

Sample (A)

English 102

How does racism still exist and why?

The issue of racism has always been apart of my life, being from a biracial family. It has affected not only me, however, but also how society views my mother for having and raising a biracial child. Now, obviously I was not born at the time, but my mother has told me stories of how she was treated and looked at after people found out she was having a biracial child. I live in the city of Everett, where the population is very diverse, at least now it is. Back during my mother's pregnancy however, not so much, consisting of mostly white neighborhoods. We live in the part of Everett known as "the village". It consists of six small streets, where everybody knows everybody. It is considered an "old" part of Everett where multiple generations have grown up, being where it was first my grandmother's house, now my mother's, pretty much all of my family has grown up here. So lets just say, the neighbors back when my mother was pregnant still saw things "the old school way", meaning they did not believe in mixing races. They saw things black and white, meaning white wife and white husband therefore a white child. Not anything like my mother's situation. She would tell me stories of how neighbors reacted when the word spread she was having a biracial child, including that of my grandmother. Let's just say she was not very pleased when she first found out, instead was more concerned with what the neighbors would think after finding out it was a biracial child. She did come to terms with it however, and provided the best of love to me.

Being biracial, I wouldn't say was a struggle growing up because I didn't even think as myself as different nor did anyone else, family and friends, treat me different. Nonetheless, people did look at my family different. By that, I mean a lot of questions came up, as they do with many biracial families. Take New York Times, Susan Saulny's article "In Stranger's Glances at Family, Tensions Linger", for example. In her article she discusses her experience being apart of a biracial family as she tells a story of when her and her daughter when to the supermarket, "how come she's so white and you're so dark?" Questions like this always arise with biracial families, as I have also experienced the same types of questions. Was I adopted? Is she really yours? And I totally understand that. I mean I sometimes question families I see, whether or not they adopted, they were just babysitting, or whatever. It's a natural thing we humans do, question.

However, this issues of race has had some negative effects to both me and my mother as well. I want to say it was it was 2 years ago, possibly last year that my cousin, Candie, held Thanksgiving at her house in Swansea, the location playing another factor in my experience as the town demographics included a high percentage of white families. Continuing however, The dinner included our family—which is not a big family like you make be thinking from the families that are depicted on TV, we are actually a very small family: me, my mother, my aunt her husband (my uncle) and two kids, and both my cousins both married each with one child; well that is what I would consider my immediate family, others are more distant and only come around once every so often. Anyways, yes, our family was there and her husbands, Sean's, family was there, which again was not very big either. Now, you're probably asking what was so significant about this family gathering that it affected me so. Well, what I should mention about her husband and his family, which I had only found out a few years ago, is that they are very racist people, having the mindset of "white america" meaning they are like that of my neighbors

when they first found out my mother was having a biracial child, white husband, white wife, white children, no in between. Hence making this Thanksgiving very uncomfortable.

My family got to her house first. My mother, aunt Trisha and other cousin Kelly helped with cooking and setting up and all that jazz while me, my best friend Alexis, and foster sister Sydney watched my younger cousins. After a while, her husband's family began to pile in. His mother came first, and she is a very nice women. She said hi, asked how everything was going, if anyone needed help. Not what you would of expected being part of a racist family, but I don't know if it was out of respect or if she just wasn't racist like that of his sisters. They all came a little after that. Now I know this was out of respect, they all said hello but did not engage in any other conversation other than that. My family mostly stayed in the kitchen, while his stayed in the living room. At times, they would come into the kitchen to come and grab more food, not making eye contact with any of us really, but mostly towards me. When they did look, they would give rude expressions, almost like they were looking down to me. We all noticed it but didn't say anything, one because we found it to be pathetic and not worth our time to say anything but also because we (my mother) didn't want to make a scene because this was my cousin's first Thanksgiving in her new home. Least to say, I stayed in the kitchen the whole time until dinner was over.

On the ride home, I found out my cousin had a talk with her husband and his family about the situation. In other words, told them I was coming and to just keep to themselves. I'm not really sure why she had a talk with them. Maybe to prevent a scene so we could just make it through her first Thanksgiving dinner? Or maybe assuming she had to protect me from hateful comments? It made me think, what if she hadn't talked to them? Would the dinner of been different, as in would they of said something, made a comment, said something hateful? Who knows. The fact that my cousin did say something and his family had to respect her wishes could of been a cause to the discomfort at the dinner, considering they had to cover up their racial views in respect to my cousin. But even if my cousin hadn't said anything, and they were able to express their racial views that would of made the dinner just as uncomfortable, if not more considering they would of been able to say what they pleased.

Like I mentioned before, his mother did not seem as bad as his sisters are, and the same goes for Sean. He did not seem like much of racist. However, recently he proved otherwise. My cousin and him were fighting, as married couples do sometimes, and like all of my family, my cousin went to my mother to talk. Pretty much, everyone goes to my mother when they have a problem, has a question and need answers, or just need to gossip, she is the go to. And, everything they tell my mother, my mother tells me because thats just the way the cookie crumbles. Now, I'm not going to get too much into their argument, but lets just say my cousin needed break from him for a while and said she was going to come to Everett for a few days with their daughter. That is where the remark that he made about me and mother, and pretty much the rest of my family came out. Basically calling us scum and that their daughter wouldn't be raised in a biracial environment. I'm not sure if he said this in the heat of the argument or if its because he just really is racist. Now although we all knew his family was racist, he never showed that side of him to us until that remark.

