Jeffrey S. Rich
60 Duke Drive
Stamford, CT 06905
Home: (203) 322-5527 Cell: (203) 921-8960
Jsrich02@syr.edu
Syracuse University

"Empathy is not simply a matter of trying to imagine what others are going through, but having the will to muster enough courage to do something about it. In a way, empathy is predicated upon hope," Cornel West, Professor in the Center for African American Studies, at Princeton University draws attention to one of the most underutilized emotions in society today. Anyone can "feel sorry" or "sympathize" for others, but to have the courage to do something about it and to make a difference, no matter how small, is true empathy.

Hospice. It's amazing the broad range of emotions that, that seven letter word can evoke in people: fear, comfort, avoidance, passion, compassion, and unfortunately sometimes nothing. When I hear the word Hospice, it is hard to even put into words my emotions.

My first contact with volunteering, now six long years ago, was at the Richard Rosenthal Hospice Residence, a place that had given the best of care to my grandmother, years earlier. At the age of twelve, I had my first visit with a patient. Her name was Emma, a ninety year-old, four foot tall, retired librarian, with more spunk than anyone I have ever met. The bond Emma and I shared was unique. Emma would sit there, with such patience, and try to teach me Bridge, a game to this day that I have not mastered. Other times we would stand in the kitchen for hours, slaving over her homemade cranberry jam. Still other times, we would just sit as I held her fragile hands in mine,

quietly talking. Unfortunately, I soon learned the hard lesson about volunteering at a Hospice residence. Emma passed away a few months into our friendship.

As heartbreaking as this was for me, the bond Emma and I shared taught me one of the most important lessons in my life. To change a person's life, no matter how big or small a difference, or when in their life you do so, is one of the greatest gifts, not only for that person, but for the volunteer as well. The sadness I felt with Emma did not discourage me, rather it fueled me to go on to volunteer with countless patients for years to come. I went into the Hospice Residence with the goal of changing the lives of these patients, however I came out changed as well. With every patient there was a different story, a different lesson to teach me, a different secret to share.

That is why I am an advocate of hospice. Not only do I wish to educate the world about hospice, but I hope to motivate others to volunteer as well, not only because volunteering has offered a sense of comfort and care to those who otherwise might have been alone, but it has also given me a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and understanding that I know I could not have gotten from any other experience. I hope that others can experience the empathy and resolve of making a change in the world. Alone that change is small. Together we can alter the world.