

“Where Everybody Knows Your Name”

Growing up, one of my beloved TV shows was called “Cheers”; a show about an ex Red Sox pitcher (Ted Danson) who owned a bar in Boston. I would always look forward to the Thursday nights when my brothers and I would sit with my Dad and watch Cheers on NBC.

One of my favorite characters was Norm whom when he walked into the bar each time without fail, would announce a loud “evening everybody” and the responses were always the same “Norm!” from everyone in the bar. Everyone knew Norm if not personally, they knew who he was and knew his name.

I served the non-profit continuum of care for 14 plus years working at the state association in Pennsylvania. I had the wonderful opportunity to visit many a campus in my time there and one of my favorite things when visiting a campus was to take a tour. Sure, I loved seeing the grounds but the best part was watching the tour guide say hello to the residents we would pass; be it in the hall, in an activity or in the dining room. I loved seeing them say “hello Mrs. Wilson” and “have a great day Mr. Dobson” when we passed residents.

I have a hard time being in new situations; starting new jobs or meeting new people so when I first started here at The Campus of the Jewish home two years ago I was terribly nervous. Not only was I starting a new job, I would have to meet new people including staff AND the residents I would be serving. I was a nervous wreck and worried if I would be able to do it. But I recalled those tours I took and mustered the strength to say hello to every person I passed even if I did not know their name yet.

Since I am not a direct care worker, I figured I would not have much interaction with the residents; would not have the chance to get to know them other than a name or two. Big deal, I would know a few of them by name I thought, what good is that going to do? Over the two years so far, I have been blessed to find out more about our loved ones than I could ever have imagined.

I have met an ex-baseball player who played in the minors and almost was called to the “big leagues” as he called it. I met a woman who helped holocaust survivors relocate to the Harrisburg area. I have met veterans who served me and my country in ways I never could have (or would have wanted to) imagined. I realized just how much I owe them in gratitude. And it all started with a name; their name.

It dawned on me what a difference I could make, if I just learned their name and said “hello Sam” instead of just “hello”. I realized how much they appreciated hearing their name and knowing that I knew who they were. They were not just another face to me, they were someone I knew and they knew me. I love the fact that at least once a day, a resident whom we care for asks ME about my kids and how they are doing.

I have witnessed a CNA make such a huge impact on the care of the resident just by using their name when she talks to them and is caring for them. How they light up when they come in for the start of their shift and they ask Mrs. Wilson how they are doing instead of “that resident”.

I have seen the difference when a volunteer asks “Mr. Rosini, is it okay if I take you to the birthday celebration” instead of just pushing them and not saying a word. Or how the residents light up when you are able to ask them about the time they worked as an accountant; or ask them to tell you about the time they rolled a “perfect game” on their first date.

It became obvious to me that no matter what position you hold on campus, we all can make a difference with something as simple as knowing the ones we care for name. Just by knowing a name, the care levels can and will rise; something so simple can make such a difference and I am proud to say I know their names.

Time

Time stops for no one. Time is very important to all of us. We watch the clock all the time to see what we have to do next and to see if we will make that obligation on time. You can look at time as a measurement and a way to organize your life. But time is also important to give to others. We spend more time at work than we do with our families. It's just a way of life for most of us. We see our families grow before our eyes. We watch the first steps of a baby, we see our child's first homerun, we see them graduate high school, etc. This is all very important to us. We take time to spend with our families.

The residents were at our stage in life at one time. They were on a time schedule making sure they were getting where they needed to be and spending time watching their families grow and just being with them. We will be at their stage someday looking back at this time in our lives. We will be reflecting on the times we had to get up really early to make lunch for the kids, get them off to school, and get to work on time. We will think about our time spent at our place of employment, the friends we had made, and the obligations we had in life.

Make the best of your life now and tell others how much you care because time stops for no one and you never know when it may be your last. Many residents reflect on their life, the time spent with others, and the accomplishments they have made in life. Listen to them and learn.

You many brighten their day if you just take TIME to listen.

