

# Hope Heals

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written by Brianne Safer | December 8, 2016

Hope has been the key to happiness in my life. Lows happen; troubled times are inevitable. But when I can hope that what hurts will be healed and difficulties will be overcome, I can be happy. Hope is something we can hold onto in difficult times and know, trite though it sounds, that the dawn follows even the darkest nights. I have also learned that hope sometimes arrives in different and unexpected packages.

During my sophomore year of college, I hit my personal low. I was drowning in depression and anxiety. Simply making it through the day was a feat in itself. I lacked purpose, and I even questioned my will to live. Hope seemed just beyond my grasp.

During this time, I was introduced to a program called Opening Minds Through Art ("OMA"). OMA is an inter-generational program for people with dementia. Its guiding principle is that people with dementia are capable of expressing themselves creatively. College students visit a nursing home once a week and partner with someone who has dementia. The students are trained to assist the elders in failure-free activities, while allowing the elders to be active agents in their own creative process.

My first partner was Peggy. Peggy is the most positive, outgoing, bubbly person I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. The very first thing Peggy asked me was, "Do you like dogs?!" She then told me a story about her dog. It's a great story, one I know by heart because Peggy told me that story approximately every 15 minutes, each time as if it were brand new. I watched Peggy create beautiful artwork every week. Her eyes would light up every time she saw me, even though she did not remember me. She made me feel like we had always been friends. Each week, I was able to leave my own world, and enter Peggy's – a world filled with joy, positivity and selflessness.

Peggy's impact on my life has been profound. She reminded me that the ability to devote some time in service to others is a gift, as is life itself. Sharing happiness restored my hope that tomorrow could be, and would be, better. That is the joy of volunteering. It allows me to be a part of something bigger than my struggle.

Did I tell you the name of Peggy's dog? "Hope."

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