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Woman with dementia shares joy of painting



More than 5 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's, a debilitating disease that causes severe memory loss.

Michael Perchick

Residents at Poet's Walk, a memory care assisted-living facility, gathered around tables Monday afternoon, surrounded by blank canvases and paint brushes.



Behind them, walking from chair to chair assisting students was their ever-active, always-smiling, 92-year-old teacher Millie Savage.

"If you're going to do something, if you're going to paint, no matter what you decide to do, you should find happiness in it," Savage said.

While working with the residents, Savage was constantly encouraging - sharing advice on colors and brush strokes, balancing it with consistent positivity.

After spending the majority of her life in upstate New York, Savage now lives at [Poet's Walk in Round Rock](#), closer to her family. She has dementia, which staff say affects primarily her short-term memory. But when she's painting, they notice an improvement.

"In this disease process, they tend to isolate. And they still want to feel purposeful, and contributing. (So Millie) being able to assist some of our other residents is really a blessing," said staff member Phyllis Crockett.

Savage said the immediate results of painting keep her interested.

"Painting, I see the results. I can either like it, reject it, try it again, improve it. (It) gives me more of a challenge," she said.

Savage said she first got into painting as a child, and has enjoyed it all her life. While living in New York, she'd take classes to try and enhance her abilities.

During class, some of Savage's finished paintings - three different portraits of foxes, one of a house in a field, and another of a flower - which typically sits in Crockett's office - are on display.

"Whenever I do anything, I always think I can do better, that I will get better," said Savage. It's a mindset that goes hand-in-hand with her motto. "Get busy, get moving."