



FOREWORD BY TIFFANY BUCKNER

HIDDEN WELLS of *Wisdom*



P.I.L.O.T. CLASS OF 2020 & FRIENDS



SPECIAL GUEST AUTHOR: ALICE BUCKNER

Copyright Notice

Hidden Wells of Wisdom

© 2019, Alice Buckner, Tynisha Lewis, Melissa Rosado, Danielle Farmer, Sophia Ferguson, Monica Jones, Brittany Yokely, Shalondria Ficklin, Gabrielle Yokely, Tiffani Koonce-Crawford, Shanice Griffin, Candida Rosado, Pearlisha Gibbs, Erica Figueroa, Marina Escobar

Foreword by Tiffany Buckner

Anointed Fire™ House

(info@anointedfire.com)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without express written permission from the author / publisher.

Disclaimer

This book is designed to provide information and motivation to our readers. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged to render any type of psychological, legal, or any other kind of professional advice. No warranties or guarantees are expressed or implied by the author, since every man has his own measure of faith. The individual author(s) shall not be liable for any physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or commercial damages, including; but not limited to, special, incidental, consequential or other damages. Our views and rights are the same: You are responsible for your own choices, actions, and results.

The author and publisher have left out names and identifying details to protect the privacy of individuals. The author has tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from the author's memory of them. In order to maintain privacy the author and publisher have in some instances left out the name and identifying details of individuals. Although the author and publisher have made every effort to make sure all information is correct at press time, the author and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, disruptions caused by stories with this book, whether such information is a result of errors or omission, accident, slander or other cause.

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	VI
Introduction.....	VIII
Melissa Rosado's First Encounter.....	
Mr. Robert.....	1
Sylvia Alves' First Encounter.....	
Ms. Sylvia.....	4
Brittany Yokely's First Encounter.....	
The Bride, Groom and the Best Man.....	6
Danielle Farmer's First Encounter.....	
Ms. Deborah, Ms. Mary, Ms. Elizabeth & Ms. Joan.....	9
Monica Jones' First Encounter.....	
Ms. Louise.....	12
Tynisha Lewis' First Encounter.....	
Ms. Patsy.....	14
Yashmee Reed's First Encounter.....	
Ms. Peggy, Ms. Lucy, Ms. Martha, Ms. Sylvia, Ms. Roslyn & Ms. Sherri.....	17
Sophia Ferguson's First Encounter.....	
Mrs. Rosie.....	22
Shalondria Ficklin's First Encounter.....	
Mrs. J.....	24
Danielle Farmer's Second Encounter.....	
Ms. Lisa & Ms. Joann.....	27
Tynisha Lewis' Second Encounter.....	
Ms. Lois & Mr. Johnny.....	31
Monica Jones' Second Encounter.....	

Ms. Blue & Ms. Green.....	34
Sophia Ferguson's Second Encounter.....	
Ms. Ruby & Mr. Charles.....	37
Shalondria Ficklin's Second Encounter.....	
Mrs. Anna & Patches' Mother.....	40
Melissa Rosado's Second Encounter.....	
Ms. Cynthia & Mr. John.....	43
Yashmee Reed's Second Encounter.....	
Ms. Donna & Mr. Germeal.....	46
Sylvia Alves' Second Encounter.....	
Ms. Ethel & Ms. Clara.....	50
Brittany Yokely's Second Encounter.....	
(Aliases: Wisdom & Folly).....	54
Erica Figueroa's Encounter.....	
Ms. Mary.....	58
Gabrielle Yokely's Encounter.....	
Ms. Norma.....	60
Marina Escobar's Encounter.....	
Ms. Lydia & Ms. Aida.....	63
Pearlisha Gibbs' Encounter.....	
Ms. Mae.....	66
Candida Rosado's Encounter.....	
Ms. Martha, Ms. Lauren & Ms. Linda.....	68
Tiffani Koonce-Crawford's Encounter.....	
Ms. Brenda.....	70
Shanice Girffin's Encounter.....	
Ms. Margaret.....	72

Alice Buckner.....	
Home or Facility?.....	75
Prepping the Family for the Facility.....	80
The Bedridden Patient.....	82

Foreword

The story behind the Hidden Wells book is as beautiful as it is inspiring. I started a mentorship program, entitled P.I.L.O.T. Mentorship, which stands for Pioneers, Intercessors, Leaders, Overcomers & Trendsetters. The goal or backdrop of the program was for me to teach a group of women everything that I know, from entrepreneurship to ministry.

In the month of February, the Lord laid it on my heart to have the women to go into one of the nursing homes in their cities. During their first visits, their only goal was to sit with a single resident and be a blessing to that resident. At the time, the mentorship program had well over thirty students all around the United States. The women complied, and we all came to see why God had given us this assignment. This was definitely a tear-jerker!

Each woman wrote about her experience and recorded one or more videos detailing her encounter. Immediately after the assignment had been completed, the Lord then reminded me that my mother, Alice Buckner, who'd recently passed away, had been writing a book. Ironically enough, her book was designed to help families decide if placing their loved ones in nursing homes or assisted living facilities was the best route for them to go. A former CNA, she was definitely unbiased regarding long term care facilities. Every time she would come into town, I'd encourage her to write about her experiences as a CNA, especially when she would complain about being bored. The Lord laid it on my heart to combine what she'd written with the students' assignments. I'm being completely honest when I say, this was not planned, at least, on my part! Overjoyed, I rushed to my computer and started looking for the manuscript. When I found the document, I was elated; I could feel the presence of God and I knew, in that moment, that God had and has a plan for the Hidden Wells book. Even though she hadn't completed her book, what she had written was still invaluable.

I eventually gave the students a similar assignment; this time, they were to go into the nursing homes, visit with two residents and ask them two questions:

- What advice would you give to young women living in today's day and age?
- What is one thing that would you change about your life if you could?

The goal of this assignment was threefold:

1. To get the students acclimated with visiting the elderly so it wouldn't just be a one-time event, driven only by the fact that it was a homework assignment.
2. To be a blessing to the residents by visiting people who normally don't get many visitors.
3. To glean wisdom from the residents that would ordinarily be locked in their hearts, never heard by the world at large.

The wisdom shared was invaluable, and the relationships that were built from each encounter are nothing short of beautiful. It was and is God's way of reminding the elderly that He has not forgotten about them, and neither should we.

We eventually opened up this opportunity for non-students to take part in it. Of course, our goal is to set a trend—to get others to visit the elderly in their cities and states so that they don't feel forgotten about. Additionally, this helps them to live longer, more fulfilled lives. All the same, people tend to complain about not having someone to talk to about the hardships of life, never realizing that a few blocks from their homes, there stands a community of people who are wise—people who've overcome the problems and the demons that they are wrestling with. In short, a visit to the elderly is a two-fold blessing that just keeps on giving!

We encourage you to not only read *Hidden Wells*, but to let it inspire you to get out and visit the elderly in your city. Go make a friend with someone! And be sure to share your story with us on social media by using the hashtag #HiddenWells. Your story may be chosen for *Hidden Wells* (Book Two)!

Tiffany Buckner
Founder of Anointed Fire

Introduction

Hidden Wells is a one-of-a-kind book, detailing the experiences of several women who randomly set up appointments with some of their local nursing homes or assisted living centers. They walked into these facilities and sat down with many of the residents. What was their goal, you ask?

1. To visit people who rarely received visits; in short, to be a blessing.
2. To glean wisdom from some of the residents in these facilities so that the world can know that there are people out there who are filled with wisdom, however, they are hidden away in adult care centers, oftentimes forgotten about. In other words, we want to encourage others to visit the elderly.
3. To preserve the voices of many of the men and women who still have something to say, but no one to say it to.

In this book, each woman lists her encounters, most of which were good, one or two that were not-so-favorable, and many of which were humorous. You'll be able to glean from the wisdom shared with them during their encounters.

At the end of this book, you will find what was initially supposed to be another book, written by Alice Buckner, a former Certified Nurses' Assistant who wanted to share what she'd learned as a CNA. Her love for the elderly was unmatched, and despite her battle with cancer, she was determined to help others to live a better quality of life. Additionally, she wanted to help everyone who's wrestling with the decision of whether or not to provide home care for their loved ones or to place them in a long term care facility to make an informed decision. Ms. Buckner passed away before she could finish her book, nevertheless, her voice continues to live on through the final pages of this book, and her wisdom will continue to give men and women the insight they'll need to make the right decision.

Each author's goal is to help you understand just how valuable the elderly are. We often think of them as "old people" who have nothing of value to share with us,

when this is not true. Satan's goal is to get you to discard wisdom that is hidden in plain sight; he does this by making you think they are insignificant burdens who have nothing to offer. In Hidden Wells, we are dispelling that lie, and we definitely want to encourage you to get out, visit the elderly and tell us about your encounter as well!

Melissa Rosado's First Encounter

Brooklyn, New York

Resident's Name: Mr. Robert

I went to a nursing home that was located in Brooklyn. The nursing home had a beautiful and orderly setting. I got there and was sent to the second floor where my friend was. When I arrived, my friend, Susan, put me to work right away. I thought that when I got there that she would just show me who I should speak to and that would be the end of it. As it turned out, this wasn't the case at all. She is a coordinator at the nursing home. I saw her on her knees with big bowling pins in her hands, bowling with many of the seniors who were in wheelchairs. Susan had me keep record of the score and assist with retrieving the bowling ball; this was so she can roll it towards the next participant. It was a lively game. After this game, we quickly went to another floor where she had me move some of the wheelchair-bound seniors to another room. I never really knew how to operate a wheelchair until that moment, and of course, I realized that it was not that hard. I've always tended to avoid operating wheelchairs, even when I was a camp counselor, but this time, I was forced to do it. I soon saw that I did not mind it! I even learned that the wheelchair breaks could be located on the front of the wheels or on the back of the wheels! The other game that we played with the seniors was Bingo. It was quite a fast game. I was very enthusiastic! I made contact with many of the seniors and tried my best to make them excited about the game. Susan also had me handing out prizes to the winners. They were so happy!

After helping Susan with these activities, I went on a lunch break with her. She was very grateful for my help. She suggested some people I should speak to. At first, I told her that I wanted to speak to a senior I felt I had made a connection with, but I quickly changed my mind when I realized there was someone else who I wanted to speak more to. I spoke to a senior named Robert. He was an Italian man who came to the United States when he was a boy. He grew up in Brooklyn and sold newspapers at the age of 12. During those days, he said that he sold the newspapers for three cents, but he had a rich uncle who would occasionally drive

by with his car and just hand him one dollar. He told me that he was excited to get that dollar because, to him, that was two to three weeks' worth of wages.

Robert had been married for several decades to a woman who also resided in the nursing home. They were both 93, and he was a few weeks shy of 94. The couple have three children, five grandchildren and a few great-grandchildren. Robert's father served in the military during World War 1. Robert also served in the military during World War 2, but he served as an interpreter for six months on the Italian side when he'd returned to Italy. He interpreted from Italian to English and vice-versa. Robert was in the grocery business when he got older, but soon had to move on to pressing women's coats at a factory, which he did for twenty years. This was a seasonal job for him that he did during the winter. He had to do this because supermarkets were taking over and the simple mom and pop grocery stores were going out of business. Robert was also a taxi driver in the non-winter seasons. He told me that he would often pick up famous people.

Robert liked to have a good time when he was younger. He loved to dance. He then admitted that he would go out dancing without his wife because she was in Italy at times. He told me he would go to a nightclub that knew him by name, but he said that all he did was dance; he didn't engage in anything immoral. He said that there were a lot of competitors on the dance floor, but that he was a very good dancer himself. He also told me that he liked Frank Sinatra and saw him perform twice with his wife.

Robert's favorite president was John F. Kennedy. He said that President Kennedy was a good man and very human. He does not like the state of affairs in America today and likened Donald Trump to a big baby. He kept reiterating that, in the old times, they would hang leaders that were unpopular. Robert also claimed that he had a disdain for royalty, when I asked him what he thought of the monarchy.

Robert told me that he liked to take care of himself; he exercises twice a day with exercise bands. He also likes to keep his brain active by reading the Daily News, which is the same newspaper that he sold at 12-years old. His favorite decade was the 1930's because he was a child back then. He remembers when

the television became popular; he said that it cost him \$400 to buy when it first came out. He also told me that he liked to travel and would sometimes go back to Italy by boat—a trip that would take 12-13 days to complete. It wasn't until the 50's that he started to travel to Italy via airplanes.

Robert had a great time speaking to me (and vice versa). I am considering going back to the nursing home when I get the chance.

Sylvia Alves' First Encounter

West Orange, New Jersey

Resident's Name: Ms. Sylvia

I had the opportunity to visit Our Daughters of Israel Nursing Home in West Orange, New Jersey. Let me start off by saying the facility was just absolutely gorgeous. The artwork and murals on the wall were just simply breathtaking. It had been decades since I'd been in a nursing home. Visiting the nursing home brought back childhood memories. My grandmother used to babysit us, and every week or every other week, we would go to the nursing home on Fridays. I have to be honest—as a child, this was not something I looked forward to, but that's a whole other story for another day. I had no say in the matter, so it's just something that was forced upon me.

When I arrived, a lot of the residents had just finished lunch. They were gathered in the rec room. I love bearing gifts so I brought several beaded bracelets with me to give away. I walked around and introduced myself; this was kind of awkward for me because I am so not that girl. By this, I mean that I am introverted. I looked for the ones who seemed open and inviting. I came across a few who weren't interested in entertaining any conversation, which was okay. I evangelize so I am starting to get use to rejection. I did ask if I could pray for them and some were receptive.

As I was walking towards one of the residents, another resident approached me. She asked me who I was and what was I doing there. She was in a wheelchair like most of the residents there. I flashed my big pearly whites and introduced myself. Are you ready for this? Low and behold, her name was Sylvia too! Will you look at God! She even spelled her name the same way as mine! Sylvia was so feisty, like a firecracker. She was so jovial. She had more energy than you and I put together. I sensed that she was the leader of the pack.

Sylvia is 96 years young! My God. I was just in awe of God and how He'd favored so many of the residents with long life. I even meet someone who was

104 years old! Granted, on the other hand, she was not lucid, plus she had several health issues—but back to Sylvia. Sylvia was from the surrounding area and has a daughter, a son, some grandchildren and some great-grandchildren. She said they do visit her, but not as often as she would like. She understood that they have lives of their own.

I shared a little about myself with Sylvia and told her that I am a follower of Christ. She is Jewish. I also shared why I was there. Sylvia was so full of chatter, there was no difficulty redirecting the conversation, not to mention her friend (forgot to get her name) came and joined in. I asked Sylvia a pointed question—“What is the secret to long life?” Her answer was a lot of laughter, good friends, joy and family. Sylvia said that overall, her life has been good, and she takes each day as it comes. She said it is a blessing that she is still alive, especially since a lot of her friends aren’t around. I noticed the sadness in her eyes when she said this. She began telling me about all her friends who had passed in the nursing home, some of them were literally back-to-back.

I redirected the conversation back to happy thoughts. I wanted to lighten up the environment again. It was then that I remembered that I still had two bracelets left to give out. Guess what? One of the bracelets matched her outfit. Her face just lit up when I gave it to her. I gave the other bracelet to her friend. She was very appreciative. I told her that I want to have long life just like her and be just as feisty as she is, if not feistier. She chuckled at that. I also told her that our meeting was no coincidence. She agreed. Sylvia excused herself because she said she was getting tired and wanted to take a nap. I asked if I could pray for her and she agreed. I prayed that God would continue to bless and favor her. I shared the gospel with her and asked if she wanted to accept Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior; she declined. I also asked if I could leave a Bible with her. Sylvia said that her eyes are really bad so she doesn’t read. I suggested that, perhaps, she can have someone read it to her. She agreed! Hallelujah! (Insert dancing emoji here).

