

Chelsea Rasnake, a senior at Council High School, recently had her work published in a regional newspaper. As part of a class project for Mrs. Amy Presley's Dual Enrollment English 12 class, Chelsea wrote a short story called "Sharing Memories is a Most Precious Gift." She then entered her story into the Bristol Herald Courier's 25th Annual Christmas Story Contest. Chelsea's story was picked among several dozen entries to win the Teen Writer category. Her story was published in the Christmas Day edition of the Bristol Herald Courier, and she was also the recipient of a \$50 prize.

Congratulations to Chelsea!

The story begins on page 2.

Chelsea Rasnake

Mrs. Presley

Council, DE English 12

2 December 2016

Where I am from neighbors come together and pull each other through when they are fighting a battle and can't get through on their own. I never realized just how strong our town was though until the "Christmas" of 2014, when sweet Mrs. Caroline needed us more than ever.

I was still in high school and was very busy those days juggling with school and sports, I didn't possibly have the time to worry about anyone else. Until November 2, 2014 when I spotted Mrs. Caroline struggling with getting her groceries in into her car, so I went and helped. "Mrs. Caroline, can I help you?" I asked politely.

"Oh dear, that would be lovely, it seems that I just can't get these heavy bags lifted."

I never really had a conversation with Mrs. Caroline just a hello here and how are you there.

She was probably the oldest lady in Plum Creek, and could still outwork over half of the people in town. She was short, with gray hair she kept tied into a tight bun, wore dresses that never revealed her ankles, she was very spontaneous though. Mrs. Caroline is a God fearing woman, and you don't dare argue with that little lady unless you want her to spit the firing truth at you.

"Thank you, dear. It's hard for me do the things I was once able to do." Mrs. Caroline was almost in tears from that statement.

"Anytime. Mrs. Caroline, may I ask you something? Do you think it would be okay if I came by your house for a visit one day?"

"Dear, oh dear! You are welcome to my home anytime you would like!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Caroline!" I then left and thought about that dear old lady my entire way home. Mrs. Caroline is an old lady, and I am scared she might end up hurt all by herself, so I decided that I should stop by and check up on her from time to time. So, the next day I decided to go see her after class, I walked up the pathway and knocked on her door. After standing there for five

minutes I decided she wasn't home, and went to leave when I noticed that the door was open. I let myself in and searched for Mrs. Caroline, I found her sitting at her dining room table just looking out the window.

"Mrs. Caroline, are you okay?" I asked quietly so I wouldn't frighten her.

"Oh, dear I never realized I had company. Please come sit, I will put some tea on. Um, may I ask who you are?" she had a puzzled look on her face, and I wondered if she just didn't remember my name from yesterday.

"I'm Rebecca, I helped you with loading your groceries in your car yesterday."

"Oh, you must be mistaken, I went to the doctor yesterday, I have plenty of groceries." she still held that puzzled look on her face. I stayed for a few more minutes, and then left so Mrs. Caroline could rest. She didn't remember me at all, she didn't even remember going to the store.

About a week went by before I seen Mrs. Caroline again, and she remembered me just like it was yesterday.

"Mrs. Caroline, do you remember me coming to your house a few weeks back?"

"Oh yes dear! We drank tea and I had a lovely time, you need to come by more often."

After going home that day I was confused, and didn't know what was going on. I went to my mom and asked her all about Mrs. Caroline.

"Mom, is she sick? She couldn't remember me one day, and then remember everything the next." I asked her hoping to get some answers since she is dating the town doctor.

"No honey, I don't reckon so. She's old, I forget things from time to time."

Mom was right, she's an old little lady, she might just be forgetting things.

The next few days I was so busy with classes that I nearly forgot about Mrs. Caroline forgetting. Until I was coming home and seen her standing in the middle of the road, I ran to her immediately.

“Mrs. Caroline! Mrs. Caroline!” I was screaming so loud the whole street could hear me. I was halfway to her when out of nowhere a car rounds the turn going fast, and Mrs. Caroline hadn’t budged.

“Mrs. Caroline, watch out!” I sprinted to her and leaped, pushing her out of the way. The car had stopped and both Mrs. Caroline and I were curled up on the road. Everyone came rushing to help, and after making sure she was okay, I walked her home.

“Mrs. Caroline, what happened today?”

“I, um, I forgot where I was. Rebecca dear, I am forgetting everything. I have Alzheimer’s and oh dear I just forget things. Darling, I haven’t spoken a word of this to anyone, but I feel I need to tell you. I haven’t got much longer. I will soon forget everything and then one day soon I won’t be here anymore.” she spoke with such a soft tone, like an angel, but she began to cry.

“Oh Mrs. Caroline, why haven’t you told anyone? Nobody would say anything awful.”

“Dear, I didn’t want them treating me different, and I get emotional talking about it. I’m afraid by the time Christmas gets here I won’t remember anything. Oh, that’s my favorite time of the year.” She started to stare out her window at the big pine tree towering over her house.

I soon left and went to my mother telling her everything. That’s when I had the idea, I would speed up Christmas, so Mrs. Caroline could enjoy her favorite time of the year. I went from house to house and told the neighbors my idea, but the time it was dark I had already went to everyone in Plum Creek, and they had agreed to help me with my plan.

