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When I was a young child, I would often wonder why my parents would pull me away from my favorite TV shows to take me to different events where I would help people that I did not even know. When I asked my mother why we were at these places, she responded, "We are helping people who need our assistance; we are volunteering." As they dragged me all over the place to soup kitchens, nursing homes, and charity events, their good example formed my own personal conscience. I found that helping others wasn't meaningless and boring, but actually quite enjoyable. Residents at nursing homes sure have some great stories to share! My favorite story was a conversation I had with a woman who was an Irish immigrant. She spoke about when she and her sisters begged their father to take them to America. She told of their journey and the struggles that they faced. As she was proclaiming her love for our country, she suddenly broke out in song, singing "God Bless America!" I can clearly remember her Irish accent as she proudly belted out the song! Along with the wonderful memories I have gained from my service, I have also found it to be very rewarding knowing that I brought happiness to someone's life. I believe that volunteerism is the most important civic value that we, Americans, have. I was raised with this civic value instilled in me, and I could not imagine my life without it.

In 1776 Thomas Paine wrote the Common Sense, arguing for Independence from England. The essays written by Paine contained many inspiring messages. "I call not upon a few, but upon all....it is better to have too much force than too little....throw not the burden of the day to Providence, but show your faith by your works, that God may bless you." Although Thomas Paine wrote the Common Sense during the American Revolutionary War, there is a message that can be pulled from it for all of American generations. It simply states that the more help that is generated, the better. In the 1800's a common event was known as barn raisings. Barn raisings were community parties where people worked together to build a structure for a neighbor. Today, barn raisings can be compared to Habitat for Humanity. Millard Fuller, who founded Habitat for Humanity, is not only an advocate of volunteerism, but is also a prime example of it. He sacrificed his whole fortune for the good of others, which is a very selfless act. These examples are what volunteerism is all about.

In addition to Thomas Paine's motivational words, I am sure that many people are familiar with this famous quote: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." These inspiring words were spoken by our 35th president, John F. Kennedy, on January 20, 1961 at his inaugural address. These words were an inspiration as they tugged at the hearts of many. President Kennedy reminded Americans that our country had already given them the best possible gift; the gift of freedom. Recognizing that others deserved a chance to experience a better life, President Kennedy founded the Peace Corps, which shows the spirit of American men and women. Through the encouragement of Kennedy, they were willing to sacrifice their energy, time, and toil for the cause of world peace and human progress. They were volunteers, and their hard work and dedication shows just how important volunteerism is.

In the hardest of times, most of us have had to lend a helping hand to others in need of our assistance. I often think back to the Irish woman that I met. I hope that when she arrived in the United States that she immediately felt the kindness of Americans. I trust that the volunteerism of the American people eased any struggles she may have had with settling in a new country. Every time I look back on all of the memories I have gained from my service to others, I become grateful of the fact that my parents pulled me away from my TV shows. They taught me that volunteerism is the most important civic value to being an American. Volunteerism binds people together in a special way. When we do service for others, we are not only helping to ease their burdens, but we are also aiding in the growth and development of America, our country that we love so dear.