So, how does this affect not only me, but the rest of my family as well? Well lets start off with the rest of my family, more specific my younger cousins. Obviously they don't know much anything about race, but even so they don't care. We all joke in my family about how I'm the "brown girl", but thats nothing serious and they know that. I've been babysitting them all since they were babies. However, my cousin, Candie, that held the Thanksgiving dinner, I barely see

her and her daughter, my little cousin. Not once have I babysat her, nor was I asked too. My mother has, and I have helped my mother when she was down, but I have never done so by myself like I have with my other three little cousins. When I do get to see her, she does not really like to come to me either. Like, when I try to pick her up, she'll let me and everything, but only for a few minutes, or she'll sit with me but not really smile, just look at me as if I were a stranger. That is how this is affecting my family. She is growing up both by a racist and non-racist. What does that mean for when she grows up? Kids learn what their parents teach them, I mean you're not born a racist right. I'm not sure why he is racist. I'm not sure why his family is racist. I'm not even sure why anyone is racist. Really, why are people racist? According to AHRC's article "Why are people racist?", there are a few "reasons" that one might be racist. One, "we take on the views of the people around us." meaning what our parents believe in and what we are taught influence how we grow up. Children are having things drilled into their mind at such a young age, from what their parents are telling them, to what they learn in school, to what they see in the media, and what music they listen to, that they are just brought up to think what they are taught and what they have heard or seen. If parents believe in racism then most likely their children will grow up with the same views because parents are our first "teachers" right. Two, "We hang around people like us" meaning that we don't venture out of our own culture and background of people, sticking within our race therefore opinions are formed within your group of people about people of a different group of a different culture or background. Three, "We're quick to judge" basically meaning we put labels on people based off of what they look like or what their culture is. The stereotype of a muslim at the airport for example, and how people immediately assume the worst for their flight. But notice how I put "reason" in quotation marks because in the end there is no reason as to why someone is racist. Sure there are suggestions, but at the end of the day there is no real answer as to why people are racist. So when it comes to my family, I know that my cousin will teach her to treat everyone equally, her husband on the other hand, I'm not sure.

It also affects me because I am the one who the racism is mostly shown towards, besides my mother. And it is a different type of racism shown towards my mother than it is towards me. The major factor of the racism shown towards me is because of my skin tone, whereas the factor of the racism shown towards my mother is because she had a biracial child.

Obviously, racism has affected my life in what one would say a negative way. And, I mean yeah considering the story of Thanksgiving dinner, and how my grandmother and neighbors reacted to the news of a biracial child. But I really don't let any of that get to me. Again, I could care less about what other people think of me and my family, and I know I could say the same for the rest of my family. The only outcome this experience had towards me was furthering my interest with racism, leading to me asking more questions and to try and understand why people are racist and why does it still exist today?

So how does racism still exist and why? Well, the how can be seen from my recent experience with the racism shown towards me and my family on Thanksgiving, along with how people today still question when they see a biracial family, right down to recent events such as Ferguson and the constant fight between civilians and authority (black civilians and white authority). But the harder question to answer is the why. Why does racism still exist today? You would think that by today's society racism would be close to gone considering how diverse we have all become and how more accepting people have become when they realized that skin tone, isn't and shouldn't be a defying factor towards someone. As said by Ellie Krupnick in her article, "Interracial dating is fundamentally changing america", "in 1987, Pew found that only 13% of

Americans completely agreed that interracial dating are helping America become more diverse as it continues to grow." Directly relating to New York Times Saulny's findings in her article that "the multiracial population has increased almost 50%, to 4.2 million since 2000." I mean you would think that with these numbers, the fact that more and more people are identified as one or more races or ethnicities and the acceptance rate of interracial dating is increasing and growing that racism wouldn't exist today. Yet it does. Least to say, it is good that the numbers continue to increase for a more accepting society, maybe that holds good things for us in a more "multicultural future"? But is there really ever gonna be an end to racism? I'm not sure. Why does racism still exist? I'm not sure. The inability to answer this question is the main factor that contributed to my experience at Thanksgiving dinner. The fact that I was faced with the issue of racism and I'm not even sure why it exist.

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Professor Grayson

English 102

22 March 2016

Sample (B)

Role Model to Distant Memory

I did not realize how big of an impact that social issues you see on the news could trickle down to affect you and people you know. I watch the latest stories and think "that's terrible" or "who would do that?" That was until it happened to a very close person in my life. All the stories you would see on the news was happening in real time in my own life. I did not know how to handle it, I was only 8 years old when it started and had never experienced this type of behavior before. It has always been a question to me as to why my close cousin had to fall into drug behavior. How did she become so addicted from what was seemingly a one time decision, and why did that ruin the long lasting relationships with her family, personality, and why couldn't she stop?

The health issue of drug addiction has made a serious impact with feelings of hurt spread throughout the entire family. My cousin, Sam was a huge part of my immediate family. She was my role model, everyone thought we were sisters because we looked and acted exactly the same; brown hair, same facial features, tall, and basically spoke the same language. To this day, my mom still tells me that I "sound like Sam" when I speak with an attitude or try to hide something. She was a lot older than me, around twelve years older, so much of our time together was her babysitting me. We would always play with barbies, kitchen, and paint nails. She had three other siblings and her parents were divorced, but she was the one I was close to because she was a girl and her sister was even older. She had the best going for her, decent grades in school, caring personality, and goals to further her life. However, she then got a new boyfriend who also came with a new group of friends. You know how people become so blindsided by "love" and the rush of being popular that they change who they are? Sam was faced with that consequence to the extreme. I stopped spending time with her, she started dressing differently, and skipping family events. She got pregnant at seventeen and had a baby girl that she named Suheily. She was still living at home with her mom and not going to attend college because of this instance. All her hard work in getting good grades and her old person seemed to go away from this new boy. She had no money or job and lived with her siblings and mom in a tiny house in my hometown. Her boyfriend did not seem to have a care in how the baby was raised or took part in raising her.

