

On top of the white dresser my great-grandmother gifted me, there is a little red ladybug. It is a small dilapidated figure, but it holds great significance to me. I remember gripping this very ladybug in the hospital emergency room my mother rushed me to because I could not breathe. A kind nurse gave it to me to hold while she and the doctor examined and treated me. Ten years later, I found myself in the same emergency room, but for a much more positive reason.

It seemed strange that now, I was not in the facility as a patient, but as a future hopeful nurse. The trauma nurse I was shadowing escorted me to the Emergency room; it was fairly quiet, as it was still early and the day hadn't started for most people. The first call that came in was that of an elderly woman who had fallen. I watched as the nurses and doctors prepared for the ambulance's arrival. Once the ambulance arrived, a petite, smiling old lady greeted us, explaining proudly, "I fell." Pulling me aside, the nurse told me she was a regular visitor to the trauma center. Her son had recently passed away, and she was pretty lonely. Everyone was extremely nice and welcoming to her. The nurse took her into the exam room, assessed her vital signs, and collected information. The patient was chatty and wanted to talk to us about anything and everything. Even after tending to her minor injury, we stayed with her and listened while she happily shared her stories.

My job shadowing experience made me realize how much the elderly can be overlooked and forgotten in our society, even though many of them have contributed so much. This sparked me to want to make a change, so later that year I decided to volunteer at a local assisted living facility, Carriage Hill. I will never forget the woman at the hospital who had no one to talk to, so lonely that she had no one else to call but 911. I did not want any other elderly person to feel that way. I signed up to go on outings with the elderly at Carriage Hill, and I also played board and card games with them. I quickly came to the conclusion that the old woman in the ER was not the only lonely elder in our midst. Almost all of the residents at the facility were eager to talk to me, and they looked forward to their excursions, even if they were weeks away. An outing for ice cream or a restaurant lunch meant so much to them.

During one of our outings, we took a detour to a local farm. It was sunflower season, and one old woman wanted a bouquet of sunflowers to take back with her. She shared a story about her childhood, explaining how she had played in sunflower fields with her siblings as a little girl. The activities director and I then secretly purchased a bouquet to surprise her. I will never forget the tears of joy, memories, and love that flowed from her eyes when she clutched her flowers to her chest. She then asked me to take pictures of the field so she could remember this day.

My job shadowing at a local hospital inspired me to volunteer, to step into the role of giver. Volunteering made me want to become even more close knit with the members of my community and to hopefully one day help them in a more extensive way. It inspired me to incorporate an extended career exploration at this assisted care facility into my spring high school schedule. It put me on track to take an EMT class during the spring of 2019 so I can get more involved in the nursing field as soon as possible. The EMT class taught me valuable skills in patient care that will help me immensely in the nursing field.

I had to finish my first year as a Nursing student at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth remotely because of COVID-19, and during my current fall semester, most of my classes are taught remotely. This pandemic only reinforces the importance of my chosen career in health care. We need health care providers who are both skilled in treating the illnesses of our patients and compassionate while they do so. Like the kind nurse who helped me get better years ago, I can't wait to be the person who can give both the compassion *and* the medical care.