

Seniors Helping Seniors Scholarship Entry

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What started as a project turned into a collection of unforgettable memories and friendships. At my high school, we are required to complete a project during the 11th and 12th grade. Each student chooses a topic, writes a research paper, creates a product and gives a speech their senior year to argue the importance of their topic. For my project, I chose the topic of geriatric care and intergenerational relationships. During my senior year, I was able to spend my time volunteering at a nursing home in my area.

The residents, strangers at first, have become some of my best friends through short interactions during BINGO or outside on the patio. Some residents didn't care to do much, but enjoyed company while watching an episode of Ellen or Dr. Phil. Growing up without either set of grandparents, I loved getting to know each resident. One woman in particular, Ms. Louise, adopted me as her own. After learning that I was Italian like her, Louise and I spent time up to five times a week chatting about our families, our favorite movies, and anything else we could think of. Being hard of hearing, Ms. Louise had trouble listening, which gave me the opportunity to learn in depth about her childhood, husband and children, and even her time during WWII. Ms. Louise will turn one hundred years old this June and I am so thankful for her warm hugs, Italian scolding, and butterscotch candies every time I visited her.

My main project was to coordinate and host a fall festival for the residents. I was in charge of arranging games, snacks, prizes, and volunteer help. I was able to create easy games that all residents, despite physical limitations, could play and we served snacks that everyone could appreciate. A few of my kindhearted friends even volunteered their Saturday to contribute to the success of my project. After weeks of planning, the residents were able to enjoy an afternoon of fun. My favorite part was the conversation between my peers and the residents, some of which don't have grandchildren and have

little interaction with our generation. All of the residents left with prizes and a smile. Although my project has ended, my time spent at the nursing home has not. As Student Body President, I am in charge of planning service events for my Student Congress. I was able to coordinate an event in which we would be able to spread holiday cheer at the nursing home. As an annual service project, we carol down the halls of the nursing home. Usually, we bring cards to share with the residents, but this year we were able to “adopt a grandparent” and the students supplied a specific resident with a bounty of gifts.

The most important lesson that I’ve learned from working with seniors, is how to be patient. I believe that kindness, compassion and ultimately love stems from patience. The seniors have taught me to realize that everyone has different backgrounds and abilities and it’s my responsibility to be patient with any limitations, mental or physical. My close friends and family have noticed a difference in my attitude over the last six months. I have begun to appreciate the little things in life and be kind in my words and actions.

Growing up without a grandparent, I missed out on the endless wisdom and storytelling that I was able to receive from the seniors I’ve spent my time with. To any child, teenager, and even adult, I would always recommend getting to know the seniors in your extended family and surrounding community. The seniors I’ve been able to spend my time with have made such an impact on me, and I’d hope that my peers are able to experience the same intergenerational friendships as I have.

The time that I was able to spend at the nursing home has taught me ways of being patient, kind, and compassionate. I have learned that gray hair comes with wisdom, wrinkles come from laughter, and you are never too old to be a friend.