Overall, I enjoyed myself. It was a little awkward at first because I had to put myself out there. Most of the residents were happy to have someone to talk to. This definitely took me outside my comfort zone, but I was open to it and that’s what counts.

Brittany Yokely's First Encounter

Rossville, Georgia

Residents' Names: The Bride, Groom and the Best Man

First, I would like to disclose that I work for a home health company, so I'll be honest and say that, even though I thought this assignment was interesting, I didn't necessarily feel that it would be a new encounter for me. Although, I work in the office of this company as a staffing coordinator now, I used to be a caregiver and have had many meaningful experiences. I have gained much wisdom from our clients. Even now on occasion, I get to visit with them or help them. I have always loved this part of my job, but this is not always the side we see. Sometimes, we see people whose children don't come to see them, and even people who are left completely alone in the world, and we are all they have. Sometimes, we see people who are so confused that they can barely function. Sometimes, we see people who are declining rapidly and just need us so that they'll have someone there with them until they pass. Recently, all of this has made me question more and more if I even want to grow old. It's all very sad, sometimes.

That being said, this assignment did not turn out to be what I expected at all. I ended up feeling led to visit a place that was not affiliated with the company I work for. This was a place that had been on my heart for over five years, ever since the day I walked in to ask where the health department had moved to. On that memorable day, I had encountered a woman there who was very excited to see me and my children. She looked so very lonely. I never forgot the desperation in her eyes. I always meant to go back and visit the people there. So today, I finally went. I asked the receptionist if there were any people there who didn't get many visitors, and if I could visit with them. I was quite surprised by her answer. She said, "No. There are not many people here who don't get visitors." After this, she returned to her work. I felt a little awkward, so I explained to her a little of why I was there. I told her that myself and several women were on sort of an outreach program, and we had decided to do visit random nursing home residents. She thought a little harder and said, "You know the people who you

asked for the location of the receptionist's desk when you walked in? The ones sitting in the lobby? They don't get many visitors, and they are about to get married." I went back out to visit with them. I introduced myself and congratulated them on their wedding. They introduced me to a man sitting with them and told me that he was their friend. This man's speech was very slurred. I could tell that his motor skills were not completely up to par, plus, he was in a wheelchair. He told me that he had become friends with them after coming to visit his grandmother, and when she'd passed away, he'd continued to come and see the couple. He'd done this because they hadn't been getting very many visitors. He said that he enjoyed visiting with them. I eased in with them by exclaiming, "That's why I'm here, too!" I asked the couple how they liked living in this facility. As I was questioning them, I was looking around and taking mental notes of how much the place had changed since I had last seen it. They had made it into a dual nursing home and rehab center. It just seemed so much more full of life! The woman just gushed about the place, telling me how much she liked it. She said that the CNA's and nurses there were just like family. Her soon-to-be husband talked about how much she loved playing bingo there and doing crafts. I asked the woman where they would be getting married. She exclaimed, "Oh here! They have a nice dining hall, and all of the CNA's, nurses, and friends of ours who live here will be stopping in when they can. It's going to be really nice."

I asked her what kind of dress she was going to wear. She told me that she was not going to wear a white dress—absolutely not. She went on to tell me that this was because she's been married twice before, and she thought it was bad luck. I looked at her and asked, "Do you believe in bad luck?" She blushed a little and said, "Yes." I told her, "Well, I don't know about bad luck, but I think you should wear what you like, and I think white is overrated." We had a cute little laugh about that. I went on to ask her about her bridesmaids. She said that she had didn't really have any family left who would come and see her in town, but she did have her fiance's daughters; they were going to be her bridesmaids. She was just so excited and grateful. I talked with her fiancé as well; he also seemed to be very grateful for her. He was quieter and took a bit to warm up to me, but he did tell me that he'd lost his first wife about ten years ago to brain cancer.

Even though their friend wasn't exactly a resident there, I wanted to include a little bit of his story, since he'd shared it with me. When he'd come back from Desert Storm, he had gotten very drunk one day. He was out driving, had a wreck, and woke up at a Veterans hospital a month later. His words were, "I shouldn't have been there doing that, but oh well." I thought to myself, "Yes, oh well. What can you do, but say oh well and press forward?" This is the overall message or essence of what I got from all of them. Getting older is not always sad; these people had found the silver lining in the cloud of aging. They'd found community. It's there for everyone if we will only open our eyes to it.

Danielle Farmer's First Encounter

Los Angeles, California

Residents' Names: Ms. Deborah, Ms. Mary, Ms. Elizabeth & Ms. Joan

This assignment was such a blessing! I was able to meet such lovely people, and this was definitely a situation where I truly had to listen more than I could speak. The life experiences, wisdom, and knowledge from the ladies I met with provided such an eye-opening experience for me. All I could do was take everything in; I couldn't write notes fast enough! The coordinator asked me to arrive at a time when the residents normally hang out in the common area for a snack and a cup of coffee. I was hoping to meet with someone who didn't get a lot of visits from his or her family, but the resident she had in mind was preoccupied. She then decided it would be best for me to sit at a table with a group of four wise ladies. I was fortunate to be at a table with racial diversity because it allowed me to stretch past cultural boundaries.

These ladies shared so much valuable insight, wisdom, and advice that I found it difficult to find an area where they may have needed a dose of encouragement. This was so inspiring to me because they were at such a peace with God that nothing bothered or worried them anymore. I shared with them that I long to be in that mental space, where you fully trust God without letting the vicissitudes of life get to you. They told me that it takes time to get there, but the sooner you realize this truth, the easier life becomes.

One of the ladies (Deborah) resonated with me the most because she really gave me a lot of insight into her life. She expressed how, even though she grew up in church, she became rebellious in her teenage and young adult years. She got into alcohol, partying, and living a wild life. I shared how I have a similar story to hers—I wanted to see what the world was like because I thought I was missing out by being a “church girl.” I found out our stories weren’t quite the same, because her life on the wild side lasted a lot longer than mine. By the time she turned 25, she’d become very depressed and wasn’t sure how her life ended up the way that it had. This was when she hit rock bottom, and this was the point

where she said she stopped toying with God and truly surrendered everything to Him. From that point on, her life has never been the same. She came to realize that her rebellion was birthed out of a distrust of God, and she was glad that she went through it all because she has learned that we absolutely must trust God in everything. Trusting ourselves alone gets us nowhere.

After driving the point home through various stories and anecdotes about their faith in God and how He has sustained them throughout all their years, the women began to ask me about my romantic life. I let them know that I was single, and before I could say anything else, they all chimed in at once and said, "Wait on the Lord and stay patient!" All I could think about was the multitude of teachings (from Sister Tiffany) that I've heard over the years, echoing this same sentiment.

Deborah was very adamant about this because she wished that she would have prayed and asked the Lord to send her husband, and then, stayed patient. She was 37 when she got married, which was late in her time, so she became impatient. She said that God told her the man she was going to marry was not the one for her, but she didn't listen. She discovered that so much could have been avoided had she waited, prayed, and listened to the Lord's leading. She vehemently advised me to do just that.

The women explained to me that once you get married, there are so many adjustments that have to be made in order to have the fifty and sixty-year marriages that they have had. Most of them had a lot of trouble with their in-laws, the men were often gone for months serving in the military, and things that they'd planned for hadn't gone as expected. Nevertheless, they decided to honor their vows "for better or for worse." One of the ladies always wanted children, but she had health complications and had to turn to adoption. This was one of the many adjustments in life she had to acquiesce to, but in the end, she has always found contentment in every situation. They shared that communication is key and said that women should always show their husbands respect. I mentioned to them that I'd heard in a sermon that men need respect while women need love. They all agreed, but one thing I wasn't aware of is the fact that hearing the words "I love you" was hard to come by in their generation. They all said that they didn't grow up hearing those words, and they rarely, if ever, heard

it from their husbands. I asked how this had affected them, and they said that it was always shown rather than said, but it did make them wonder from time to time, if they were actually loved. One of the things they said they admire about the generation today is how affectionate the people are. They said it was an adjustment, in itself, getting all the hugs, kisses, and being told “I love you” from loved ones when they hang up the phone. But even with that compliment, they were sure to remind me that we are still spoiled in their eyes.

A piece of advice that each lady left me with:

- **Deborah** - “When something offends you, don’t nurse it, rehearse it, or curse it.”
- **Mary** - “Before your feet hit the ground each morning, praise Him.”
- **Elizabeth** - “Don’t let the sun go down on your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).
- **Joan** - “Be content in everything.”

Monica Jones' First Encounter

Kinston, North Carolina

Resident's Name: Ms. Louise

I went to a nursing home called Signature. There, I met a 91- year old lady named Louise. She was happy to have some company. She wasn't shy at all. I told her my name and she told me hers. She had a sharp memory for her age, but she was constantly having issues with her legs. She told me how she was once married to a man named Joe and they had a daughter who had passed away in 2006. She never thought that she would outlive her daughter. She had experienced a lot of death around her. She had two son-in-laws to pass away, as well and a great-grandchild.

Louise loved to collect elephants; according to her, she has plenty of them in a china cabinet at her old home. I asked her why did she like to collect them? She said that they were beautiful and majestic. I asked her had she ever seen an elephant in reality. To this, she said no, just on television.

She was watching "the stories" and said that all those people do is sleep with everybody. I said, "Yes ma'am, they do. That's why I stopped watching them a long time ago." She said she's been watching the *Young and the Restless* since she was a younger woman. She said that her favorite character was Victor Newman. I asked her why, and she said, "because he is nothing to play with and he was a great businessman on the show."

Louise told me that she has two great-great grandchildren, but she has never seen them. I was taken aback. "Wow," I said. "I have rarely heard of that." Her response was, "I know, but the times have changed. Families aren't as close as they used to be." She rarely gets to see her family. She stated that it's almost like they are strangers.

According to Louise, she has three grandsons who she hasn't seen in years, because they live in other states and rarely come to North Carolina to visit. She

said they call her, but their calls are infrequent. They mainly check on her on Thanksgiving, Christmas and her birthday. I asked her how did that make her feel. She said she's used to it because she is very independent; she always has been.

Of course, I had to shift the line of questioning. I asked Louise if there had been anything she'd wanted to do that she hadn't done. To this, she said, "No, not really." She's just happy to be alive at age 91. A lot of people that she has known has passed on. She is grateful to still be in the land of the living.

Louise asked me if I'd ever been married and if I have children. I said "No ma'am." After she asked me why I had never married, I told her that times are very different now. Many people rarely desire marriage, and so many have children, but are afraid to commit to a marriage. Louise nodded her head in affirmation. "You're right," she said, adding that when she was growing up, marriage happened before children. She mentioned that, even if a young man and young woman had a baby out of wedlock, the parents would coax them into getting married.

Louise shifted the conversation again. She began to talk about her daughter, Cat, who had passed on. She said that when Cat was 16, she had gotten pregnant by a young man, and she told him that he had to marry her daughter. I was curious. "So, what did he say or do?" I asked. Ms. Louise didn't miss a beat. She replied, he said "yes ma'am" and he married her. I began to laugh. They didn't play when it came to having kids out of wedlock. I told her that I had to get going, but I'd enjoyed our chat. She said she did too.

Tynisha Lewis' First Encounter

Duluth, Georgia

Resident's Name: Ms. Patsy

After calling three or four nursing homes, I finally found a nursing home that gladly allowed me to come visit a resident. Mr. Scott, the Director, assured me that he had a resident who would love to speak with me because she rarely has visitors. The only caveat was that I needed to print out a release form for her to sign, giving me permission to interview the resident, which I did.

Upon my arrival, I was greeted by Mr. Scott and a couple of the other residents of the nursing facility. In the activities' room, there were several residents and a young man teaching them how to sing a certain song. After a few minutes, I was escorted to the person I would spend the next hour with for my interview: Miss Patsy. She was a small, petite woman with white hair and blue eyes. She had taken the time to put on Olive eye-shadow that happened to match her shirt. Her nails were red and she wore a simple watch. Later during our conversation, she would tell me that the necklace she was wearing had the birthstones of all her grandchildren.

Ms. Patsy is 84-years-old. She told me that, two years ago, her husband died after fifty years of marriage. She explained that he'd died from brain cancer. She also had two sons, one of whom passed away a few years ago as well. I asked her how she ended up in a nursing facility. She responded that her surviving son and his wife thought it would be a good idea to put her in a nursing home, although she has her own home on Lake Lanier. The fact that she has had three strokes might be the reason why they placed her in a nursing home.

"What are the three most important things in life?" I asked. Her first answer was God. Her second answer was family and how they should be appreciated because, as she said, we never know when they will no longer be with us. Lastly, she said that home is very important. Having a good home where relatives can come and visit is important.

For the first 15 minutes of the interview, Ms. Patsy cried a lot. She had a lot of pain that needed to be released. What I came to understand is that she feels that she does not need to be in a nursing home; she would rather be in her own home. She was frustrated throughout the interview because she couldn't remember certain details about past events.

We kept making our way back to her husband. She mentioned how their 50th anniversary celebration had been the most amazing party. She shared the story of how they'd met at the skating rink; she said that he was just the smartest man she had ever met. When I asked her what should I look for in the man that I want to marry, her first response was that he should be Christian. Her second response was that he should be smart and know how to do things—all kinds of things!

Once we got past the tears, she mentioned that she really enjoys playing Wheel of Fortune in the activity room at noon every day. This is in addition to her affinity for puzzles. I found out that her favorite food is bacon and she often asks the other residents for their bacon during breakfast. She shared with me that she doesn't drink a lot of water; instead, she loves tea and Diet Coke. I mentioned that, for an 84-year-old woman, she still seems very sharp mentally and very agile, able to lift her arms above her head with ease.

Ms. Patsy told quite a few stories. Many of those stories ended with her being appreciative of some kind act of another person. She went on and on about how the nursing home director went all the way to the bank to get her change for a twenty-dollar bill. I asked her what are some of the things that she would just love to do. Her requests were simple. She wishes she could drive. She wishes she could just go shopping and not get tired from walking around. She wishes she could just jump in her car and go whenever and wherever she wants to. Her answers took me by surprise. They made me feel like I'm very unappreciative of just the small things in life. At this point, I even started to cry. She was a very fragile older woman. And my visit with her really made me consider my own mortality. At some point, we all have to cross over into old age. I understand how this can be depressing, scary, confusing, and an all-around bad experience for some. Ms. Patsy doesn't have anyone to come visit her often. I felt sad when she

said that she doesn't call some of her relatives because she doesn't want to bother them.

This entire visit made me think of my own grandmother who I don't go visit due to her toxic attitude and ways. I felt kind of guilty for not going to visit her as much as I could. I feel guilty for not being able to see my grandfather (who lived in Michigan) before he passed away last year. This was an enlightening experience, but simultaneously, this was a sad experience. No one knows how life is going to play out. Who will be there for you when you're old? Who will come and visit you? Who will call? It is all too much to consider.

When I left, I saw about five elderly people just scooting around the halls in wheelchairs. It really hurt my heart. Elderly people are often forgotten people. I pray that the day I cross over into old age, I am surrounded by love and people who carefully consider my well-being.

