

Park Vista Senior Living Volunteer Experience

Roy Rao | 7/26/2019

The inspiration for my volunteering at Park Vista Senior Living came more than two months before my first visit. As part of my school's orchestra, I was given the opportunity to volunteer at a senior living house in May 2018. With other performing arts students from my school, I played two pieces on the piano. Halfway through my performance, I noticed that one of the residents of the senior living house had appeared next to me, listening intently while I finished playing.

From the moment he neared me, he stood still, listening intently, transfixed by the music. Upon completion of my two pieces, he thanked me for my performance, saying that he had not expected to hear Rachmaninoff—whose Prelude in C-sharp minor I played second—that day. I saw how positively this man had responded to my performance and how much the other seniors enjoyed all the pieces performed.

Realizing that I could help many others in similar predicaments and help break the often monotonous cycle of their lives, I reached out once again to the senior living house the following summer to see if I could volunteer again at their facility. Because that specific location had no opportunities for me to volunteer, I found another senior living house in my area, Park Vista Senior Living and reached out to them. They were eager to accept my help, and I started playing the piano there soon after I contacted them.

My first time volunteering at this location, however, was not what I had initially expected. While only two or three people had attended our performing arts department's performance, around twenty people had arrived to watch me play alone. Many of them had poor health, some pushed in on wheelchairs by personal nurses who attended to them on an hourly basis. A few of them asked me questions: what was my name? What school did I go to? How long had I been playing the piano? However, the majority remained silent, expressions neutral, waiting for me to begin.



I introduced myself and the pieces that I would be performing to a silent audience and began playing. The first piece I performed was far less than perfect—perhaps it was the fear of disappointing the residents or the wobbling keyboard or the lack of a pedal. By the second piece, however, my confidence had grown, and my audience still listened intently. When I finished all of my pieces, a few of them clapped for me or said a few kind words.

However, as I began to gather my belongings, one of the residents asked me if I was about to play the piano. I did not know how to respond, so I just told her that I was and played another piece so as to not disappoint her.

While the staff welcomed me and helped me set up the keyboard the next few times I played, most of the seniors did not seem to recog-

nize me. They asked questions similar to ones they asked during my first visit each time. However, one of the residents, Joe, remembered who I was. He greeted me warmly each time I arrived and commented on the piece that I played. He told me that I reminded him of his son, who, he said, used to play the piano beautifully. I decided that I wanted to play more than just the piano for the seniors, so I also started bringing in my cello and playing pieces I had learned on that instrument as well.

For the most part, the residents of Park Vista sat silently while I performed each time, only speaking up to thank me when I left. Even so, I knew that they enjoyed hearing me play, as they showed up each morning I was scheduled to perform. I suppose that it's because their lives are fairly monotonous. Despite being cared for by personal nurses, the seniors' daily schedule was very regular, and they seldom received visits from their family members. For those whose family members visited them regularly, however, I doubted that those residents could remember much about their families, as most of the seniors had forgotten who I was despite my visiting twice a week. Although my skill had not reached a professional level and the sound quality of the keyboard I played was not perfect, I know that the residents enjoyed my playing.

One of the moments that showed me the seniors' appreciation for my music took place weeks after I started volunteering at Park Vista. I was playing "Greensleeves" on the cello when one of the residents started humming to the melody. I was surprised, since I had never heard her speak before. I felt that she truly enjoyed the music, as she spoke no more after I finished the piece and stayed silent as I left. I never heard her speak again afterward. The next time I arrived, she showed no more recognition of me than before, only responding to that particular piece of music. I also gradually received more and more recognition from the seniors: occasionally, more would clap or smile at me when I finished a piece.



From my experiences at Park Vista, I learned that I truly enjoyed helping others by bringing joy into their lives through music. I believe that I have brought more happiness into these seniors' lives and provided them with something to look forward to. Using music as a medium, I believe that I have succeeded in improving the quality of life of those in my community.