Then, she started taking heroin because of the influence of her friend group. They would tell her that it "wasn't that bad", or "try it just once" or explain the rush that it will make her feel when stressed by everyday life. All this can sound appealing to a young adult whom has a child to take care of with no solid support from her boyfriend. When getting the hit of heroin, I would assume that it made my cousin stand on top of the world and feel as if she could escape her everyday troubles. Therefore, that one decision to try something that "wasn't that bad"

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according to her friends now makes her crave more every time she is feeling down. This then led to an everyday basic need in order to function. It started right under our eyes because we were so blindsided from her innocent person. My family never thought that the sweet girl that was always there for them would ruin her life taking heroin for a boy she met in high school. Do you think that teenagers in high school are influenced by peers? I know from my personal experience and those of friends around me that peers always judge and try to alter peers views and decisions. Those may be forced to feel weak if not taking drugs, alcohol, following the fashion trends, or using the newest terms, so often fall into the popularity what majority of classmates are doing. She, like many other teenagers wanted to fit in and be able to participate in the same activities as her friends so that they would approve of her. She did not want to lose the boyfriend she had always wanted, so she felt the need to take the drugs.

Her mom tried to intervene before the drug abuse even started. She told her to stay away from the boyfriend and his friends because she found out they were bad news. Her mom, Sue saw how horribly he treated her, how he carried himself, and how poorly he was doing in school and life. He had no job, bad grades, addicted to drugs, and no want to change. However, Sam must have been persuaded by "love" and continued seeing him in school or behind her mom's back. Then the drug abuse started, and it became an addiction before it could be stopped. Her mom would yell and try to get her to stop. But, Sam started resenting her mom for being controlling and pushed away. The addiction got so bad so quick, that it seemed impossible for her mom to stop it. According to the articles I read, heroin can become addictive after the first time used. So after her first hit, it was all over for mother intervention.

The drugs forced her health to deteriorate and it messed up her mind to do the unimaginable. She turned on her family that was always there for her, she started lying and stealing. When it first started she stole a camera and ring from my godmother and godfather (her aunt and uncle) yet, there is no proof of that instance. They could suspect, but she was still a part of the family at that point just starting off on her bad habits. I was very young at the time so I could not comprehend what was going on. Nobody told me what had happened to her and I wondered why she never wanted to babysit me or play barbies anymore. What are you supposed to think when someone just disappears out of your life? I didn't even know what drugs were at this time, I was only 10 years old. This made me upset at a young age because to me I was slowly losing a friend and someone that was a huge role model for me. I then heard one night that she went to jail, for what presuming was drug possession and dealing of drugs with her boyfriend. Sam was 20 years old at the time. She was sentenced two years in prison for being an accomplice of drug dealing of heroin on school property. In Massachusetts, that is the minimum when convicted for possession of drugs in a drug free zone. Her boyfriend, got much more jail time and ultimately ended up serving six years because he was the dealer. However, I wonder if she should have gotten rehab instead which is also a debate in society. She sat in jail and did her time, but when out of jail she went right back to using. If those two years were spent in a rehab facility then she may have learned to cope and cut the addiction. However, she sat in jail waiting to get out and continue the use of heroin, just like her life used to be. Many articles and rehab treatment places explore this idea. Recovery First Treatment Center posted an argument that drug offenders should not be sentenced to jail, but rather given a rehab facility to

become clean, which they said would therefore reduce the crime and drug use in the United States. They posed the issue many people believe in, "To some, rehab seems less like a punishment than prison time. Others may not understand that addiction is a neurological disease, and not simply a matter of low willpower or poor character" (Recovery First). This shows that a recovery center knows that the rehab is what is needed for these people, yet society does not understand why. With the facts presented I would argue and agree that my cousin may have been healed if given proper treatment instead of being charged as an offender in jail. This could get them back working and contributing to society rather than bringing it down.

She got out of jail, and immediately wanted her daughter Suheily back. However, this had to go through the court system because her mom did not want to transfer the custody back to Sam. This was a long process in which Sam got to watch her daughter during, and the court forced random drug tests on her to make their decision on if she could raise a child. Within that same time my aunt had moved to Chicago with her now husband, Sam and Suheily. They were all living together and Sue had gotten a new job in Chicago. Sam then eventually moved out of her mother's house and got an apartment of her own, while working at a clothing store in the area. Even though she had a job and moved out, she was far from having her life together, she was back to using heroin very quickly as it is readily available in Chicago. Back to court, she could not pass the drug tests, therefore my aunt finally got full custody of Suheily. There was then many years that I nor my parents had any contact with or information about Sam. We would see my aunt and Suheily when they came up for various holidays. Sam would still see Suheily on occasion when my aunt wanted her to visit. She was a distant memory for a few years.

