



When Opportunity Knocks—Open the Door!

By Angela Houser-Betti, Psy.D.

In 1992, I seized the opportunity to become a **Compeer volunteer** and I hope that you will too! Even though it's been a while, I fondly recall the invaluable experience of sharing in the life of an individual with chronic mental illness. My Compeer friend, Kim, and I shared many joyous times, including a concert to see MC Hammer. Yes, he was quite popular back in the early 1990's and Kim was a big fan of his! We also enjoyed going out to eat and trying new foods together like Oyster Rockefeller. She loved it! Going to the movies, going shopping, and taking walks at the park were also activities we had lots of fun doing together. All of these special outings fostered the development of a close relationship that enhanced the quality of both our lives.

I was an undergraduate psychology major at the time and Kim was living in a group home setting. I was getting ready to embark on a graduate school journey. She was getting ready to embark in the world of work through a vocational rehabilitation program. She had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and was responding well to medication and case management services. I had no personal experience with chronic mental illness but I had a strong desire to connect with others that did. Although our futures were headed in different directions, we shared the common bond of friendship. Think about your own friendships for a minute and the value of connecting with another person in a way that brings each of you joy. **We brought each other lots of joy and laughter. Dancing together at the MC Hammer concert was one of our "most joyous" moments together.**

Becoming a Compeer volunteer afforded me the "opportunity of a lifetime." The program focuses on "relationship," which is at the heart of the Compeer program. Our relationship and understanding of each other developed over the 14 months that we spent quality time together. I learned "first hand" that individuals like Kim, who have a chronic mental illness, are so strong,



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so resilient, and so capable of living meaningful lives.

I was able to provide her with social opportunities and activities that she may not have experienced otherwise. She was able to provide me with a different perspective on life, one that focused on living and being "in the moment." **Kim taught me the value of the present by living her life in the moment without worry or concern about the past or future.** She lived the "take it one day at a time" philosophy. We can all appreciate the value of this philosophy. She also taught me to "take time to smell the roses." I learned to slow down and be in the present moment with my friend, Kim. This lesson has stayed with me over the years. When I find myself getting "caught up" in future worries or past regrets, I remember Kim and her special skill of living in the moment with contentment.

I hope you will seize this unique opportunity to make a difference in the life of someone special, someone with a chronic mental illness that makes them truly unique in a way that will enrich your life! Open that door and make a new friend today!



The Compeer model is recognized as a best practice for recovery by the American Psychological Association.

If you'd like to learn more about becoming a Compeer volunteer or to learn about other ways to get involved with the MHA, please call Compeer Program Director Sal Caraco at 704-365-4380 or e-mail scaraco@mhacentralcarolinas.org. [Click here](#) for the Compeer web page.