Yashmee Reed's First Encounter

Jersey City, New Jersey

Residents' Names: Ms. Peggy, Ms. Lucy, Ms. Martha, Ms. Sylvia, Ms. Roslyn & Ms. Sherri

I've been working in a nursing home for twelve years. I have seen the highs and lows, I have seen so many people come and go, whether the person came for a few months, and then, went home or the person stayed with us until the end. As a nursing assistant, it is only normal that you will create a bond with some of them and you will get attached to most of them. You begin to start spending your own money because you want them to look, smell, and feel good, especially the ones who don't get visits. You will even find yourself buying things for the ones who do get regular visits at times. There are some residents you'll be anxious to see so you can have a good laugh, get a big hug or share in a little small talk while assisting with some of the activities of daily living. When this assignment was presented to me, I said, "Great! I already work in a nursing home. I can share one of the many experiences I've had with some of the residents." But God starting dealing with my heart. He said for me to let Tiffany know that I work in a nursing home, and to ask her if it's okay for me to share a previous experience and see what she says afterwards. I was a little nervous asking on the message board. I held back for a little while; I didn't want to sound foolish. Once again, I heard God say, "Ask her!" So, I asked, hoping that she would say, "Sure." I was wrong. I had to do my assignment, not my work. I said, "Okay God, I hear you; be obedient and honor your mentor." I thought I knew everything until the day of my visit. At first, I thought it would be a normal trip. Oh, how wrong I was yet again. Let me make it known—I still had to call and let someone know that I was coming down and give the name of the person I was coming to visit. I preferred the evening shift, because around that time, everything starts to slow down. The residents would already have had their dinners; some of them would either be in their rooms or out in the day room watching television.

The person I went to visit was named Peggy.

When I arrived, I let it be known that I was there. I knocked on the door with a big smile on my face. I said, "Well, did you miss me?!" Ms. Peggy's face lit up with so much joy! She said, "Jas, Is that you? Get over here! "Where have been?!" Jas is a nickname she gave me. "I've been looking for you!" she said. "I had some ginger candy for you, but I ran out. You took too long coming back." I thanked her for thinking of me. Ms. Peggy would always have ginger candy on the side for me.

She was born and raised in Jersey City, New Jersey; she's never married or had any children. She had a nephew who would come to visit her maybe once a week, but it had been almost two years since he'd last visited. Ms. Peggy is a Jehovah's Witness; she loved when I would play my gospel music while helping her with her activities. She would always tell me to stay on the right track and enjoy my life with my children. One thing you have to understand about her is—she a tough lady. She makes it very hard for anyone to get close to her in the beginning, but once she sees a person's face regularly, she will slowly open up to that person if he or she is soft-spoken and loving.

On the night of my visit, I noticed that she was watching television. I was surprised. I said to her, "Well, this is a new thing." Ms. Peggy started laughing. "Yes, it is," she said. "Because I always sit and read books. Now, I'll see you later," she said jokingly. I rubbed her hands and told her that I would be back soon. Ms. Peggy knows how to get rid of a person quickly! She's very guarded and afraid of being hurt. What I learned from the visit with her is how I could be the same way, and I don't want to live the rest of my life being guarded and living in fear.

While on my way to the elevator, I had to walk past the day room. I stopped by to say hello to everyone sitting in the room. There were a group of familiar faces sitting at the table, including a blind woman by the name of Lucy. Ms. Lucy likes to sing every song that she hears, even if she doesn't know the lyrics. Of course, they questioned me about where I'd been, so I explained to them how I was taking a little break while God healed my body. Everyone said in unison, "Amen." Standing there and watching them smile at me warmed my heart. I grabbed a chair and sat at the table with them. We had small talk at first; we discussed what had been going on around the place. Everyone was silent for a

few minutes. Mrs. Martha broke the silence. She said to me, "I see you." Of course, I asked, "What does that mean?" Mrs. Martha told me that I looked nice. "What else?" I asked jokingly. I told the women that I would like to have a talk with them, after all, we don't normally get to sit down and chat. Of course, this is because when I'm working, things seem to be very busy and everyone is moving around. I told them that we had some time to chat if they wanted to. I knew that I was going to be in for a treat! Mrs. Sylvia replied, "Well, I don't know about all that." We all started laughing. I asked Mrs. Sylvia if she had been born and raised in New Jersey. She answered, "No." As it turns out, she was born in North Carolina on a farm. She said that her mother would get her cleaned up every Sunday for church, but when she'd gotten older, she'd stayed in the church but wasn't of the church; she'd stayed in the world, but wasn't of the world.

According to Mrs. Sylvia, in her youth, she didn't drink, smoke or fool around with different men. She'd had one husband, and he'd decided a long time ago that he wanted to go and do other things, so she let him go. The couple never divorced. They'd had ten kids together, but only one son was left. All of her children had died from the same illness, but she couldn't remember the name of the disease; all she remembered was that it was the same disease. According to her, she'd never questioned God about it. While at church, she started out doing volunteer work. Later on in life, she'd become a minister. These were her words, "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, His grace has brought me this safe thus far, and it is His grace that is going to lead me." While tapping her hands on the table, she started ministering to me. You could feel the change taking place in the room. There was a calmness. I sat there like a little girl who was listening to her grandmother speak. She continued, "If you hold on to God and do what He tells you to do, He will hold on to you. God doesn't play. He is real!" She reiterated that she could tell me this from her experiences. She said that God has never failed her, but she failed Him so many times. He didn't fail her; this is why she's here today at ninety years old. "We don't have to sin if we don't want to," she said. "It's up to you if you take this in or don't, but you have to be real ... no wishy-washy stuff." She talked about how she'd stayed close to God so she wouldn't run back into the world. "If you want to stay with God, He will keep you; stay with Him and for Him, and He will be with you and for you." She finished by saying that she turns her mind and soul over to God every day. At this, we all said, "Amen." Mrs. Sylvia started praising Jesus. I felt a shift in my spirit.

Mrs. Martha started sharing her testimony. She said that God called her while she was in a club. She was out on the “party floor” when the Lord began to speak into her ear, saying she wasn't raised that way. He told her to go home, so she ran out of the club. She said that people were looking at her like she was crazy! When she got home, she fell on the floor and started crying. Her mother said to her that she knew God was going to bring her back home. Mrs. Martha was born and raised in South Carolina; she moved to New York, where she met her husband. A beautiful smile swept across her face as she told us that he fell in love with her at first sight, but she didn't fall in love with him. We all started laughing. She explained how one day, she was pretending to leave him because he wasn't serious with God. She'd started getting strict with him and had threatened to leave. Because of this, he turned his life around and became a pastor; she's an evangelist. One of her daughters lost her life in the streets; she'd begged her to come back home, but the devil had such a tight grip on her through drugs, and of course, the drugs killed her. Mrs. Martha has five kids left, and one of her sons is a pastor. Her husband passed away, and one of her daughters had been placed in the nursing home. She said that her family does come to visit her.

Ms. Roslyn was another woman sitting at the table. She shared how she could have been dead from using drugs and “being out in those streets.” She'd had a stroke, but God saved her life. The left side of her body is paralyzed. Ms. Roslyn suddenly started crying, saying, “I love God! He saved me! I could have died! Thank you, Jesus!” The whole time that Ms. Roslyn had been testifying, Ms. Lucy, another woman sitting at the table, was shouting, “Hallelujah!” I asked her how she was doing. She said, “I'm okay, but I need to use the bathroom.” I waved my hand, gesturing for the CNA to come in the room to assist her. Turning my attention back to the ladies, I told them how amazing the conversation had been. “I thank all of you for sharing some of your life's stories with me. I'll be back for more ladies' talk. Would anyone like to pray?” I asked. Mrs. Martha said that she would do it. The sound of this woman's voice when she prays is so powerful! While she was praying, Ms. Lucy kept shouting, “Amen, Amen! That's enough! I don't wanna hear it anymore! It's too much!” Nevertheless, Ms. Martha kept calling on Jesus, and we all joined in with her! She was still praying and speaking over me. Once she was done, her exact words were, “Ain't nobody mad but the devil! Now go on home, baby. It's getting late. Remember what we told you. Hope

that I be here when you get back." I said, "You will. Is there anything else I should know?"

Mrs. Sherri interrupted, "When trouble comes, don't run to Mary, Jane, and Sally; they will tell all your business. Tell it to Jesus. He will fix it for you. Hold God's unchanging hand and build your hope on things eternal." Mrs. Sherri said that she knew God had a purpose for her, but she just didn't know when He was gonna use her until that moment.

Mrs. Martha cut in. She said, "I always thought you were a pretty girl, but the last time I saw you, it looked like Jesus was leaving you. You look clean now." With tears in my eyes, I thanked the women. They said, "Don't thank us, thank God!" I gave them all hugs and made my way out the door, but before I left, I went to say good night to Ms. Peggy. She was already asleep. I also noticed that Ms. Lucy had moved into a different room. She was laughing with her CNA. I still said, "Good night."

This has been an emotional experience for me. It felt like layers of pain had lifted from me. I could have taken the easy way out, but it would have been a dishonor to God and my mentor. I also would have missed my moment of healing and the opportunity to have wisdom poured into me. Additionally, I had a chance to be a blessing to others who, at times, felt alone and afraid. Had I not gone down there, the ladies would still be people who I cared for because it was my job; as a nursing assistant, this is what I get a paycheck for. Nevertheless, I realized that this is not only my job, but it is also God preparing me for my purpose! All this time, I looked at them like they needed my help, not knowing that, in truth, I needed their help more. They had my healing inside of them; all I had to do was pull on them. I pray that when I do return to work, all of the ladies are still there. If I don't go back to the job as an employee, I will always go back as a visitor! To God be the glory!

Sophia Ferguson's First Encounter

Miami, Florida

Resident's Name: Mrs. Rosie

On the same day Bible Studies resumed after the Holidays at Bethel, I spoke to a woman named Alex and I asked her about the Nursing Home Ministry. Just through small talk, I discovered Coral Reef Nursing & Rehabilitation in my neighborhood. I made my way there, checked in at the front desk, and was referred to social services. From there, I proceeded to find the office based on the instructions given. I was really impressed that such a well-preserved facility was only minutes away from my home. The layout of the facility was aesthetically pleasing. I finally found Maria in Social Services. She appeared overwhelmed and mired in a desk full of paperwork. I introduced myself and stated, in detail, exactly why I was there and what I wanted to accomplish. I did not expect to be given same-day access to the resident. I was elated when she said Mrs. Rosie's name and room number. She then proceeded to provide me directions to find her. Yes, it truly was my lucky day!

I walked into room four to find Mrs. Rosie in bed on a forty-degree incline, finishing up her lunch—vegetable lasagna. She wore a warm, welcoming smile, and I soon discovered a radiant personality to match. Our small talk began. We exchanged church information. She'd been a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church of Perrine. I reciprocated with information about The Bethel Full Gospel Church. We discovered that we have a lot in common. She's heard of my church and Pastor, and I've heard of and visited hers in the past. We began talking about food, and I shared how much I used to enjoy vegetable lasagna, but don't eat much of it today. I learned that we both abstain from eating shellfish, albeit, for different reasons. Most Adventists and other faiths abstain based on scripture information found in Leviticus. I don't eat shellfish for the same reason principally, but I know that crustaceans live at the bottom of the ocean and feed off of remains (the dead) of other 'sea food'. The thought of consuming something that eats dead things is distasteful to me. We spoke about the body being a temple of the Holy Spirit, and how keeping our vessel holy was important

to the both of us. Shortly after, Mrs. Rosie disclosed with me that she didn't like most of the food that had been served to her by the nursing home. Thankfully, she had been recently visited by the resident Dietician who'd suggested that she pre-select her food choices from a menu. She receives regular visits from some of the members of her church, and they bring her the food she enjoys on occasion. Mrs. Rosie has outlived her two children, as well as her husband thus far, and she still manages to wear the look of joy and peace on her face. This is what the scriptures talk about; this is the result of walking with God. No two journeys are the same. I asked, "What, if anything, do you look forward to at this stage in your life?" Mrs. Rosie answered so eloquently, "The life I have left." Today, I set out and spoke with a complete stranger as part of a mentorship assignment, and made what possibly will be a long-term acquaintance.

Shalondria Ficklin's First Encounter

Grand Prairie, Texas

Resident's Name: Mrs. J.

Upon hearing the instructions for this assignment, I had multiple mixed feelings. I dreaded it—I was nervous, I was angry, and I was unsure. No matter what, I trust the Lord, Tiffany's leadership, and the God in her—the God who instructs her on our assignments. Within the last three years, I have had a less than desirable experience with a nursing home—a nursing home that had been housing my grandmother. It was a fresh wound, and honestly, I had finally gotten to a place where it didn't hurt as much. So, my human inclination was to stay in a less painful place, also known as my “comfort zone.” However, God had other plans. This assignment was the best thing for me to do; it was the best teaching tool for me. I went to more than one facility because the one I tried initially had given me a yes, however it turned out to be a *not yet*.

The first facility turned out to be the one my grandmother had gone back and forward to. She was in the hospital and in the nursing home on and off; that's how she spent her final days. In my mind, I thought once I entered this facility, I would burst into tears and run out crying. Maybe, I was being over-dramatic, but I really love my Nana and she was such an integral part of my upbringing. Upon thinking about things, I changed my perspective. I now viewed it as a chance to spend time with someone else's grandmother—a woman who is deeply loved and cared for. I saw these individuals as souls in need of God's love. It was selfish of me to withhold that from them because of my selfish, hurt feelings.

Emotions are meant to be felt and healing is progressive. We are not robots, so we feel. I made up my mind that if I had to cry, I'd cry. I gave myself permission to feel all of my emotions and to document the journey; this was so that I never lost sight of the experience and healing I was sure to receive. God moved. The second facility I tried was very welcoming and the residents were sweet and friendly. There was no lengthy process, and the place was very laid back. Once cleared, they asked me if I wanted to sit with someone right away.

They encouraged me to walk around freely and to sit and talk with anyone I saw who appeared to be lonely. I could tell there was an atmosphere of love and community amongst them. I'd called prior to showing up to ensure that I respected everyone's time. I am so glad I didn't get lost in the previous *not right now*. Tiffany shared with us that one no means that there is a yes out there, but we hadn't reached it yet, so we had to keep pushing. She encouraged us to not make excuses or procrastinate.

When I walked in, I saw a gray-haired woman resting; let's call her Mrs. J. Mrs. J. would go on to be my pillar of wisdom for the day. She actually ushered other residents in, and they sat and talked with me too. She is a black woman like me; I was naturally drawn to her because she had the look of a wise grandmother. I walked over and asked if I could sit with her; she smiled and said yes. She was like the tour guide of the facility. She sat and talked with me about the facility, what the traditions were, and many other things. We talked about life, love, children, marriage, family, and so on. She even answered a question I had been asking God for direction with. She told me that *she never applied for jobs that would take her away from her family on weekends*. Mrs. J. had only applied for warehouse and lab jobs. She worked for twenty years at a pharmaceutical lab company. Mrs. J's job was to inspect medication that had been approved by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and make sure that they were properly filled and free of foreign matter or debris.

Mrs. J. is from Cleveland, Ohio. At 86, she is the lone survivor of her five siblings. She was the second born child of her parents, and she has both children and grandchildren, all of whom are grown. Mrs. J. is a widow; her husband passed away in 2000 from a massive heart attack. They had been married for thirty-four years. I learned a lot from her in the area of marriage. My question to her was, "What has been your biggest lesson learned in marriage?" She answered, "*Communication. It is not easy and is frustrating when one person doesn't know what the other person is doing. Don't let every little thing bother you and cause you to give up; only the strong survive. There were things I didn't like, but he took care of home and never messed up his money for things he was responsible for. As long as a behavior isn't affecting your well-being and ability to care for yourself and your family, try to stay and work it out.*" Mrs. J explained to me that her

husband drank, and even though she got onto him about it, it didn't help. So, she left him alone about it. She said that it wasn't too overwhelming because her mother was an alcoholic (in her childhood) and had died at the tender age of forty-six.

