During my last semester of high school, I volunteered at an assisted living facility as part of my school's senior class service requirement. Within a matter of days, I grew attached to the environment and the people. Though I did not know it at the time, this experience would forever change my life; it provided me with a compass for the future.

A gentleman named Arthur, in particular, helped me understand the reality of growing old in an assisted living setting. I learned much about Arthur through his vivid storytelling about his family, friends, and life in general (back then, the gas was only *20 cents* a gallon!). At the facility, Arthur enjoyed movies and the company of his peers—but what the home could not offer him was relief his sense of loss.

When I arrived for my first semester at Ithaca College, I decided to take Introduction to Gerontology, a course which allowed me to learn more about the unique challenges we face as we age. This class, combined with my previous volunteer work, inspired me to declare my major in Aging Studies and pursue the discipline full time.

I quickly found that Ithaca College offers a variety of interesting and inspiring classes about gerontology, including Dementia and Aging, the Biology, Psychology, and Sociology of Aging, and Fieldwork in Gerontology. These courses—combined with IC's multiple local partnerships—provided me with a holistic education enriched with valuable experience.

In fact, one of the greatest parts of the Gerontology program is its emphasis on practical experience—and I got plenty of it. My fieldwork at the local assisted living/memory care facility was particularly influential in that it provided me with my first exposure to dementia and long-term care for individuals afflicted by the disease. Weekly visits to the facility exposed me to the horror, humor, beauty, and hope that accompany degenerative neurological diseases. I hope to build on my understanding of this age-related phenomenon for the rest of my life.

Outside of campus, I had the opportunity to intern at a geriatric psychiatric unit in a hospital near Boston, MA, and study overseas in Africa. Throughout my travels, I observed the role elderly persons play in the United States and on the island of Madagascar. My study abroad experience was eye-opening, and I gained valuable insight into the lessons developed society may learn from the developing world in regard to the process of aging. When I returned to the United States, I continued my independent research by writing a lengthy summary about elderly persons in Madagascar and how Malagasy elders are affected by the culturally resilient concept of fictive kin.

Overall, the aging studies program at Ithaca College leads to many amazing experiences. You can travel to Africa, work in a hospital, and write life histories of fascinating older adults. Studying gerontology as an undergraduate also allows you to make yourself that much more prepared for up-and-coming graduate school and career opportunities. And beyond the academic programs at IC, the campus and town are the perfect places to develop as a student and as an individual.