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On a beautiful Saturday afternoon, I wait at the bus stop for number five, Happy Hallow, to come around. I have an appointment with Mr. Clarence and Mrs. Thelma Kidd at the Indiana Veterans' Home. Finally, after waiting thirty minutes, I decide to call a friend and have them drive me there. I hope the interview will go more smoothly than the transportation. Finally, we turn onto the steep winding drive that is the entrance to the Veterans' Home. It is truly a beautiful place. There are matching white grave stones organized into many rows. In the center of these graves, there is a pond with a fountain and ducks.

At last, I walk through the automatic doors of Mitchell, enter the wide (wheelchair accessible) elevator, and push the button for the third floor. I am aware this seems lazy, but for access to the stairs, you must have a special code. This code is mainly given just to the faculty, and I assume this is for the residents safety. After all, if someone their age falls, it could be deadly.

As the elevator door opens, I see what little hustle and bustle takes place in a veterans' home. There are residents sitting around a table, watching television and socializing. Many have small bags of Doritos and milk. I notice one resident playing solitaire with a bell on his TV tray and an IV in his arm. There are flags and patriotic decorations throughout the building. Also, there are many nurses and some security guards scattered throughout the floor.

I walk down the hall to the very last room, where the door is slightly cracked. I knock and slowly push the door open, peeking my head inside. It is kind of dark, the blinds are shut but the television is on. They are on the right of me, both in reclining, cozy looking chairs. Mrs. Thelma Kidd is napping, and Mr. Clarence is watching television. He notices my entrance, turns off the television, and immediately turns to welcome me.

Mr. Clarence is short, and looks clean cut with his khaki slacks and button down, light yellow shirt. Being the gentleman that he is, he shakes my hand after standing up and offering me his chair. However, I politely decline the offer and pull up a wooden chair that was sitting at a table against the wall. I take a seat as Mr. Clarence softly awakens Mrs. Thelma Kidd, and tells her, rather loudly, “the young lady who is interviewing us is here.” Using his body, he angles her cozy, rose patterned chair, so it is facing me.

She is a sweet looking woman who gives me a sleepy, warm smile. She is wearing an ivory colored sweater, gold shoes, and pearls. On her legs, there is a light peach, crocheted blanket, and she winks at me through large pink framed glasses. I notice both of them are wearing hearing aids. One thing I did not expect to see in their room was a full bed.

Every other room I had passed down the hall had two twin beds with a retractable privacy screen. When I ask about this peculiarity, Mr. Clarence informs me that they are married. Clarence and Thelma had met a couple of years back, when his nephew married her granddaughter. She had been divorced, and his wife had passed away long before.

They are in their fifth year of marriage and are still going strong. After hearing this, I see how very much in love they truly are.

While rubbing her arm, he informs me that Thelma will not be doing much talking because she is hard of hearing. With that he gives her a wink, and she just smiles. It is obvious I find their marriage fascinating and he seemingly tries to shock me more. He tells me that she is 101 and he is 98. Mr. Clarence then tells me how his first wife had actually got him dismissed from the army. He enlisted to fight in World War II when he was 35, and was sent to Camp Aderbury, then moved to Chicago (“skunky valley”), where he served for 17 months. Although he would have served longer, he was given an honorable discharge so he was able to be with his sick wife when she had gotten worse. She died shortly after his dismissal.

Mr. Clarence ensures me that he is glad he enlisted though. He sounds genuine when he claims, “I have enjoyed me life.” Mr. Clarence tells me the hardest part was missing his daughters, and if his wife hadn’t been so sick, it wouldn’t have been so bad.

Being inspired to enlist by his younger brother, Mr. Clarence decided to do the same. His brother enlisted before him, spent a lot more time in service, and was even stationed in Italy. As he proceeds to tell me about his younger brother, and three younger sisters, his love for them is apparent. While talking about his parents, he mentions a “punishing rod,” or a stick from the tree outside the kitchen door. He explains that they were strict, but he is glad for it.

