

Meet the Riders



Cooper Westphal, 14

Highland Park, Calif.

Caregiver to his neighbor, Mary,
for six years

“Caregiving allows me to get to know my elders and hear stories about the past.”

At age 5, Cooper just wanted to help his parents out when he agreed to assist their older neighbor, Mary, with a few simple tasks. She would pay him \$1 a week to bring in her trashcans, eventually evolving into picking up her prescriptions, groceries, and helping out around her house. In becoming a caregiver at such a young age, Cooper found himself enjoying this role because it allowed him to learn more about Mary and what life was like for women of her generation.

Cooper says Mary helped teach him to respect his elders—and how to have fun. She taught him card games like rummy, and often cheated, but Cooper took it in stride as Mary became a fast friend. In middle school, he would brag to his friends that he had **“this super cool old neighbor he was friends with.”** Eventually, Mary’s condition deteriorated. Cooper remembers the last years of Mary’s life as challenging, but he also remembers hearing her vivid stories of early 1900s California. **“Even though caregiving can be hard sometimes, you should stick to it because you’re being nice to the person and the chances are they really appreciate it.”**

At 102, Mary died at home with Cooper and his family by her side.

While less common, more kids from Generation Z are becoming caregivers and can look to Cooper for inspiration. Since Mary’s death, Cooper has started to think about the needs of his other aging family members, like his grandparents, and what help he can eventually provide. Cooper wants young caregivers like him to know it’s helpful to have support and to stay positive, saying, **“my parents definitely supported me and reinforced that it’s good to care for others. When I was first helping Mary, I saw it as more of a chore. My parents encouraged me to continue caregiving and get to know Mary, and I’m so glad I did.”**