Have a Drink on Me

Ever have one of those days, where things just don't seem to be going your way? And then you hear of or see something just so cool, that it makes you realize things aren't so bad? Had an "ah ha" moment this afternoon, and made me realize how a very simple act can make a huge difference and you realize how easy it is to turn things around and smile again.

We have an activities staff person who seems to have found a way to make the residents' smile and recall fond memories all with one simple act. She makes "Shirley Temple" drinks and delivers them to the residents in each neighborhood. If you have never had a "Shirley Temple" or "Roy Rogers" as we used to call them as young men when I was little, then you are in for a real treat. It basically is made with ginger ale and grenadine and garnished with a maraschino cherry if you are lucky!

Well, Tasha makes the concoctions and places them on a cart for delivery. She will head to each resident's room and offer them a refreshing beverage and a wonderful memory. A lot of them recall days of past when they would enjoy these drinks when they too were younger. Add in the music she plays when delivering and the "quiz" paper she offers each resident and watch the smiles grow.

Tasha likes to joke that when they hear the music, it makes them think of the ice cream truck coming down the street. The residents hear the music and know what is coming! Asked what the best part of delivering the drinks is for her and her response is simple; "it allows the residents who might not come out for an activity as often, the chance to enjoy something as well".

Well done, Tasha, well done. Have a drink on me!



An Unlikely Mix?

Teen-age children and their aging grandparents? How often do grandparents complain that their adolescent grandchildren stay as far away as possible? The kids prefer their own friends, their own music, and, sometimes heaven forbid! their own fashions. The grandparents are simply too old-time even if they are not old; they want visits, attention, and conversation. A relationship between a teen-ager and his grandparent can be a difficult disconnect.

Not so with Tim and his grandma Josephine. Grandma Josephine lives at the Campus of the Jewish Home, at least a million miles away from the volleyball and basketball courts and the malls that Tim patronizes. Most afternoons, Tim and Grandma sit together, indoors when the weather is unpleasant and outdoors when it is nice. They eat the lunch that Tim brings and enjoy gentle conversation. Clearly, they love being in each other's company.

Nobody forces Tim to visit Josephine. He *wants* to. In summer, the tall, handsome young man arrives almost daily at the Jewish Home, but cuts back in fall when school and volleyball practice interfere. Tim sees nothing unusual in his behavior. He loves his grandmother and understands how much his visits mean to her, especially given Josephine's residence at the Jewish Home where she is away from her family and friends.

Grandma, of course, loves Tim's visits. It doesn't matter what he brings for lunch, or what they talk about. Tim's attention and Tim's company ease the separation from grandma's loved ones, and greatly enhance her quality of life.

A generational disconnect? Not for these two.

America's Game

The smell of the fresh cut grass. The sound a ball makes when it hits the catcher's mitt. The crack of the bats in batting practice. Trying to get that foul ball or home run they just hit. The hot dog and nachos or pretzel that was about as big as the glove you had brought along with you. Baseball is here, and America's pastime usually stirs up some good old-fashioned memories we had as kids.

Going to the game with our Dad, pulling him along as we tried to say hi to our favorite player or get them to even look in our direction. Getting to the seats an hour early just to watch the players warm up. Or sitting in front of the radio or tv to watch the game and cheer our favorite team. Does not matter the specific memory, but pretty much all of us have a memory of baseball when we were young.

A lot of times, as we get older we lose sight of those "good times". Work gets in the way, we forget how fun it was to watch a game, there just does not seem to be enough time. That is why I love when baseball season comes back each year.

I know soon, we will be taking a few residents out to a Harrisburg Senators game at FNB Field. Man, they love to go to the games; one resident told me the best part is the "hot dog and cold beer". And I will have the pleasure of setting up another resident to watch the games with his son via the computer. (The Campus purchased the MLB Plan so they can watch their favorite, the Philadelphia Phillies whenever they want!) The son comes in just about every day and they so look forward to the day games.

So, now that the season is officially under way, who are you going to root for? I personally am rooting for good games and great memories.



