

In 2005, Hurricane Wilma struck in south Florida. I can remember every detail of the destructive storm as if it ~~was-were~~ yesterday. I was young and huddled with family in the innermost bathroom of the house. In the dark, we could hear the howling winds and the crashing of the rain as it hit our house. The shutters that were meant to protect us rattled and fought against the wind, but we could hear them as they were plucked off the windows one at a time. When the storm had finally passed and we emerged into the light of the outdoors, we were able to see all of the devastation. I was surprised to see our six-foot tall, solid wood fence had been torn down.

As a young child, it was frightening to see such devastation and I could ~~n't~~ imagine that any good could come of this. Little did I know, that the fence that had been erected to keep us protected, had ~~really~~ been standing in the way of a meaningful and impactful relationship.

With the big wooden barrier gone, I could now see the house behind us. ~~In that house was~~ a widow named Alberta ~~lived there~~. She ~~had~~ lived alone for years with no one but a yellow lab named Rocky. One day, ~~across the yard~~ she gave me a smile and a wave. I began to ~~go and~~ visit her after school, and while I was there, I ~~would~~ help her with whatever she needed. I ~~would~~ take out the trash, clean out the refrigerator, and even walk ~~the dog~~ Rocky. When I was older, I ~~would~~ mow her lawn or help her get holiday decorations from the attic. Anything that Alberta needed help with, I was willing to do. She joyfully called herself my “Jewish Grandma,” ~~and~~ introduced me to Jewish traditions, and ~~would~~ share meals with me. Alberta told me that it was hard to eat alone since her husband had passed, and my visits eased her loneliness.

Over the years, I ~~witnessed~~ saw Alberta age and become frail with Parkinson's. She needed more than an occasional social visit and the lawn mowed. Now in high school, I did ~~n't~~ have as much time to spend with her and to meet her increasing needs. Eventually, Alberta ended up in the hospital and subsequently passed away. I was left with an empty feeling. My “Jewish Grandma” was gone.

While I was staring out at the house I used to visit, it dawned on me that there must be other older adults, living alone, ~~whethat~~ could use a ~~helpful~~ helping hand and companionship. I thought of my 85-year-old grandmother living alone in Puerto Rico. I thought of all of the elderly people at the senior center where I volunteer. They all have one thing in common: they just need a little help. They don't need full time care; they don't need or want to leave their homes. They just need an “adopted” grandchild, like me.

Statistics indicate that there are many elderly living alone. Many are in homes with an extra bedroom and bathroom that they don't use or need. Additionally, there are young people who need places to live that are reasonably priced. I want to create a service that links the two. In exchange for low or no-cost housing, the young adult would agree to assist the elderly person with specific tasks. ~~They~~ could ~~include range from~~ running errands, ~~to~~ walking the dog, ~~to~~ providing transportation to the doctor, or just carrying heavy packages in from the car. Linking the generations ~~would~~ have value beyond low rent and errands completed. Wisdom from a life lived ~~would~~ be shared with a younger generation while the despair and loneliness of aging alone ~~would~~ be minimized.

Equipped with my passion to help others and my ability to be a problem-solver, tearing down any barriers won't take a hurricane. It will only take me.

General comments: I like this essay a lot, but the opening could be improved from “pretty good” to “nearly dynamite” in terms of hooking the reader: There's a rich vein of drama there waiting to be mined. Also, I contracted some of your pronoun/verb combos to make the piece sound more conversational.

Comment [WPC1]: This is “dry.” The piece would be better if you were to get to this idea some other way. Maybe “Even from my limited perspective, I know that there are many elderly who are living alone” and it might flow better if it were to be joined to the next sentence, as in “living alone, and many of them...”

Here are the good things I noticed in your essay.

You...

1		opened your essay with words that will catch the reader's attention, draw a reader forward
2	x	focused on <i>your</i> feelings
3		wrote in a "conversational" manner
4	x	used a specific and personal incident/moment to illustrate your general point
5	x	talked about how what happened changed you
6	x	demonstrated perspective & ability to see things as others might – a sign of growing maturity
7		demonstrated a love for learning
8		conveyed your sense of intellectual curiosity about your immediate and broader world
9		used humor effectively
10	x	responded appropriately to the essay prompt
11	x	used figurative language that made your writing more vivid
12	x	relied on an idea thread that tied the essay together
13	x	avoided generalizations about others, keeping yourself in the mirror
14	x	didn't overuse superlatives
15		used adjectives to make your nouns more revealing
16		employed sentences of varied lengths to imitate a conversational style

Here are things you could improve upon to make your essay better.

You could...

1	x	create an opening more likely to catch the reader's attention, draw a reader forward
2		talk only about how <i>you</i> feel and not about how "people in general" or "one" feels
3		use a specific, personal incident/moment to illustrate your general point, then discuss that point
4	x	write your essay in a more "conversational" manner
5		Perhaps do more to explain how you were changed by what happened
6		add something that would convey a sense of...
7		add something that would convey the idea that...
8		avoid the topics of death, divorce, disease
9		draw your response closer to the actual essay prompt – do you understand the task?
10		choose an idea thread that ties together your essay
11		employ more and varied adjectives to power your nouns
12		use sentences of varied lengths to imitate a more conversational style
13		Be more aware of run-on sentences that contain too many thoughts. How would you <i>speak</i> it?
14		Avoid really common essay openers that read something like these: <i>From a young age I have (always) been (interested in/fascinated by)...</i> <i>For as long as I can remember I have...</i> <i>I have always been interested in...</i> <i>Throughout my life I have always enjoyed...</i> <i>Reflecting on my educational experiences...</i> <i>Academically, I have always been...</i> <i>I have always wanted to pursue a career in...</i> <i>I have always been passionate about...</i>