



Girls Gone Great Essay

by Aidel Miriam Reach, 2010 Winner

Giving or Getting?

*"We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we give." Winston Churchill*

I enjoy giving to my community. The more I have contributed, the more I have gained.

For the past four years, I have been visiting a local old-age home on Saturday afternoons. My friends and I speak to the elderly men and women, sing lively songs, and sometimes even dance with them. To many of our seniors, our visits are truly what keeps them going. One elderly woman told us, "You girls are my medicine- you keep me well." Still, I leave Tudor Heights each week feeling like I am the one gaining, and they are the ones giving. They have vast reservoirs of life experiences to share. I return home with an upbeat outlook on life, and a real appreciation for my health and the freedom that I have to use each day to the fullest.

In tenth and eleventh grade, I also led a youth group for children every Saturday afternoon. Aside from the meticulously-prepared games, activities, and treats that I provided each week, I was expected to bring a cheerful disposition and a positive attitude to each meeting. The children loved to be paired with a counselor, and enthusiastically volunteered to help me out.

Last year, I was responsible for one of the rooms in an art exhibit built by my high school. Aside from utilizing my artistic talents, I also greatly enjoyed motivating my classmates and underclassmen and working together with them. I was amazed at what we accomplished through unity, and so were the dozens of schools that attended from across the country.

In addition, I periodically visit ill children in Sinai Hospital of Baltimore to instill them with hope and happiness.

This year, I am a Class Leader for a middle school class in our school. My job is to motivate the students through biweekly programs and activities.

To my surprise, I have realized that I have a profound influence on those around me. I believe that everyone does. I know that my opinions and remarks cannot be flippant; my every action is being watched, but not just watched- mimicked, copied, displayed, and remembered. And I know that long after I act, my actions can live on in another's heart. Some of these activities have placed the responsibility for the leaders of future generations on my shoulders. These children are junior-sized inspirations to push myself past my limits. They give me the opportunity to become a better person, and teach me to think before I act.

Every Thursday afternoon I work after school as a Project Coordinator for Menucha, a program for special-needs children. Every week, I am responsible for planning a creative project that can help advance the skills of these very special children. I also work as a counselor for a child at Menucha's weekend retreats. I originally began working with these children in the summer as a 1:1 counselor in Camp Mishkon in the Catskills. Caring for a special-needs child is not easy; it entails taking responsibility for his every physical need, often without any acknowledgment from the child. It can be very frustrating when tremendous efforts to accomplish even something small may seem to be in vain. I have learned to appreciate all the gifts that I have: a functioning brain, the full use of my body, and the ability to care for myself and to express myself to others. I also learn from my special children that accomplishments are not measured by comparison to others, but rather by comparison to yourself and your abilities.

I have plans to teach others in the future, either in mainstream schools or in special education. No matter what life throws my way, I

want to continue helping others with a smile. I hope to give to everyone: my family, my coworkers, and my acquaintances. I want to help others, motivate others, and share my talents and gifts with others. From my experience I know that giving breeds satisfaction, and satisfaction breeds success.

Although my school does not require community service, I believe that it is the job of every individual to help others. I do my best to make a difference in my small community, and if every girl my age would do the same, the entire world could be a better place. Making a difference in my community is important to me; I gain from giving to my community. The feeling of accomplishment that giving induces is unsurpassed. For my community and for myself, my making a difference makes a difference.