

# The First

Category: Crying

written by Teresa VanCauwenberg | May 3, 2017

I have wanted to work in geriatrics, specifically with people with dementia, since I was in high school. Over the past year, I have been able to volunteer with a program called Opening Minds Through Art (OMA). I have worked at the same site as both a volunteer and a leader and therefore have gotten to know many elders on a personal level.

A woman I volunteered with and hold most dear had a twin sister. Recently, during one of our sessions, I found out that her sister was headed for hospice; the next day, she began the active stages of dying.

These sisters had never been apart since the day they were born, and when the one twin died, it tore the other one apart. This was also the first time a person I had worked with died.

A day or two later, I was in the car with a close friend, and she asked me how my week was going. I started sobbing. I told her that I just wanted to get through the week, that I wanted to put my head down and sprint until the sadness was far in the past. I told her that I didn't know why I wanted to study dementia anymore. Why would I work hard through four years of college, so I could get into a good grad school, just to constantly watch people die—people I cared about and wanted to help? Why would I spend so much effort trying to help people who were out of my reach?

I sobbed in my friend's car for over an hour.

But she reminded me of what I am called to. That I am called to love people as well as I can for as long as I can. That I am called to walk through each day with joy, despite the circumstances. That I can cry until I feel empty, then get up and continue to love my patients to the best of my ability.

And that if I can do that, it will be enough to make a difference.

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