

The Community Kid

Anna Verhaegen (8th grade)

Stuart Country Day School

April 27, 2009

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can." - George Bernard Shaw

Mr. Shaw states that it is his responsibility and privilege to do for his community whatever he can. Like him, I firmly believe that aiding one's community, in however small form, is an action to strive for. Doing something beneficial for a group can stir someone else to do good as well, sending a chain of kind reactions through the whole community. During my volunteer work at a small music camp in Trenton, it was a little girl named Penzi, who really taught me the meaning of responsibility to one's community, and made me truly understand the meaning of giving back.

When I volunteered as a Junior Counselor, Penzi, an adorable six-year-old girl, was in my chamber music group learning how to play the violin. Her talkative, cheerful, and "quick to please" attitude made her a joy to help reading notes and sheet music. She often helped me a great deal with watching with the very small children. She'd entertain them and be patient with them, as she and I showed them how to use the xylophones or maracas during their recess breaks. Her good mood could spread through a room faster than it took a hundred campers to eat a hundred egg salad sandwiches.

One early morning, just before the group of beginner violin classes started, I wonderingly asked her, "How are you so joyful all the time?" It was almost 7:30 in the morning, much too early for one to be smiling in the midst of twelve children playing the same song with twelve completely different wrong notes. Penzi's mature answer surprised me. "Miss Anna," she said, using my nickname with the little ones, "I'm happy because I like to make other people happy. You said that helping you with the youngest kids makes your job easier. I just want to help you. Like a thank you."

Anna Verhaegen
Stuart Country Day School

Wow. Her answer really made me think, this little girl, though only six was trying to give back to the community, our camp, by being happy and helpful to me. Penzi's responsibility was to ensure that she was kind and cheerful to the people who helped and taught her. She aimed to be gentle and compassionate, and it made difference in the day of all the campers and staff, including me. Just like Mr. Shaw, she took her role in the group seriously, and as a privilege, not a right.

No matter what it is that you contribute to your community, you can never underestimate the effect it has on everyone around you. It is our responsibility to ensure that we try, just like Penzi, to change the way our community is for the better, even in the smallest way. After she spoke to me, I realized how much my volunteering affected her, to the point where she wanted to reciprocate, making another difference to our musical environment.

Even though it was tiring and hot, I saw that volunteering to help kids from Trenton learn to play instruments they probably wouldn't have gotten to play, was (and still is) my contribution to the community. I'm not changing the world, but something as small as taking time out of my summer to practice scales and "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" with Penzi, had such an affect as to prompt her to want to do something in return. I feel that it's my new responsibility, and Mr. Shaw, you certainly are correct; it is my privilege to do so as long as I live.

What Have You Done for Your Community?

I strongly agree with George Bernard Shaw's quote about duty to your community. Shaw states, *'I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can,'* I believe that it is a privilege to do whatever you can for your community. Though each task may include a sacrifice or a responsibility, it is important to fulfill the tasks, as the people and organizations in your community end up reciprocating your kindness in some way.

With every opportunity to serve your community there is a sacrifice, but those sacrifices are often overcome with the satisfaction you get from completing a task. For example, when I was four, I saw a commercial for Locks of Love, a children's charity that donates real hair wigs to children suffering with permanent hair loss due to Alopecia or cancer. I decided that I would give my hair, as it was quite long, and proceeded to donate a 13 inch ponytail to the charity the next year in front of my elementary school community. My example led 21 other students and faculty to join me the following year in donating at least ten inches of hair each. We did have to sacrifice our hair, but we were able to know that our donation and service to our community made another child's life a great deal happier.

Community does not just mean the city you live in, and the people that inhabit it. Community includes people that you identify with in some way. After Hurricane Katrina, my friend Anna and I decided that while the hurricane hadn't affected us, it was effecting

Alexa Rangelcroft
Stuart Country Day School

hundreds of people like us, and hundreds of students from our fellow Sacred Heart School in Louisiana. We decided to set up a bake sale, to send money to the suffering people and to let them know that our prayers were with them. In shorter than a week, we raised almost \$200 which we sent to New Orleans with a nun from our school who was going there for a conference. We did sacrifice our time and effort but we got the money to the people who needed it and inspired others to do the same for other suffering communities.

Community may involve everyone who lives in your town or a smaller group of people, like an activity group or sports team. I play for the Logan Charge in South Jersey. I was a new player, as I transferred from another team in London, and was made captain within 2 months of joining the team. The role of captain involves making smart decisions on and off the field. Your play and leadership can affect the way your entire team views and plays the game. Taking on the captaincy was taking on a huge responsibility, but it was a great honor and privilege to serve my team in this way.

George Bernard Shaw sacrificed his reputation and livelihood through his political activism he expressed through his Fabian beliefs; he took on large responsibilities like exploiting social problems through his plays. Many of us can not compare to the amount of service George Bernard Shaw did for his community, but as he stated, it is *our* privilege to do whatever *we* can. Everything we do for our community is a privilege and an honor, like captaining a soccer team, donating hair to children's charities or sending relief in a small form of \$200, these are appreciated by the whole community. By living to these standards, communities satisfy each other with hospitality and acknowledgment. So ask yourself, 'What have you done for your community?'

Lindsay Eberhart

John Witherspoon Middle School

A community is like the nurturing soil that surrounds a growing seed. While the seed is little, the soil protects it underneath the cover of its warmth. As the seed grows, it starts to poke through the soil and become more independent, but the soil is still there to foster the seed. The stem of the plant grows taller over the months and starts to grow further from the ground. One day, a beautiful flower appears from the stem. Its color is a captivating lavender with a trace of dark purple running down the center of each dainty petal. The flower would never be as beautiful as it is now if it were not for the soil supporting it every step of the way. When the flower's time comes, it will decay and become part of the soil to help other seeds become flowers. This is an example of how the community helps us succeed and guides us to places we never thought we could get to. And how in turn, when we have lived our lives to the fullest, we should come back and help others.

President Obama is an example of a flower that returned to the soil to help others. Like a seed in dry soil, President Obama had an exceedingly hard start in life. His father abandoned him when he was very young and he was left with just his mother during his childhood. But he benefited from others around him who helped push him to succeed, like his grand parents and teachers. You can imagine their look of pride when President Obama finally held his graduation certificate with a smile on his face that said I can do anything. After President Obama graduated, countless job opportunities were laid out in front of him. Instead of taking a high paying job, he accepted a job as a community organizer to help disadvantaged youth. President Obama returned to his community to

Lindsay Eberhart

John Witherspoon Middle School

give others a chance at life, just like the flower returned to the soil to help other seeds grow.

Numerous examples can be given of people who served as soil for others to grow. However, all these examples are meaningless if people don't follow them. That is why my dream when I am older is to become an environmental engineer. This will allow me to create alternative energy sources and help protect the environment. Our world is getting warmer every minute, and our communities are being threatened. If I can manage to slow this process even a little bit, I will have made a difference. This can help keep our town as stunning as it is today. Beautiful lush green parks and colorful trees decorating the town will be my way of giving back to the community for everything they have done for me.