

Turner Intergenerational Essay Contest
Over 18 - 1st Place
Emily Levin

As I reminisce on my time at the Intergenerational Learning Center and the impacts it had on my life, I can not simply pinpoint specific instances that directly altered my view of the world, sparked inspiration, or strengthened my confidence. The Mount didn't spark small isolated changes in who I am but rather fundamentally shaped who I am, a more powerful reality. My time from the baby room to the space lab shaped me, the lessons I learned are woven into who I am.

In life, the only constants are aging and death. These realities bear heavy on society and are a point for continued wrestling throughout life. On December 5th, 2005, as my father signed my name into the check-in book, my Grandfather's name was recited over the speaker, stating his passing the previous day at the Mount's skilled nursing facility. Out of context, your preschool announcing that your grandfather has passed sounds very concerning, but in that environment, I believe it was healing to my 4-year-old self trying to understand what exactly death is. I remember feeling a strange sense of contentment that my grandfather took his last breaths at the Mount. Being content may seem like the exact opposite feeling a 4-year-old should have towards their grandfather's death, however, I had seen the care and love the residents received and was comforted that my grandfather had spent his final moments in their hands. This moment had such a deep impact on myself, that it is one of the few vivid memories I hold from my childhood. I believe this experience speaks to how the Intergenerational Learning Center fostered an environment that helped me to develop a comfort level that allowed me to wrestle with heavy topics such as death.

The Intergenerational Learning Center facilitated interaction with individuals on the opposite end of the age spectrum in my formative years. Painting with the residents during art time was my favorite activity because of the simple conversations I was able to have. These conversations created a sense of companionship and love between the residents and my young self. These experiences allowed me to grow skills in building relationships with people who are different than me, in age and beyond. I believe that these conversations have largely shaped how I view the elderly and aging in my own life. I see aging not a grim reality but rather part of the beauty of life.

Although I am no longer the little girl in the oversized pink coat on the Intergenerational Learning Center's website, I still carry with me the lessons I had learned that very day. The values the Mount instilled have propelled me to pursue a degree in Public Health at George Washington University. My career trajectory is motivated by my desire to pursue a career that will allow me to work with populations different than myself and work to expand access to the same quality of care my Grandpa received 14 years ago.

Turner Intergenerational Essay Contest
Over 18 – 2nd Place
Kathleen Hooks

The only things I remember well from my preschool days are the purple reading couch in the drop-off area, Mama Dee's cooking, my frustration one year over not being placed in the Ladybug Room with my best friend, and the day my parents brought cake into my class when I became a big sister. I remember that weekly art classes with the residents were my favorite, and the experience I still credit for sparking my love of art and creativity. Those were the moments I would sit closest to the residents, collaborating with them despite differing levels of communication and physical abilities. I was too young to understand what battles the residents were fighting, but I understood the positive experiences we shared.

After preschool, I remember the years of volunteering at the Mount Summer Concert Series and the years of setting up Black Tie Bingo. I remember the people and the connections: Mama Dee, precious moments with my parents, my preschool best friend, the other volunteers, and the residents.

A desire to connect with people is what I hold onto to this day. Now, in addition to cognitive and physical ability differences, language, social, and economic differences push me to work harder to connect. I've studied Spanish since kindergarten in my effort to communicate and connect with more of the population around me, and completed my Spanish minor last semester in Madrid. The summer before, I interned at my local King County Sheriff's Office, translating for any Spanish-speakers and helping to implement the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program. This program gives those in our community who battle substance abuse and mental health problems, domestic violence, low education, or homelessness an alternative to prison: shelters, job training, rehabilitation programs, GED courses, etc. Now back in college in Chicago, I work for the Chicago City Council in a struggling neighborhood greatly affected by the same battles. I work in conjunction with the Chicago Police Department's Community Outreach Officers to provide resources to those whom society is inclined to ignore.

Some children are afraid of people who look, sound, get around differently, or who require more assistance; growing up at the Mount, I never developed that fear. Before I worked in a police precinct in Burien, WA, my family was afraid, and asked me countless times if it was safe there. In my first month of sitting behind bullet proof glass, I even asked myself if I was safe when some people came into the precinct. But the desire for connection with those society has warned us of, a desire fostered and cultivated in the ILC, was stronger than all of those questions. It allowed me to see past the fear and help those facing battles for which we had resources, while always remembering that many are facing battles I knew nothing about. Connection is what I remember about the Mount and is what guided me to Chicago, to Madrid, and to a career in public service.

Turner Intergenerational Essay Contest
Over 18 – 3rd Place
Keely McCool

There is a quote that I've heard my whole life that could have been said originally by me; "It takes a village". I was raised by a village. My village was full of color and diversity, acceptance and love. I did not know how lucky I was at the time, but I sure do now.

My earliest memories are of wonderful things. Wagon rides all over the Mount. Hugs and kisses by everyone we came across along the way. Laughter and joy at my being brought into a group of residents. My just being there was greeted with such joy and love that I always felt special. My teachers became my family, and to this day I am in contact with several of them. Every day was full of laughter and love. I knew no different. It was a wonderful way to start life.

What I didn't realize at the time was just how much I was learning about what being part of a "village" meant. Being a baby, and then a toddler, the attention always seemed to be on me. But the Mount wasn't just about me, and my fellow group of kids; it was about the residents that live there. I interacted with them daily. I was in their home. I played with them. I sat with them on the patio and had ice cream treats to share in the summers. I went on walks with them. I ate my lunch with them. I sang and danced with them. I played with dogs and cats with them. I sat on their laps and took naps with them. I made art with them, (art that to this day my mother has hanging in her house). They were my friends. I didn't notice or care that they were elderly. These interactions were some of the longest lasting gifts I received from Mount St. Vincent's ILC. People of all ages, of all colors, and of so many backgrounds were part of my life as I was growing up. To this day I think of them as my earliest friends.

It took me many years to realize that our older generation is not treated in such high regard as I witnessed in my formative years. The residents were an integral part of our program, and I grew up viewing them as I did anyone else in my day....just a part of my life. This is something that is one of my most favorite takeaways from those early years...my comfortableness and ease with the elderly generation.

I am profoundly grateful for my early years I spent with the ILC. The memories I have of that growing up experience are all just wonderful. If I could change one thing, it would be that I never had to grow up and was still there. Thank you for a wonderful start to life. The lessons I learned there will be with me forever.