Do you believe in second chances? How about if it's family and someone you love? Well, my mom did. My uncle had a wedding in which Sam was invited to, my mom was having a picnic the same weekend. Her mom, Sue, assured us that she had turned her life around and was trying to regrow relationships as well as being in support to quit using. She told us that she went to rehab and was no longer taking heroin, she was seeing her child more and more as well. So, my mom decided to give her a chance and allowed all of them into my house for a Labor Day picnic. I was 13 at the time. Sam asked to use the bathroom so I brought her to it, not thinking anything of it. The party went well and everyone went back to the hotel they were staying for the weekend. The next morning I noticed \$60 missing from my room. My mom blamed it on my carelessness, but then walked into her room and immediately started crying. My dad and I went in to see what was wrong, two rings were missing from her jewelry box. One was a gold ring my dad had given her and one was a ring passed down from my mom's mom when she died. It was an irreplaceable item, it wasn't the money concern but, the sentimental meaning. My parents and I could not stop crying as she called all her close family to tell them. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that it was Sam that had stolen the rings. My mom, her other sister Sherri and their husbands went to where Sam was staying to confront her and attempt to get the rings back. She claimed that she was "not a thief" and acted appalled that they would even accuse her. What do you do when you are certain someone in your family stole from you, but there is no proof? Well, my mom made the decision to take it to the police and presented her reasoning for thinking so. She told them how she has been in jail for heroin, and how she was the only odd one at the party that is not there all the time, as well as left in the house alone when

everyone was outside. The police decided that they would call her in for questioning. Turns out that as she was walking into the police station she broke down and told her sister that she had the rings stored away at the hotel. Her sister brought her back and immediately returned the rings to my mom. My mom then proceeded to drop all charges, all she wanted was her rings back. But, my mom wanted her away, so she paid Sam \$300 to get back to Chicago and leave us and our family alone. I believe to this day that money went to drugs. All of this happened in the course of one day. I guess that second chances do not work for everyone, and it was very eye opening for me to see what drug involvement could do to those around you.

Needless to say, she is still an active user of hard drugs and now has another child that is currently in her care. She will never be welcomed back into my immediate family because of that day forced upon us by her drug abuse. I will never again see her as a big cousin or role model to me, because she ruined her life making one bad choice that turned into addiction. This is why drugs are not only a health issue. It really affects her brain, mentality, and wellbeing. She will never be able to fix herself or achieve the goals she once set. But, it doesn't only ruin her health, it ruins family, trust, and communication with those around her. She will now go to any extremes to get a dollar, including stealing from her family and grandmothers belongings. The drugs ruined her mind so much that she does not see what is happening right in front of her.

As long as she keeps using, without help, this will only affect her more and more too where she will continuously hurt those around her. This relates to me even in current events because of the heroin outbreak in towns near. This makes me think of how these families will be affected when someone they know becomes addicted because of a choice they made. Throughout various places of the world, the epidemic is becoming more publicly viewed and more overdoses are being seen. An article posted on New York Times explores the recent epidemic, posted on March 6th, "With heroin cheap and widely available on city streets throughout the country, users are making their buys and shooting up as soon as they can, often in public places. Police officers are routinely finding drug users — unconscious or dead — in cars, in the bathrooms of fast-food restaurants, on mass transit and in parks, hospitals and libraries" (Seelye). This quote points out a lot of good ideas, first of all how heroin is cheap and always available. This is how it has become so accessible and I believe that this is why it is becoming a more popular drug and creating an epidemic in society. It is becoming so apparent and uncontrollable that many businesses and churches discussed in the article have shut down public bathroom use to try to decrease overdoses. The article also states that the addiction comes from pain killers and has spread to all different areas including white, suburban, urban, and rural. Then Seelye states, "Nationally, 125 people a day die from drug overdoses, 78 of them from heroin and painkillers, and many more are revived, brought back from the brink of death — often in full public view." This number was crazy to me, I did not realize that a preventable addiction could cause so many deaths in the nation. Another article posted on ABCnews also explored the heroin epidemic and a story of the effects it can have on families. The mother in the article tells how blindsided she was by the beginning use of heroin in her children. The author writes about her story, "I thought I should have seen it coming, but I didn't. And most likely you won't either, because we all suffer from the "Not My Kid" syndrome. I didn't plan on my children being in jail instead of attending college.... Drug addiction only happened in dysfunctional households where the parents didn't

supervise their children and the home life was abysmal” (Hinebaugh). This shows how it seems to come out of nowhere in the eyes of the parents/family around them. I can relate this to how my cousin Sam fell into the addiction right under her mom’s eyes. Once noticeable to parents, it seems to be too late for the help of a mother to stop, more needs to be available. This family thought they had everything going for them, just like my cousin, and then it was gone in the blink of an eye. I feel as this could be a reasoning for why nobody intervened or stopped her, because as this mother said, it is not always possible.

It needs to be controlled and stopped so that deaths and relationships are not ruined due to an addiction. One way that I think it can be prevented relates to the earlier article of having rehab centers. This way, instead of being punished people can cure their addiction and therefore lead to less drug offenders on the street. As stated, “Breaking the cycle of addiction could be the only way for some criminals to get off the streets and become more productive members of society. If Americans are ever going to put a stop to drug crime, they need to understand the benefits of providing addiction treatment for offenders” (Recovery First). According to the recovery treatment center, they believe that it is most important to have the addicts in treatment rather than in jail, punishment or on the streets. Another impact would be to make sure that the public, especially teenagers and young adults, as well as health providers are educated about the effects of prescription drugs and gateway drugs that could result in heroin use. This way there can be an attempt to prevent it from happening in the first place. Everyone administering and taking drugs should be properly educated and suitable to take the drug. More control and regulations of the drugs and prescription drugs as well as treatment centers being properly funded and available could be a start to ease the epidemic. I feel that it is very important to try anything imaginable to help the addicts because it is ruining the lives of many.

