Sean Gillespie

Reflection Paper

 My experience over the past several weeks at the Hallmark Assisted Living facility have been nothing short of inspiring. I worked one on one with a ever so sweet elderly women named Myrtle Kaplan. In our time together I instructed her on the inner workings of the computer and shared a multitude of conversations spanning the spectrum; nothing was taboo. The experience both met my expectation and completely surprised me. The general idea of what we were doing was basic; I was the teacher, and she, my student. We each filled our roles despite her advantage in age, and apparently wisdom. The attitudes of each of us going in were excitement and interest. This allowed us to fall into our roles and really get to work.

 However, the part of the experience that surprised me and remains what I will take away from this class is not the lessons themselves, but the interactions. Myrtle and I are very similar people. We are both observers and inquirers. To put to people of this personality type, with over 70 years in between them, and completely different life experiences is a social experiment in and of itself. She is a very bright woman and is well aware of the world around her. While I am not as well versed in recent history, she lived it, experiencing every hill and valley for the last 93 years. When it comes to modern technology and events I am more than capable of discussing various topics. The bottom line, the knowledge we did not share we taught to each other, and the knowledge we did share, well that became either an in-depth discussion or a heated debate.

 Our lessons began as instruction on her basic needs for Internet use. This was mainly the ability to access book reviews, because she is involved in the book club at Hallmark, and is in charge of selecting the books for the members to read. She was also interested in the research capabilities of the World Wide Web. As the lessons progressed she became aware of the communication aspect of the Internet. She is very family oriented and remains close with a large group of friends, both in and out of her living facility. For this we set up an email account and practiced sending emails to relatives and old friends.

 Each week Myrtle would be equipped with a list of research topics to “Google”, an email she wished to send, and a number of books and artists to read up on. We learned together. Once the topic was picked we would “surf the web” as a team, finding and researching what we found interesting at the time. This was very exciting for her because it showed the real power of the Internet, and the quality that makes it an international bank of information. These research and explorative bouts sometimes lasted up to an hour, pulling off each other’s interests and adding our own touch to the topics.

 Now that our sessions have come to an end, the memory of our experiences is dwelling in the back of my mind. I feel a void, whether it be a need to teach and help someone, or more. It could be the student in me missing her insight, and perspective of modern technology and everything else for that matter. It could even be the absence of a relationship like ours. Nearly indescribable, but in a sense, simplistic. There were no barriers, no fear of violating verbal discretion. She taught me a lesson I will never forget. For the first time in my life someone spoke freely, and not about trivial topics, but about serious, unspeakable fears and joys. Death, regret, loss, longing. What is it we enjoy most? What do we do when we can no longer enjoy it? I spoke first hand with someone who knows the answer to these questions and remains extremely positive and light hearted. My biggest fear has always been finding the answers to my deepest questions, and not being able to handle them. Myrtle taught me, “the negatives are a part of life, and a small part in comparrison”. My only hope is that I was able to help her half as much as she helped me.