

# A Beacon of Hope

Category: Hope

written by Danyelle Roan | December 13, 2016

I never realized the importance of surrounding myself with people in need of hope until I experienced a difficult time in my life, a time when I needed to lean on others to find hope and solace.

During the fall semester of my sophomore year in college, I suffered the loss of my grandma to lung cancer. I became wracked with guilt, anxiety and depression following the death of this essential member of my family. When I was informed of my grandma's terminal illness, I had joined a support group; in this group, I cried and yelled until I came to accept that my grandma would not live to see me graduate from college or medical school or witness any of the milestones I'd achieve in my life—a fact that was especially disheartening for me.

Then one day I remembered a piece of advice my grandma had given me several months before she died: "Do what you love and explore your passion for working with older individuals."

When I returned to college for the spring semester, I discovered the field of gerontology and became involved in a program called Opening Minds Through Art, an intergenerational art course for individuals with dementia. The program paired me with numerous artists who reminded me of my grandma, who'd begun to display early symptoms of dementia during her terminal illness. I encouraged my partners to express themselves in the form of abstract art and reveled in their surprise at the art they created. That was the exact moment I realized not only that was I providing hope to my partners—through the knowledge that the art they created was amazing, that they could do anything once they set their mind to it, that they were not confined by their disease—but also that *they* were providing hope to *me*. Hope that the values and ideals my grandma instilled in me would never fade, that I could encourage others the way she'd once encouraged me—indeed, the way she still encourages me to this day.

My partners made me hopeful for a future where individuals of different generations will be able to work alongside one another, for a future where a cure for dementia and Alzheimer's will be discovered. Through the darkness of death and grief, I found my solace in Opening Minds Through Art, my very own beacon of hope.

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