Her grandmother and her sisters (Mrs. J's great aunts) all lived past one-hundred years old. Yet, her mother and her siblings (Mrs. J's aunts and uncles) had only gotten near or to the halfway point of fifty-years old. I asked about her children and her eyes lit up. There is a sense of accomplishment she exudes when speaking of her family. She has four children, one deceased. I asked her what her biggest piece of advice was as a mother. *"Love them, take care of them, be there for them and help them with their little problems. Let them know that you care and are there for them, but most importantly, love them."* Mrs. J's words were encouraging to me. I so enjoyed sitting with her, and she seemed to enjoy me too. There was a time where it seemed as if I was sitting with my grandmother again, just talking as we used to. She said something to me and reached out and slapped my leg in the same exact way that my grandmother used to (when I made a great point). That's when a few tears started to fall. I believe it was the healing that I needed. I am so glad that I stretched myself and sat just to hear Mrs. J's heart because it helped me to release my own. I needed this experience, and I am glad that I didn't stay in my comfort zone, making excuses about why I couldn't do it. I believe I will go back to visit Mrs. J. regularly.

Danielle Farmer's Second Encounter

Los Angeles, California

Resident's Name: Ms. Lisa & Ms. Joann

Walking into the nursing home was daunting at first. I heard coughing, sneezing, moans, and even screams from some of the residents. I wasn't sure what to expect, and was rather apprehensive of who or what I might find. It didn't help to see hand sanitizer dispensers at what seemed to be every few feet. In spite of the slightly uninviting first impression, I was extremely blessed by being afforded the opportunity to speak with Ms. Lisa. She was a sweet woman who seemed to be quite young in comparison to some of the other patients I'd seen in the home. My guess is that she was probably in her late fifties or early sixties at most. She was a frail woman, small in stature, with the largest, warmest eyes I had ever seen.

Although she seemed to be fatigued, I was glad that she was well enough to entertain a stranger. However, it was not such a surprise after she revealed that she was never really close to her family. She was the black sheep, or the odd one out, sometimes wondering if she had somehow gotten switched at birth because it seemed as though the apple had fallen far from the tree. Needless to say, company was welcome since visitors were scarce. Ms. Lisa told me that she moved to California as soon as she graduated from high school, never looking back at the small-town life she had once called home. She'd never married or had kids, and frankly, she had never wanted to. Growing up, she had very different aspirations than her female peers. She wanted to advance in her career and explore life on her own whims, and that's exactly what she did before her life took an unexpected turn because of her health issues.

But now, being in a nursing home with not many loved ones visiting, she wondered if she'd made the right decisions by not prioritizing the social relationships that matter to her in life. She gave her life to her career, and she felt very comfortable in it because she'd mastered it. She knew her job inside and out, and that had brought about a sense of peace in her life. While she felt successful

in the workplace, she admittedly felt like she could have made improvements in her social life by not pushing people away who tried to get close to her. If she could have changed anything in her life, it would have been to not take time for granted. She mentioned that she never would have thought that she would wind up in a nursing home at her age, and had she known, she would have better stewarded her time and her relationships much better.

She began to inquire about my career and life, and I briefly explained to Ms. Lisa the journey towards destiny that I am trying to reach, and the unexpected challenges and pressures that come with it. She encouraged me with such kind words of affirmation, and she reminded me to stay on the course and never give up. She had stories of her own about how she'd faced the same insecurities that I battle with when she was young. Nevertheless, she bluntly told me to let go of the fear that appears to be holding me back, lest I remain stuck in the same place for the rest of my life.

A key piece of advice she gave to me, as a young woman, is to live a balanced life. She said that the earlier I find that balance, the better. Making time for everything (and everyone) that is important and discarding what isn't important is vital. When your time on earth is near the end, you want to have the assurance that you've lived a full life, where you properly prioritized your career, family, relationships, hobbies, skills, etc. She admonished me not to waste my youthful years, but to invest them. I was extremely appreciative of the time I spent with Ms. Lisa.

After leaving Ms. Lisa, I got a chance to speak with Ms. Joann. She had such a memorable personality; she was very warm, outgoing, funny, and even a little explicit. I enjoyed my conversation with Ms. Lisa so much that it gave me the boost of confidence I needed to just sit, speak, and have a candid conversation with Ms. Joann.

I started out by asking if she had any family regularly coming by to visit, to which she responded, "Kinda." She was a widow, but she had her children and a few other relatives to come by regularly as if they had shifts. She spoke about the stigma of nursing homes and how she experienced a drop in visitors when she

was transferred from the hospital to the home. Having visited hospitalized loved ones in the past and communicating with other family and friends, I definitely agreed with her. I noticed in my own experiences that people were reluctant when it came to visiting hospitalized patients because people said that they couldn't stand to see their loved ones in a painful or distressing condition. I tried to offer up encouraging words and reassure her that she is still very much loved, but I began to think about the importance of family and friends pushing through their own discomforts when someone they love is not well. That love and support really goes a long way.

After having a long chat about families and hospitals, Ms. Joann and I began to shift gears. I asked what advice she would give to young women living today. After taking a moment to ponder, she responded by saying that people in this generation give up too easily. She spoke specifically in regards to the short-lived marriages of today, but she also gave several examples of how failure is really just a matter of perspective when it comes to life in general. She got married when she was just nineteen years old, and it was no walk in the park. There were several things that could have broken up her family, from the wars, to poverty, to in-laws, to family secrets — but none of these things had succeeded because her vows meant something to her, and giving up was never an option.

She explained how she has had such a wonderful and beautiful life, but the more she began to dive in and give more details, the more I thought, "Wow, she has been through a lot." Even though, she has experienced many hardships, she never let any of these things rob her of her perspective or perseverance. She said that she always knew that it could be worse, and she is grateful for the life that she has lived and is still living. With that being said, she had absolutely no regrets. She believes that she has spent her life well, doing the things that she had always wanted to do.

Everything that flowed out of her mouth came with such ease; she was so effortlessly wise that I hung onto every word. It was so inspiring because she unknowingly answered a lot of questions that I had in my own heart. Things were definitely put into perspective. The small complaints and few hardships that I had been experiencing were nothing in comparison to what she had gone through,

and yet, she never lost sight of what was important. She never allowed circumstances to make her give up on anything, but she pushed through until she had a successful marriage that she was proud of, beautiful relationships that she cherished, and unforgettable memories that brought a twinkle in her eyes every time she thought of them. I will treasure these beautiful conversations and store the wise words I have received for years to come.

Tynisha Lewis' Second Encounter

Duluth, Georgia

Resident's Name: Ms. Lois & Mr. Johnny

Today, during my adventure to the Country Gardens Senior Living Facility, I met Ms. Lois. I asked her if I could sit with her and talk. She said I could. I gave her one of the fleece blankets I'd purchased as a gift to any senior who would share their time with me. As I sat down, she proudly proclaimed that she was born in 1926. She told me to "do the math." So, I did the math and it turns out that she is 92-years old.

She warned me that her hearing was not what it used to be. She seemed a little frustrated at the fact that the batteries for her hearing aid would not remain charged. Her inability to hear could be the reason why she yelled at me for the majority of our visit. Now, had it been anyone else, I probably would've gotten offended, but I knew her inability to hear was the cause of her speaking so loudly. I wouldn't label her an angry woman, but I will call her fussy. She fussed about not having enough money. She fussed about not having visitors. She fussed about how there was no one to help her. And her favorite saying was, "Do what you can and that's it!" She said it about five or six times during the interview. Even one of the employees had stopped by and asked me if she'd said it yet. I assume she says it quite regularly. I asked her if her family comes to visit and her response was once again loud, as she explained, "Everybody's busy working and I don't expect anything from anyone!" This visit was a little different than the last one, much more animated to say the least.

So, as our interview progressed, I asked her what she would tell someone who felt like they worked too much—that, of course, would be me. She told me how she grew up on a farm and that was *REAL* hard work. So basically, she was telling me I hadn't seen hard work like she has seen hard work while working her family's farm. She even mentioned how she personally worked in the cotton patch. I continued our meeting by asking her what advice she would give to young people. Her exact words were, "Learn something instead of looking

pretty!" She also continued on to say, "If you learn how to work hard, you can do anything in life." I think she was more so saying that your work ethic will take you far in life.

We concluded our meeting, but not without Ms. Lois sharing that her teeth kept trying to fall out of her mouth and that the insurance she has is not adequate enough to fix her dental problems. She then continued to fuss about how she has very little money. I was almost afraid to ask if I could take a picture with her, but she agreed. I told her to keep warm with her new blanket. She thanked me, and I then departed.

Today, I met Mr. Johnny. He was getting off the elevator and I politely asked him if he had a few moments to spare and talk with me. He obliged. Immediately, I noticed that he was a proud Vietnam vet. His hat had the words VIETNAM VETERAN in bold letters, along with the United States of America flag pin. He shared with me how he was a North Carolina native and seventy-years-old. He also shared with me how he had spent a year fighting in the Vietnam War.

I couldn't help but notice the stench of alcohol on his breath. It didn't really bother me, but I noticed. When I asked him if his family comes to visit him, he said he didn't know because he's always out on the back porch smoking a cigarette. Then, as if he'd suddenly remembered, he mentioned that his big sister does come to visit from time to time. Mr. Johnny shared with me how he would love to eat some Planter's peanuts just as soon as he gets his new teeth. He had a dentist appointment that day. He also shared with me how he'd had a stroke and lost the use of his left arm and left leg. He seemed optimistic about the fact that he was soon to begin physical therapy and the possibility of walking again was within reach.

I asked Mr. Johnny if there was anything he could change about his life, what it would be. He said he would never have touched drugs and alcohol. I assume drugs and alcohol are the reason for some of his ailments. I don't know this to be true, but it was clear from the way he spoke against drugs and alcohol that they'd caused some type of turmoil during his life.

I asked him if he had three pointers of advice to share with young people. Number one, he said that you should be happy to be alive and able to do those things that you enjoy. Number two, you should strive to get a good education. Not only should you go to school, but you should be serious once you get there. Lastly, he said that you should be active and exercise; find some hobbies, get out in the world and talk to people—“like I did.”

I told Mr. Johnny that I’m going to bring him some peanuts one day. He asked if I was going to come back to visit. I told him “Yes.” He countered with, “You promise?” I said, “I sure do!”

Monica Jones' Second Encounter

Kinston, North Carolina

Resident's Name: Ms. Blue & Ms. Green

On February 7th, I went to Spring Arbor of Kinston and prepared myself to meet two ladies who had been chosen by the director of the assisted living facility to be interviewed by me. I arrived at the facility sharply at 9:15 that morning, not knowing what to expect or what type of personalities these ladies would have. I was introduced to the two ladies, and the director told them about the interview that was about to take place. They were two ladies who were not only very coherent, but also pleasant and open to talk with me.

I interviewed Ms. Blue first. Ms. Blue had only been there for three months, and she told me that she didn't want to come there initially; she'd cried every day because she was used to taking care of herself. She was very independent and had always told her children that if anything had ever happened where she had to be taken care of, she didn't want to burden them. She told me that she had three children,—two daughters and one son. She said that they visited her regularly and the staff there had been very good to her.

When I asked Ms. Blue what advice she would give a young woman living today, she stated that ladies should always remember who they are and keep the truth; she also said that women shouldn't pretend to be someone that they aren't. She stated that life isn't easy, but God gives us the information that we need in order to live this life. She also made mention of another lady who lives in the facility who is 101 years old. She admires her and said that, even though she doesn't speak often, she looks up to her because she sees the wisdom in her and how she has overcome in this life.

When I asked Ms. Blue if she could change anything about her life what would she change, she stated that she wouldn't have gotten married so young. She got married at the age of fifteen and was married for 56 years. She stated that she also wished that she was more outgoing, especially with people when it

pertained to expressing her thoughts. She had come from a household of nine kids, and she was the baby of the family. She said that she was very shy and often played with her dolls alone.

She had gone to college, became a teacher and later worked with the developmentally disabled children at Caswell. She talked about how she enjoyed working with them and how they would go to the mall together. She said that whenever the children whenever saw her, they would say, "Hey Mama!" She said that she was their teacher, but those children taught her more about life than they realized.

The second resident who I interviewed was Ms. Green. Ms. Green has been living at the facility for three and a half years. Initially, she didn't want to come. She stated that the facility saved her life and she probably wouldn't be alive today if it wasn't for them. She explained how she fell into a diabetic coma while in there and how three nurses came to her aid. She was later taken to the hospital. She now has her glucose checked four times a day to make sure everything is functioning regularly.

When I asked Ms. Green what advice she would give a young woman living today, she stated the importance of getting a good education and being a person of good character. She didn't really elaborate on this, but what I gathered from her is that, in this life, education and being a person of good character will take you further than anything else that we have a tendency to focus on. Even though the times that we live in now are completely different than they were when she was growing up, these qualities are still a necessary part of life.

When I asked Ms. Green if she could change anything about her life, what she would change, she stated that she wouldn't have gotten married so young. She was married at sixteen years of age, and was married for eight and a half years until her husband told her he no longer wanted the marriage. After the marriage ended, she went to college and studied to be a bookkeeper. She had three children as well—two daughters and a son, just like Ms. Blue.

She shared that, before she came to the facility, she was living with one of her daughters. She would help with watching the children and they would spend quality time together. She said she loved it. Unfortunately, her daughter had fallen ill with cancer, and she was no longer able to live with her. This situation caused them both to come up with the decision for her to move there.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed my time with both ladies. They were very pleasant, down to earth, and easy to talk to. Their presence was a blessing to me. I was raised to respect my elders, and even before my great-grandmother passed away, I loved to sit there and listen to her talk about life and the Lord. Since her passing, I hadn't really been around elderly people that much, but to me, they are valuable and we need to appreciate them more.

Sophia Ferguson's Second Encounter

Miami, Florida

Resident's Name: Ms. Ruby & Mr. Charles

Surely, it was only by an accidental glance or I would indeed have missed her. She was a diamond in the rough, literally beaming from the center of the Activity Room. Head dressed with a queen's turban, gold-framed glasses, and a smile so bright it gave light to the dead space in the Activity Room. This is what allowed me to see her. As I got closer, I realized the light I saw surrounding Ms. Ruby might have been the very natural honeycombed sunlight coming in from the Atrium, which was only a few feet away from her. It was a gorgeous day actually; the vivid green plants were separated by a clear glass door, and the sunlight cascaded through the foliage, and then, vacillated its way to the lovely Ms. Ruby. She was diplomatically fending off a fellow resident who was trying to take away the pink socks she'd just won in a Bingo game. She managed to break away to say hello and chat with me, all the while, holding a magazine open to a certain page. I asked, "What are you reading?" Pointing at an article, she said that she was smitten by the barbecue chicken strips recipe featured on the page, and was thinking about making some of it when she got home. Ms. Ruby had been an Atlanta, Georgia native. She was here in Florida visiting her daughter when she took ill. She was transferred to Coral Reef Nursing & Rehab from Baptist Hospital two months prior to our visit. Widowed for seven years now, she'd lost her husband to the complications of Diabetes, being the lady that she is, never divulging why she herself was hospitalized. And trust me, I could never bring myself to ask. But I did muster up the courage to inquire why she was sitting in that particular chair. She said that she is able to stand and bear weight with help, but could not walk independently. She began talking about the weakness in her left leg, but did not offer the genesis of the problem that started the weakness, which explains why I found her in a wheelchair. Ms. Ruby gets regular visits from her daughter. She said, "As a matter of fact, my daughter was here to see me yesterday." She said that she is looking forward to going to live with her daughter full-time. I was instantly taken by a feeling that her daughter did not share the same sentiment. Mind you, I have never met her daughter, and doubt I ever will.

