When first going into the Scholars Program at Triton College, I was told by counselors and other people I talked to that I would be required to do Service Learning, or community service work while here. I wasn’t thrilled about the idea going into the Program, but as I learned about it, I became more and more interested. Ultimately I ended up choosing Gottlieb Memorial Hospital as my Service Learning partner. I am planning on going to medical school and figured that this would be a perfect place to start. Since I have to do it, why not do something that interests me and will potentially help me out in the future? I did a little research about Gottlieb and their volunteer services and liked what I saw.

When I went in to talk to the volunteer coordinator, she seemed very nice and grateful that I was coming in, looking for volunteer work. The entire interview process went rather quickly.

I was practically hired on the spot and was told when to come in for my first day. I didn’t exactly know what to expect from volunteering at a hospital, especially in the Emergency Room where I was placed. I knew that there would be real emergencies coming in and out at all times and was quite honestly wondering if this is the right job for me. I was told by the coordinator that volunteers at the Emergency Room help out with little things like changing sheets.
on beds and take specimens to the lab. Knowing all of this, I embarked on my first day as a volunteer in the Emergency Room at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital.

My first day at the Emergency Room was very interesting to say the least. When I first arrived there, one of the nurses oriented me to the surroundings and introduced me to the people working that shift. Not surprisingly, everyone was very nice and willing to offer any help they could, but what did surprise me is the amount of respect I received from the people working there, due to the fact that I was volunteering. I was told by the coordinator during my interview that since I am hoping to go into the medical field, that the doctors and nurses would let me observe some aspects of the job, and that is exactly what I was offered. With each new patient that was admitted, the receptionist clued me in on what was wrong, why they were there, what we would be doing, and asked if I would like to watch. I took every opportunity offered. When I wasn’t observing treatments, I was taking specimens (mostly blood and urine samples) to the lab for testing, and changing sheets on beds that are getting prepared for the next patient.

There are many things I liked about working at Gottlieb; the general aura and atmosphere of the nurses, doctors, surgeons and patients was enough to draw me in. People seem content when working there; they know that they are helping people and that makes them feel good. I talked to a few nurses while there about why they decided to go into the medical field, and the most popular answer was to help people, and to provide a service to the community. I also liked the
relationship between the nurses and surgeons. There wasn’t that career barrier present; everyone was friendly to everyone else. You couldn’t see a superiority/inferiority complex amongst them, and that makes for a very fun and pleasant work environment.

There was one thing that I didn’t like, however, and believe it or not, it was that I didn’t have enough to do. Towards the end of my stay there I found myself sitting more often than actually doing. Now, I know that’s not something to complain about, and of course there is very little they can have me do without any training what-so-ever, but since I was already there, I would have liked a little more responsibility.

Meeting the patients and talking to them was a big part of my stay there. I had certain preconceptions that the patients would not want to talk, that they are in the Emergency Room, and the last thing they want is some kid bothering them with questions. I was pleasantly surprised that this was not the case. Most, with the exception of one man, were beyond nice. They would talk about everything, starting with their day, and what led them to the ER, then they would go into family background, without an end in sight. Just like the personnel, the patients were also pleased and surprised that I was volunteering. I got reactions like “What, a college student volunteering? Impossible.” And of course, there was humor in the statement, and in the way it was said, but when I thought about it,
that really can be a misconception in society today, that there really aren’t people volunteering.

I was positively affected by some of the patients that came through the ER while I was there, but I think family members of certain patients affected me even more. We had a man come in with high levels of carbon dioxide in the blood. This is a very serious matter that can, and would, lead to death. When you see the faces of the family members, and how they talk to the patients, you begin to understand real human compassion. I know that sounds rather deep, but when you know that someone you love is potentially on the brink of death, everything else is set aside. You deal with the problem at hand, and you can see this with the way people talk and act. These patients, and people working at the hospital, taught me a few things about myself. There is an entire world beyond what I have going on in my life. I may think that school or work are too stressful, but when I look at everything else going on, the entire spectrum, then I really begin to notice the true essence of emotions.

I will without a doubt return to Gottlieb (specifically to the Emergency Room) if not to work, then to at least visit. Over the course of two months I got to know plenty of wonderful people that guided me throughout this experience. I would love to be able to volunteer some more and will look into other departments at Gottlieb as well. There is an indescribable feeling you get when doing something without an agenda such as a paycheck. I would love to return
and do some volunteer work out of my own will, not because I have to in order to meet certain Scholars Program requirements. I know my work there was appreciated even though with very limited experience there wasn’t too much I could do. The nurses and surgeons did not hesitate to ask when they needed assistance, and I likewise didn’t hesitate to help out wherever I could.

This experience was unlike any other. I honestly didn’t expect to get too much out of volunteering; maybe it is because I chose Gottlieb over, say, a library but I just feel as if after completion I accomplished something. I learned many things associated with medicine and the medical career as well as about myself. I can now proudly say that I have volunteered and gotten something more than a good grade out of it. I will continue to seek out other volunteering opportunities to try and broaden my horizons with each new experience. I hope to eventually make it into the medical career, and when there, maybe will get to sculpt the lives of other volunteers, wherever I end up.