

Dominique Jefferson

Professor Groninga

Volunteer Service Project

1 May 2014

Night at the Home

I am not the type of person to go out and look for volunteer opportunities. If the chance is there, I take it. This assignment helped me to no longer be casual about offering my services. I actually wanted to go out and see what kind of difference I could make. This mindset is what led me to write about my visit to the Cedar Falls Primary Care Nursing Home. The Nursing Home is about five minutes away from campus and I only worked about two hours there, but it was my only volunteer position which was not told to me by someone else. This service felt a little more special to me, and the impact left a greater sense of joy.

It was by chance that I found out about going to the nursing home. I had to stop in the front office of Hagemann Hall to ask a question, and I saw the sign-up sheet for April 16th. It was two days before the event, and I wanted to see if older people really liked me or did my grandmother just tolerate me. Wednesday finally came around and I was anxious to go. The other volunteers and I gathered in the lobby to prepare to leave. Only four people signed up to go, but about ten to twelve of us showed up, which made it more exciting. We found out which people were driving and who needed rides, then we made our way down Hudson Road to the nursing home.

When we got there, we had to wait in the front room for fifteen minutes while the employees finished getting the activity room together. After being there a short while, I realized that a lot of senior citizens do not like our generation. My friend told me this before, and I never

took too much into it, but what he said had some truth to it. While waiting on the room to finish being cleaned, I was watching TV. One man, who was sitting next to the nursing home's bird case, looked at me, looked at the TV, then me again, and turned away. He did not notice I saw him, but I most definitely did. I honestly thought he was racist, because immediately after looking away from me, he moved his electric wheelchair right in front of the television. I was thinking to myself, 'Wow! Five minutes and already some racism.' I could not do anything but laugh, because the man got in front of the TV like it was going to hurt my feelings, but I did not care. I could still see about fifty percent of the screen. He looked at me again to see my reaction. The stale expression on my face is probably what prompted the man to move. The man in the wheelchair wanted me to care, but I could not give him that satisfaction. Then, a few of the volunteer girls went to look at the birds, and he asked them, "What are you doing?" One of the girls told him we were there to hang out with them, but the man showed no feelings towards her. I realized that he was not racist, but instead angry at the young. The woman in charge came and got us, and we proceeded to the activity room. We left the front room, but this would not be the last time I saw the old man in the wheelchair.

The activity room was nothing more than the meal room. I guess one could consider eating an activity. On the way there, we picked up the supplies we would need for the games about to be played. The games we had for the senior citizens were 21, 500, and bingo. We also had prizes for the participants. Each volunteer was assigned to a game, but since there were few games, we just helped out where we could. I volunteered for the game 500, thinking it was Rummy 500. We were giving the senior citizens points based on how many games they won. The people with the most points received first selection on the prizes. As the members of the home started coming to the room, two women came to the 500 table. One's name was Patty, but

I cannot remember the other woman's name. Most of the residents were not like Herb. A lot of people were happy to see us. One lady even said, "I have on my purple UNI." The two ladies and I had three players for 500, but four were needed to make equal teams. We were getting our playing area together when I saw the old man in the wheelchair roll into the activity room. I would have looked away if he had not been heading for our 500 table. It turns out the old man's name was Herb, and he was now my teammate. I did not feel awkward around Herb, but I did feel some slight tension from our pairing.

I have never played 500 before, but I am familiar with card games. I had to learn as we went along, but in due time, I got the hang of the game. 500 is somewhat similar to Rummy 500, but there are major differences. Through the first hand, I was pretty terrible. I kept making mistakes, but the game was a little confusing without having the rules being explained. The woman, whose name I did not know, tried explaining the rules to me, but her words puzzled me even more. Then, surprisingly, Herb interjected and said, "You're explaining it to him wrong." Herb went on to explain the rules to me, and I now understood how to play the game of 500, at least for the most part. I did not know if Herb was taking a liking to me, or if he wanted me to not mess up his hands, but regardless, we were on the same page now.

While playing 500, I realized something about Herb: He was not angry or racist, just afraid to open up. Maybe he was afraid of how the young people would treat him, but he was a nice person. He smiled, was helpful, and understanding. The more we played cards together, the more comfortable he became with me. I think I won him over when I bailed us out of defeat. Before the hand, Herb called eight with no trump. Long explanation short, we had to win eight hands or we were going to lose almost all of our points. I was confident in his decision, because he knew what he was doing. However, after seeing how his hand was shaping up, he believed he

made a wrong decision. I told him not to worry, because I would bring us home. I won the next five to six hands, and we got the eight wins we needed to secure victory for the round and the game. I earned a full blown smile from Herb and he earned a top three finish in total points for our win.

The trip to the nursing home is something I think about every day. These people are disconnected from society, so a little outside life really makes them happy. We assume that older people do not like us, but, just like in my case with Herb, I made myself look like foolish by assuming. Sure, there are some seniors citizens who do not like us, but they are shy and a little timid, because they do not know how we will treat them. Honestly, some older people just want to see us more and be more connected to us.

Before we left, after we helped clean up a little bit, we were talking to this one older woman who was playing bingo. It was the lady who said she had on her purple. She could barely speak, but we were all ears. She asked me did I play football, and I said no. She also asked me was I in the band, and I said no. I was wondering where she was going with this, because I knew she was not being stereotypical. She was a football fan and sometimes could hear the band practice. She asked me did I play football to see if I could either get the band, the team, or both to come to the nursing home so she could see them. I literally almost cried. One of the only things this woman desires is less than ten minutes away, but she cannot see it. I have not stopped thinking about her words since that day. The reason why our generations do not coexist well is because we do not understand one another. When young people want to do something, we just get up and do it. We do not know the feeling of being bound to one place unwillingly. We truly are spoiled. My perspective on senior citizens has changed, so I vow, before I leave UNI, to get the football team to the Cedar Falls Primary Care Nursing Home.