

I finally understood what people meant by calling someone a ray of sunlight when I first met Orville. I was gravely nervous walking into my first volunteer shift at St. Therese. I had heard that the Technology Help position was always in high demand, and very popular with residents. A million worries filled my mind. What if I wasn't able to help? What if they didn't like me? What if I was a downgrade from the last person who held this position? I sat at the black wooden table facing the floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out into the hall. People walked past, and I plastered a smile on my face unsure of my place in this building. People started trickling in, eager to get their questions answered. When Orville came in, he had a smile on his face, a gold chain around his neck, and rhythm to his walk. His eyes were kind and his manner was youthful. He began asking me a question about his laptop but quickly trailed off to tell me a story of his late dog Timber, a white German shepherd who barked all through the night annoying the neighbors. He loved her. Time began to run out for our time slot, and I helped him the best I could. He thanked me, asked my name, and walked back out the same way he came in, a smile on his face and a rhythm to his walk. The next resident who came in told me about Orville, and how he liked to talk. She told me if I didn't stop him, he'd talk all night. I politely chuckled and stored that in the back of my mind. That small interaction that night would impact me in a way I could've never anticipated. He had made me feel welcome.

Following my first evening at St. Therese, I closed up the room and walked outside into the cool September air with a glow emitting from my heart. Every anxiety I had felt before that night had been taken away and replaced with fragments of adoration for what I was doing, and who I was helping that would slowly mold together over my 1.5 years at St. Therese. I drove

home that night feeling golden. And I knew at that moment that I was meant to be here. I was meant to have met those people because they would be the ones who changed my life.

The weeks began to pass, and the weather outside became frigid, but each night I spent with residents at St. Therese felt impossibly warm. As they began to see me regularly, a personal connection was formed. I knew them, I knew their spouses, their children and grandchildren, I knew their passions, their pasts, I knew their hearts and souls. And they knew me. Conversations about life, love, and regret sneaked their way into many moments. My meetings with residents soon became a trade-off. They asked me a question about technology, I listened and taught them how to understand technology, and how to work through problems they were having. In turn, I asked them questions about their life, and they taught me things that I will carry with me forever. One moment I remember clearly is a meeting I had with a woman who came to me struggling to order pictures. I had heard of this news, her wedding, and I felt incredibly lucky to help her. She told me her story. She shared about her children and her late husband, and she told me of the losses she'd endured, for which I shared her grief. She then began to tell me how she met her new husband. She spoke of their shared grief for loved ones and his charm she couldn't ignore. Her eyes dazzled with endearment as she told me how it felt to fall in love at her age, the same way every lucky person feels, no matter their age. So, I sat with her and listened, touched deeply. We went through her pictures, and she smiled reliving her wedding day. Through a little bit of puzzle-solving, I was able to help her select and order the memories she wanted to keep forever. The gratitude she expressed towards me was something I felt I didn't deserve. In my eyes, what I was helping with was simple, something I didn't think twice about in my own life. But to her, and to all the residents I visit with, I realized it has a deeper meaning. It means staying connected

with family or fulfilling their journey of writing a memoir. It means saving the moments they'd most like to remember and integrating themselves into a new age of communication.

Through similar moments spent with many others, I was taught that life is very long and that it's difficult. Life is full of loss and hurt, but it is incredibly beautiful, and it is not something to take too seriously. I've also been given purpose in life. Volunteering here has taught me how to teach. I believe this is a lesson that will aid me in many ways throughout my life, extending well beyond how I use it at St. Therese. But, what I am delighted to know is how impactful and meaningful it is to many people.

Being at St. Therese was something I had never expected to impact me in the way that it has. Though I spend my days teaching, I am learning *far* more. I will be eternally grateful for this opportunity that found me in September nearly two years ago. It is more than volunteering to me, it is a passion. This experience has grown not only my communication, and teaching skills, but it has opened my eyes to the morals of life; which I learned from the people who sat across from me at the black wooden table. I aim to prioritize listening and understanding when meeting people. See, I found that no matter how different two people may seem, there is *always* a connection found within. This is the driving force of what it means to care for others and to live a fulfilling life. The residents at St. Therese made me the person who will go on to earn her degree in neuroscience. And they made me the person who will attend medical school grow her knowledge and one day return home because she was given a reason— to care for the very people who cared for her.

Thank you for your consideration of my application,  
Grace Olaley