

Winner Winner of the December 2009 writing contest for the 15-18 age group category Winner

There are many ways to give. This is my story...

"It's better to give than receive" is a very cliché phrase. During the Christmas holidays, mothers will drill this into children's brains, trying in vain to keep that greedy 'X-mas' lust from their innocent minds. And yet, despite the pleas, coaxing, and even harsh assertion, those same children tear into the red-and-white striped parcels and pout when the gift inside the wrapping is not the top item on their wish list. I, too, was one of those children—and it took me all of thirteen years to understand the real meaning of the phrase.

It began as necessary service hours for my grade 7 class. Volunteers from my church would head out every Friday to visit a local nursing home, Val Haven, and spent an hour there with the residents. Unwillingly, I became one of those 'volunteers', clutching my piano books to my chest and shuffling over to the squeaky wooden piano bench where I would slouch for a half-hour playing music for the old folks. I would play, ignoring the stares of the cheery and those exhausted with life both. Slowly, my hours clocked at the piano bench began to fill the necessary time schedule. But despite this, I had not spoken to a single resident yet without blushing and stammering awkwardly. I had not yet discovered how to love them.

And then one day, shuffling my book of classical sonatas and Baroque dances, I felt a light tap on my shoulder. It was an old woman in a purple cashmere sweater, leaning on a walker and trembling as she tried to support herself with one hand. My first reaction was to shy away from the leathery fingers, but something made me take the hand and look to where her chin was pointing.

"Look," she said. "Eva is dancing."

And Eva, a one-hundred and five year old woman, was dancing. She was swaying back and forth on the plaid couch, her entire body and soul wrapped up in the music I was reluctant to play for her. I felt an overwhelming sense of remorse, and then, even stronger, a wave of tender affection for the little old lady. Unexpectedly, I found myself hugging the woman in the purple sweater, feeling her cheek against mine. It wasn't leathery at all; in fact, it was soft, and it smelled like soap; just like her white hair that was now tickling my forehead. Instead of disturbing Eva, I sat down at the piano again, my new purple-sweater-wearing friend leaning over my shoulder, and played. I played for my whole half-hour, hardly stopping to turn pages, putting my heart into the music I clunked out on that old wooden piano. And my heart was full—full of love for the century-old woman dancing to my music, full of love for the purple-sweater, full of love for every person in that room.

I wanted to dance, too.

If anyone tells me now, "It is better to give than receive", I will smile at them, and instead of looking to see what is in it for me, I will think of Eva and say "Yes."

Note: Since 2006, Eva has passed away.
Please offer a prayer for her.

written by Veronica, age 15, BC



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