

Drumroll Please

Written by Jes-c Brandt



A different senior trip

Not long ago, I found myself on a senior citizen mission trip. Yeah, you better believe there's a story behind this one.

It started last Christmas, when my grandparents and I crossed paths for the first time in five years. We never meant to go so long between visits, but life happened, and we did our best to keep in touch online.

We only had one day together, so we did our best to catch up, and it came up that my grandparents would be going on a trip to Oklahoma this summer to help out at Cookson Hills, a children's home.

I didn't know much about the trip, but I knew I had the time off from work, and my grandparents would be there, so I jumped at the chance to spend a whole week with them.

Fast-forward to early June, and we arrived at Cookson Hills late Sunday night with two other people from my grandparents' church. Now I was certainly the youngest of our group of five, but that didn't really register as anything out of the ordinary.

It wasn't until breakfast the next morning, when the whole group got together for the first time, that I surveyed the crowd and realized I was most definitely the outlier. Gray hair and spectacles were the norm, and I finally caught on that I had landed myself on a trip with a bunch of senior citizens.

At one point I overheard the trip leader joke with one of his buddies that you can tell it's a senior citizen mission trip when volunteers show up with a small bag of clothes and a large bag of medication. I chuckled to myself and started a mental list of other idiosyncrasies of such a trip.

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You know, you might be on a senior citizen trip if they serve cottage cheese at every meal, and a full pot of coffee is a requirement 24/7. Or when a number of the volunteers excuse themselves for a nap at some point during the day.

If your fellow volunteers keep referring to that “young guy” working on the roof, and you look up to see a man pushing 50, you might be on a senior citizen trip.

One day, I found myself engaged in a conversation about the Beatles, and I asked one of the older ladies if she liked the group. She replied that she didn't care much for modern music, and I knew I must be on a senior citizen trip.

This group never had their cell phones out; instead they actually talked to the people around them. That's one senior trait I'm certainly not complaining about. Of course, I could have gone without the conversations about how often everyone needs to get up in the night.

In all seriousness, though, that trip was phenomenal. We spent our time there building a new dining center for Cookson Hills. I stayed for one of the two weeks that the World Mission Builders group was there, and the area was transformed from a slab of concrete to an 8,000-square-foot building.

Many of the volunteers had a long history of working in construction-related fields, and in retirement, they're volunteering their time to help others. World Mission Builders embrace the idea that they have more time and more money in the second half of life. They believe that retirement is about more than playing with grandkids and that they can still make an impact in the world.

The shared knowledge of that group was just astounding. Regardless of the task, I could always find someone who knew how to get the job done. And to top it off, they were so willing to teach me.

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When I was looking for something to do, they invited me up to the roof to help roll out tar paper. I know it would have been easier for them to go about this task on their own, but they took the time to explain what was being done and let me help. I can't even count the new things I learned as we erected the dining center that week.

They may never know it, but I was really touched by the people on that trip. Their hard work, willingness to serve and eagerness to build relationships are things you don't see every day.

At the end of the week, everyone was trying to persuade me to stay for the next week, too. I pointed out that I don't yet have the luxury of retirement, and I had to go back to work. I left determined, however, to follow the example of my new friends. They're an inspiration to me.

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