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CAVE

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Volunteer Reflection 2 - Senior Assistance

During the middle of this Spring 2020 semester, our nation was struck with the novel coronavirus, resulting in a “shelter-in-place” law to be enforced. Because of the severity of this virus and the cancellation of face-to-face classes, I decided to go back home to San Francisco to help out my parents. Both of my parents are 61 years old, so I wanted to contain the risk of them catching the disease as much as I could. Fortunately, my parents have been able to stay wise and healthy during this difficult time. Some, however, are less fortunate.

My father got a call one morning from a long-time friend of his, Gene, explaining his deep concerns over his father’s ill condition after falling down in the kitchen of his apartment. His real concern is that he obviously needed to look after his father, but was having lots of problems of his own at home and at work. With no services being available to Gene’s father from the government, I figured that this would be a great opportunity to help someone in need. I have been eager to expand my volunteer experiences and working with the elderly has always been on my list as a potential career path. I went to my father and told him that I would like to help, so he gave me Gene’s phone number and we discussed some possible ways as to how I can help him during this hectic time and provide for the needs of his bed-ridden father of 89 years.

After agreeing on a loose schedule, Gene and I agreed that I could help out during the weekdays, checking in on him periodically between 10 A.M. and 3 P.M., while Gene went to work. Come that first Monday, I finally drove over a few miles to the other side of San Francisco to meet his father, Mikhail (Or Michael in English). Right away, Mikhail and I got along, discussing minor topics like differences and similarities between our families and places of origin. After getting to know each other for about an hour, he asked if I could make him a small meal to eat as his lunch time was approaching. I was able to make a healthy oatmeal snack and serve it with some soup and soft bread that his son had delivered to him earlier. After finishing his meal he said he would lay down and watch TV, maybe nap for a while, at which time we agreed that I would come back after about two hours. Later on in the afternoon, I came back and cleaned up a little bit around his kitchen and living area, dusting and vacuuming what I could, and helped him get around from his bedroom to the bathroom and back. After a short while, his son Gene came directly from work and we had just gone over how his father was and his condition. This was basically the routine for the first week.

After a few weeks had gone by, Gene had more issues to attend to at work than he originally intended on due to the coronavirus epidemic, so he asked if I could put in a couple more hours a

few days a week and possibly get some groceries for his father. This was surely not a problem for me as I am fortunate enough to have my own car. The following day I went to go check up on Mikhail in the morning and asked what he would like for me to bring him. We made a shopping list and I went out to a couple of super markets to shop while he took his afternoon nap. This became a weekly task but a very helpful one in that it saved Gene a huge amount of time, considering the crazy waiting lines during the epidemic.

Mikhail would regularly talk about his childhood days growing up in Soviet-era Russia, just like my ancestors, comparing his experiences to mine. It was honestly really fascinating learning about the adversities that his generation had to face in the midst of various wars. But we also discussed philosophies on life, relationships, parents and children, etc. It was nice spending a couple of months getting to know someone with such a rich and vivid memory of their past and really appreciating the lessons that they pass on. During this time I took care of Mikhail's mail, groceries, house cleaning, and any technical problems he had with his television or phone system. The novel coronavirus epidemic has really limited his ability to go out and do the things that he regularly liked to do. For an 89-year-old man, Mikhail was in excellent condition as he constantly advocated to me how important it is to walk everyday. Although he wasn't able to go outside of his apartment complex, I was at least able to take him on walks through the hallways and down to the lobby and back up, which he really appreciated.

After about the 6th week of volunteering/working with Mikhail, his son Gene came over on a Friday to see his father and explained that he had finally gotten laid-off from his job, so he would be able to visit his father more often. With that being said, we agreed that I would come by once a week to take Mikhail out for a walk and spend some time with him, but otherwise I would remain on-call during my stay here in San Francisco. Although I am still volunteering, I've had an overall wonderful experience so far in working with the senior population. I saw this as an opportunity to provide assistance to one of the many people in need during this time, but I knew that I had to start on a local level to make the progress. My volunteering experience was forcibly cut short due to the coronavirus epidemic, but I am happy to have learned about all the other great volunteering opportunities that I can take advantage of outside of school and really make an impact.