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Eng. 101  
November 18, 2020

### Growing Up Giving

Volunteerism is something that I learned about at a young age. My mother worked at a non-profit organization whose mission was helping those living in poverty in our community. Helping others was more than a job for my mom, she dedicated her life to helping other people both at work and in her personal life. Her dedication included recruiting other people to help out at events at her agency and other places in the community that needed help. She expected my brother and I to give back to the community through volunteerism. Oftentimes when there was a community event my brother and I were always given a volunteer placement. Whether it was serving food, handing out coats or giving toys to children at Christmas time I had no choice when it came to “giving back.” When I was younger volunteering seemed like the worst punishment I could be given. To me volunteering meant several hours of hard work for no pay, no recognition, and no fun. I often tried to come up with excuses to not help out, rarely did they work. Volunteering was not fun as a child and not something I enjoyed doing. As I got older I began to appreciate volunteering and I began to see the reward that came from helping other people. The lessons I have learned through volunteering have helped to make me into the person I am today and have changed my outlook on volunteering.

One thing that volunteering has taught me is that the reward in helping another person can be greater than money. This lesson became clear to me at an annual Holiday Giveaway. The Holiday Giveaway was an event put on by the agency that my mom worked for each year in December. The event was organized to help those that were in need during the holidays. Families would come to the event to see Santa and each child in the family would receive a gift from Santa. I was recruited to be Santa's Helper, which meant when a kid came up in line it was my job to choose a gift that looked like it would be appropriate for the child's age and gender and hand it to Santa to give to the child when they sat on his lap. When I was young I remember thinking that it was not fair that I had to give toys to all these other kids and not get one myself. As I got older I started to recognize the excitement in the kids that came through the line. Seeing the excitement in the other kids was rewarding to me and I began to enjoy choosing a gift for them. One year I remember a boy that came through the line, he was about 10 years old. As I looked at the toys available on the table I thought all these toys are boring and there is nothing here he is going to like. I chose a toy truck for Santa to give him and I instantly saw the happiness on his face when Santa handed it to him. I remember him saying I have never had a toy truck before. I was in disbelief that a boy his age, not much younger than me, could have never had a toy truck before. I remember thinking about how many toy trucks I had, too many to count, so many they seemed boring to me. It was at that moment that I learned that there are people less fortunate than me and giving that boy his first toy truck was the best reward I could have received that day. This lesson was valuable to me because it helped me to be thankful for what I had.

Another part of volunteering that I have learned to appreciate is how many new people I meet when I volunteer. I have met friends my age, leaders in my community, and many people who want to make a difference in other people's lives. I have met a lot of people through volunteering but one person that I will always remember is Roger. Our local Kiwanis Club was holding their annual Chicken Barbeque fundraiser to raise money to help children in the community. I was a junior in high school, my mom told me that the club was shorthanded and did not have enough volunteers to run the Chicken Barbeque. She recruited me to help out. Shortly after we arrived at the Chicken Barbeque a man introduced himself to me, his name was Roger and he told my friend and I that he was 94 years old and he had been volunteering with the club for 64 years. I could not believe what I had heard. I was astonished that he was 94 years old and so active and still giving back to the community and that he had given 64 years of his life to helping other people. Roger went on to tell me many things that he had done in his lifetime including working as a Veterinarian, serving in the military, and volunteering through the Kiwanis Club for 64 years! He told me that the club had changed a lot over the years and that it began as a mens club and that women were not allowed to join. He laughed because the club now had more women than men. I enjoyed the history that Roger shared with me and I think he really enjoyed sharing it. Roger was an inspiration to me. I remember thinking it would be easy for him to say he has given enough or he was too old to continue volunteering, but he didn't. This conversation is one that I will never forget. Whenever I am tempted to not help out or find an excuse to not do something I always think of Roger. Roger is someone I am proud to have met and

someone who made a huge impact on me and how I look at volunteering and giving my time.

Volunteering also allows me to share my skills with others. As I got older I began volunteering at lacrosse tournaments and with teams of younger lacrosse players. I love sharing my skills with the younger kids. I enjoy teaching them about the game and helping them find where they belong on the field. The summer before college I was a volunteer assistant coach for a 5/6th grade lacrosse team through the City Youth Bureau. Though I did not get paid for the time I spent coaching these boys it was very rewarding. The boys looked up to me and looked forward to seeing me each week. They knew that I was a varsity lacrosse player and many of them had watched me play and hoped to play varsity lacrosse some day. The feeling of teaching them new skills and instilling a love of the game that I loved was an amazing feeling. I remember getting as excited for their games as I did for my own games. When they won a game, it felt like a win for me. This volunteer coaching position was more rewarding to me than a paid job. I had so much pride in the boy's success. Volunteer coaching is something I hope to continue in the future.

Although volunteering was not something that I chose to start doing on my own or something that I enjoyed when I started doing it, I appreciate all that it has taught me and the opportunities that it has brought me. I have learned a lot about my community, other people, and about myself through volunteering. Volunteering has shown me that helping someone else can be very rewarding. Volunteering gives you a sense of purpose and helps to make you a happier person. When I volunteer it helps me to be grateful for what I have and thankful for the people in my life that have helped me to get

to where I am. When I was younger I thought that I volunteered to help other people but what I have learned as I have gotten older is that I get as much out of volunteering as I give to others. Volunteering is about sharing your skills, meeting new people, giving back to your community and most of all learning new things. I appreciate the lessons I learned along the way and I will continue to volunteer in the future. I am thankful that my mother instilled in me the value of giving back through volunteerism and I am proud of the person it has helped me to become.