it how it was and spoke their mind. This fragile woman's booming personality reminded me of my strong-willed grandma. On this final day, I learned the importance of people. Loretta became a dear friend and reminded me to keep the ones that I love, close.

Over the three days that I spent at Ravenwood, I learned to be grateful for what I have, try new things, and to never drift from loved ones. Each time somebody volunteers they help out others and feel great. I got to do both at Ravenwood and learn a few life lessons in the meantime. I arrived, ready to help the residents, and left as a grown person because of the special people with experience.