There was an awkward moment of silence. I was wondering if this ‘feeling’ could be categorized as spiritual discernment. Maybe, I was acquainted with the scenario by way of professional experience. “Anything you would change in your life; any regrets?” I asked. Ms. Ruby sweetly replied, “None—I lived a good life.” A well-known member of the “Rat Pack” began serenading the Activity Room once again with another familiar song. Not quite sure what the name of this particular song was, but I knew I remembered my dad playing it often on one of those lazy Sundays from the distant past. We shared our Christianity, and the church she would frequent while here in Florida: ‘Sweet Home Baptist’. I left Ms. Ruby a Word Jumble, Crossword Puzzle books, and some colored pencils. The advice she gave to take with me regarding young women living today was to be kind, be nice to everyone you meet.

On this particular day, Ole Blue Eyes was crooning, *“When somebody loves you, its’ no good unless they love you, A-l-l t-h-e w-a-y!!!”* His voice was blaring from the television set, suspended on the center wall in the Activity Room which, by the way, was just in front of the information desk after I walked in. I hadn’t noticed it before until today’s visit. It was an almost perfect day outside, with no sign of rain in sight. I greeted Melissa from Social Services once again, who was perched-up at the front desk, and I asked if I could see two residents today. She pointed me to the Activity Room, and instructed me to take my pick. This room was where most of the clients sat and played games. Looked like the staff had just finished up collecting Bingo boards from the group, and mostly everyone in the room was interacting with the nursing staff. Most of the the residents participated in activities after they were done with breakfast. The Activity Room was packed and full of life. I literally climbed between wheelchairs and walkers before I saw the back of a brown shirt, tanned skin, and coily gray hair. I took a couple more steps and the gentleman looked up at me, and then looked away. “Hello! How are you today?” I asked. I went on to introduce myself, and I noticed he made such an effort to speak; he was tongue heavy. It seemed as if his tongue stuck to his lower palate each time he tried using it to get his words out. He'd recently suffered a stroke. He told me, it was his mother who'd diagnosed it. She spied the facial droop and urged him to go to the hospital, according to Charles. His mother phoned his brother and sister to help convince him that going to the hospital was the next best step. Mr. Charles initially told me that he was seventy-

eight years old while interjecting how he knew that I was older than he was, and then, he said he is fifty-eight years old. He then accused me of trying to make him older than he actually is. Ha! Mr. Charles has never been married, and he has no children—by choice. He absolutely loves baseball—he is/was enamored by Babe Ruth and he felt Michael Jordan was the greatest basketball player who ever lived to play the game. It was a struggle to decipher his words due to his garbled speech. He urged me to “do what you wanna do.” This was his advice to take with me on my journey. Not finishing up his education and jumping around from school to school is one of the things he could’ve changed and done differently; this is what he told me while wearing a blank stare and sitting in his wheelchair. I wasn’t sure if this stare was a byproduct of the stroke. Both hands seemed to work just fine as he used a spoon to scarf down the Flan (dessert) from a plastic cup a nurse put in his hand a moment before. Mr. Charles said he also tried his hand at wrestling while at Palmetto High School, but never said if he’d won a championship or if he’d ever competed in any sport outside of school. Both of Mr. Charles’s legs are weak, and he is not able to stand independently anymore since the stroke. Our conversation ended shortly after I left him with a wooden chess game as a parting gift for talking with me, which he seemed very happy to receive.

Addendum... I learned today when I went back to the nursing home that Mr. Charles’s mother, Mary, is also a resident in the respite facility. I took Mr. Charles in his wheelchair to visit with her.

Shalondria Ficklin's Second Encounter

Grand Prairie, Texas

Residents' Names: Mrs. Anna & Patches' Mother

Assignment: Go to a nursing home and visit with two residents. Ask them the following questions:

- What advice would you give to young women living in today's time?
- What one thing would you change about your life?

This assignment stretched me and was very interesting. It helped me to see that we are not as different as we think. I had the privilege of meeting two wonderful women. They helped me learn and get new information. I am so glad I got to experience this time with them. One of my biggest takeaways was to save money, even if it's only one dollar per day. That would be thirty dollars at the end of the month and could be helpful in purchasing things like gas, groceries, or shoes for our children. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to sit and talk with these wise women.

My first resident; let's call her Mrs. Anna, was pleasant and helpful. I saw that her face lit up with pride and accomplishment when we spoke about her family. I could tell that she viewed caring for her family as very important, and it was a priority. At the same time, talking about her husband made her a bit sad. When I noticed that she had gotten restless and wasn't as enthused, I politely thanked her for her time and wisdom, and then, went on to my next resident. When I asked her for advice to give to women living in today's time, she replied, "Be real special; be kind and friendly to everyone, and trust in the Lord." I asked Mrs. Anna, "What one thing would you change about your life if you could?" She replied, "Nothing. I believe that everything has happened the way that it was supposed to."

As a bonus, I asked her for advice on marriage, since she'd shared that she had been married for sixty years. She said, "Be friendly and kind to one another always and trust in the Lord." Her faith in God was sure and it was apparent.

My second resident was a lot different. She had a cat named Patches who happened to be a black cat. I am not a fan of cats, and it seemed Patches knew it. He walked up to me, looking like a suspicious father who's allowed his teenage daughter to finally date, only to try and scare off the poor guy. This cat walked up to me, nodding his head and growling at me—all at the same time! I was flabbergasted because I never thought cats did much else than *meow*, let alone, growling.

She told me about the cat and explained how he behaves around new people. The cat looked me in my face and was nodding as if to say, "*Don't start nothing, it won't be nothing!*" The funny thing is, I was in full agreement and I felt the same way about him. Mrs. Mary told him to go away. After this, she offered me to sit anywhere I wanted. The more we talked, the more I noticed the similarities we had.

As we sat, we began talking and she shared her life with me. Her advice for young women living in today's time was, "Have self-confidence; take care of yourself, take care of your children, become homeowners, and save money. If there is any training or schooling you need for a particular job, take/get it while you are young and have a chance. The biggest thing of all is to save money. I cannot stress enough the importance of saving money. If you can do no more than to save a dollar a day, save as much of your money as you can."

I then asked her, "What one thing would you change about your life if you could?" She wasted no time answering my question; she said, "Nothing. I think everything turned out the way it should have." However, after a few moments of reflection, she said she'd like to change her answer. She then said that she would have had more children. It was then that she shared with me that she'd had seven miscarriages. The writer in me longed to know how she'd processed all that pain and how she got through it. I also longed to know how close they were to one another.

She shared that they were close together and she cried very often—sometimes daily or whenever necessary. She said that after her divorce, it was very hard for her to raise her children. She began working consistently after they

went off to school. She had to leave them home most times. Her neighbors would look out for them and check on them. Mrs. Mary told me that she remarried after ten years of being divorced. Her ex-husband remarried right after their divorce. She shared that she is good friends with her ex-husband and his new wife. She said, "We're a small family, but we work together and we help each other out." I was amazed by this woman's strength.

Melissa Rosado's Second Encounter

Brooklyn, New York

Residents' Names: Ms. Cynthia & Mr. John

Today, I met with a woman named Cynthia at the nursing home. I was told that Cynthia loved to speak and would talk your ear off! When I met with Cynthia, she was bedridden. She was dozing off when I went to see her, but when she heard me walking in, she instantly perked up. I told her about an issue that I had in my past and asked her what she would do in that situation. I told her that sometimes, I was worried about how I appeared to others. She told me that I should not care. She told me that she never cared about what people thought about her because there was nothing that she could do about it. She said, "Why spend time worrying about things you can't do anything about?!"

I then continued to speak with Cynthia and she told me a little bit about her life. She called herself the "lone survivor"—a woman who had no friends or family alive today. She was very happy to speak to me, and I was happy that I was able to give her some comfort. She told me that she had been at the nursing home forever. She spoke to me about her beautiful best friend whom she was friends with for decades. She'd recently passed away. She spoke about her life and about a bad marriage that she had when she was younger. She also bragged a bit about her cooking skills and told me that she would cook up some very delicious food when she was younger.

I then asked Cynthia what advice she would give to a young woman today. She told me that she would advise a young woman to not let the stars get in her eyes when it came to a man. She told me that it was wise to not trust everything a man tells you. She was drawing from her own experience when she was younger regarding a lying and cheating husband that she'd divorced after four years of marriage. I then asked her what it was that she would change in her life if she could change anything. She told me that she would not have gotten married so young.

I spent some more time with Cynthia, but then had to move on. She told me that I made her very happy just by speaking with her. She told me that she would keep me in her prayers, and she then spoke a blessing over me. After I finished speaking with Cynthia, I went to speak to John.

John was a gentleman who I'd met at the nursing home previously, but had not gotten a chance to speak to. I was very happy that I would be able to speak with him this time around. He told me that he remembered me and was very happy that I was there to spend some time with him.

John is married and has several children who visit him frequently in the nursing home. He is always cheerful and happy; they call him "the ambassador." He also has a family member who lives in the nursing home as well, who does physical therapy with him several times a week. He loves to watch television and read whenever he gets the chance.

I asked John for his advice on a previous issue that I'd had regarding what others thought of me. He told me to not let what anyone else thought of me to bother me. He said that when it came to him, he doesn't let what anyone thinks of him upset him, because what they think is not true. He said that he likes to be happy and keep a positive mindset, and does not let anything bring him down.

I also asked John what advice he would give to a young woman today. He told me that young women need to be very careful with who they choose as a spouse. He told me that most men are bad and do not have good intentions with women; they only want to use them. According to him, he was speaking from experience as a young man, and he also referred to the young men who he had been friends with. When I asked John what he would change about his life if he could change anything, he told me that he would change absolutely nothing. He is happy with how everything turned out in his life. He felt well taken care of at the nursing home. He also told me that he says what he means and means what he says. Before I left the nursing home, he told me that he was very happy that I spent time with him. He also told me that he would pray for me.

All in all, the visit to the nursing home was a very nice one. These nursing home visits have inspired me to make an effort to visit them more often. A lot of the individuals who live in nursing homes do not get visitors and are often very lonely. A visit from a kind stranger can turn out to be a blessing in their lives.

Yashmee Reed's Second Encounter

Jersey City, New Jersey

Resident's Name: Ms. Donna & Mr. Germeal

Today, I had a visit with a resident named Donna. I chose to visit Donna because I woke up with her on my mind. I also noticed how no one took out the time to really get to know her.

Ms. Donna was more than happy to see me and share what's been going on in the building! I told her that I had come for help, and how I believed that her life's story with me would provide me with the wisdom that I needed. With a smile on her face, she began to share. Born and raised in Jersey City, New Jersey, Ms. Donna had entertained dreams of becoming an African Dancer and singer as a child. But at the age of eleven, those dreams were shattered when her mother died. This caused Donna and her six siblings to be separated from each other; they were dispersed throughout their family and had been raised by family members who didn't want to deal with them. "They only wanted us around for the money," she said. Dealing with abandonment and rejection at the age of fifteen, she started hanging out with friends who introduced her to drugs, heroin and cocaine. This led her into prostitution. She also reminisced about the night a trick had gotten mad with her because she wouldn't allow him to have sex with her without protection. Out of anger, he'd pulled out a gun and started punching her face. The beating was so bad that she was left for dead. A stranger found her in an alley and brought her to the local hospital. After she recovered, she'd still went back out into the streets chasing money. She had worked a few small jobs, but they didn't compare to what she'd made being a prostitute. She'd had a stroke which had been the result of her drug use, along with an unhealthy lifestyle. This is how she'd ended up in a nursing home, not being able to take care of herself. We continued to have small talk, swapping stories, laughing and joking around.

I asked Donna, "What advice would you give a young woman living today?" Donna's answer was simple. She said, "Stay in school and follow your dreams."

This lifestyle in the streets will leave you in a grave. It's easy to get inside that lifestyle, but hard to get out. Don't follow the crowd. Beware of people who only want to be your friend when you have things. And be very careful who you turn to for love."

I continued, "If you can change anything about your life, what would you change?" Donna answered with, "I wouldn't have been out in the world at such a young age, chasing money and using drugs. I would have stayed in school and became a dancer. I never thought that my life would end up this way. I get so frustrated because I can't do things for myself. I wouldn't wish this life on my enemy, but I'm hoping to go home and get a home care aide. Although, I'm in this situation, I'm happy to be alive. It feels good to be drug free! I have my two sons, three grand-kids and my man who is still by my side!"

I believe my visit with Donna was what we both needed. It showed how my life could have been if I'd stayed out in those streets, doing drugs like ecstasy, partying, and having sex with men for money. Donna had a chance to see how her life could have been if she had chosen to get help. We both had a choice—I chose to give it all up and follow Jesus. Donna chose to stay out in the world until the enemy was done with her. Before the visit was over, Donna said, "Thank you so much for coming to visit me. I'm ready to get out of this bed, now!" I replied, "Thank you for having me and sharing some of your life story with me! You're a blessing! And I'm coming back for more!"

I chose to visit Germeal because he is someone who only receives visits twice a week. His visits are always from his mother. He's a young guy—thirty-four years old, to be exact. His mother is from Jackson Mississippi, but he was born in Jersey City. Unfortunately, he has never met his father. Due to an unhealthy lifestyle, Mr. Germeal has problems with obesity and suffers from congestive heart failure. For this reason, he has to be treated with a BiPAP machine.

During the visit, he shared how life was never simple. His mistake was that he never took the time to see what he wanted to do; he had always been a great listener, however, he'd just listened to the wrong people. According to Mr. Germeal, he'd never thought about what he wanted to do with his life, so he didn't know what he could do when he was younger. Instead, he'd spent a lot of

his youth out in the streets chasing money to take care of his mother. At the same time, he didn't care about how he spent the money, he just kept spending money on all the wrong things, people, and friends. It angers him, because now that he's down, those same people don't come to check on him. This is a hard lesson that he had to learn. I told him that it is now time to forgive, get into a relationship with God and work on his health!

I asked Germeal, "What advice would he give a young boy living today?"

He answered, "I would tell him that no matter how bad things may seem, don't turn to the streets. The drug game is not where it's at! I lived that lifestyle! Being young, you may not wanna hear anything positive; give it up before it gives you up! You will either end up dead or in jail. Be more into your life, find out who you are before you look to others, because the majority of them don't have a clue about who they are. Life, is always gonna be hard, but it becomes harder when you're trying to fit in with the wrong crowd."

I asked him if he could change anything about his life, what would he change? He answered, "I would take better care of my health, change the way that I looked at money, and instead of running to the streets, I would take out the time to figure out who I am and what I want out of life."

I also asked him, "What are you going to do when you leave here?" He answered, "If everything works out and I do get to go home, I'm seeking God this time around, not Islam! I've tried everything else!"

Of course, I said to Mr. Germeal, "You don't have to wait until you go home —you can receive God now! Just know that I'm not trying to push it on you— whenever you're ready, go for it!! It would be so worth it! But in the meantime, I will pray for your health and healing. Hopefully, things will begin to work out for you! It's time for you to do the work, if you ever want to leave this place."

