When I was in middle school, both of my Grandpas died within two years of each other. While I realized it is not fun growing old as your body or mind begins to fail you, both of my Grandpas were lucky because they were continually surrounded with family and their loving wives in their final years. I always found it sad to visit my Grandpa in a nursing home and see the other residents sitting alone all day long without someone to show interest in them or eat a meal with them.

Around the same time as my Grandpas were falling ill, a block away from my house a new building was completed housing an assisted living and memory care center for the elderly called Maplewood. My parents urged me to go volunteer. I always enjoyed spending time with my grandparents, hearing their stories and learning from them, so I decided to give it a shot. My first day, I was very nervous; however, when I sat down with an elderly woman at lunch, she was so welcoming to me, I realized how lonely she was and how happy she was to have a visitor. I talked to her about her childhood and played a game of cards with her. It made me feel good to know that I made a difference in her day, as I discovered she has not had a visitor in months because her family lives far away.

I wanted to continue to brighten people's day and I found getting to know the residents and hear their stories was really interesting. I was able to learn from their stories and hear about history in a different way then just reading about events in a book. At Maplewood I met many different types of people: a woman from Australia, a woman who grew up in Nazi Germany, a World War II veteran who served in the Navy, a former math teacher, just to name a few. So many people had stories to tell, but no one to tell them to. I realized that by simply sitting with them for a meal, reading to them, or playing games with them could make their day better. I often talk with them about current events, and through my conversations with them, I realized how much I gained as well in learning different points of view and how experiences influence perspectives.

Being older can be lonely. Simply sitting with someone shows you care and fosters a sense of connection. Often what I thought would be a simple act of sitting with someone for a meal, or playing a card game turned into a dynamic conversation and I walked away feeling like I just touched history. I hope by my volunteering I make someone's day a bit less lonely and bring a smile to their day.