



Katrina Rutkowski, front desk, Pinehaven

I've bounced around Columbia County the entirety of my 31 years, but Philmont has always been home. My grandparents purchased the duplex at 19 Main Street in the mid 70s, then converted it into the single family home that stands there now. Growing up in Philmont was like growing up in any small village in America; everybody seems to know everyone else, or at least their latest gossip. With the Agawamuck Creek flowing just beyond our back deck, learning to swim, fish, hike, and smoke pot in the adjoining woods (now the High Falls Conservation Area) was just something you did. Every now and then some of us "bus-stop friends" will still hang out, catch up, and play old school video games.

Working the front desk here at Pine Haven for the last 13 years I've become privy to a lot of families' stories, ones of joy, but unfortunately, most are of heartbreak associated with the decline of a loved one. So many people have told me that I'm like a counselor to them when they come to visit. I get to listen to all of their stories with an empathetic ear. The hardships I've experienced in my own life help me in relating to them. It's honestly the best part of my job, experiencing the many different walks of life coming past my desk.

After being a long time resident of Main Street my grandmother passed away in August of 2016. I had lived with her on and off my whole life, but the closeness I developed with her during the last few years of her life was like no other, I dedicated my time to taking her to appointments, checking her blood pressure, and the like, while watching her slowly decline. Then, after a weekend away, I came home around 1am to find she had passed away. The local fire department, EMS, rescue squad, and all the first responders who came were so

comforting. Through all of the commotion, I remember Maria, one of the RNs out of Dr. Baillargeon's office, was a first responder that night. She held me while I cried.

It's weird driving past my grandmother's house now, seeing all the updates to the house and to the neighborhood. Everything is the same yet so different. The grocery store is now a Family Dollar, Stewart's, after sitting empty for so long, is now a great co-op, and even the old town garage is now a restaurant. So many things change when you grow up!

This is a close-knit community; everyone is able to get behind someone else in a time of need. It's very comforting and very warm. I appreciate everyone that was there the night I lost my grandmother, and *everyone* that helps out in the community, really. No matter where life takes me, Philmont will always be home.

By Katrina Rutkowski