



M.W. Story 22

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*I am the proud mom of
two awesome kids and
a preschool teacher's
aide.*

Friends of All Ages

Having lived with my grandmother for 27 years and grown up in a traditional Filipino family, I have always felt comfortable (and often comforted by) spending time with people much older than me. So, it came to no surprise, that one of the first friends I made when I moved to Minnesota was an elderly woman named Cecilia. She was a feisty, sharp and funny Chinese woman who I met in church. She couldn't see well and used a walker. Our friendship began with me driving her around to run errands or taking her out to lunch and/or dinner. But as her health deteriorated, we became more like family. She was divorced, with no children and no relatives in the United States. I, along with a network of loving friends, helped her with doctor visits and kept her company when she couldn't leave her home.

I met her before I had children. Back then, it was easy to come quickly when she called. When my daughter was born, months would go by between visits. At the time, I was still working, on top of having a baby. When my son was born, it made it even harder.

When the kids got a little older, I felt comfortable enough to hang out with Cecilia on a somewhat regular basis. By then,

Cecilia was living in a nursing home. At first, I was nervous bringing them with me to see her. What if they stared at some of the residents? What if they didn't understand some of the conditions they had? Despite my hesitation, I brought them with me to visit. It was a little rocky at first. Ellie and Harley would ask innocent questions out loud that probably offended some. But, the more and more they came to visit, and the more they made connections with the residents (who were thrilled to see my children's smiling faces and get their warm hugs), they saw that the elderly are no different than their classmates or cousins or even grown-ups my age. They didn't see the residents as outsiders they should be afraid of or didn't understand. They were friends. Especially Cecilia.



So, when we found out a few weeks ago that Cecilia was dying, I didn't hide it from my children, nor did I keep them from seeing her slip away. While it was overwhelming for them to see her

unresponsive in the hospital, they also got to witness the crowd of loved ones crammed into her room. Crying. Praying. Celebrating her incredible life. When she was moved back to the nursing home for the remainder of her days, the kids and I visited several times before she died, sometimes for hours at a time. They didn't complain or throw a fit. They didn't even ask, "Why do we have to keep coming back?" They understood what was happening and why it was important for me (and for Cecilia) that we be present during that time. When she did pass away, they weren't sad or scared. At the funeral, Ellie looked at our friend lying in a casket and remarked with a smile, "She looks like she's sleeping." My friendship with Cecilia has made such a wonderful impact on, not just my life, but also on the lives of my children. It is because of her that they have respect, compassion and love for the elderly. What a beautiful blessing.