Before the visit was over, we gave each other a high-five, with Germeal saying, "Good looking, Yazzy!" I thanked him for his time and told him that I'd be back soon!

**RIP to Germeal Reed. He passed away two months after our encounter. He was only 35-years old.*

Sylvia Alves' Second Encounter

West Orange, New Jersey

Resident's Name: Ms. Ethel & Ms. Clara

I had the opportunity to go back to the same nursing home I had visited initially. This time, I brought back my sister in Christ (who is on fire for Jesus) and her granddaughter. The more the merrier. Of course, I had some opposition. Since I was returning to the nursing home, they required us to complete a background check. I had a couple of days off and I wanted to complete this assignment while I was off. The person who manages the volunteers and staff told me I could come in on January 30th, 2019. My friend and I came, only to have the person not to show up for work that day. I was told by a staff member that I couldn't volunteer that day and I would need to complete the background check, which would only take 48 hours. Well, it actually took more than a week. To be transparent, I was quite aggravated because I had every intention of completing this assignment early. I started to get anxious because it was getting down to the wire. I called another facility just in case, but it was an Assisted Living facility. I really wanted to go back to the nursing home. I prayed to Abba and asked for Him to intervene. He heard my prayers and responded. I just love my Jesus.

I specifically asked for the names of people who don't get visitors. The first person I visited was a woman named Ethel. Ms. Ethel is 96 years young. She was reading a Danielle Steele book when we arrived at her room. She said she loves to read and play games. Ethel has two daughters who are in their sixties and are retired. One resides in Florida, and the other in Edgewater, New Jersey, which is approximately 35-40 minutes from the nursing home. She said the daughter in New Jersey doesn't visit her that often because her husband is an invalid.

Ethel was very fluid and spry. She had all her faculties, which I told her was a blessing; she agreed. She has such a sense of humor which I could definitely appreciate. We just clicked like that. I was Lucy and she was Ethel. Although, I told her that her nickname was Sunshine because of her personality. She loved it.

I asked Ms. Ethel what advice she would give young women living today. She said to always be in the present. She said, "Whatever you're doing, try to enjoy it, concentrate, and remember it. She said that if she was in the present, she wouldn't have fallen. As a result of that fall, she'd fractured her hip and has been in a wheelchair ever since. She has a walker and tries to use it from time to time, but she has to have someone with her.

Ethel said that her mind was elsewhere when she fell. She wasn't paying attention that day. She'd had her accident in June. She started out in the Rehabilitation unit, and then, transitioned to where she is now. You see, up until June 2018, Ethel was living on her own. She said that, for the most part, she had been independent, even though she did have aides assisting her from time to time. She hasn't had much luck with aides. She's had to get her daughter involved a few times, even though she didn't want to. Ethel misses living on her own; she misses her independence.

Ethel advised us again to always live in the present and try to take in as much as we can. She said she wishes she would have done that. If she could change one thing (more like a couple of things) about her life, it would be to finish her nursing degree, and she would have liked to have gone to Israel. She had been in school during World War 2 and her husband was in the Air Force. She only had six months left to become a registered nurse, but ended up getting married. The newly married woman had ended up taking office jobs that allowed her the flexibility she needed to raise her family. Ethel said that this generation seems to work harder than her generation; her generation was more family-oriented. In this generation, the women have careers, and not just jobs. Careers take up more of their time.

Ethel told us not to put off things. She said to make memories and time with our families. "Memories are so important," she noted. She is definitely a lover of family, and sadly, her husband had passed away ten years ago. Other than her daughter and her niece, the majority of her family doesn't reside in the area.

Ethel was excited because one of her nieces from New York was coming to visit her on the following day. I was excited for her. I could tell just by talking with

her that she loved company. My friend and I were with Ethel for over an hour, and let me tell you, there was not a dull moment. I asked her if we could pray for her before we left. Her exact words were, “Of course.” In the midst of me praying for her, she kissed my hand (insert heart emoji here). My heart melted. I was so humbled. I thought I was there to be a blessing, but was blessed instead. My God!

We visited four to five of the residents that day. Like I said, each one was a blessing. We came across Clara. She was not on the list, but as God would have it, He'd directed our steps to her room. Clara is 92 years young. She had a head full of hair and a lot of wisdom. I was impressed. She didn't feel she had a lot of hair. Because Clara is Catholic, we were able to talk about Jesus. She said Jesus hears from her a lot. She was spunky and just a fireball. She had us laughing uncontrollably (even my friend's granddaughter was tickled). Clara does not have children and was never married.

Ms. Clara didn't appear to be as active as my buddy, Ethel; she required more assistance. She was in bed when we ended up in her room. I could tell that she loves to talk and loves to have visitors. One of Clara's words of wisdom was to not keep the past alive. She said, “If you have family, let them know that what happened is in the past. It may not seem like a lot, but it's important.” Clara said that she had a Jewish brother-in-law who believed in the same thing.

One of the things Clara said she wishes she would have done differently was to keep her mouth shut more often. She said that her mouth has gotten her in a lot of trouble over the years. I could definitely see that. Ms. Clara was definitely not shy about her opinions or feelings. I can respect that. She also said she would have learned to speak Polish (her parents were Polish) and Spanish; they would have both come in handy. She also enjoys reading a lot. I told her that's why she also has so much wisdom.

One thing she does not like is something she has observed, and that is how some of the aides talk to the elderly. There's no respect. She said she will let them have it (and I believe it too). She also interjected that her family has never had any prejudices against Black people; they have always shown respect to them as well. I wasn't sure where she was going with that, so I just smiled.

She has had several types of jobs over the years. On her last job, she worked as an Accounting Secretary; this was the job she'd enjoyed the most because, according to her, the job had been very interesting and she'd learned a lot. She was also a Switchboard Operator. Every job she'd ever worked had prepared her for the next job, and had come in handy. I received a revelation right there. Every experience we have, whether good or bad, prepares us for our next season. But God!

She asked if we had "snapshots" of ourselves. We told her that we could take a picture with our phones. Of course, she'd requested a copy of the picture. I ended up having to have two photos printed. Clara really enjoyed our presence as much as we were enjoying hers. She asked us to write our names down.

Like the other residents, Ms. Clara said there is a shortage of help. I reassured her they are doing the best they can and that we were there to assist in any way possible. She thanked us for coming and asked when we would be coming back. I told her soon.

Overall, I was quite pleased with how the day went. I remember praying that morning to allow God to use me as His vessel to be a light at the nursing home. He honored and answered my prayers. Again, I went there with the intentions of being a blessing but was also blessed. Our God is so faithful. I know this is only the second month into the mentorship program, but this was my favorite activity.

Brittany Yokely's Second Encounter

Rossville, Georgia

Residents' Names: (Aliases: Wisdom & Folly)

I decided to take both my daughters with me, along with my oldest daughter's friend, for a visit to the nursing home. We were told we could do this in a group setting, and I wanted to model this act of servitude to them. I had called this particular nursing home ahead of time to let them know that I was coming. I asked one of the attendants to tell me some of the residents who did not get many visitors, and she provided me with a long list of names. I took my youngest daughter with me. I let my oldest daughter and her friend go off on their own to visit with the resident who they had chosen. My youngest daughter and I went to approach the first woman who I intended to meet with. Her room was colorful with much décor and many pictures of her family. She was very busy coloring in an adult coloring book. She looked content. I asked her if she wouldn't mind visiting with us, and she was happy to oblige. She asked me several times if I had daughters. I kept telling her that the young lady standing next to me is one of my daughters, and that my oldest daughter was visiting with another resident. She did not have a great memory, yet and still, the wisdom that she imparted to me, although simple and short, was quite useful. She told me about her life. When I asked about her children, she repeatedly told me that she had to work, because they always needed something. I had to ask her (quite quickly) from that core statement another related question to keep the conversation going before she would forget again. She had gold within her, but I did have to dig for it. I asked her what she did for a living. She told me that she had once worked at a mill, and that her husband had also worked at a mill. She kept telling me that she hated to go to work, but that she had to because her three daughters always needed something. She told me that she had been blessed with a woman who'd cared for her children as if they were her own; she said that the woman would care for and nurse them as if they were her own when they were sick. Her face lit up as she told me how much she loved the woman, and how she would not have traded her for the world. I gleaned from her how important it is to have a support network—a true, God-sent one. While she was on the subject of working to provide for her

three daughters, I asked her if it bothered her to have to leave them. I asked her what it was like when her daughters got older—when they were teenagers. I told her that I had a teenager and would love to hear her advice, as the teen years are especially hard with girls. She told me that with her girls, she had never had many problems. the reason is, she said that she had sat them down once and told them that if she'd ever heard anything negative about them, they wouldn't go anywhere again. Her words were so simple, but I knew what she meant. She seemed to be about as old as my great aunt who had raised me. So, I knew what she was referring to; she was talking about hearing of them having a bad reputation, because I'd heard my aunt speak this way. In their generation, they didn't even speak things like this out loud. She looked at me and said, "Well, I had to do something. I had to let them know that I was serious." She went on to tell me that, later on in life, her daughters had thanked her for this. She said, "Your daughters will thank you too if you just stick with it. They will look back at their lives, and they'll be glad that they stuck with it." This doesn't seem very explanatory, but I knew what she meant. She just couldn't really find the words to say what she wanted to say. God bless her. It was obvious to me that all she had done in her life was work and produce. Even with her struggling within her own mind, she was determined to sow wisdom into me! As she was struggling, she mentioned how her daughters were thankful that they hadn't given up. She could not find the right words, so I asked her, "Is it their integrity; is that what you mean?" She said, "Yes!" Then she went on to tell me that her daughters were grateful to her for being strict with them and shielding them. They had seen how other girls' lives had turned out, who had made the mistakes they'd avoided. She told me over and over again how I was a good mother, and how my daughters would thank me for it later when they come to realize what I was trying to do for them. She said that later on in life, they would understand and thank me, just as her daughters had done with her. We chatted about the facility a little longer—just small talk. I gave her a word search book, and she was really happy to receive it. I thanked her for all her advice and asked if I could give her a hug. Afterwards, she held both my shoulders, looked me straight in the eyes and repeated all the things that she had said once more. "You understand what I'm saying, don't you?" I told her yes and thanked her again. That's when my oldest daughter walked in with her friend, and I remembered the question that we were supposed to ask. What advice would you give for a young woman living today? I didn't even

have to ask. She seemed to take notice of my younger daughter. All of a sudden, she asked if they were my daughters. I answered, "Yes, these are my daughters." She told them that they were both beautiful and began asking them about school. When my oldest daughter told her that she was a freshman in high school, she told her, "You don't have very long. Have you decided what you want to do with your life?" My oldest daughter answered, "Not yet." The woman told her, "Take your time and find out what you really want to do. Make sure it's what you really want to do." I truly feel that she was led to answer that question without being asked. Whether she remembers it or not, whether she knew it or not, I feel that this woman had been able to impart wisdom to both of us. She was obviously a woman who had worked hard to build her life. She'd worked hard and diligently to provide for her family. She'd worked hard and diligently to parent her three daughters. She told me several times during our conversation that she was happy now that her three daughters were married, and now, she could rest. She demonstrated the wisdom of sowing and reaping. To my oldest daughter, she gave the simple wisdom of slowing down and searching within herself to find her true calling. All without the use of many words at all!

As I told you, the first woman I visited had much wisdom to offer from having lived a life full of diligence and hard work. I would have to say that the second woman who I visited was the exact opposite. She was very sweet and kind; she was also pleasant to be around. So, I suppose that's wisdom that I gained from her—you want to be the kind of person that someone enjoys being around. Now, I don't know her issues; I don't know what may have been going on in her body or her brain. I can only speculate that by the way she communicated with all of us, my daughters, and her friend (who was a 15-year-old boy), that she had not disciplined herself much in life. She began talking with us about escaping from the nursing home; she would go in and out of telling us how she was going to do it. She truly believed she was leaving that night. She kept going back and forth, speaking about different people who had upset her and she kept making punching gestures with her hand. She made jokes saying if they didn't like this or that, how she would pop them. After this, she would make the gesture. She told us that she had a boyfriend who was 18, and described, quite frankly, a sugar mama situation. She didn't say anything really graphic, but she implied that she gets him whatever he wants to keep him around. She flirted a little with my oldest

daughter's friend. They seem to think that she was very funny, but I didn't. Don't give me wrong, she was pleasant to be around in a way, but I'm just going to be transparent here—try as I might, I couldn't learn anything from her. She just made silly jokes and would even act like she was going to lift her shirt up, but thankfully, she never did. She had a friend who she was chatting with. We ended up chatting with her a little bit too. Her friend just seemed really lonely, and honestly, she just seemed to be spending time with her because of that.

Eventually, the friend started lifting up her shirt a little too, I guess to fit in with this woman. That's the problem with folly and with filling the loneliness with it. Perhaps, she couldn't impart any wisdom because she was so full of bitterness. This woman kept mentioning how angry she was with her brother and how she was going to pop him; it was as if anger had consumed her. I just remember thinking to myself that this is not how I want to be. I do not want to get caught up in folly. I do not want to live to a ripe old age and have nothing to impart to anyone but foolishness. I don't regret our visit with her; I think it helped her to have some people around, and her friend who was sitting with us was very excited to have visitors as well. For that, I am glad that we could have been a blessing. I just can't help thinking what a waste; it is a shame to not have any wisdom to offer or share with the younger generation when they come knocking on our doors. She was very sweet, however, that's just not who or how I want to be. I don't want to be Folly, I want to be Wisdom—like the first woman. Once I finally got her to settle down and quit making jokes, I said to her, "Now, there's one thing I have to ask you before I leave." She asked, "What's that?" Gathering my belongings, I asked her, "What advice would you give a young woman living today?" Even with a straightforward question, she didn't even try to answer. Her immediate response was another joke, although I felt she was somewhat serious. She shouted, "I was hoping that maybe you could give me some advice!" That spoke volumes to me about spiritual maturity. Some people just never mature, sadly enough. So, I'm afraid I have no wisdom to offer from this woman, other than an example of what we do not want to end up as, other than an example of folly.

Erica Figueroa's Encounter

Miami, Florida

Resident's Name: Ms. Mary

My visit to the nursing home was truly astonishing. I talked with an employee about employment opportunities or, perhaps, volunteer work. It was lunchtime and the seniors were just finishing up their meals when a resident named Mary greeted me. "Hello," she said with a huge smile on her face. I greeted her back and assisted her to a sitting area. After we sat down, she told me that I resembled her granddaughter. I returned her smile and asked, "What's your granddaughter's name, and how many grands do you have? Do they come out from time to time to visit?" It was as if a dam had broke; Mary began telling me about her family. One thing I learned is that they all live in Texas.

Mary had always been in good health for the majority of her life, but according to her, as she started aging, she'd noticed her body changing and her energy waning. Her eyes got glassy and started wandering; she paused, and then, said that she'd had a massive stroke. Because she is unable to take care of herself now, she'd ended up in the nursing home. She has been living there for almost 18 months, and feels like she is just sitting around every day, waiting for the good Lord to take her when He's ready. Nobody really comes to visit her, and the little family she has left gives a million and one reasons as to why they can't allow her to live with them. They'd made excuses like: they live in apartments or their lifestyles are consumed with work and are not conducive to caring for a senior citizen—the reality of paying bills hit them strong every day, and the responsibility of raising their kids is a daily struggle within itself. She went on to say how empty, sad, lonely and depressed she has been since she took up residency at the nursing home. She said that her will to live was diminishing! "The nursing home can only do but so much for you," said Mary. "The staff helps out sometimes during the day, but after dinner, I am basically on my own. There have been many times that I have sat in soiled or urine drenched diapers. It's dreadful at times being around strange sick people with different personality ailments everyday, all day," she explained. Later in the conversation, I asked Mary if she

could change anything about her life, what it would be. Her response was, "If I could do life over, I would have gotten the best darn education/career and set attainable, realistic life survival goals so I wouldn't have to be here. I would prefer to succumb to an accidental death or my ticker stopping without a warning while living my life somewhere else. I would have found God so much earlier in life, or I would have married a rich man!" Nothing can be worse than the situation she's in now because she doesn't have any money or good medical insurance. Mary told me to not waste time in life—to keep learning, set goals and be the best and first at everything great. "Don't depend on anybody," she continued. "Trust God and believe in yourself. Exercise, eat healthy and live your best LIFE."

