
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU B4

Gabby Aquino is a senior Biology major and Theology minor in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences. Gabby's featured piece was written for a class with Professor Amy Boesky and came as a result of personal reflections on her hospice volunteer experiences. Additionally, she is Editor-in-Chief of *ASIAM* literary magazine

Mr. Salisbury was 95 years old. He would fall asleep every 20 minutes and forget what he was doing every 15. The first day I met him, we watched *The Sixth Sense*. He fell asleep for most of it, but woke up for the ending. I turned to him, "Is this your first time watching this movie?" "Yes!" he replied. "Did you like it?" "Yes!" "Do you understand the ending?" "No, I don't," he answered, looking confused. I was surprised he had never seen the movie. It was possible he just forgot. "Bruce Willis was dead the whole time," I explained. He didn't hear me. "He was dead the whole time!" "Come again?" "HE WAS DEAD THE WHOLE TIME!" Mr. Salisbury made an understanding face and nodded. I gave away the ending to all the residents of the home, but then again, I'm sure they've all seen it. Thus began my attempts to find the best way to communicate with Mr. Salisbury. His left ear was better than his right, and he didn't mind if you held his arm to keep his attention. And like that, we were able to start our relationship.

The next time I visited Mr. Salisbury, I walked to security to sign into his visitor's log. Even though a whole week has passed, my name was the last name that had been checked in. I went to his room, but it was empty. I suddenly became nervous that he had already passed. I approached the nurse station and asked where Mr. Salisbury was. "Salisbury?" the nurse replied, "He goes to Bingo an hour early to get his favorite spot. The rec room." I headed over to see Mr. Salisbury in his motorized chair with two Bingo boards in front of him. I reminded him who I was. He immediately welcomed me to the table and introduced me to his best friends, both in wheelchairs. Lou was a charming grayed man and Bernie was a middle-aged man who can no longer speak coherently after having a devastating and paralyzing stroke. The Bingo caller started the game and everyone gave undivided attention. This was quite a serious activity, except for whenever B4 was called. At least one resident would always shout "B4 what?" followed by laughter. This happened every game, every week. The joke never got old.

We played Bingo each time I visited. Between games, we talked about his service in the air force and his family. He spoke highly of his children, but I never asked where they were now. I didn't meet his family, but Mr. Salisbury and I had fun on our own. Very quickly, my company became an expectation, something we both looked forward to. Soon I was one of the voices cracking the "B4 what" joke. It was guaranteed a laugh.

But time kept passing. One day during Bingo, Mr. Salisbury fell asleep in his motorized chair. His arm pushed the joystick forward and he sped into our table, causing a commotion. He woke up panicked, but I knew I had to have a cheerful attitude. I calmly moved the chairs and tables back to where they were. He relaxed with a smile. “Silly me. Can’t stay awake for nothin’” The signs were increasing over the weeks. I was reminded of a sentence from my training, *“Patients in hospice service acknowledge that they are in their last six months of life and do not want to be resuscitated or kept alive by any extraordinary means”*. By the end of three months, he was sleeping for most of my visit. I tried to memorize his face and the wrinkles in his hands. My training instructed I should start giving a countdown until my last visits. I came in more often to avoid the lower numbers.

The dreaded day came when I told Mr. Salisbury that this would be our final visit. I stood up, taller than him in his chair. He grabbed my hand, looked me in the eyes and said, “I wish you all the best. Thank you so much for seeing me.” I assured him it was my pleasure and I will miss spending time with him. We took in each other’s faces and smiled with sadness, knowing.