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GERO 605  
Service Learning Project  
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Journal 1

August 30, 2013- 2 hours

Today was the first day of my visits with Mary. She is an elderly woman from my hometown of Peoria, IL that has been a family friend of ours since I was a baby. Mary is eighty-four years old and she is a widow who lives in a large house by herself. I have always known Mary to be pretty active with her Church, friends, and family, but lately she has declined and kept to herself more, which is why I was interested in working with her for this project. When I asked Mary if she was willing to help me with this project, she seemed to be a little hesitant, but finally she agreed to help me. When I got to Mary's house she was very slow to answer the door, which worried me a little bit. We sat at her kitchen table like we have many times before, but this time she didn't offer me a soda or cookies like she usually does. She looked very tired and not as well kept as she usually appears to be. We casually talked about school and the family for a few minutes and then we got to business. I got out my wellness assessment and began to ask Mary the questions. She seemed a little annoyed that I was asking her these questions, but was compliant. She was having a hard time focusing and I had to repeat myself several times in order for her to understand the question. Mary was also very slow in answering and halfway through the assessment she told me that she was not feeling very well and asked if we could move to the living room so that she could rest her head. Mary scored very high in the spiritual and occupational dimensions and she told me that her Catholic faith is very important to her and it is what keeps her going most days. She was weak in the emotional and environmental dimensions and she told me that she thinks it is because she hasn't been feeling very good lately, but hopes that it will get better soon.

## Journal 2

September 14, 2013- 3 hours

My mom had called me earlier in the week and told me that they were helping Mary's family move her into an assisted living facility. I decided to go home and help in hopes that I would get to spend time with Mary. My family and Mary's family packed up her belongings and moved them into her new home while Mary and I sat and rested. We talked about different memories that she has had in the house that she has spent more than fifty years in. I felt sad that today she is going to say good-bye to a huge piece of her life and part from all of the events and memories that have taken place in this home. I was also feeling hope that she would be safer and get healthier in her new home. I asked Mary how she was feeling about everything and she didn't really respond; she just kept saying that she wasn't feeling good and that she was tired. She told me that it was going to be hard and then she started talking about something that her husband had built in the house. I kept thinking about class and how social interactions are so important to an elderly person and it was then that I realized that most of Mary's friends have passed away and her husband has been gone for twenty years. She is very close to us and to her family, but we are very busy and she knows that. I started thinking that the assisted living home would be good for her because it would supply her with many opportunities for social activity and connection. I felt like I was able to relate to her on a small scale because I was feeling very sad when I had to pack up all of my belongings and move to Indiana. I was scared because I was going to an unfamiliar place where I did not know anybody and I had no idea what to expect and I think that is how Mary is feeling as well. I thought today's meeting was both sad and informative. It was hard to watch her because

I could tell she was sad, but I learned a lot about her that I did not already know and she told me some really interesting stories about her and her family.

### Journal 3

September 22, 2013- 2 hours

I received a text earlier in the week from my dad saying that Mary fell in her apartment after two days of being at the assisted living home and was now in healthcare. On Saturday while I was at home, we received a call that Mary was released from healthcare and allowed to go back to her room. I visited her on Sunday. When I got to her room and knocked on the door, she just yelled for me to come in which made me feel a little nervous. She was sitting in her recliner with her feet propped up looking very tired and sore. She smiled at me and said, "I'm alive!" and she sure was. This proclamation of hers made it easier for me to relax. She told me that she had lost her balance and fell and it wasn't serious, but since she had not really been eating more than a bite of toast at home for the past few weeks her body was very weak. She was sent to health care to gain some strength. She told me that after being on the health care side of the home she never wants to be there again. It scared her into wanting to eat more and become more social in order to get better. I was very worried when I had heard she fell because I have worked with elderly frail before and a fall can sometimes lead to the end of their lives and their downfall. I was overjoyed when she told me that she was going to work to get better; it made me happy to see that she still had some fight in her. Mary seemed frightened by her experience in health care, but I think it was just because she had never associated herself with elderly sick people and being a part of that group terrified her. In class we had discussed the different departments that are at most assisted living homes so I was familiar with the different areas that Mary was describing to me, which made it easier for me to follow along with what she was telling me. Today's meeting gave me hope that Mary is going to get better soon and get back to the person that I know and love.