The next morning, we all started decorating, and come night fall the entire street would be glowing with lights. Mrs. Caroline would love the lights, and I will go down with her to the town square and show her the gazebo decked out with lights, and tassels. The pines on the street will be decorated. Plum Creek is going to have an early Christmas for the ending memories of one of the main people of Plum Creek.

Later that evening, right before night fall, I ran over to Mrs. Caroline's and asked her to take a walk with me to the town square. We walked until we arrived to the gazebo, right at dark, and then the lights are on!

"Oh my, oh my, dear did you do this?" she asked with a beautiful sparkle in her eyes.

"Well, you said Christmas was your favorite, and right now you still have a memory, so when you go to bed tonight you can remember this."

"Oh dear, Rebecca, I love it. You treat me so well; you are just like the granddaughter I have always dreamed of. Oh dear, you are such a blessing from God."

"No, Mrs. Caroline, God sent you to me." I had to hold back the tears as I told Mrs. Caroline this.

Later that week I barely got to see Mrs. Caroline, and I decided that since the whole town of Plum Creek is moving up Christmas for Mrs. Caroline, I had to get her presents. So I went shopping! I bought her simple little things like blankets and socks, but I knew she would appreciate them. On my way home I stopped by to see her, I knocked and no one answered, so I let myself in. I walked into the kitchen and there she was, passed out on the floor, so I immediately called for help.

Mrs. Caroline was rushed to the hospital and I stayed by her side the entire time. The doctors came and went but still didn't have any news, by the second day there was still nothing. I was aggravated, and helpless. Finally, that night we received the news that Mrs. Caroline's memory was fading faster than we thought. She barely even remember things from yesterday or 40 years ago. She still needed Christmas, even if it was her last memory.

Mrs. Caroline was admitted to a room, and I finally went home to get some rest. Instead of going home though, I went to all the neighbors to ask a big favor.

"Rebecca! Oh am I so glad to see you!" exclaimed Mrs. Johnson as she opened the door.

"I was wondering if you could help me. Mrs. Caroline is really sick as most of the town knows, but now it's worse. Her memory is quickly fading, and she still needs Christmas."

“Honey, it’s November.” she had this sad look in her eyes, but still held a cheerful face.

“I know, but by December Mrs. Caroline probably won’t know what Christmas is. Please can you help me. I need the whole town of Plum Creek to help out. We can have our own Christmas with her. Her last memory of Christmas, Mrs. Johnson, please.” I was nearly in tears just thinking about it.

“Okay, okay. What do I need to do?” Mrs. Johnson said with the biggest smile on her face.

Later that day the whole town got together and decorated everything. We were bringing Christmas to Mrs. Caroline, her house was decorated, the streets, our neighbors houses, everything. When my mom went to pick up Mrs. Caroline from the hospital the next evening, we all waited in front of her house to surprise her. Finally, they pulled into the driveway, and when Mrs. Caroline got out she seen it all. Walking up her driveway she seemed younger, she would walk so far and then stop and look around in amazement, like a child with so much joy in her eyes. She made her way over to me, smiling from ear to ear.

“You are the one in charge of this, I already know.” she says smiling at me.

“Yes ma’am. I thought you might would like some Christmas in your life.”

“Dear, I love it almost as much as I love you.” She hugged me and then we went to talk to the neighbors.

We all went in and had our own celebration of Christmas at Mrs. Caroline’s house. We all sang Christmas Carols while we all helped Mrs. Caroline decorate her tree. Laughing, and telling memories of the days past, we all listened to what Mrs. Caroline had to say, when finally, at the end of the night she spoke words of wisdom way beyond my years.

“Thank you everyone. This is so great, and I know you all have such great hearts for this, but if this is one of the only days in the near future that I can remember I am glad you all are in it. I ask everyone tonight though, go home and kiss your children and take a second to remember every detail about it. Go and look at pictures because sometimes those are a saving grace.

Don't ever want to forget, always try to remember, and always love someone special to you and you let them know it. I love you all, and thank you again."

Everyone was quiet but they understood exactly what Mrs. Caroline was saying. Even if she was to forget this Christmas, we would all still be able to remember it, we would be the one's keeping her memory alive. She told us her stories tonight not to just tell us, but to keep them alive.

"Mrs. Caroline, I'm heading out, do you need anything before I go?"

"No dear, but thank you. Thank you for everything, I would have never been able to get up and go if it wasn't for you, you know. You keep me going, and I love you dearly." She spoke in a soft, comforting voice just like an angel.

The next day came and I was going to go into town and do some real Christmas shopping, and I was going to take Mrs. Caroline with me. I went over to her house and knocked, she didn't answer but I just let myself in. I walked in and hollered for Mrs. Caroline, but nothing. After a few times I began to worry, maybe she forgot where she was and walked out again. I walked to every room in her house until I got to her bedroom. There she was, still asleep in bed, I walked over to look at her when I noticed she wasn't breathing. I called help, but it was already too late. Mrs. Caroline had passed peacefully in her sleep. She had her Christmas memory of that night, and every other one she told to us. She took her memories with her and I took my memories of her in my heart.

Word Count: 2,166