Gabrielle Yokely's Encounter
Rossville, Georgia

Resident's Name: Ms. Norma

Back in the summer of 2019, my life seemed awful. It was filled with problems that I had invented for myself. In my mind, there always seemed to be a lot going on. For my friend, Christopher, this was also true, only his problems were less of a limitation he had created and more something he couldn't even begin to control. His mother and stepfather had finally reached their limit and they'd decided to get a divorce after many toxic years of staying together because it was "the easier thing to do." Christopher's stepfather was, in a word, manipulative. He had always more than disliked Christopher, so when he and Christopher's mother decided to split and the matter of custody regarding their only child together came into place, he came up with all the lies against Christopher that he could. Of course, as you can assume, these lies weren't just petty lies, they were set into place for a reason—he was trying to keep his son away from Christopher's loving mother. So, like any mother, Christopher's mother did anything she could to see her child, even if that meant that Christopher would have to leave a lot more often than stay. That is how Christopher ended up at my house so often over the summer, and how he ended up taking a trip with me and my family to the nursing home.

Originally, when my own mother told me that we'd be going to the nursing home, I didn't think much of it, seeing as it is that years ago, we used to visit often. In my mind, it seemed silly to think of the trip down the road as anything more than passing a few hours. Of course, I always thought elderly people were sweet, and in some cases, interesting. I just figured whenever someone is so far gone, they don't have much left to teach anyone. When we first came in, we all seemed to split up a little; my mother and younger sister went to the back, towards some of the resident's bedrooms, and Christopher and I went towards the front where a few residents had just been finishing up lunch. At first, I'll admit, it was a little awkward talking to any of the residents in the home. This is

only because they had a hard time understanding us and we had a hard time understanding them.

As time went on, and after talking to multiple people, I realized that it wasn't necessarily a matter of understanding each word they were saying or understanding each phrase that they meant, it was more of an observational understanding. The first woman that I sat with and talked to was named Norma. Norma couldn't talk very easily, so I was mostly the one doing the talking, which was alright with me. As time went on, she said more and more, but she only spoke the words that I couldn't make out from her hand motions. She mumbled things about her husband and sister sitting across the table from us when no one had been there, and one of the staff members of the nursing home told me that she always thinks that they're there. To this, Ms. Norma said, "No, I wish they were." She talked about her old house and the dogs she had; she said that they were so cute, and even though it was obviously a struggle for her to talk, she continued to speak softly about how much she loved those dogs and the shenanigans that they had once gotten into. After a while, she fell quiet and acted tired. One of the workers asked her if she was ready for a nap, to which she nodded her head in affirmation. Before she let the woman roll her chair away to her bedroom, she grabbed one of my hands and clasped it between her hands. After a moment of gathering up her strength, Norma said, "I really hope I see you here again, sweetheart." After that, she gave me a warmhearted smile and she was gone. I remember thinking how kind she was and how all she wanted was someone she loved to be near her as much as possible, quite like the dogs, her husband or her sister whom she imagined were there.

It's a sad thought to think that we may all one day be alone, no matter how surrounded we feel now. One of the things Norma taught me was something simple that you'd expect to learn from a nursing home: keep close to the ones around you who you love, because they won't be around forever. As simple of a teaching as that was, it was a valuable one to be shown in real time, especially to someone as young as I am. Many of the women I spoke to all taught me the same lesson. They'd make up stories about the nursing home, saying that they had a swimming pool, or they'd offer incentives, like saying they would cook for us or do laundry for us. This was all in hopes that we would stay there with them. So much so that everyone felt a pang of guilt when having to leave.

The whole experience was another reminder of how precious people are. Not just the people you are close to, but everyone, including the people who are always around you, the people you only encounter once a week, and even someone you may encounter only once in your life. It doesn't matter. You show kindness to that person. I'm sure that this may be the lesson that anyone may get when going to visit a nursing home; even so, it was one of the most valuable lessons that can be taught to anyone of any age: people matter. So, be kind to anyone and everyone, because one day, we will all be old, simply wishing we had more people to be kind to.

Marina Escobar's Encounter

West Orange, New Jersey

Residents' Names: Ms. Lydia & Ms. Aida

My friend, Sylvia, asked me to accompany her to visit the elderly at the Amazing Love Nursing Home. I have never taken the opportunity to speak with someone who I really don't know and to get to know them on a more personal level. The elderly were overall, very happy, welcoming and open to visitors. At first, I was a bit unsure about joining my friend on this trip, but I have to say that I am really glad I came. I enjoyed conversing and getting to know some of the elderly women we met. Walking up to someone who I don't know and starting a conversation was outside of my comfort zone.

I met two wonderful women by the names of Lydia and Aida. These two women have lived completely different lives, one was happy and content with her status, but the other one, not so much. Let me elaborate.

Lydia is a 64-year old woman who was born in Puerto Rico. She is one out of ten children. She has four sisters and five brothers, in addition to three daughters and five grandchildren. Two of Lydia's daughters live in Belleville, and the third one lives in Pennsylvania. Lydia was a homemaker for most of her life, but had to find work when she'd parted ways from her husband due to his infidelities. She went to work as a factory worker for Crayola, and she'd worked there for six years. While speaking with Lydia, she told me that she'd suffered from a very minor stroke at the age of 24 due to stress. She then suffered a severe stroke at the age of 62, which had almost ended her life. That stroke landed her in the wheelchair that she is now confined to. As I spoke with Lydia, she became very emotional about her condition, but grateful to be alive. She wishes she was independent and able to walk once again.

I asked Lydia what advice she would give our new generation, and to this, she responded by saying that our generation should further their education and go to college; this is so they are able to get a decent job. I also asked her if there

was anything that she could change about her life, what it would be. She said if she could go back in time, she would go back to the very night she had a stroke and undo it. She stated that not being able to walk and not being independent had taken a toll on her. She would have taken necessary precautionary measures to prevent that night she'd had her major stroke.

Lydia proceeded to tell me how much she missed her home and home-cooked meals. She isn't very happy with the meals provided by the facility because she is of Latin descent, and we Latinos like to use our condiments and spices. She is very grateful that her sisters occasionally bring her food. Her daughters, on the other hand, have never really learned how to cook Latin cuisine, which I found to be very amusing given the fact that we are of the same ethnicity. I know how old fashioned Hispanic moms can be. At the end of my visit, Lydia asked us to return and visit her. I think I will return to visit Lydia, after all, I have never really had a grandmother figure, and I think if I did, Lydia would be exactly what I would picture her to be like.

During my visit, I was also able to converse with Aida. Aida is a 98-year-old Russian woman who remembers her life story as if it were yesterday. Aida's father was of Russian descent; he'd decided to move to China to continue his profession as a Dentist and open his own practice. Aida's mom lived in New York City. She'd decided to take a chance by moving to China and starting a family. Aida was an only child and had been very fortunate to have the finer things in life. For instance, being able to have custom made clothes designed for her. She resided in China for fourteen years before moving to New York City.

Unfortunately, Aida lost her dad when he was in his forties. After his death, she then had to find work and help her mother financially just to make ends meet. Her mom was able to find work as an embroiderer. Aida then went on to tell us how she went about meeting her husband, which we found very entertaining. She was engaged to another man when she'd coincidentally met her future husband at a Christmas party. Aida had her first kiss with her future husband at the Christmas party that night, and the next day, she broke off her engagement. She married and had two children—one boy who is now 68 years old and resides in New Jersey and one girl who lives in Florida who is now 62

years old. Her son happened to be visiting while we were there, and her daughter would be visiting her the following week. Aida's son has two children, but unfortunately, her daughter was unable to conceive. Nevertheless, she lives a very fulfilling life with her husband. Aida also has two great-grandchildren who she is very proud of. She is such a positive, stylish and very outgoing individual. While sitting with us, she wore a beautiful royal blue floral shirt, along with her bracelets.

She was very open to sit and talk with us about her upbringing. She told us how she'd lost her husband when he was in his fifties. She shared with us how she had to find a job, but luckily, she was able to find a job working for a very prominent Urologist in New York City as an office manager. I asked Aida what advice she would give to our generation, and she said that she would advise our youth to further their education and go to college so they'll have successful careers. I also asked her if she could change anything in her life, what would it be, even though she is very happy and content with her life choices. She said that she would have gone to college to become a teacher. At the end of our visit, Aida excused herself because she would be receiving a call from her daughter. She thanked us for taking the time to talk to her. She left saying, "Be well and be positive." Nevertheless, we were the ones who were grateful to have had the opportunity to meet such a fine, happy-go-lucky person. It really made me put things into perspective and analyze my life choices.

Pearlisha Gibbs' Encounter

Lawrenceville, Georgia

Resident's Name: Ms. Mae

My name is Pearlsha Gibbs. I had a talk with my friend's grandmother at a local facility. Her name is Mae. She is a very sweet lady. She grew up in Mississippi along with four other siblings. With her being the oldest, she had a lot of responsibilities with helping her mom take care of her siblings. I asked her if there was anything she would have done differently in her life; she said that she would have been more confident in herself. She'd once had a lot of self-doubt about going to school to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. She was afraid of failure. She wishes that she would have gone with her gut feeling to pursue her dream career.

Ms. Mae has one child, and her husband had once wanted another child. She now feels she was being selfish because she only wanted to have one child. Nowadays, she feels that taking care of her alone is a huge responsibility for her daughter to bear. Because of this, she wishes that she would have had another child like her husband wanted. She said that she tries not to bother her daughter or granddaughter, unless she really needs them.

She gave me some great advice about life. She said, "Live life to the fullest; do your best at anything that you are trying to achieve. Never give up!" She also said that we need to help one another and be supportive of family and friends. According to Ms. Mae, when you're helping someone else, you're actually helping yourself. She said helping others and not getting anything in return is a good thing.

Ms. Mae looked at me and said, "Take care of yourself and your body. Your health is your most valuable asset." I have a lot of health issues that I could have avoided by just eating healthy and taking care of myself. Now, I'm in a wheelchair and need assistance with daily activities; this is because I had a stroke. So, take care of your mind and body. She said to me, "Pace yourself; take things one day at

a time. Love your family and friends. Be yourself, and always remember where you came from.” After this, she gave me a really big hug , told me that she enjoyed talking to me and to never forget what she'd told me.

She opened my eyes when she said, “You have to love yourself and take care of you.” Sometimes, we don't want to do things in life if it's not beneficial to us, but after listening to her, I've learned that we should do things from the kindness of our hearts. God will bless her. She told me that she has self-doubt sometimes, and I shared with her that it is good to fail; we all fail, but what makes those failures so great is what we learn from them. This gives us a redirection to come back at our situations stronger, with better reasoning. So, you get another shot to do your very best.

Candida Rosado's Encounter

Brooklyn, New York

Resident's Name: Ms. Martha, Ms. Lauren & Ms. Linda

I entered a beautiful nursing home. It was spacious and clean. A friend of mine who worked at the nursing home led me to a lady who she thought would be good for me to talk to. Her name was Martha. Martha is a 92-year old woman. Her daughter happened to be visiting with her while we were there. Martha told me how much she liked the nursing home. We were all sitting outside under a gazebo, next to a pond filled with large Koi fish. Martha liked to go visit the pond just to stare at the fish. She was in a wheelchair and had to be led around. Her daughter, Gloria, told me how Martha used to always take care of herself and wear her face creams. She also loved dancing salsa when she was younger, but she didn't like to dance too close to anyone because it tickled her. Martha was from Puerto Rico; she used to visit Puerto Rico all the time. Gloria said that her mother never got angry and was very passive.

Martha had several children who would come to visit her often. Speaking to Martha was very nice. She was happy that I was there. She said that I was beautiful and that she was very old. Her daughter then responded, "We never get old as long as our hearts are happy."

After speaking with Martha, I went upstairs and visited a lady named Lauren. Lauren was bedridden and very sad. She was depressed and did not want to eat. She said that she did not want to eat and just wanted to die. I held her hand and spoke with her. She then cheered up. I then left her when she started falling asleep. Afterwards, I went on to an activity happening in the common area.

A friend of mine at the nursing home was leading the activity. I observed as the residents danced and sang along with a video that was playing on the television. Almost all of the elderly at the home were in wheelchairs. After the exercise, my friend led everyone in prayer. It was amazing. They all repeated after her. They all looked like happy people.

The nursing home was big and beautiful. The outdoor area was very nice as well. I would definitely like to visit again.

I went to another nursing home and visited someone that I had not seen in years. Her name was Linda. She had been in the nursing home for two years. Ms. Linda is in her eighties. I had not seen her in a very long time, but I was inspired to see her after my nursing home visit a few days prior.

I visited Linda by surprise. I went to her room, saw her and called out her name. She was very happy to see me. She was now in a wheelchair and could not really walk. She led me to the common area so that I could sit and speak with her. She was talking to me about her life at the nursing home and told me how her children would come and visit her. We began reminiscing about the past.

Linda also told me how she was very involved with the activities at the nursing home. She told me how she enjoyed these activities. When it was time for me to leave, Linda dropped me off downstairs, and on the way out, she showed me the yard that she liked to go to often. I was happy that I had gone to visit her, and I will definitely go again.

Tiffani Roance-Crawford's Encounter

Kinston, North Carolina

Resident's Name: Ms. Brenda

As I prepared to ask my interviewee about her regrets and what she would advise for the future, I looked at her in a way that I have never imagined I would before. I admired her fine lines and wrinkles, which are not so much representative of age as they are wisdom. I looked into her eyes and I saw a great lineage—a woman who has seen things that she doesn't even remember or things that she would not dare repeat because of the day and age she grew up in. I am honestly proud of this moment and proud that she has graced the earth for eighty years. Her name is Ms. Brenda, and she was born in 1936.

I asked if she had any regrets, and she stated, "Well, I reckon' everyone has regrets of some sort over the years, but I regret not taking up computers after I got my GED. I wish I would have furthered my education a little bit more." At this time, I simply told her that she quite possibly did exactly what she was supposed to do. It took courage for her to go back to school at fifty-six years old to get her GED after raising nine children. Her family is beyond proud of her for just doing that. She may not be the most educated person, but her old sayings and words of wisdom started off with, "If you outlive me, always remember this..." I love that phrase, but I hate it at the same time because it's a reminder that one day, we all have to leave this world.

Finally, I asked her what advice she would give today's generation. She quietly responded, "They need to listen more to their elders." I don't think they respect elders like they did when I was growing up. They don't think we have good sense." We both laughed almost simultaneously because I knew she was right. Millennials today think they have all the answers. After our laughs, she went on to say, "They also need to be okay with working hard. These days, kids want things handed to them on a silver platter." She did not have a lot to say honestly, but she ended by saying, "And stop trying to grow up so fast, because eventually, they'll be grown, and you can't turn back the hands of time." After

these remarkable statements, she went back to arguing with the television about the latest news, as if it could answer her back. It amazed me that she never even asked me why I was asking the questions. She welcomed the chance to just engage and to give her opinion, which to me, are facts, because as far as I am concerned, this lady knows a lot. That's what I felt as I was speaking with her. As I prepared to leave, I waited for Ms. Brenda to ask what the questions were for, but she never did. She just told me, "Take care now and be safe."

