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Creative Writing and Research

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### How to Relate Pirates to Volunteer Work

The reader is probably wondering how in the heck do *pirates* even *remotely* relate to volunteer work; don't worry, I'll get to that in time but the reader needs to know the story first. My tale began when I read through the syllabus and noticed that one of our projects was to volunteer ourselves to a certain organization; I can honestly say that I wasn't looking forward to it. I had always been skeptic of volunteering ever since I was old enough to understand what the word meant. I had misconceived volunteering to be an unbeneficial act that received no recognition or compensation, and I denoted it to be a waste of my time. In efforts to make the work as enjoyable as possible, I decided to volunteer at the Cedar Falls Historical Society, seeing as I am interested in history and it would look impressive on a résumé. However, after working with the historical society for a few hours, I was surprised to find how misguided I was on the benefits of volunteerism.

The first day I walked into the society, I was expecting to be treated more like a burden than an actual asset; however, I was greeted by an enthusiastic and kindly, elderly lady named Rita at the reception desk. Apparently, she was a retired teacher of Cedar Falls, and worked part-time at the historical society by helping children better understand their heritage. She couldn't stop telling me how much she appreciated my services at the society, and she gave me the most sporadic tour I have ever had anywhere. Afterwards, she asked me all sorts of questions about my hobbies and interests in history, wondering where my services could best benefit *me* and not

the society. I was rather surprised, considering I had always thought that they'd just toss me a duster and tell me to clean something. I told her I was interested in all kinds of history, but I thought it would be nice to actually learn a little bit about Cedar Falls history. She got all excited and took me on *another* sporadic tour of the museum; she almost felt like a grandmother that I never had, and I'll never forget her energy and charisma when she talked about her own interests in history.

However, it was actually a younger guy named Josh who helped me begin my volunteer work. Josh was both the executive director *and* collections manager of the historical society; therefore, he was an extremely busy and important person for how young he was. He was more of a serious person, but he knew where my interests lied the instant I mentioned 'military history'. He dragged me down into this dungeon-like room, rumored to be haunted, and opened a cabinet filled with ancient rifles, pistols, and swords; my heart shot to the roof in excitement!

All Josh wanted me to do was catalogue the artifacts into a computer database; research those that were unregistered and give them descriptions; and then photograph them. It was surprising how much time it took, but it was also surprising how much fun I had. Sometimes I would find old pistols that didn't even have a cataloguing number printed on them, and I would have to do quick research to uncover their secrets. For me, it was almost like an investigative adventure, and I couldn't help but pick up one of the swords and swish it about like Jack Sparrow from Pirates of the Caribbean. I also did my best John Wayne impression when I fiddled around with an old revolver; but this was all off the record, of course. However, in all seriousness, there were dozens of artifacts that needed to be organized and catalogued into the database. Josh had told me that those old weapons have been lying in that cabinet for so long that

*no one* knew their cataloguing number, or what kind of weapons they even *were*. Therefore, I did a valuable service for the historical society, as well as had some fun in the process.

On a side note, my public-history course had a field trip to the Cedar Falls Historical Society and my professor was confused when I greeted Josh like an old friend right in front of him. Needless to say, I had to explain to him my *other* volunteer project. He was rather impressed, and I felt like I got my much-deserved brownie points for the day.

I also worked at the Des Moines County Heritage Center in Burlington, Iowa. My public-history course required me to do volunteer work as well, so I used half of my hours from that project to go into this one. I basically did the same things as I did at the Cedar Falls Historical Society, except I actually had to *create* an exhibit while being a friendly navigator for tour groups; and there were no swords this time. It was fun and enjoyable, but not as much fun as being with ‘Grandma Rita’ and Josh, especially when Rita starts ranting on all the ‘bad eggs’ she had to teach in her earlier years. In the end, both societies wanted me to return to help them, and it made me *feel* special in their eyes; it was in those compliments that I received the recognition I thought vacant in volunteer work.

Ultimately, those few hours of volunteer work gave me happy and joyful memories that I will recall for many years to come. After I completed my project, I regretted being so pessimistic about volunteer work and how many years I’ve wasted not experiencing it. There *is* recognition and compensation in volunteerism; they were just in different forms that I felt *inside* of me. It made me *feel* proud of myself because I did a good deed and asked nothing in return. I will always remember the experiences and revelations from working with the historical society, especially if I’m thinking about swashbuckling buccaneers or John Wayne westerns. And *that*, intrigued-reader, is how to relate pirates to volunteer work.