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Karen Grayson
ENG 102
February 23, 2016

Sample (C)

Alzheimer's

Health issues can have a very big impact on loved ones and even the people being the caregivers everyday. Two years ago, my grandmother, Nonie, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's is memory loss and confusion, most common in people of old age. When she was diagnosed with this terrible disease, it trickled down on me because she is my favorite person and biggest role model. The impact felt like a knot in your stomach whenever you would think of something bad happening or your worst nightmare coming true. I would always have the question, "what if?" stuck in my head because what if we could have done something before this disease came to take over? Was there anything that anyone could have done to stop this from happening? Why did this have to happen to her? Nonie is the type of lady that is very easy going and has the biggest heart, there was not one mean streak in her. She looked like they typical Italian grandmother, short with big red poufy hair and a darker complexion. Before she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, her favorite hobbies were to cook and clean all day. Everything was always perfect in her house with a five course dinner on the table every night. First, she would start us off with bread and butter then, a small salad, after that was the pasta with sauce, then she would give us two options which were steak or chicken and then finally a nice dessert to top it all off. They were the most delicious dinners ever! She raised 7 kids with my grandfather before he passed away. Nonie was a well known lady for her cooking in the north end every year for the feasts, I still have a clear memory of going to the St. Anthony's feast with her and as soon as she walked through the crowd of people everyone knew exactly who she was. Every year, she had to make her special meatballs that were the best! People would always go back and tell her that they just went for her meatballs. As time moved on it was harder for her to cook as she was 90 and couldn't stand on her feet as long as she used to be able to. She lived on her own in a senior citizen apartment building for 8 years, but then we noticed how she started slowing down. The first symptoms we started noticing were that she would get scared when she was left alone for a very long time because she felt lonely, she would call my mom a couple of times asking the same questions, kept forgetting to do the normal daily tasks of living such as, eating and taking her medication, and her walking started to become a lot weaker so she had to use a walker. By that point my family all noticed that it was time that she needed to move out. But where would she move to? Well, she moved in to my house with my mom, dad, two brothers and I. She moved in in the summer of 2014, this was the biggest change and adjustment that my household has had to deal with. Nonie needed around the clock care.

Nonie does not have Alzheimer's as bad as others but there are certain days and times of day that she can react. She can wake up early in the morning and be spot on and know everything in the book. As the day goes on and the sun starts to set her memory starts to slow down and isn't as spot on as she was that morning. Nonie would become very frustrated with herself when she could not remember simple things such as, the question she had asked 10 minutes before. This experience started to effect me because it was very sad to see her memory going and I always had a fear of her forgetting me one day. There are 13 grandchildren in my family and sometimes she would have trouble remembering their names but I think my presence and her living with me



and also having the same name as her helped a lot. As Nonie could not be left alone, it was harder to go out if someone couldn't stay home with her. In a way, I did miss the freedom that I had before she moved in being able just to run out with my friends to go shopping and no having to worry about if she was going to be ok or not, but I knew that none of this was her fault and I would never want to be in her shoes. I was usually the one who stayed with her if my mom couldn't because I had a lot of patience with her and my brothers are 3 and 4 years older than me so it made more sense to keep a girl home with her incase she needed help. Often times, she needed help walking to the bathroom, picking things up off the floor that would fall, getting a glass of water, changing the channels on the T.V., answering the phone, etc. This was definitely a job that needed someone with patience.

Having someone move in with you and your family isn't as easy as you think. Alzheimer's is not a short term illness that goes away, it is life long. During the time that she lived with my family and I we thought it was best that she would go to a day care Monday through Friday to keep her busy while my parents were working and me and my brothers were at school. One of my parents would drop her off in the morning and then when the day was over she would come home on a bus and I would help her off of it when I got home from school. This day care was aimed towards elderly people who had dementia or Alzheimer's and they would have many activities to simulate the brain like memory games and making arts and crafts.

As time moved on, it was starting to get a lot harder to care for Nonie because her memory kept going and my house has a lot of stairs that were getting harder for her to climb everyday when she would get back from day care. In the winter of 2015 when she was 92, my parents gathered together with the rest of my family to come to the conclusion that she needed to go into a nursing home to have more care and people of the same criteria as her. It was a very difficult decision and of course I did not want her to leave because she is my best friend and always made my day when I would get home from school. She always had the biggest smile on her face and would tell me everything that she did at "school," as she would call it, everyday. I got so use to having her around all of the time and helping her that I knew once she would go into a nursing home she would not be able to come over as much as she did.

Nonie lived with my family and I for a total of one year. In that one year I learned so much from the experience. I learned that dealing with someone who has Alzheimer's, patience is everything. The questions that I would answer over and over again about 15 times would get a little bit annoying but then I had to bring myself beck and put myself into her shoes and realize that she doesn't remember that she just asked the question and its not her fault.

When the health issue impacted me the most was the day that she had to move into the nursing facility. I was very sad that she wasn't going to be at my house all the time and that I would not be able to have funny conversations everyday. I knew that putting her into a nursing home was also a good thing. Nonie is in Hancock Park in Quincy MA, which is very local and one of the best nursing home/ Alzheimer's care units around the area. She got to meet a bunch of new people. The nursing facility that my family chose is one of the best ones. It is aimed towards elderly people with Alzheimer's and they have a bunch of activities and keep them going all day. They play bingo there and that is Nonie's favorite, whenever I go up there to visit her I ask if she wants to go play bingo and her eyes light up. She really loves it there.

