



2022 Recipient ~ Leanna Cutler
The Leffell School, Class of 2022

During my freshman year of high school, my school sent out its monthly update of community service opportunities. One in particular caught my eye: the opportunity to help Morgan, a blind nine-year-old girl, during Sunday school. As someone who also attended Sunday school during my elementary years, I decided that I would volunteer to help give someone the same type of experience that I had growing up. While I was excited about the chance to help someone in this way, I was nervous because I had little experience working with children, and no experience working with someone who is visually impaired. Beyond my worries of how I would help her, I began to worry about what our relationship would be like. Would she like me? How well would we connect?

Eventually, the first day of Sunday school came, and I still remember the first time I met Morgan. As I took in her sequin-covered boots and the small plush toys hanging from her walking stick, I could not help but notice how much like every other nine-year-old she seemed. As I got to know her, I was struck by how full of life she was. She could never sit still, and was constantly cracking jokes. I learned that we both shared a love of music (specifically, musical theater), and that both of us love Arts and Crafts. Even though Morgan is blind, she still finds joy in things that I imagined were impossible without sight.

Over the course of the last four years, I have learned how to lead her in navigating the school, helped with art activities, and once I even described to her a magic show by a visiting magician. Some of my favorite memories with Morgan are during the first hour of Sunday school each week when all of the students are gathered for prayer. Morgan is not particularly interested in the prayers, so she usually adds her own spin on them. Impersonating her favorite hip-hop artists, she will usually lean over and whisper so low that only I can hear "yo-yo-yo, it's the remix!". She has been making the same joke for four years, but I still laugh just as hard.

One of my other favorite memories was during the fall of my sophomore year when Morgan was in fifth grade. Her school was doing an Arts and Crafts activity different from the usual coloring sheets: making houses from candy. My heart sank because I thought it would be impossible for a blind person to do a project involving so much construction. Working together, however, Morgan and I figured out how to make a candy house in a way that worked best for her. I would hand her an M&M or a piece of licorice so that she could get a sense of

its shape through feeling. Then, she would describe to me where on the house she wanted to stick the candy, and after I moved her hand to where she had described, we would press the candy on together. Personally, I think our candy house was the best in the class.

Morgan is currently thirteen years old, and is nearly my height now! Even though she is five years younger than me, Morgan has been one of the most inspirational people I know. Despite being the only blind person at her Hebrew school, I have never seen her not smiling or unwilling to participate in class discussions. I always think how easy it must be for someone in her position to be sulky, but she is so happy and outgoing. Working with Morgan has taught me how much of life depends on a person's outlook, and that the circumstances a person is put in do not define who they are or what their capabilities may be.

When I was fourteen, I volunteered to help a stranger, but I think in reality it is the stranger who helped me.