

As someone who has lived in Ridgefield my entire life, history has always surrounded me. From field trips to the Keeler Tavern in elementary school to trick-or-treating at centuries-old houses on Halloween night, our town has a rich history that we often take for granted. While we are taught in school that history is a series of broad events, including wars, mass migrations, revolutions, and so much more, what has always fascinated me is the history of individuals. Peering into the lives of common people during points in history that we can only read about in books suddenly changes history from a series of events into lifetimes of stories and memories not unlike the ones we experience today. Living in a small town like Ridgefield has only fostered this fascination, as apart from a Revolutionary War battle, most of the large events in our town have been individual.

While I've always been interested in history, in January of 2021, one of many heights of the COVID-19 pandemic, I took initiative and began an internship at the Ridgefield Historical Society. The first project I was assigned was to transcribe letters from a wealthy family during turn-of-the-century Ridgefield, as this could be done at home on the computer. Not having learned to write cursive past a 3rd grade level and only ever reading it in my grandma's birthday cards, I was unsure of how well I'd be able to accomplish this task. Even more, I had no idea what these letters would entail, as I couldn't imagine the lives of a family hundreds of years ago would be very engaging. Yet, to my surprise, what I read, or was able to read when the cursive was especially complex, wasn't that different from what I had experienced living in Ridgefield. The children went to college, as I'm about to do, asking their parents to borrow money in their letters. They went sledding with their friends and walked down Main Street, something everyone has done at least a few times as a kid in Ridgefield. While history seems inaccessible and

obscure, taking a glimpse into the intimate lives of long-gone individuals truly showed how relatable history can be and that some traditions span generations.

Coincidentally, I began this project deep into my AP US History class, and some of the most important events I was learning about were casually mentioned in the letters I read. They discussed how they supported the Union during the Civil War, how their cousins in Chicago were unionizing for better wages, and how they attended lectures by a then-sitting president who we rarely hear about anymore. Not only was I relating to these people, but I was now relating to these events that we only discuss in the broadest, seemingly inaccessible contexts. History is so important to study not only because of what we can learn from it, but how we can apply it to today and connect with it, realizing that people who lived centuries ago are not as different from us as we believe.

The connections I was making made me begin to wonder how my own life would be preserved. Just as the family whose letters I read lived through major events, I too have seen a global pandemic, fear over terrorism, and immense leaps in technology in just 17 years. History is happening every second, and preserving the lives and memories of individuals is just as important as remembering broad strokes of events. Hundreds of years from now, students my age will be learning about events I lived through, and hopefully they too will see that people during the 21st century weren't too different from them either.