

64 Village Park Way
Santa Monica, CA 90405

Friday, January 03, 2003

Adventures in Caring Foundation
P.O. Box 3859
Santa Barbara CA 93130

Dear Adventures in Caring Foundation:

It was a gloriously golden sunset on a winter evening, and as I biked along the path leading from Goleta Cottage Hospital back to my apartment near UCSB for the last time, I realized that I was not the same person that I had been three years ago. Each week as I made my bike ride toward the hospital, with my Raggedy Ann doll and costume in my backpack, the colors in the sky and the temperature in the air were different. Some days the fog lingered until sunset keeping the air cool and damp, and other days the sun was so bright that I could see the Channel Islands clearly.

Like the weather, the patients that I visited in the subacute unit changed on a daily basis. Some days everyone would be out of their beds and ready for a visit, while other days the curtains were still closed and tempers were brewing. I soon learned to be understanding, flexible, and ready to face whatever the day or the patient had to offer. I lost all presumptions and expectations and learned to follow the emotional cues and desires of the patient. Compassion soon filled me as I slipped into my costume, and I learned that just by being present and offering support to the patients, life was beautiful and life was better. Some days I would return home saddened with a patient's grief and suffering and other days I would greet my roommates with laughter and smiles and great stories to tell.

Gradually, however, the weather, the mood, and the experience all became superfluous. By simply focusing on others and opening my heart, everything became brighter and more beautiful. My three years as "Raggedy Ali" have left me braver, more compassionate, more emotional, and more alive. I now realize that life is stunning in both its magnificence and its disappointments for these experiences awaken us, enliven us, and bring us closer to each other and to God.

I am so grateful for the experiences that I have been able to have while a volunteer with Adventures in Caring and know, without any doubt, that they have made me a better friend, a better daughter, a better girlfriend, and one day I hope, a better doctor!

Best wishes,

Alison E. Freimund