#### Journal 4

October 4, 2013- 2 hours

I came home this weekend to celebrate my mom's birthday and to do the Alzheimer's walk with my whole family in honor of my uncle who passed away last year. I decided to go see Mary on Friday when I got into town and see how she was doing since her fall. This time when I got to Mary's room, she shouted that she was coming and then I could hear her walking to the door. She opened the door with a big smile on her face and hugged me. I did not even notice at first that she was using a cane until we sat down and I saw it and a walker sitting next to her; this shocked me because I had never seen Mary rely on anything like this for help. She must have seen me looking at them because she told me that her kids thought it was a good idea to get her a cane and a walker so she would be less likely to fall again. She told me that she really likes the walker when she is walking to the dining room because it is a long walk and she tends to get very tired and there is a chair on her walker that she can sit and rest. We talked about school and about the family and she gave me a birthday card to give to my mom and told me that she would be thinking about my family while we did the walk on Sunday. She also told me about her "friend" who was assigned to her to help her get acclimated with the building and show her how to get her meals and other important things. She told me that she was very nice and that she had made her feel very welcome. I liked hearing that Mary was adjusting well because I knew how scared she was. Mary already looked healthier and her attitude had improved. I know that when I started to make friends in my program here at Ball State, my outlook became much more positive and it was much easier for me to adjust to this new place. I like that Mary and I are able to relate with each

other it seems to make our age gap seem smaller. I am looking forward to my next visit with Mary and seeing how she improves each time I am able to visit with her.

Journal 5

October 25, 2013- 1 hour

This weekend my cousin is getting married and since Mary is so close to my family, her and her family were invited as well. I was running errands today, so I decided while I was out I would just stop by Mary's and see how she was feeling and if she was ready for the wedding. She greeted me with a hug and held her cane in one hand and my hand in the other as we walked to the living room to sit down. She asked me if I was prepared for all of the duties that I was assigned to do at the wedding; I am my cousin's personal assistant and have several tasks that I have to attend to. She told me that she was so excited to see everyone and that she was a little worried about what people would think of her using a cane. I told her that none of that mattered as long as she felt more comfortable and safe with using it and she smiled and said, "yes". We talked about what we were wearing and our jewelry that we had to go with our dresses. She also told me that she was looking forward to having a glass of wine and that made me giggle a little bit because I had never seen her drink before. She told me that this would be her first outing since moving to the assisted living home and that she was hoping that she would be able to do it and that her body was up for the challenge. I encouraged her to get a good night's sleep and just try to relax and not stress herself about it. I also assured her that everyone was looking forward to seeing her especially now that she is feeling better. I am excited to see Mary tomorrow and getting to spend more time with her.



## Journal 6

October 26, 2013- 3 hours

Today is the day of the wedding! I was at the Church early because I had several things to do and when Mary arrived I was working the guest book table. She caught my attention because she looked so beautiful! She had a purple dress on that I had never seen before and it was so much different than she had described it the day before. She had a big smile on to match how pretty she looked. She seemed to be using her cane proudly while holding onto her son's arm with her other hand. She was immediately greeted by everyone and she told me that she secretly liked all of the attention that she was getting. After the wedding, I was able to talk to her for awhile and we both complemented each other and she told me that she was feeling very good. Mary's table at the reception was very close to mine so I got to talk to her a lot. I helped her get her food and she put a lot more on her plate than I was used to seeing her eat; usually she has the tiniest amounts of food that almost make you laugh because they are so small. Mary talked to many different people and it was nice to see her old outgoing self because recently she had been very shy and closed off to others. She was also very pleased to tell people about her new home and how much she liked it. I could tell that this made her family and all those who were close to her happy because it made us think we made the right decision in putting her into an assisted living home. In class, it is stressed how significant social events can be to an elderly person. I was able to really see this importance today. Mary's demeanor completely changed when she was surrounded by all of these people who were giving her love and attention. I think it also encouraged her to become more involved in activities at the home. I love being able to see the improvements in Mary and I can't wait to see even more!

## Journal 7

November 10, 2013- 1 hour

I stopped by Mary's apartment before heading back to school. My mom gave me some cookies that she had made to give to Mary. She greeted me again with a big hug and was excited to see the cookies in my hand. She was watching some news program so I sat down with her and watched it. She held my hand while we watched it and it made me think about how we have learned how touch is so important. Just by holding hands I was able to feel comfort and I think that Mary did too. We talked a lot about what was on the news and this was somewhat surprising to me because when she wasn't feeling too good she had no interest in what was going on in the world. I liked that she was getting back into this and was staying up on current events and not just focusing on how she was feeling anymore. We did not talk long this day because I needed to get back to school and it was almost time for Mary to go to lunch. I waited while she went to the bathroom and got her stuff together and then I walked with her to the dining room. She told me about what she was going to have for lunch that day and it was nice to see her getting excited about food again. I sat with her while she waited to be called into the dining room and she introduced me to some of her friends and then we gave each other a hug and parted ways.

