

**“Reflect on how small gestures can create a lasting impact on people and communities.”**

This question right here is quite a simple one, you may think, but it really isn't. Sometimes holding the door for others or lending a hand to those who need it might seem easy or just something that makes you feel good about yourself. Really what this question is asking is how did you change someone's day by doing something effortless that can really alter someone else's mood and happiness.

I am a part of a girl scout troop located in Rumson, New Jersey. I started with the troop when I was only 7 years old and have evolved from a Daisy, to a Brownie and now Girl Scout. Over the past two years we definitely have focused more on community service, giving back to the community and our town, but never focused on one particular person. During an event last year, we were at a senior citizen home in local Red Bank. After I left that place something shifted in my heart. This one little lady out of many caught my attention. I walked over and started to talk to her. Her name was Maria and she had a heart of gold, always hugging me, kissing my cheek or doing anything to make me smile. We had previously brought cookies and she was extremely grateful for this simple act of kindness. I gave her my Santa hat that I was wearing and when it was time to go she hugged me close and whispered in my ear, “Promise me you will come back.” Of course I told her. I will definitely come back to see you, and I did. Maria might have forgotten about me, but she will never forget the girl who hugged her and kissed her, gave her a Santa hat and stickers and the girl who didn't break a promise. It wasn't about the promise that made me go

back, it was the pure joy she gave me when I came and how her eyes lit up whenever I got to spend time with her.

Truthfully, I didn't even want to go to this event because I could have been hanging out with friends after school or on my phone, but I am so grateful that I decided to. Maria truly changed me and helped me realize how everyone could use a hug or a friend to talk to. I came back in March and played bingo with her and we have a Mother's Day plan in May for me to paint her nails, and use the face mask that she won in bingo and have a mini spa day!

I know that Maria always looks forward to me coming and I could not picture never meeting her. I was always curious when I visited her if she had any family at all that came to visit her. I didn't want to ask and make her feel uncomfortable, but I wondered if she thought of me as her friend. Maria and I are not related, but by me coming and visiting her when she needed someone to talk to or she felt down, lifted her spirit and gave her something to look forward to. One time when I saw her she mentioned to me that she disliked being in the senior home, but when I came it made her happy. When we scheduled the next time I would come and see her face, it gave both her and I a smile. The reason I keep going back is not just for Maria, it's how I feel when I am there and even after I leave. We started going there to bring younger faces and smiles to these older people, but now it's me who is smiling. This tiny act in the beginning formed a friendship and an everlasting bond.