Remember Me

Students design an award-winning app to help people suffering from a disease.

By Leilani Kahale

Annie Gainer (third from right) and her classmates work on their app.

When sixth-grade students in Chicago, Illinois, were asked to brainstorm ideas for an app, 12-year-old Annie Gainer didn't think twice about it. She wanted to design something that would help people who were suffering from Alzheimer's disease—a condition that causes memory loss.

Just two years earlier, Annie learned that her grandfather had Alzheimer's disease. Gradually, the disease caused him to forget basic things about his life—such as his phone number, where he grew up, and eventually, the people he loved—including Annie.

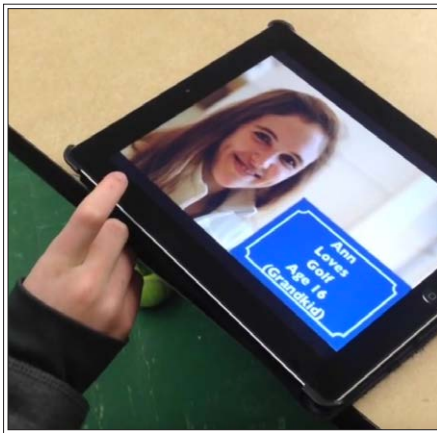
To help him, a nurse recommended that Annie's family create a scrapbook. "It has photos of his grandkids, and our aunts and uncles," said Annie. Whenever her grandfather needed help identifying a family member, he would look them up in the book.

It was that scrapbook that gave Annie an idea. "I wanted to create a digital version of that scrapbook that he could easily carry around."

Designing an App

Annie's teacher and classmates loved the idea and immediately set to work. They created an app that allows people to upload photographs and descriptions about themselves. In addition, they can type in their relationship to the user and basic information about themselves. A person with Alzheimer's simply scrolls through the digital scrapbook to view each family member. The students named the app "Remember Me."

The app turned out so well that Annie's school decided to enter it into a major app-design challenge. It won the top prize! The app was named the "Best in the Region" and earned Annie's school a $5,000 prize.



The app allows users to look up photos and information about family members.

Annie and her classmates were thrilled about the win—and what it meant. "We didn't do it for the money or the prize," she says. "We just wanted to get it created to help Alzheimer's patients."

A Bright Future

So, what's next for Annie and her classmates? The students now hope to add facial recognition technology to the app. Users with Alzheimer's disease could take a picture of a person with camera phones. The Remember Me app would scan the face in the photo and then match the face to a person in its database. It would then pull up information about that person.

The app's success has also gotten the girls thinking about their future. According to Annie,

she and her classmates have mostly used their cell phones for "social media and games." But as a result of the app challenge, the girls have all taken an interest in medical and mobile technology. Now, some are thinking about pursuing careers in these fields.

"I never really thought about having a job like this before, but after doing this [challenge], I think it would be really fun," she said.

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