

Friendships Across Barriers

Category: Across Borders and Cultures
written by Lindsey Johnson | May 12, 2017

At my university I am involved with a program (OMA, or Opening Minds Through Art) that has exposed me to men and woman who have inspired and empowered me. Many have become my friends. The catch is, these people happen to be four times my age and have been diagnosed with different stages of dementia.

As a twenty-one-year-old college student, I never thought I would be able to relate and bond with people who grew up in a completely different era. Yet I have discovered commonalities in humor, values and morals that have eclipsed the cultural and cognitive barriers dividing us. These people have impacted my life more than I could ever imagine.

One elder, Nina, is non-verbal, yet extremely expressive communicating via sounds and facial expressions. I was goofing off one OMA session, putting books and trays on my head and pretending I was walking a tight rope. "Da da da" – I hummed the circus theme song. I noticed that Nina was laughing at my silliness, so I decided to place the tray on top of her head for her to join in. When she started giggling and humming the song along with me, I could not contain my surprise and amazement. Not only did we have gaps in our age, backgrounds and culture, but we also were divided based on the way we communicate. Yet this had no effect on our ability to goof around together and act like kids, giggling as we pretended to be circus performers.

I have learned that friendships can spring up among even the most diverse groups of people if you are able to keep your mind and heart open to new possibilities.

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