

# Manor Care, musical BINGO and Mary An

by Kris Boss, University of Northern Iowa

I volunteered at a nursing home called Manor Care. It's more than a nursing home, because most of the folks there are mentally challenged in some way. They may have Alzheimer's or some other mental disability. There are also people there who are perfectly fine, but are just really grumpy! I decided to go there for two reasons, the first was that my best friend volunteers there every week. The second reason is because when I was in grade school we used to visit there once a month. I thought it would be nice to go visit the place again and see if there were any familiar faces.

While I was there, we set up and played musical bingo. If you don't know, musical bingo is where they play a song and, if you have that song on your card, you put a marker on it. It was quite an experience sitting at a table of four elderly women who had no idea why they were there and having to explain why every ten minutes. I started getting used to that, but what I really enjoyed was some of the stories these women told.

Mary An was her name, and she was originally from Britain. She was telling me that she managed a modeling company over in Britain before WW2. She explained what she did and all the places she went while she was over there. Then the Second World War was breaking out and her family and her were no longer going to stay in Britain. They decided to get out of the country and come to America. I wish she would have explained how she got to Iowa and what she did here, but half way during the conversation she forgot what she was talking about. I felt bad for her, because I tried reminding her what she was talking about, but she gave me a really weird face and said, "How do you know that about me?" I decided to stop and just continue on playing musical bingo.

The other lady sitting next to me sure liked candy a lot. She knew that if you had a bingo, you would get a piece of candy at the end of playing. She decided to throw her markers on the bingo spots when the song was not called. I really wasn't paying

attention to her because she seemed to know how to play, where the other three didn't really know how to. I started catching on when she would get a bingo after every eight songs. I thought it was really funny, but I guess the nurses didn't because they want them to be honest and truthful.

It was really weird because it reminded me of a whole bunch of kids. It made me come to a conclusion that we act like a kid when we are young, then we grow up, but then as we get older we start

going to that kid stage again.

People have to start taking care of you and have to explain things very slowly to you and things like that. When you are young you try to get away with things that are so obvious, but you think they are sly. The same thing was happening with the lady who was trying to get a lot of candy. I really did enjoy doing this, because it made me laugh with some of the things they were doing and what they were talking about.

There was an elderly woman and man hitting on each other, which I thought was funny and cute.

At the very end of musical bingo, we started taking them back to their rooms. This one lady walked past my friend David and I and thanked David, and then she looked at me and said, "You're such a nice little girl for doing this." David started laughing his ass off. I was trying to hold it back because I didn't want to be mean. The nurse then said to her, "That's not a little girl, he has facial hair." She responded with, "But he has curly hair," and then she turned to David and said, "Why are you laughing? You shouldn't make fun of her, she is doing a nice thing." Even though it was a little embarrassing, it still was the best part of the night. We each said our good-bye's and then all went home.

I really did enjoy doing this, just talking to Mary An about the world war reminds me of how much history elderly people have been through. I'm sure they have stories that are just unbelievable about their life and people would find them fascinating. Overall I'm really glad to have done this; it turned into an assignment that I really got a lot out of.

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