***5. UC Application Question: Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity.***

In a situation where I expected to be the giver, the roles were reversed; I ended up playing the receiver. On day one of volunteering for Meals on Wheels, I expected to drive the assigned route, monotonously ringing doorbells and dropping off groceries at homebound elders’ doors. But the experience ended up being much more.

Rather than treating this as a way to obtain volunteer hours, I truly sought to connect with these senior citizens. Every Friday, in exchange for delivering healthy nutrition to homebound clients, these wise souls--who I now consider friends and mentors--fill me with stories that leave me extremely enlightened.

A multilingual Russian Jewish couple reminisced about fleeing their communist country as teens during the Iron Curtain, teaching me the concept of sacrifice. I have encountered a 97-year-old man’s attempts to keep his brain sharp by staying up-to-date with current technology, displaying willpower. I’ve come to know an exuberant woman who was forced to retire as a public speaker after developing degenerative disc disease, but she speaks to me with a fiery passion in her voice, which taught me about the power of energy. Alzheimer's has worsened for one client, but when I ask about her children, her recollection becomes sharp again.

Certain encounters made me realize everyone starts aging the day they were born, but the spirit has no expiration. The spirit is ageless. And when one woman divulged stories about her life, I realized that you are every age you have ever been; she is the cheerful, twelve-year-old equestrian girl; she is the astronomy professor at Cambridge; but she is also the old woman peacefully sitting in her rocking chair, now hooked up to tubes and machines.

These elders often become invisible and forgotten within our society. Some live without communication for days or weeks, so I simply listened and absorbed stories as they candidly spoke their mind. But I wanted to do something more for them, something aside from gaining volunteer hours. As secretary of This Club Saves Lives, I was able to bring an idea to life. I asked around for a list of Meals on Wheels client names, and lead the club in creating holiday cards addressed to homebound elders who are part of the program. Many do not have a family that surrounds them during the holidays, so they are thrilled to see personalized artwork made especially for them.

Through the connections I’ve made thanks to this organization, I walk away with personal growth and genuine human connection; knowledge of history, sacrifice, love, energy, and soulfulness; and a deeper grasp of giving and receiving. And this state of enlightenment is a gift that a bag of groceries could never amount to.