

# Sophie Meinhardt Memorial Scholarship 2013

Elena Popejoy

OLV

Most of my life my Grandma was suffering from a disease called Alzheimer's; it is a disease that creates memory loss. My Grandma and I were very close, even through the toughest times. As time went by, and when my Grandma's memory was getting worse, a smile would still light up on her face each time my family and I visited; somehow I felt like she always knew who I was. This story explains how I truly got to know my Grandma and how we helped each other keep joy in our lives.

When I was younger, my Grandma and I were like best friends. She would babysit me all the time. Together, we would play board games and puzzles. She taught me how to paint and she even got me started on cooking. She loved it when I drew or painted pictures for her and I was always excited to spend time with her. She was a very good artist and taught me many things about painting. My Grandma would also let me do things that my parents would not, such as staying up past my bedtime and making many messes. She never complained about my messes, she just laughed and smiled, without saying a word.

Each year, my family and I would celebrate my birthday at my Grandma's house. My birthday is on July 5th and my Grandma's neighborhood always had a 4th of July Parade. My entire family would always be there and we would all march in the parade, get hosed by the fire trucks and eat popsicles. Even though I have a brother and sister, my Grandma would always hold my hand as we walked in the parade. After the parade, we would celebrate my birthday. It was such a fun and special day, it made me feel so happy. This was a tradition with our family until my Grandma's Alzheimers Disease got worse and we had to move her from her home into Assisted Living.

When she was in Assisted Living, I started to learn piano. Over the months she was in there, I would play songs for her when we visited. My Grandma always loved art and music. So, it brought a big smile on her face when I played songs for her. I only knew how to play small simple songs like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and "Mary Had a Little Lamb." but, the songs always made her smile, clap and sing along. She greatly enjoyed listening to me play and she loved to sing along. With her Alzheimer's, she could not remember things that she did five minutes ago, but, she could always remember the words to songs I played. It seemed to bring her joy to sing along, even if the song was a simple one.

We visited her once or twice a week. She enjoyed our visits because every time the door opened her face lit up with a big smile. We would also take her out to dinner or take her for walks at the local parks. I would still create pictures for her, and I loved having conversations with her. At her Assisted Living home we played a lot of games too, such as: cards, bingo and guessing games I played with her and other residents that lived there. She always made me feel special, we had a very close connection.

Over a few months, her disease got even worse and she had to switch from Assisted Living to Full-Term Nursing Care. Her disease got to the point where she forgot who I was, she forgot I was her Granddaughter, she forgot she taught me how to paint, she forgot I painted those pictures for her. That was very hard for me to go through, knowing how close we had always been. At this point, my Faith helped me during this very difficult time. Even though my Grandma didn't know me

anymore, I still had a positive influence on her. She didn't know my name or that I was her Granddaughter but, I made her happy by simply talking and laughing with her or playing piano for her. I never let her know how sad I was that she didn't remember me. I kept acting like I always did, happy, proud and loving.

I feel like I brought her joy and light into what must have been a scary and dark time for her. My family still visited her a couple times a week, even though it was tough. I knew that my Faith and God would take care of everything and I would not need to worry.

Her disease grew stronger over time, but she also developed an infection in her body. She had to go to the hospital, a lot. This was the time where God took over and wanted her to join Heaven. So, they moved her into Hospice. My parents explained to me that Hospice was a place where some people went before they get sent to Heaven. My parents visited her everyday but, I only was able to visit her once and that day I will never forget. My parents told me it would be difficult to see her and gave me the option of just waiting in the lobby. While I was waiting in the lobby, something forced me to say I wanted to see my Grandma, it felt almost like God wanted me to see her, my Faith was forcing me to take one last visit. One thing I remember, most of all, is looking through the door to her room and waiting for a smile to light up on her face, instead I saw my Grandma lying on a bed asleep, she was breathing deeply and looked very pale. I ran out of the room crying. I wasn't ready for her to leave me yet. I didn't want her to go. But, thinking about it I realized that when she would pass over, she would be in a better place. In Heaven, I knew that she would be completely healed and living a happy life once again. At that point, I became a little stronger knowing that she would be safe.

The next morning my Mom had cooked us an extra big breakfast. While we were eating, my Dad gave the announcement that my Grandma passed away at 5:00a.m. I ran straight into my Dad's arms and cried asking "why...why?" Knowing that my Grandma would no longer be with us in human life, she would still be there spiritually, living her afterlife happily with God in Heaven.

Now that I look back to what had happened in my childhood I begin to realize it may be a terrible tragedy to us on earth, but my Grandma is now happy that she can live her life and that God brought her to a better place. She is now teaching others to paint in Heaven. She is singing songs with everyone else. She is clapping and smiling and making those around her happy, just like she made me always feel happy.

I think back to the days when I played piano for her. Even though, now, I can play more difficult songs, I still like to play "*Row, Row, Row Your Boat*" and "*Mary Had A Little Lamb*" so I can feel my Grandma singing, clapping her hands and smiling at me.

Now, I help other elderly people with Alzheimer's by playing piano for them. It makes me feel happy seeing the smiles light up on their faces, like my Grandma's, and hearing them sing to the songs. And, even though it reminds me of my Grandma, I don't get teary eyed anymore, I just smile back and enjoy the company of other happy people. I look up from the piano and can see my Grandma singing along with all the other people in the room.

After my Grandma's passing I now try to pick out the positive things in others and try to keep up the good work that I have shown others. As I went through this tragedy, I will always remember it, but, I realized God had a plan for her. Even though it was tough for everybody else, Heaven is now better

because she is there. Knowing she is in Heaven makes everyone down here, on Earth, happy. One day, I know I will be able to see that smile light up on her face, again, just like it did in the past. I also realize some people, like my Grandma, can only be a part of our Earth life for a short time, but, they can teach us and give us so much love that lasts a lifetime. I received so much love from my grandma and I want to show that love and joy to others.