Nonie is now 93 years old and she looks amazing, I go up to the nursing home a few times a week because she only lives a town over from me. She still has her good and bad days but I am thankful that she is not as worse as some of the people she lives with because some of them don't remember anything. On a good day, as soon as I walk off of the elevator, she always



spots me out and yells my name with a big smile on her face and I must say this brightens up my day. On the other hand, on one of her bad days that I will go up there to see her it might take her a minute or two to remember my name but she will have recognized my face. This part does affect me because I never want her to forget my name. It is very sad to see this happen to a person that means so much to you and that you love so much but life takes its course. I am so lucky that she has been apart of my life for this long and is still kicking it because she has taught me all that I know about cooking and life decisions. She would always teach me how to make chicken cutlets and meatballs with her because they were my favorite. I am so lucky and thankful to still have her around because some people do not get that chance to have such a close relationship to their grandparents.

In regards to Alzheimer's not having any cure, the United States does prescribe medications that help slow the rate of the disease down so it does not happen rapidly. In my opinion I feel as though that the patch Nonie was on did not help her because she would go on and off of it to see if there was any difference in her memory and it did not change. However, some people feel that the medications prescribed do help some patients but I do not believe it does.

Since there is no cure to Alzheimer's, the *Alzheimer's Association* tells us what the care, risks and prevention of it happening. It does give a list of the medications that you can try to alleviate the symptoms which are Aricept, Razadyne, Namenda, Exelon (the patch Nonie was on), and Namzaric. These medications are all meant for the seven different stages of Alzheimer's. the risks of Alzheimers is cardiovascular risks, physical exercise and diet. The seven stages of Alzheimer's which Madeline Vann states are, no impairment, very mild, mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe, and very severe. Nonie went through four of these stages and is now in the fifth. First, Nonie had no impairment and remembered everything and went through all of her day-to-day activities, then she started the very mild stage where she would misplace the clicker to her T.V., the mild stage is when my family members started to notice something was off with her because she would forget and have a lot of confusion. The moderate stage was when she moved in with my family and I because she could no longer live alone and her forgetfulness was getting worse. Lastly, she is in the fifth stage which is severe and she is in a nursing home that caters to this stage especially because she can't get dressed on her own and she will sometimes forget where she is and keep saying that she wants to go home.

The impact of Alzheimer's weighs heavily on the family and friends of the loved one. In the article that I found, "Impact on Family and Friends," by The Alzheimer Society of Canada it tells us the three main stages a family or friend can go through which are guilt, grief and loss, and anger. I found this article to be very informative and also I can connect to it in many ways. Most of all I had to deal with the grief and loss because Nonie wasn't the same person that she used to be. Her behaviors were very different and she became very frustrated often with herself when she couldn't remember small things. It was a big change when she couldn't cook anymore because that's how I grew up with her, she was always in the kitchen cooking non stop and that eventually came to an end when she couldn't stand as long or forgot some food ingredients like she used to remember. I also experienced anger with some of my cousins because me and my cousin Jeanna were the only ones that would help her out the most as grandchildren and it wasn't as fair but I do not regret it at all because it made me have a closer relationship with her. When Nonie moved in more attention was even to her causing some things to change in my household but it was expected because it's a whole new person loving into your house and most of all it is a person with a memory disease. This disease changed who Nonie was as a whole person.

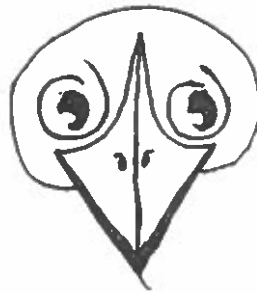


I always knew what Alzheimer's was but never had to experience it to the fullest until Nonie was diagnosed with it. After reflecting on this very meaningful experience, I learned that all you can really do is grow stronger from obstacles in life. This experience did not only affect me, it affected Nonie herself. Having Nonie live with me taught me a bunch of things, but most of all patience. Health problems in the world major to minor can effect everyone around you, and you never really know who is or who had to go through a tough time.



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How Does Blindness Affect Me, and Why Should It Affect You?

The topic of visual impairment may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of a health issue. But in all reality, it is a very relevant and rather common issue effecting people all over the world. In fact, "some estimates suggest that approximately 10 million people in the United States are blind or visually impaired" (Mandal). Much like any other health issue out there, watching a love one deal with something like a visual impairment is painful. After all, it is human nature to feel sympathetic towards others in tough situations, and watching someone we love struggle is a whole different kind of emotion. I can attest to this after my experience volunteering with the North River Collaborative, a special education school. I am all too familiar with health issues effecting ones I love and care about. The kids I met were indescribably wonderful, and the whole experience was terribly sad and yet uplifting in the end. After all, there is nothing more inspiring than young kids overcoming adversity and not letting a disability discourage them. But how did this opportunity come into place? And what made it powerful enough to change the way I view life in general?

At the Collaborative, I volunteered with the same group of ten kids over a three year span. I started as a freshman in high school, and had to stop volunteering when senior year and the stresses of college became my focus. This opportunity was available since my mom is an orientation and mobility specialist for visually impaired kids, which is one of the main reasons why I admire her so much. I look up to her and love being around her, because she radiates compassion, understanding, and patience, all of which help her to be the best teacher and mom out there. Her job requires her to insure that any blind student that lives in the South Shore is trained in orientation and mobility. "Orientation and mobility training (O&M-training) in using an identification cane, also called symbol cane, is provided to people with low vision to facilitate independent participation in the community." (Zijlstra). From grocery shopping to riding the T, my mom makes sure her students can do it all. It is an unbelievably important job that sometimes goes unnoticed. But she's not in it for the praise, she helps these kids because she believes that no matter what challenge you're facing, a little help can push you to overcome it. Her loving attitude and the patience she had while teaching these kids to travel safely and independently is still unbelievable to me, and it motivated me to show up to the program every Thursday afternoon. I mean I have never seen her get anything close to upset at a kid, or show any type of frustration when the seemingly simple tasks, like tying their shoes, held them up for what seemed like hours. The Collaborative is a school that has member towns, and works to provide ~~services~~ for kids with special needs. These services include things like making sure the kids have the properly trained special education teachers, as well as a variety of programs to engage students and help them to live normal lives, regardless of impairments. This particular program works with kids ranging from 5-14 years of age, all with different issues resulting in their visual impairments. Some of them were born blind, while others had tragic accidents as babies that resulted in a vision loss. Every week, the program would do something different with the kids. For example, one week we would go rollerblading at the local rink, and the next we would be horseback riding in a barn. I would be lying if I said that the activities and the issue of blindness didn't intimidate me when I volunteered as a sophomore in high school. I wondered how these kids, some with absolutely no vision, could do the activities my mom was telling me about. I had a lot of misconceptions about blindness, and I didn't really see it as a major issue in the US, I mean "90% of visually impaired people live in low- and middle-income countries" (WHO) so I

