

My family has told me my entire life that my mother loved being kind. Whether it was feeding a stranger, donating to charity, or even just complimenting someone in passing, she divvied up and passed out kindness like it was slices of a pie she made. When she passed away, the world lost an unfathomably large portion of its kindness. When I was first presented with the opportunity to volunteer in my community, I spent time at the Harrison Public Library, mentoring elementary school kids and coaching them through STEM-related projects. On “Zombie Night”, I dressed the part and ran around with my team of 1st through 5th graders to win the scavenger hunt. After that experience, I moved on to another: assistant directing the musicals at LMK. I’ve participated in the musicals there for three years now, seeing some 6th graders all the way to their last show and now performing in musicals with some of the 7th and 8th graders I started with. The connections I made with the middle schoolers is something that I am going to wholeheartedly miss after I graduate, but the experience is also something that has encouraged me to pursue volunteer work in the future.

I’ve put in more than 35 hours in a week after school, during their tech week and shows, for the past three years—not counting the time I’d spend over the course of the three months they would rehearse, that which I haven’t counted up. I’ve assisted with warm-ups, costumes, technical aspects and whatever odd job I needed to fill in on. I’ve coached students through anxiety, peer conflicts, and even stomach bugs. The best part of it all, by far, was being able to return every day and get everyone excited to do the thing I’m incredibly passionate about myself. I’m now pursuing music and theater in college, which is something I never would have settled on without those three years, and after it all I know exactly what my mom loved about being kind. You can have your cake, your slice of pie, and you can absolutely eat it too; when you give your time and commitment to something, all the energy you have, you’re guaranteed to receive everything you gave back. The warm feeling of seeing little performers nail their high note with your advice, of seeing them run onstage with your slightly lopsided pinning job, it’s unmistakable and irreplaceable, one of the best feelings in the world. I’m incredibly grateful I got to feel it.