PERCEPTION

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the words “nursing home”? I will bet it has to do with white uniforms, BINGO and maybe even sadness. What if I told you that those thoughts were way off base, would you be surprised?

Yes, our Campus does offer BINGO (who doesn't LOVE Bingo?) but we offer so much more. The Campus has a dedicated activities staff that offer so much more than something to do. They offer a hand, an ear to listen and a heart to provide love! They offer hope, life and a chance to thrive. A nursing home does not have to be a dirty word in the world these days.

What if I told you that our residents enjoy art class, picnics, concerts outside, bird watching, marble art, exercise class, blackjack, rummy, nail painting and even the occasional visit from the ice cream truck? Would you be surprised?

What if I told you the halls are often filled with laughter and smiles? Our residents can be found in the Café enjoying a special lunch together or with family; or enjoying a nice evening on the porch? Our residents have an Executive Chef who plans and helps prepare their meals.

We offer short term rehab so some of our residents can get back to their homes as fast as possible after a fall or a short stay at the hospital. Please know, not trying to mislead you, some of our residents are long term and will never be able to return to their homes. But that does not mean they have to stop living. They may have a medical condition that means they need nursing care 24/7 but they can still participate, and participate they do!

They may enjoy the book club, bowling, cooking with Karen, horse racing game, painting and yes, even BINGO(!). They may enjoy going to the Harrisburg Senators game with us, or maybe running out for a lunch at a local restaurant. But just because they live in a nursing home, does not mean they no longer can “live”.

Are you surprised?

Art Knows No Age

“Art is a reflection of poetry and beauty of the heart and mind without the use of any words.”

Ever sit back and think you are too old to learn something new? Or wonder what it would be like to be able to create something beautiful like you never have before? Well, the residents at The Residence of The Campus of the Jewish Home are finding out just what that is like!

Many of our loved ones have joined us never having picked up a paint brush in the past. Or have not taken an art class in over 50+ years if they ever have in the past. They are finding the freedom and joy of what it is like to create beautiful art and the pride to be able to show that work off!

Lisa, an art teacher and artist herself, joins us and the residents to guide them, teach them and maybe most importantly, spend time with them. You see, she is much more than an art teacher to us, she is a friend who for some has become almost like family.

Four times a week, precisely at 11:00 a.m. they gather around the activity table and create. They tell stories, laugh and share. They pick a favorite picture or recall a memory and put it on paper. They will create the rough draft in pencil and craft the outline.

Before they know it, it is time to finish with color and with the help of Lisa explaining shades and balance. She will guide them and explain why a certain color should be added here or there. She encourages them to expand and create their very own folk art. The skills they develop, the pride they earn are evident as each week passes. The joy they get is evident in their faces each time you visit.

The Jewish Home takes great pride in showing off these “masterworks” and chooses different works each month. They are hung in the halls for all to see and all to love, for it is very true...art knows no age!

More than Therapy

When I first came to the Campus one of the first things I fell in love with was the story I read from a letter to the Campus. It was from a daughter who was thanking the staff for the care her father had received.

He evidently was at the Campus for a short-term rehab stay and she could not say enough about the staff and the therapy he had received. The thing that caught my eye, stole my heart is how she described the staff who would not let him off the hook. This man who entered the Campus having lost his fight and his will left the Campus “a new man”.

This gentleman who came into the Campus refusing to go to therapy would soon end lunch with his daughter early, so he would not be late for his sessions! Spoke of how the staff knew just how to push him, just how to speak to him to get him excited. Soon enough, this man who wanted to lay in bed, could not get enough of the therapy and his desire to continue to “keep in touch” with the staff was heartwarming.

In the months after reading that letter, I witnessed first-hand what she had referenced in her letter. The therapy staff seemed to have the same impact on many a resident, ones that came in with a different attitude than left with. Residents who were actually happy to attend their therapy sessions.

The one that stands out the most is the bouncy balloon session. A resident (favorite of mine, one I had grown close with) was in the therapy room in a very unusual bad mood. Something was off and they he refused to exercise that day. That would soon change, as I watched the staff listen to him and hear what he had to say. They listened to his concerns, explained to him what they planned and tried their best to get his smile back to no avail.

