

SHE NEEDS LOVE

I was not a very impressive teenager and spent little time serving others. During this time my mother invited me to come with her to visit my great-aunt at a nursing home.

My cousin and her daughter Stephanie accompanied us on this visit. Stephanie was seven or eight years old. As we walked into the nursing home, she waved at everyone she saw. They lit up as if she were handing out sunshine and rainbows. I, on the other hand, avoided eye contact.

When we entered the room that my great-aunt shared with another elderly woman, I did my best to disappear into the background. Stephanie, however, jumped onto my aunt's bed and began to regale her with stories.

I noticed something about this room. On my aunt's side were signs of love and family. Pictures and crayon drawings hung on the wall, and flowers adorned a nightstand. The other side of the room was sterile and bare. There were no signs of any visitors; no cards or pictures hung on the wall.

My aunt's roommate sat alone in a wheelchair and did not acknowledge our presence. She was humming a tune and tapping the arms of her wheelchair, which made me uncomfortable.

Stephanie tugged on her mother's arm and asked, "Mommy, what's the matter with that lady?" Stephanie's mother leaned down and whispered, "She needs love." I was not prepared

for what happened next.

Without hesitation, Stephanie ran over and jumped into the woman's lap. She then began to tell her stories and ask all kinds of questions. The woman did not answer. Instead, tears ran down her face as she embraced Stephanie. For the next several minutes, Stephanie sat in her lap, stroking her hair and kissing her cheek.

I had never witnessed this type of unselfish love before, and I tried to hide my tears. Later, as we drove away from the nursing home, I marveled at how young Stephanie could be so selfless and so full of love and compassion for a complete stranger.

Eventually I turned my life around and served a full-time mission. While I served, Stephanie wrote me cute letters that included drawings just like the ones in my aunt's room in the nursing home.

Before I returned home, I received the devastating news that an illness had claimed Stephanie's life. I still weep that her light went out so soon, but I remain grateful for her example. She taught me what service truly is.

We do not ever have to wonder how or if we should serve. If our hearts are in the right place, then service will become a part of who we are, not just what we do. ■

Jay McFarland, Utah, USA

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