## Journal 8

November 26, 2013- 2 hours

I got home a few hours ago and my dad and I decided that after we ate dinner we would go to Mary's. She seemed very excited to see us and gave us both a big hug. We sat and talked about how I was finally on break and what my plans for this break were. We also talked about my dad's new job and how that was going for him. She told us that she had some pizza casserole for dinner that she liked, but some people at her table did not like it and were rude about it. She said she could not believe how outspoken and rude some elderly people are and that she hopes she never gets that way. I laughed because I could never see Mary getting like that; she is so sweet that it would take a lot more than a casserole to get her upset. She told us that she was excited that her and her family were coming to Thanksgiving at our house this year and she said that we could spend a lot more time talking on Thursday. I am looking forward to getting to spend a lot of time with Mary in a different setting. I kept thinking about the people that I saw at The Woodlands and feeling bad for them that they may not have people who come and visit them like Mary has. I think that all of the love and support that Mary has received has really helped her to get better and more confident. I wish that every elderly person had someone to talk with and do things with because I think it would make their aging experience more positive. Mary seems a lot happier with life and more excited to live even longer. Mary's birthday is tomorrow, which is one of the reasons that my dad and I wanted to stop by and see her. She turns eighty-five and it is so nice to see her turn another year older because we were all worried that she may not see another year when she was doing so poorly in her house. I look forward to seeing her on Thursday and celebrating her birthday.

## Journal 9

November 28, 2013- 3 hours

Mary came to my house Thursday with her daughter and son-in-law. She walked in confidently like she has done so many times before and she hugged my mom and me and the rest of the family members. She told my brother to take her coat and then she sat down and took a deep breath; I could tell that she was tired, but she wasn't going to let other people know that. Everybody wished her a happy birthday and she smiled big and told everybody thank-you and she couldn't believe how old she was. Mary and I sat at the small table in our nook and ate snacks and chatted while we watched the other woman cook in the kitchen. She told me that it used to be her job to make the gravy, but she can't stand that long to stir it constantly. So, instead she just kept giving my mom directions on how to make it the proper way, which I thought was funny. She said she liked doing that because she felt like she was still helping with dinner in some way. We talked about how we both like snacking and that we needed to slow down or we would ruin our appetites. We have a tradition in our family that Mary is familiar with. Before we eat, we all stand around the table and hold hands and my brother says a prayer. At the end of the prayer, we thanked God for keeping Mary around and we thanked her husband for keeping such a good eye on her. Mary had tears in her eyes and she thanked everyone for being so supportive and said that she honestly did not think that she was going to make it to Thanksgiving or her birthday. Seeing Mary like this made me tear up because I was so happy to see that she had gained weight, she had color back in her face, and she was finally smiling again. She told me that she found purpose in her life again that she had felt like she lost and that moving into the assisted living home saved her life. Today's

meeting was so beneficial to me in seeing how far Mary has come and I cannot wait to do my final assessment on her.

## Journal 10

December 1, 2013- 1 hour

Today is the last time that I will be meeting with Mary for this class assignment. I am feeling kind of sad about it because it has given me an excuse to visit and chat with her on a frequent basis. I brought with me her favorite cookie from a bakery in our hometown that is delicious and she once again greeted me with a hug. We sat down in her cozy, new apartment like we had done so many times before, but today it felt different. She knew that I would be giving her the second wellness assessment and she told me that she was looking forward to seeing if she had changed at all. I liked that she was actually looking forward to this because last time she seemed bothered by the questions that I was asking her. We both got comfortable and then I administered the assessment in the same way that I had done it the first time. Her mood this time was upbeat, energetic, and positive. She also talked a lot more and offered a lot of feedback on the questions that I was asking her. Her scores improved by a lot in every single area of dimension except occupational. Her score went from a seven to a four in this dimension, but that is mostly because she had to leave some of the volunteer organizations that she was previously in since moving to the assisted living home. She told me that she has no say in when she eats and that meals are provided at the same time every day, but she said that it didn't really bother her. She says she likes following a schedule, but she wouldn't of minded having a say in it. I was very happy that her emotional dimension had improved since moving to her new home. She told me that she feels good about herself now that she is feeling better. It makes me so sad when elderly people do not feel like they have purpose anymore and that is exactly how Mary was feeling. She told me that she realized after moving that she was basically just letting herself die and she admitted to me that she

often prayed to God for her life to be over. This kind of scared me because I had never seen this side of her before and I am so happy that she has since left this feeling behind. She told me that she is so thankful that she has a loving support system and that she feels bad for those who do not. I have learned so much from this class and I really liked giving Mary these wellness assessments; I think I would enjoy administering these assessments to other people of different ages as well. I learned so much from this assignment and I can not wait to use the knowledge that I have gained in the future.