Sensing talk was not enough they soon grabbed the balloon on the rubber band and asked him to stand. They explained he was going to punch his anger out on the balloon, get all his concerns out by hitting the balloon. Soon enough, as his range of motion grew stronger, he was exercising without knowing it and that famous smile was slowly returning.

Sometimes you just have to think out of the box; sometimes you have to be able to offer “more than therapy”. We are lucky to have the staff we do and blessed to see them work every day.



It's the LITTLE things

"Sometimes" said Pooh, "the smallest things take up the most space in your heart".



Pooh said it best, if you ask me. It is the small things we do in life, that can make the biggest difference or have the most impact in someone else's. (One of the many reasons we work in Long Term Care.)

September 1 had a theme of Random Acts of Kindness for the day. There is a commercial running on tv right now, that challenges the members of the staff for an insurance company to perform 100 acts of good. There is a number of websites, greeting cards and even songs dedicated to acts of good. They must be onto something!

In a setting like a nursing home, the smallest acts can have the biggest impact. And the biggest impact is usually achieved with the smallest gestures, the smallest leaps of faith. Walk down the hall with me and watch Edna smile from ear to ear from the simple fact I took a minute to say "Good Morning Edna" compared to simply saying good morning. Just me remembering and using her name makes a big difference!

That donut the resident in her room is eating? Came from an aide who stopped on the way into work this morning for her. The one with the beautifully painted nails? They were done by the aide who worked in the other neighborhood last night, punched out and came down to paint them for her. The digital clock the resident with bad eyesight is holding? Was bought by a nurse last week when she realized it would light up and allow them to read it easier.

The even bigger differences are done with the heart. The story of the gentleman who pushes himself into the nurse's office every morning, just to hold her hand for a few minutes. Or the aide who passes out hugs with her smiles just to make the residents feel loved. Even the simple act of listening...giving a resident 3 minutes of our time to listen, chat and catch up. Something so small to us means so much to them. Those are the difference makers, the small acts no one knows about but affect our loved ones' lives each and every day.

So, we challenge you today, and every day. Perform one small act of kindness and see who it makes feel better. The person you helped or maybe even yourself. We think the answer may surprise you...as you realize, it really is the *"little things we do"*.

So much more than “nursing”

When you think of a Nursing Home, you automatically think of the nursing staff such as the RNs, the CNAs and so on. Makes sense, they are the people you most likely have the most contact with as a friend or family member of your loved one when you visit. They are important and the heart of the campus, the reason a campus fails or succeeds.

But next time you visit, take a minute to look deeper and see the other staff who make up the campus. The receptionist who greeted you; the admissions person who helped you so long ago; the social worker who answers your questions. And please, please don't forget about the activities staff!

The activities staff who help your family member get out and about, do exercise, enjoy trivia or play golf, sing songs, offer an ear to chew on and a hand to hold. They may not be able to provide direct care, but they directly affect the feelings and happiness on your loved one in so many ways.

See the activities staff person pushing the woman down the hall? See the smile on her face? One of her favorite memories is enjoying ice cream with her grandkids on the porch. She just came from enjoying her favorite ice cream flavor thanks to the ice cream truck visit. Or the gentleman sitting by the birds talking to them? He used to bowl in a league when he was younger; had a perfect game 3 times “when he was a kid”. He was just crowned “bowling champ” for the month thanks to activities.

Just returning from the Senators baseball game is a resident who played in the minor leagues so long ago. He is still holding the foul ball he caught with the glove he used when he played. The man with the harmonica and the smile from ear to ear; he used to play in a band ages ago. He had not seen or even touched a harmonica for 15 years...until the activity staff brought one in for him. The halls have been filled with beautiful music for the past 20 minutes.

So please remember it takes a team to make a nursing home what it is. There are so many people that touch the lives of our residents each and every day and we take pride in every single touch, every single encounter. We are honored to care for them and appreciate the opportunity to do so.

