At the beginning of the week, I was unsure of what to expect. As we drove from Seattle to Yakima, I began to feel how different the environment was from that of the city. It wasn't until we reached Goldendale that I really sensed how distinct the culture of a small, rural town was. Everyone knew each other. It amazed me to discover that our host families were not afraid to leave their doors unlocked at night and no matter what corners we turned, we were welcomed by anyone and everyone with open arms. There was a collective attitude towards helping one another, which simply does not exist in Seattle. I realized that this culture was at the center of every interaction between the people of Goldendale and I was able to understand this more throughout the week as I shadowed Dr. Ferch at the Goldendale Dental Clinic.

At the clinic, Dr. Ferch and his team showed nothing but compassion for their patients. I learned that the nearest oral surgeon was half an hour away. People were forced to drive to Yakima or cross the border to Oregon for complicated procedures. Patients at the hospital with more serious illnesses were forced to transfer out of town to be properly cared for as well. Dr. Ferch’s team understood that many did not have the luxury of traveling far or choosing the best treatment plan. Being one of two dental clinics in Goldendale, he was relied on by many for his expertise. In nearly every case, Dr. Ferch would consider less expensive alternatives before continuing with a dental procedure. He even followed through with an appointment despite knowing that his patient could not pay for it. I observed that he took great care in drilling, extracting, cleaning, and filling the teeth of his patients. Although he was friendly and easy going towards his patients, he also took his work seriously because he knew what he accomplished that day would affect his friends and neighbors.

Before I arrived in Goldendale I did not understand what it meant to be a dentist; however, after spending a week at the clinic I now know that it is a profession that requires a passion for helping others, a love for detail, and patience. I had the choice of rotating between two sites, but I was so excited about the field of dentistry that I decided to stay at the clinic for the entire week. I have never been so enthusiastic about a career and I could not have had a better experience anywhere else.