



# The grandparents that guided her

In life and to a career she loves

by Pamela Charach

**H**olding back tears, Montana Shermann took a deep breath and paused for a moment. “Sorry, I haven’t talked about them for a while.” She pulled herself to the present and continued, “I was close with my grandparents who passed away this year. They’re the reason I went into this field. They were a huge part of my life and I’m excited to give back to

seniors, especially those who don’t have families here. I’m really excited.”

Therapeutic Recreation is meant for people like Montana. When she speaks about supporting older adults, you can’t help but smile – perhaps it’s the grin illuminating her face as she is swept up in her passion. The happiness she feels describing the people she supports is contagious.

## **THANK YOU, GRANDMA AND GRANDPA**

Reflecting on her journey, Montana credits her grandparents for leading her to a career she loves. Their relationship was strong and her grandpa filled a father-like role in her life. “We played baseball. He taught me to ride a bike and ski. He was a teacher, so I learned from him. He painted, he built the house we lived in, he built a

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boat. I admired everything he did.”

As time passed and her grandparents got older, Montana saw their lives change. Their transition from an active couple to one whose independence slowly slipped away pulled at her heart. Montana empathized for her grandparents, but more than that, she supported them. “I’m glad I could give back because they looked after me, and now I could look after them.”

When Montana’s grandpa passed and they moved her grandma into care, Montana gained a deeper understanding of what older adults and their families go through as time takes its toll. These experiences built the foundation for what would become her career. Montana stated, “I’ve been there. I know what it’s like and I’m excited to help.”

#### BACK TO SCHOOL

Having taken general studies at another college and not feeling at home, Montana was surprised

at the connections she built in Stenberg’s online program. “I didn’t think I’d be able to make relationships but we had weekly collaboration sessions, so I got to know everyone well. I’ve never connected with people who are interested in what I’m interested in. Having 15 girls who also enjoy working with older adults made me feel like I belonged.”

Amazed by the growth she saw in herself, Montana shared, “I feel more confident in my abilities and knowledge. It’s been a huge year for me. My family knew that I doubted myself and never wanted to let anybody down, and now they see I’m confident, happy, and excited about my future.”

#### MEANT TO BE

With a diploma in Therapeutic Recreation – Gerontology Specialization, Montana found her purpose. From leading bingo to games of pool-noodle hockey, this is where she is meant to be. Although Montana enjoys the activities and values the purpose they serve, the relationships Montana builds is what she loves the most.

With warmth in her eyes, Montana shared, “One lady had no family here but received a letter from a cousin. She said, ‘I’m so happy they contacted me but I can’t write anymore.’ I asked, ‘Do you want me to write a letter with you?’ I learned so much about her life. She hadn’t talked to them in so long and it felt amazing to help her get in touch.”

Montana is not the only person who feels this career was meant for her. As she excelled in the program and her passion shone through her work,

her instructors took note. One instructor, Laurie Chiasson, praised, “Montana is a genuine person with a natural skillset. She was at the top of an impressive class and poured so much thought into every assignment. She was a quiet leader whose work guided others. Montana is a calm, steady, kind-hearted student who is positive and respectful.” She continued, “Because of Montana’s passion and clear understanding of the concepts of Therapeutic Recreation, I’ve encouraged her to complete her degree and become a Recreation Therapist. Montana is going to make a difference in the field and the lives of many older adults.”

Looking ahead, Montana feels she is exactly where she is meant to be. Brought to tears once more, she explained, “I’m doing this because I want to make a difference. I’m with people during the last part of their lives. I want to fill their days with what they enjoy, what they love. I want to make their last days really happy.” ❖

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*Loving her grandparents, Montana cherished every moment with them.*



*Special moments with her grandma.*