

Sophie Meinhardt Memorial Scholarship 2016

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St. Jude

Showing Mercy

My family and I are sitting in a crowded, cramped, hot room with my great-grandma who we call Granny. We are visiting her at in her room at Bayley Place nursing home. She doesn't know who we are, she just thinks we are strangers who have popped in to say hello. We are trying to start a conversation with her. Instead, she repeats again and again that she wants to go back to the hills. In the following seconds, she is scared and looks like she wants to cry. It appears that she thinks someone is chasing her. She says that someone is screaming at her. It scares my family and I, so we quickly try to distract her with toys, stuffed animals, or pictures. The next instant, she is happy again and starts singing or humming. We put on a song for her and she sings with us. It's like everything is back to normal again. Then she is back to saying weird things. It's like an emotional rollercoaster. We never know when she is going to be okay to visit, so we have to guess and if we come on a bad day, we only stay for a little while, but try to make the best of the time that we are there. This is not how it always was.....

My parents and I are listening to an elderly lady, named Hilda talk about her past and her childhood experiences. Her memory is as sharp as a nail and she remembers almost everything and shares it with us. I am listening and very interested as she talks about the Great Flood of 1937 and how she survived during that time. Then she talks about when her house was first built in Bridgetown and how she played in her barn in the backyard. Her home was one of the first in the area to be built. My dad starts to say mass and everyone quiets down. I then either say the petitions or a reading. One of my parents gives her communion and she thanks us and gives me a bucket-load of candy. I used to not want to do this because I thought it was a waste of time and it would be boring. It isn't. I actually look forward to this and am very interested to hear her talk and compare her past to my present. It is obvious that Hilda looks as much forward to these visits as I do, since she has the candy on hand to distribute and the stories ready to tell.

My family is sitting in a very warm and welcoming home belonging to the Meyer's. We are talking to a man in a mechanical wheelchair. He lost one of his legs because of diabetes. He has many health problems as well as to not being able to get around. It's very difficult to talk to him because he also has a lot of hearing problems too. We have to talk very loudly and clearly for him to understand us and stand on one side of his body toward his good ear. We go through the same thing, my parents say mass and I help and then we share communion. We talk about sports because Mr. Meyers is a huge sports fan. Both he and his wife inspire me because although they are homebound and having to deal with so much, they are both very positive people and always are interested in what is going on with me. I think that they enjoy having us visit as well because it gives them something to look forward to.

When I'm visiting Granny, I am doing the Spiritual Work of Mercy "Comfort the Afflicted" and the Corporal Work of Mercy "Visit the Sick". I am doing this by going to visit her even if it may be really hard because it makes me sad. Granny is afflicted and sick in her mind. She is losing more and more information every day because she has Alzheimer's disease. It's really hard for my family to go to see her because we have known her for our whole lives, and she acts like she just met us.

When I'm visiting Hilda and Mr. Meyers and one other couple that I distribute to, I'm also doing the Spiritual Work of Mercy "Comfort the Afflicted" and the Corporal Work of Mercy "Visit the Sick". At first I did not want to distribute communion to the homebound because I thought that it would be boring and take a long time. My parents wanted me to learn something new about people. Now I like going once a month and it has taught me a lot. Even though both Hilda and Mr. Meyers minds are still great, they are afflicted in body. They can't get out of their homes weekly to get to church and their family is too busy to take them. I find it a little bit easier to go visit Hilda or Mr. and Mrs. Meyers than Granny because I don't have memories of them before they were sick. I also feel it's a little bit easier to talk with Hilda or Mr. and Mrs. Meyers than Granny because it's really hard to start or carry on a conversation because she always blanks out and starts a new subject, talks about something strange or bizarre, and lately, cries out

loudly. Hilda and Mr. and Mrs. Meyers always give me a very warm welcome when I come to their houses. They sometimes even ask for me when I'm not there. Granny doesn't even recognize me anymore.

My memories of Granny are strong. When I used to visit Granny at her house, she would greet my family with a huge hug and a smile. We would sit at her kitchen and eat Lipton boxed chicken noodle soup, and talk with her. If we would eat all of our soup, we would get a chocolate fudgesicle! Then we would get out toys, play, and read stories together.

She would play music for us on her old victrola and we would all sing together to "You are my Sunshine," which was always her favorite. Sometimes, she would show us her collection of music boxes and she would maybe even give us one. As the years passed, she started showing early signs of Alzheimer's disease, like forgetting how to make soup, or where things were. My family started to bring food to her house instead of her making it. But it didn't matter, we still would all be very happy. I remember some of these times very vividly because I had so much fun and I would hate to leave.

The important thing about spiritual and corporal works of mercy is remembering that you are doing them to help people. By distributing communion to Hilda and the Meyers, not only am I helping them, but I have come to treat them like family because they treat me like family. This is something that Granny taught me. I have learned by working with the elderly, that by spending time with them, I learn more and more about them, and I begin to understand them better and can show them true compassion. I have learned that being there for someone when they need it most, even when it isn't easy or it makes you sad is important. Granny has always been there for me, and I can bring her comfort and show her compassion by being there with her to help me remember all of her good qualities. Even when she is really bad, if we start singing, she can suddenly seem to remember for a minute what's going on around her and we can sing together:

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy. When skies are gray. You'll never know dear. How much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away.