

Giving Back to the Community

It was July 27th, 2019, and I could hear the music of the birds' delightful singing as I smelled the refreshing scents of the beautiful blooming flowers. My mom and I were roaming around the booths of Ananda Mela, an Indian festival celebrated annually, where people all over our community come together to celebrate the festival of happiness. It is an event that I always look forward to because it is so fun and exciting to be part of it every year! All of a sudden, I heard groans in the distance. I glanced up ahead and colorful spots of pink, green, and blue caught my eye. They were scattered all over the grass, and I realized that they were rings thrown away from the ring toss booth. What were they doing lying around everywhere?

Rings on the ground, kids crying in despair, it was so sorrowful to simply glance at it. I couldn't help it, I had to fix the booth!

"This stall is a complete mess! Can I go help?" I asked my mom eagerly.

"Are you sure you really want to? Well if you're certain about it... Sure, I guess you can!" she replied in a hesitant voice.

The second I heard my mom say yes, I was filled with excitement! I immediately jumped onto the ground, and I picked up the pink, green, and blue rings lying on the grass. First the blue, then the green, and finally, the pink. I hopped up and I saw little kids standing and waiting in a line trying to play ring toss. Some of them were crying, and the ones who were, had tears that were pouring down their face like a never-ending water fountain.

They all looked at me skeptically, likely thinking, "Who was this girl? Did she think she could run a ring toss booth by herself?!"

I felt let down, but then, I came up with the perfect idea! Maybe I could run the booth for a few more minutes and reset the ring toss game after kids play each round! But what if I

couldn't do this? Wouldn't this booth go to waste? It was critical that this booth was successful because it was advertising classes for children at the temple. The volunteers were too busy taking care of other booths and the entire festival as a whole, so I felt like I had to help them out!

"I have to give it a shot," I told myself.

I immediately got to work and distributed the rings to the little kids waiting in line.

"There you go!" I exclaimed, "Have fun!"

The first person in the line played first, then went the second person and so on. I got to meet and get to know some of the kids, and surprisingly, they were pretty nice, and they were having fun, which made me happy.

"Wow! Good job! You did it! You fixed the booth!" I heard my mom cheer, as she stood near the stall.

"Yeah! You're right! It is working! Yay!!" I exclaimed.

Looking at the happy children, I decided to stay for 5 more minutes, just to take care of the booth for a little bit. All of a sudden, my heart started to race and I stood looking at a big crowd of kids and their parents eagerly waiting to play!

"Ahhhhhhhh!! Oh no! What am I going to do?!" I screamed, at a volume so loud that I thought Oregon could have heard me.

I was overwhelmed of how many people were there, and I was a little worried that I would not get to everyone, but at the same time, I was also hopeful because I knew that if I tried my best, then everyone would be happy! Come on, I can do this, I thought to myself. I took a deep breath and got to work again.

CRACK *CRACK* *CRACK* By the time I was done, my back was as broken as a cracked egg from repeatedly picking up the rings on the grass and handing them to kids. I was

done, but suddenly, I saw the head volunteer coming to me! My cheeks blushed and sweat dripped from my forehead. What was she going to say to me? Was she going to tell me that I was not allowed to help? Was I in trouble?

To my surprise, she told me with great gratitude, “Wow! Aishwarya! You did an amazing job! I heard lots of things about you from kids and parents who came to your booth!”

My eyes enlarged to the size of beachballs. Had the head volunteer complimented me?

She then told me, “Here is a shirt for you. It is for the work you have done in this booth to earn it. I am impressed! Please come back next year!”

I saw bright blue and yellow colors on the shirt, and I could not stop smiling because I loved it so much!

“Thank you so much!” I replied happily.

How cool is that, I thought? I had earned myself a volunteer shirt and had been invited to come back next year! That day was filled with happiness and many sweet memories, and it was getting late, so my family and I finally went back home. I could never imagine that I was capable of something so small, but so impactful to the community. I felt so proud of myself wearing my new shirt, and it felt as though the winds and the beautiful, shining stars were with me that miraculous and memorable day, which I will never forget.

I also learned several things that day, like how every person matters and how each individual plays a role in the community. It doesn't matter what they look like or what beliefs they have, everyone is important in shaping our community. On the 27th of July, I mattered because I helped run the ring toss booth, supporting volunteers and the temple. But it wasn't just the 27th of July where I mattered, I matter every day and all the time, just like every single other human being with whom I share this world with. I am no Albert Einstein, but I confidently

believe that every person is unique, valued in so many ways, and has an important role to play because each one of us fits like a puzzle piece that together unites us all into one large community.