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never concerned myself with the 10% that live in America. I was beyond naive and close minded...until I saw it for myself.

I remember so vividly my first experience volunteering, and it took place at a cooking class. Of course I was skeptic that these kids could bake muffins successfully, but they sure did a great job at proving me wrong. One kid in particular really challenged my way of thinking about disabilities. He was a 10 year old named Jared, and he is one of the most influential people I have ever met to this day. The way he, and all the kids in the program, approached the task at hand, and all the others within those three years, was absolutely inspiring. It was like nothing was different about them... They did everything a person with perfect vision could do. This first cooking class changed my life. I watched Jared measure out vanilla extract without spilling a drop, I watched others successfully take burning hot muffins out of the oven, I watched what looked like a normal friend group baking muffins on a Thursday afternoon... and I'm going to be honest, I watched with a look of awe. I didn't think a blind person could do most things a "normal" person could do. But I saw it happen with my own eyes, and every preconceived notion I had on what it meant to be blind disappeared after watching all the things these kids were capable of. I think we are all guilty of having thoughts on a type of person before getting to know who they are. I'm not proud to say that I honestly did not think that blind kids, kids like Jared, could accomplish the activities my mom listed to me before I began to volunteer. It was a wonderful feeling to be proved wrong.

After about a month working with the program, I started to develop personal relationships with these kids, Jared especially. I grew a respect for him and all the things he was able to do. He was such a normal kid, he was able to take his dogs for walks, ride his bike on bike day at school, and just do everything your average ten year old could do. I felt an immense amount of empathy towards them all. Yet at a certain point, after a few months, I realized they don't need pity, because they never once viewed their impairment as a negative. No matter the task they embraced it, no matter the struggle they conquered it. You would expect a health issue to harm you, but for these kids, being blind didn't matter. That is where the story of Jared really fits in. He showed up to every program with a smile on his face, and openness to new challenges. When you're blind, it is easy to keep to yourself, and to be apprehensive of your surroundings. But Jared was never like that; he would run into the gym at gymnastics and do flips on the trampolines. He would decorate cupcakes better than I ever could while we were baking, and he would make all the other kids feel comfortable in the loud bowling alley, explaining to them what all the noises around them were. He really was the nicest, most genuinely smart child I've ever met. I think watching Jared and seeing how he interacted with other kids was really beneficial to me as a person. Jared and the other students showed me that their "issue" was not something that possessed the ability to define them. Jared was a key component in what brought me to the realization that perspective is everything; after all he was a very "it is what it is" kind of kid. He understood that there are some things in life you cannot change, and he accepted and even embraced that fact. Jared's outlook on life radiated the idea that nothing can bring you down if you are resilient and willing to overcome hardship.

Health issues can take a toll on everyone involved. Just my friendship with these kids granted me the feeling of empathy and despair as I wondered why such wonderful people were forced to bear such a burden. I recall always feeling bad for their families, who had to pay for

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medical bills, and deal with the issue of having a blind child. This pitiful feeling disappeared as I began to meet the families that supported and loved these kids. They were not beaten down by their loved ones disabilities, but rather had a sense of pride in all of their accomplishments. They never once complained, or showed any sign of hopelessness, instead, they were just as friendly and open minded as the children they raised. It was honestly amazing to see that everyone who had a personal connection to visual impairment did not view it as some hindering, life altering issue, but rather as a small bump in the road. Having a blind child is not easy by any means, and any parent that had a child in the program would tell you that if asked. There are so many things their children need vocalized by a parent in order to understand what is going on around them. Family Connect makes note of this when they explain things to parents about being blind as a child. "Although that is not always possible, as often as you can, you want to help your child learn about the activities taking place in the world that she may not be aware of because she cannot see them. For instance, your child may not realize the many jobs that people perform around her. When your family goes to a restaurant, she may meet the hostess who seats your family, but she may not realize that the hostess is seating everyone else who comes into the restaurant as well."(AFB) There is just so much that can be missed when you're unable to see the world around you, and the parents of a visually impaired child have to go the extra mile in making sure their kids understand what is going on. Though this can be a burden, no one at the program had parents that showed anger or resentment towards the extra effort needed to raise their child. All the families were incredibly kind, but Jared's parents and two sisters went above and beyond to show how much they appreciated the program. When they went to Disney World, they came back with countless small little pencils and key chains for all the volunteers. Every holiday I received a gift with a card written in Braille from Jared, and every time his mother made jam, I would receive a jar. Looking back on it now, it is really crazy to me. How can someone be dealing with the biggest burdens but still have the ability to think of others?