Shanice Griffin's Encounter
Los Angeles, California

Resident's Name: Ms. Margaret

I have to admit I was initially somewhat afraid to walk into the nursing home. I wasn't sure what to think exactly, how it would be, or if I would be able to really connect with the residents. This was my first time visiting a nursing home. I was very apprehensive. After a quick prayer and pep talk from the Lord, He reminded me that this was not about me. I had to swallow my pride and focus on being a blessing to another person. I'd heard the testimonies of my big sister who'd gone to a nursing home, and the amount of wisdom that she'd shared with me was something that I didn't want to miss out on.

While I pride myself on being super outgoing, I had all kinds of thoughts running through my mind, for example, what if the resident was reserved and didn't want to talk much? I am learning how to deal with silent moments, but I didn't want to overshare as an attempt to keep an awkward silence from happening. After all, the whole point of this visit is to actually learn from the resident, right? The office assistant scheduled my appointment time during the morning when the residents are usually at their peak and somewhat wired from a cup of coffee. The assistant walked me into the room and gave a brief introduction to a lovely lady named Margaret. There was a small patio attached to the room, which is where Margaret wanted to meet with me so that we could get some fresh fall air. She was helped out of her bed, into her wheelchair, and pushed outside into her favorite spot in the shade.

Margaret had the biggest grin, and told me how excited she was that a young woman was coming to just sit and chat with her. That statement put me at ease and I began to ask her a few preliminary questions, such as how long she had been in this home and if she sees her family often. She had been living in the nursing home since the beginning of the year, and most of her family lives out of state, so she doesn't get to see them too often. I asked how that has affected her, and she was very transparent with me. She shared that it was difficult for her. She

had two daughters, and both of them had moved to separate states once they'd gotten married. Her husband had died of cancer several years earlier, so she has felt alone for quite some time now. She and her husband lived in a retirement community together, so she felt as though she had some sense of community, but it didn't compare to her own family.

I began to ask if she utilized technology to stay in contact with them, and while she's not a big fan of technology, she does use it from time to time since that is the only option she has. I didn't want to pry too much—I didn't want to ask why her family doesn't visit her often, but I could tell that it was a very sensitive subject for her. After sharing a bit more about her family, she began to ask about my life. We talked about the relationship I have with my family. I shared with her that I am excited to be in college so that I can have some distance from my family because of our different religious beliefs and values. She explained to me that, while it's good to be your own person and sometimes it's great to have that time away to learn yourself, it's equally important to return back to your family at some point to share what you've learned so that they can be afforded the opportunity to change as well. She really encouraged me to place a greater amount of value on my family, and she said that she would give that advice to any young woman, especially in today's time, because most women work. Margaret loves how times have changed and that women have the freedom to achieve essentially any goal they choose, but she hopes that it's not at the expense of their families. She believes that there is a way to have both, but it is key that women today find that balance.

The next question I asked her is what she would change about her life. She said something that was powerful; she said to not live the life that other people expect of you, but to follow the dreams and goals that you have on your heart. Margaret said she had dreams of being a singer. Ever since she was a little girl, she would turn everything from Coke bottles to hairbrushes into microphones. When she shared her dreams with her family, they basically shunned her and told her that this would never happen. She was expected to become a wife, mother, and homemaker, so that's what she became. But yet she always wondered what could have happened if she'd pursued that dream anyway. She explained that having that feeling at the end of her life is tormenting.

As my time with Margaret was coming to an end, I asked her to share one last piece of advice. She advised me to give equal attention to the different areas of my life: career, school, relationships, spirituality, etc. so that I don't come to the end of my life lacking in any area, but feeling fulfilled and surrounded by people who love me. I believe I found a friend in Margaret, and I plan on visiting her again.

Alice Buckner
Greenville, Mississippi

Home or Facility?

Choosing home care or facility care is sometimes a hard decision to make, but in reality, it's up to the family and the doctor to make that decision. Home care is best, in some cases. For others, facility care is the best choice, depending on the amount and type of care your loved one needs. Those with terminal illnesses and those with certain illnesses who cannot care for themselves and have no family support should be in a facility. Keeping your loved one home does help them to cope better with their illness, and being around family and friends is always good for the mind and body. And keeping the mind satisfied and in a good place is always good for the healing process, especially with family involvement. But those who have to be in a facility still need the support of family and friends just as much or even more.

So, now is the time to weigh your options on which is better for everyone concerned. Home or facility? That's the big decision. The doctor and family must come together and make that decision.

In-Home Care Vs. Home Health Care

What are the differences between in-home care and home health care?

"There are several distinct differences between in-home care and home health care. In-home care includes all of the non-skilled services, such as bathing, preparing meals, dressing, companionship, light housekeeping, personal care assistance, hourly care, and live-in care.

In-home health care or skilled services include the following: nursing assistance, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and maintaining IV's.

In-Home Health Care services are performed by an RN and are usually twice to 3 times more expensive than in-home care. In-home caregivers are certified caregivers or CNAs trained in the field of in-home care. Having a certified caregiver of CNA is a great alternative to expensive facilities like nursing homes when the patient is not in need of nursing care, but just needs assistance with everyday activities."

(Source: Answers.com/What is the difference between home care and home health care?/Wiki User)

"Home Health Care allows you the comfort of being in your own home, as well as keeping your independence. You can customize the kind of home health care services you need. So, you may have home health care that is 24/7, or you may choose to take limited help at home if you feel you need help in just taking a bath or perhaps you need rehabilitative therapy. When you are registered at a nursing home, you are required to stay there, along with other patients. There is very little independence that you have. The nursing home schedules your activities and makes sure you are getting all the proper treatment you need."

(Source: Answers.com/What is the difference between a nursing home and home health care?)

"Noncustodial Home Health Care refers to the home health care performed in a patient's home, at one of his relative's home or a friend's home on an outpatient basis. It does not refer to care in a nursing home because that is called custodial care."

(Source: Answers.com/What is noncustodial care and custodial care?)

A home health care worker assists with the daily living activities of individuals. These activities may include assistance with getting out of bed, dressing, bathing, using the bathroom, and eating. They may also provide assistance with light housework, cleaning, cooking, and laundry.

(Source: Answers.com/What do home health care worker do?)

To sum it up, it comes down to where the needs of the patient can be cared for best. Just be sure to include family in the care plan. And family, be sure

to include yourself because your being there is very essential to the patient's health and recovery.

There are nursing homes, assisted living homes, adult day care centers and more that are available. These places work miracles for some of the clients and residents by helping them to get well and getting them back on their feet. Although, there are those who are bedridden who will need more care with bed baths, keeping them dry and clean, turning every two hours, and feedings. They also need visits from family and friends.

Keep in mind that if your loved one is bedridden and needs help with everything, please check on them often to make sure that they are being cared for properly. Don't just make phone calls, go into the facility as often as possible; that way, you will feel assured and your loved one will also feel assured that she/he is getting the best possible care and they will know that they are really loved.

Also, if your loved one is in a facility, be sure to check the medications that they are on, because sometimes, the doctor may have left one off the list accidentally or the facility may have the wrong list. It's just always a good idea to double-check because mistakes do happen and no one is willing to take the blame.

My mother was in a home for a few months and they were not giving her all the medicine that the doctor ordered. The doctor blamed it on the facility and the facility blamed it on the doctor, saying it was not on the list. After that, I blamed myself because I should have checked on the medicines that they were giving her.

Another point I would like you all to be aware of is that, if your loved one owns any property with their name on it, be sure to have it secured through a lawyer before signing those papers. Because your loved one could have been paying for the property for years; they may even own it now or they may have willed the property to someone in the family, howbeit, the facility may still have a

claim to it. This is especially true if your loved one is on Medicaid. So, be sure to contact a lawyer to have everything in order.

These homes and facilities are really lifesavers for some and a home for others because for some, there is no home to go to or no one to go home to. So, they are truly a huge blessing.

At times, these facilities are understaffed with too few nurse aids and too few nurses. This causes a problem. The nurse aides and the nurses have to take on more patients, meaning, they are not able to get to everybody in a timely manner. Then, when they do get to the patient, they feel rushed to take care of them. So, to move on to the next room, they rush to answer the call lights that need immediate assistance. Often, the nurse aids have twelve to fifteen patients each, and sometimes, more. But that's a problem you'll find with a lot of these facilities; that is, until the State Examiners come in. When the State Examiners come into a facility, there are more nurse aides and more nurses working the floor to make sure that everything goes well, books and paperwork are all in order, call lights are answered quickly and the aide gets the message that one of her rooms needs assistance. On that day, there are more than enough nurse aides and nurses to cover the floor. There are so many facilities in every state: nursing homes, daycare centers, assisted living facilities and more, all of which keep the State Examiners very busy.

Also, when your loved one is in the hospital, someone needs to be there as much as possible. This is to ensure that when the doctors make their rounds, someone will be there to talk to the doctor and listen to the doctor to get the diagnosis. Sometimes, when the patient is alone, especially if it's an older individual, they can't tell the doctor everything that's going on with them. Family presence is greatly needed for the patient, also for peace of mind and to be assured that they are getting the best possible care. If your loved one is in a facility and has to go to the hospital, inquire about when the patient is released, if the facility has a van or bus to pick the patient up from the hospital.

I use to be a Certified Nurse Assistant, and I truly loved it. I've worked at four nursing homes, and I loved taking care of people and helping them with their

needs and anything else that I could assist them with. I look forward to being able to go back to work and give back to my clients some of the love, support, prayers, and blessings that I have had since I have been off work for an illness. Thanks to the Lord that I am doing much much better! Prayers go up and blessings come down. That's a true statement.

"Certified Nurse Assistant or CNA helps patients or clients with their health care needs under the supervision of a Registered Nurse (RN) or a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). Liability and legality prevent CNA'S from performing certain procedures."

(Source: Disabled World/Certified Nursing Assistant Code of Ethics
Outline/2009/07/21 -/Rev. 2014/10/21)

Duties of a CNA may include gathering information such as vital signs, blood pressure, temperature, feeding, bathing patients and filling the role of a general caregiver for patients who do not need constant medical attention, but do need assistance with personal care. Also keeping record of certain types of private information.

"Roles of a CNA will vary based on where you work or live. CNA'S often work in a wide variety of settings ; nursing homes,adult daycare centers, personal homes, and assistant living facilities all require CNA'S to act as a helpful liaison between the RN or the LPN and the patient."

(Source: Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services/Utah State University/Nursing/Certified Nursing Assistant/CNA)

The healthcare field is continually expanding, and even though there are a lot of young people getting into it, there still seems to be a shortage. People are living longer than before, and some need assistance with daily living activities. The healthcare field is a very good field to get into, especially with the ever-increasing population and aging. The healthcare field will always be open with careers.

Prepping the Family for the Facility

The facility has been chosen. Now, it's time to do a walk-through to check the facility out. Ask questions about activities, physical therapy, and any question that you can think of pertaining to your loved one's care.

Talk to your loved one about the facility and reassure him or her that the family will be there every step of the way with regular visits and outings, if possible. This will be their home for a while, and it will take a little time for them to adjust to living there. Their bathing, waking up and eating schedules are all probably different from the schedules they followed at home. This will take a little getting used to. Also, meeting new people in the lounges, hallways, and in the dining rooms of their new facilities will be quite an experience. While sitting in the lounge, they get to watch television, read books, play games, and socialize with other residents. Even in the dining room, there will be communication eventually. After getting acquainted with some of the residents, your loved one may look at this as a little vacation away from home, especially with the family's visits and support.

Another great idea is to take some of the family's pictures from home, a favorite blanket, etc. to the facility to give the room more of a homey feel. Also, check with the nurse about the list of medications. Together, we can make the facility a good experience for your loved one.

The Hospital: When your loved one has to go to the hospital, be sure to be there as much as possible, or have a caregiver there to help care for them. This is because they sometimes don't have enough aides on duty to take care of all their patients' needs before meals are served or in a timely manner. I'm sure there are a lot of families who have had these experiences at the hospitals. My main point is to always have someone there, if at all possible, to be sure that they are getting the best possible care. And it's good for someone to be there when the doctors make their rounds so that you'll know the prognosis and the plan of care that the doctor has ordered. Making your loved one feel and see the love that you have for them works miracles; it supports mind and body wellness.

When they are able to go out for a while shopping, visiting someone, church, or just getting out of the home for a few hours is great. Being confined to the facility is not always good, especially if they are used to going out sometimes. Also, if they had a special friend, it would be nice for the friend to visit if possible. I know this seems to be a subject I can go on and on about—**FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**—whether in a facility, hospital, or at home—it's so very important. Do not take it for granted. Make sure that your loved one will be treated with respect and dignity, as you would treat them. As in any facility, there are the very good, the good and the not so good.

Do not take any expensive jewelry, watches or anything valuable to the facility. It's best to keep the valuables home and let the loved one wear them on his or her outing with family. The holidays are very good too. Some of the facilities have parties for the residents and serve special dinners for family and friends.

But if you have planned something else with your loved one for the holiday, by all means, do it. There are many other holidays where you'll be able to stay at the facility, participate in the celebrations and enjoy the day there with your loved one.

The Bedridden Patient

The bedridden patient will need more attention than the ambulatory patients because they will need bathing, mouth care, feeding, incontinence care, cleanups, turning every two hours, dressing, and getting them up and out of bed sometimes so they can go out of the room for a few hours. I know that this sounds like a lot of work, but it's all necessary to care for the patient with dignity and respect, just like you would like to be treated if the tables were turned.

I must say that most of the aides and nurses that I have worked with were pretty good. The problem is that there is a very limited time that they can stay in each patient's room. A benefit that your loved one will have if he or she is able to stay at his or her own home is that the caregiver will be able to give your loved one all the attention needed, plus more.

I told my three children/adults to be sure to read my book, plus others before putting me in a facility or a hospital. Also, to be sure to consult with a lawyer if that is going to be my home for a while. They promised. We just never know what's going to happen to us in this life, so it's best to have already discussed it with your family and have a plan set up.

Respect the Elderly Day

Did you know that some countries really do have a day to honor their elderly?

America: President Ronald Reagan declared August 21st 1988 to be the first National Senior Citizen's Day, so now, Senior Citizen's Day is on August 21st of every year. But, they should be honored daily throughout the year, and on that day (August 21st), we should do something extra for them.

Our elderly are full of wisdom and knowledge. They can tell you about your family's history, who's who on the family tree, special (forgotten) moments and so so much more.

Our elderly truly should be loved, honored, cared for and respected every day. China actually has a law requiring its citizens to respect the elderly. The elderly in China can sue their grown children for emotional and financial support. Companies are also required to give workers time off to visit their parents.

Special Thanks

A very special thanks to every individual who participated in this assignment! You may not realize this, but your act of love and selflessness will not go unrewarded!

Authors		
Sylvia Alves	Danielle Farmer	Sophia Ferguson
Shalondria Ficklin	Monica Jones	Tynisha Lewis
Yashmee Reed	Melissa Rosado	Brittany Yokely

Guest Authors	
*Alice Buckner	Marina Escobar
Erica Figueroa	Pearlisha Gibbs
Shanice Griffin	Tiffani Koonce
Candida Rosado	Gabrielle Yokely