Then, Mrs. Thelma Kidd adjusts her crocheted blanket, causing Mr. Clarence to remember and important event. By informing me that they are moving rooms shortly

because theirs is too cold, it caused me to note the temperature. However, I probably did not notice it because it isn't uncomfortable to me.

By apologizing for the mess because of the planned move, I notice the little details of the room. The room looks a lot like any room you could find in any elderly persons home. The musty smelling room has a large bed, and a table with two chairs. On the table, there are framed pictures of smiling people, I assume to be their relatives or friends. Two recliners sit in the corner of the room, facing the television with the VCR. In the opposite corner, there is a dresser, with various canes leaning up against its side. The overhead, fluorescent light is off, causing the room to have a sleepy feeling.

Although, there are some characteristics that distinguish this room from one you would see in a typical house. For example, there is a soft hum from a few machines that are used for health purposes in the room. Also, there are numerous outlets situated half way up the wall, and there is a box of plastic gloves hanging near the television. After assuring Clarence that my dorm room is much more of a mess, he begins describing a typical day for his wife and himself.

Around six in the morning, the couple naturally get up. They get breakfast on their floor in the TV/dining lounge. Mr. Clarence mentions that their food is too dry, but they give them what they think they should have. After one of their usual nurses check on them and get them whatever they need, they usually socialize for a while before returning to their room.

Upon entering their room, they will find that since they have left, someone has come in, made their bed, and cleaned whatever else looked dirty. Watching television

usually causes them to fall asleep, and they wake up again to go to lunch. If they want, they can have it brought to their rooms, but usually they like to eat with all of their friends they have made in the home.

After finishing their lunches, Mr. Clarence and Mrs. Thelma Kidd like to take walks. They realize exercising is important, and try to get outside after lunch when the weather is warmest.

When I ask if they play bingo at all, Mr. Clarence replies, “No, because my eyes are bad and she’s hard of hearing.” However, he is quick to add that they participate in some of the many activities provided by the veterans’ home. “She likes to do the puzzles, and we both really enjoy the live music provided every other week in the lounge,” he adds excitedly.

Telling me about his friends, Mr. Clarence also talks about the other activities offered there. “Some of my friends have a lot of fun at the Euchre Parties, and I know a lot of them that play bingo every night they have it,” Mr. Clarence beams. He quickly adds that another one of his favorite hobbies includes talking about “Gods plan.” Mr. Clarence is obviously proud when he tells me that he used to teach Sunday school, and was the head of the mens fellowship at his church.

While describing his monthly trips to two nursing homes, I learned that he would go every Thursday for eleven years, after he was discharged from the army. During these visits, he would sing, read scriptures, and have prayer.

Unfortunately, Mr. Clarence and his wife are unable to attend the “All Faith Chapel,” located just outside their building. “She can’t understand the minister, and I can

still talk with my friends and others about God,” Mr. Clarence adds.

After their daily walk, they usually retreat back to their room and rest until dinner at 4:30. However, today is different because I am here interviewing them. When he tells me that dinner is at 4:30, it is apparent that it is something they look forward to. After dinner, they usually try and talk to their children and grandchildren, watch television, and get ready for bed. For them, it is an early night, and they are in bed by nine. One of their nurses will also check on them and get them whatever they need before they get their rest.

Rising to leave, I thank them for sharing their lives with me and offering me their time, and I promise to stop by and say hello the next time I am there. Mrs. Thelma Kidd stays reclined and softly shakes my hand while giving me a warm smile. Mr. Clarence walks over to the door while I am shaking his wife’s hand, and opens it for me. As I am leaving he shakes my hand and thanks me for stopping by. As I walk back down the hallway, I hear Clarence loudly say, “Well Thelma, that was a nice young lady.”

I notice I feel as if I know every veteran I see a little more than I did before. I walk outside to the bus stop and wait for the bus to come with a woman who is visiting her brother. They tell me that there is a wedding going on in the “All Faith Chapel,” and that it has been going on for a long while now. After my “Happy Hallow” finally arrives, as we begin descending down the winding drive, I hear the music being played by the bells outside and decide the wedding is finally over.

WORKS CITED

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