

Reva Kale - Volunteering Essay

I will always remember the feeling of my first book. My first true book. One I cracked open and deciphered on my own, one that enticed me, amazed me, electrified me from start to finish. The minute I learned to read, I was gifted with a set of keys to a whole new world bound only by my imagination.

Volunteering, like reading, gave me an extremely valuable set of keys. When I chose to work with Special Olympics at my local YMCA, I never imagined it would be like learning to read once again. I thought I knew all there was to know about the world I was about to enter. It was charity work. Good for college. A way to be active in my neighborhood. But I was entirely wrong. Spending just fifteen minutes with a child with special needs, meant their mother had fifteen extra minutes just to herself. Spending just fifteen minutes with a child with special needs, meant they had fifteen extra minutes to laugh with a peer. Spending just fifteen minutes with a child with special needs, meant that I had fifteen extra minutes to feel completely content. Volunteering taught me about a community of people I would have honestly looked over, a group of people I sympathized with but paid no mind to. Volunteering taught me not to pity them, but to respect them, to help them, to learn and grow with them. I was given the keys to their world, and was welcomed in with open arms. I was apart of a secret, special, community, bound in mutual love and understanding. Never, except in the pages of my first book, had I ever felt so awed and accepted.

Volunteering, like reading, also taught me about myself. When volunteering, I never considered myself less than. There was no rush for grades or accolades, no social drama or shameless self promoting. Volunteering taught me to differentiate between artificial happiness and true, unfiltered, joy. Before Special Olympics, I thought the only way to feel self worth was if someone else recognized you. Service was a way for me to realize that although the opinions of others matter, it is your view of yourself that truly counts. When helping out a child with special needs, I received no grades. They got the medals, I didn't. When they mastered a skill, it was their accomplishment not mine. But I had my victories. I felt good about myself, by making them feel good about themselves. I grew as a person by helping them grow.

As I move to college, and into my adult life, I will never stop volunteering. I will continue to revel in the feeling of pure enjoyment that comes with unselfishly giving back to those around you. Volunteering, like reading, has changed my life, by welcoming me into a new fascinating world where I can give happiness to others while simultaneously finding it within with myself.