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Before I discovered my meaning to life, I was faced with a drastic challenge. However, unlike most childhood stories, mine begins with a unique setting:

I grew up with a gay father, an unknown surrogate mother, and a grandma who played the role of my mom. My childhood contains many impactful memories of my grandma. I had sleepovers with her every weekend as a child, admired her compassion for others, and looked to



her for advice, life lessons, and motherly love. I volunteered at her senior living facility, and she congratulated me on every accomplishment in my life. My grandma was not only my mother, but my teacher and best friend; she taught me how to knit and sew, how to act

respectfully and create self-discipline, and how to have compassion and respect for others. When she passed away in December of my sophomore year, I lost a piece of myself- a piece that encouraged hope and passion in life. My persistent determination in school and extracurriculars slowly fell away and I was left in a state of mental disorientation and depression. My grades

slipped, my social life disappeared, and, after four disheartening months, I was hospitalized because of a suicide attempt. *All I wanted was to be with my grandma.* After spending three weeks in a psychiatric hospital, I returned to school with barely a month left in the school year. My first day back, I felt so overwhelmed after missing schoolwork from my seven classes. I could have easily caved into my fears and given up, but I didn't.



When I decided to fight my depression, I uncovered determination, courage, and motivation I had never seen before. My initial motivation was my grandma, knowing she would have wanted me to be content with life. Eventually though, I was able to find the motivation within myself, not only to live, but to give others the same hope I had uncovered.

Over time, by exposing myself to familiar extracurriculars, I was able to focus on my passions and goals. During my freshman, sophomore, and junior years, I continued to volunteer at senior homes, joined an internship called *Ready, Set, Connect*, which encouraged me to lead



Steven, a homeless man who I met with every Saturday to help with his technology needs, such as job resumes

technology classes for the elderly, and even started my own non-profit business, where I dedicated my work to helping close the technology gap between senior and youth generations by introducing seniors to modern technology and basic computer skills in a group setting. With this experience, I planned on becoming a registered nurse for seniors; however, my senior

year of high school changed that. When I saw my passion more clearly, I realized I didn't want to be a nurse; I wanted to give this generation the hope and happiness everyone deserves in the last few years of their life just like I did for my grandma.

By senior year, my mental health and grades had significantly increased. I had ended sophomore year with a 3.3 GPA, but I ended senior year with a 4.5 GPA. Nearing the end of 2018, I was on my way to graduating early from high school. Now, at the beginning of 2019, I am spending my gap semester volunteering with the elderly at local senior living homes and working on expanding my non-profit business to more senior living homes through advertising and recruiting more tutors.

Today, I strive to open a non-profit senior living home where I can provide a caring, loving home to seniors of all incomes, backgrounds, and sexual identities. Not only does my motivation come from the close connection I shared with my grandma in the last 16 years of her life and the 16 years of the beginning of mine, but they also root from my relationship with my dad, who struggled with sharing his sexual identity. After hearing the struggles he and many other seniors I volunteer with faced during their lifetime, I decided to expand my life's mission to, not only focusing on providing this senior generation a caring home, but also a welcoming environment to enjoy life's last moments in peace and happiness.



Alice, an elder who participated in many of my classes and faced certain hardships in her life

To meet success, I constantly practice and grow my business skills through volunteering, leadership, work experience, and entrepreneurship. Currently, I am using my volunteer time at senior living facilities to understand the specific needs of the residents and to study the responsibilities of management positions. Furthermore, I am working with a variety of businesses, such as Woodson&Woodson and Child's Play, to gain more insight into the realities of the business world. For example, at Woodson&Woodson, I am shadowing the boss in order to expand my understanding of a boss's responsibilities, work complications, and customer interactions.

When I dream of the future, I see myself chasing my children through the halls of the senior living home, giggling past all the elders' rooms. I dream that my neighbors will be the apartments of the elders I care for and that my children's grandparents will be the elders who eat in the family dining room, tell stories in the library, and create lion puppets during art classes. But, most importantly, I dream these passions will become a reality.

My story may not be about a lifeguard saving someone's life through CPR training or about a babysitter who applied her basic first aid skills to saving an infant, but I believe the most impactful changes aren't as simple as that. Volunteering saved my life and, in return, I want to share that same hope and love to seniors, like my father and grandma, who have faced social discrimination and inequality, challenges with mental health, and/or financial hardships/homelessness, because providing healthcare to others is about giving them a welcoming home and a peaceful, content state of mind. I believe, with the help of a college education and a bachelors in business administration, I can make a difference in our society and, if anything at all, give someone else a second chance to life like I was once given.



In memory of my  
grandma, Martha Perry.  
You will always be my  
inspiration.