The whole experience of volunteering with the North River Collaborative was undoubtedly the best decision I have ever made. The opportunity really put everything into perspective for me. You realize how strong we can be when you see people dealing with blindness with a smile on their face. I mean all the petty problems I was facing in high school seemed like nothing after spending time with the kids and their families. Think about it, I used to freak out at every blemish I woke up with in high school, and these kids were the nicest most carefree people I've met, and they were dealing with the inability to see the world around them and all their loved ones. But why was my experience with the visually impaired students so influential? And how did it affect me in the long run? I'm not exactly sure what contributed to my feeling of love and pride for these kids, but a few things do come to my mind.

My grandfather has been blind for five years now. Meaning that he was given his diagnosis shortly after I began to volunteer with these kids... Let me tell you, dealing with something like that, watching a loved one suffer, is hard. It may have been one of the hardest things I had to do. My grandfather loved driving, and the day he had to give up his license was tough for everyone. So maybe it was my sense of understanding that led me to have such an attachment to kids like Jared. I watched blindness start to define my grandfather, as he gradually lost more and more vision, and his world became darker and darker. This transition started to change his mood, and his outlook on life. He wasn't happy, not anywhere close to the joy that the kids had, and he was paranoid about what was going on around him, and I can't blame him.

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But I think the kids acted as a way for my feeling on blindness to be leveled out. It was refreshing to volunteer with these kids after a day spent with my grandfather because they helped me come to terms with what it means to be blind; they helped me to understand that it wasn't all bad. It took awhile for him, but with the help of my mom, he was able to learn skills and acquire tools that made being blind a little easier. It was just another example of how important my mom's job is, and how it is able to give people of all ages freedom and security. So maybe this personal struggle of watching my grandfather accept his blindness drove me to appreciate all the positivity radiating out of the North River Collaborative program.

My mom's job also played a major role in why the health issue of blindness really affects me. I gained so much respect for her after watching both the kids at the program, and my grandfather act. As I said before, she has to make sure they can get around safely and independently, and that's not easy. Think of how you walk, you're constantly aware of what is in front of you, when to step over an object, when to step off the curb, when to step around a puddle. But when you're blind, you rely on your cane to do all of that for you, and an orientation and mobility instructor is the only person who can teach you how to use a cane correctly so you're safe. She has an extremely large burden to bear, because I know she gets nervous as she watches her students step out into the world alone because there is many variables that she has to try to prepare them for. There are certain things you don't encounter every day that can still happen, and my mom has to try and teach her students how to deal with the "freak things" that may happen. If a kid is trying to cross the street, and an accident occurs, everything they've been taught goes out the window as they have to figure out what exactly happened around them. It's the things you don't always think of that can cause a major problem, and an orientation and mobility specialist has to be on top of these things that lie in the unknown. My mom is definitely a key contributor in why this whole topic of visual impairment means so much to me. I am aware of all the work that has to be done when you're blind, and I respect anyone who has to teach, and learn all that is required.

The point that I'm trying to make is that a health issue can impact you, or someone you know personally, but it really doesn't have to be in a negative way. Visual impairment has affected me by changing my whole entire outlook on life. I have seen the worst of blindness with my grandfather, but eventually even he began to understand that it didn't dictate who he was. I've seen the positives with Jared and the other kids at the Collaborative, because they never stop believing in themselves and their capabilities. And I've seen the love and strength of people like Jared's family, and even my own mother. I have gained such an appreciation for all I have, and all the people dealing with a disability.

I think everyone needs to be more aware of this issue of blindness. I know I had a lot of false opinions and invalid thoughts of what it meant to be blind. I mean I was in disbelief five years ago when my mom was telling me that her students go rollerblading. We all formulate these stereotypes about people with disabilities, and I challenge everyone to break those. If you like I once did, think that blind people are any less capable of a task than you, I seriously consider you rethinking it. It is a fact that "visual impairment in children has long been overlooked and underestimated in terms of prevalence, personal impact, and the social and economic implications"(Keeffe). This needs to be addressed, and it is our responsibility as part of humanity to understand one another. I have watched the struggles and the triumphs, I have

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seen the light and the dark, and I have come to understand that being blind is no different than being sighted. It is all about how you view yourself and how you view the world around you. Stereotypes are the reason why we all believe that blind kids can't do the things sighted people do, and I remember years ago thinking "oh it must suck to be blind" but I was wrong, dead wrong. By volunteering I got the opportunity to see this disability in a different light, and it was one that shattered the ideas formulated by stereotypes. I mean of course health problems are terrible, and you never want to see a loved one deal with it. But when you watch a person defy all odds, and refuse to let their issue define them, it broadens your horizons.

I stumbled across a quote a few months back that was spoken by a blind film critic named Tommy Edison addressing people who say it must be terrible to be blind. His answer and outlook remind me a lot of Jared and the other kids I volunteered with, and I find it extremely uplifting. The quote reads, "You know what's cool about being blind? There's no race. I don't know from beauty. I know people from what comes out of their mouth, and what's in their heart. That's a very cool way." This quote is a wonderful representation of how you can turn an issue like blindness into a positive, and that's exactly what the ten kids I worked with and their families were able to do. All in all, I feel honored to have volunteered with these kids. They helped me much more than I helped them, which is cliché but true. I don't think I would have been so positive about my grandfather becoming blind if I didn't have the Collaborative program and friends like Jared. They changed my ignorance towards visual impairment, and showed me what it is to live life to the fullest. I've watched them fall, and get up with a smile. I've watched them fail, and refuse to stop trying to succeed, and I've watched them prove that disabilities don't define a person.

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