

Polar Express

The first thing you needed to do is go to Elf Training. I did attend the training with my friend Nikkie and her family in October. There we got the rules and instructions on how to act the part on the Polar Express train. The training was rather intense and long. It lasted several hours. The former volunteers were not very happy when they told them they could not dress like elves this year. The main goal was to stay in character the whole night, they walked us through the whole night as to what to expect, and the main thing was to make the experience as real as possible.

Over Thanksgiving break, on Nov. 25th, my friend Nikkie's family invited me to go work the Polar Express for the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. I was a bit nervous to go because I have never done it for and didn't know what to expect. It sounded like a very good and fun opportunity to practice my acting skills, so I gave it a shot. I was told in past years everyone dresses up as elves, but this year it was changed so that all the Polar Expresses around the world would be the same. They told everyone to wear a white shirt and black pants. They would provide chef outfits for us to put over our clothes once we got there. Once we arrived everyone was so grateful and friendly that we were volunteering to be workers on the Polar Express. We were given a small meal and then the train took off. We made our way to the car we were assigned as we prepared it for the kids. It was exciting! Once we got close to the location where the kid would be loaded up, we were sitting by the windows waving to all the kids outside and I was getting very nervous yet so excited at the same time. It was about 15 minutes after we stopped that many people started to board and we helped show them to our seats. Our cover stories were that we were elves, but we were chef elves and that is why we were not dressed as like christmas elves. There were many different kind of elves and those were the toy making elves and the reason they weren't there this year is Santa had a really big demand for toys this year so all the toy elves need to stay at the North Pole.

It was fun getting to talk to all the kids and seeing the true Christmas Spirit in their eyes. Although there was one little boy who at the beginning of the train ride who was a little grumpy

and claimed the whole train was fake and that Santa wasn't real which was saddening. So all of us in the train tried super hard to make all of the kids believe by the end. I was really trying getting into character. I was always smiling when passing out hot chocolate and cookies and tried my best to make it all about the kids. And once we arrived at the North Pole all the kids were so amazed by the sparking light, friendly elves, Santa, Mrs. Clause and a few elf dogs. This was truly mesmerizing for kids and adults alike. And as we were returning home from the North Pole there was many fun games that we had and interacted with the kids to play. There was the pajama parade where all of the kids got to walk down the train and show off their Pj's. They started on the side with Nikkie my friend and her mom and they had to walk across the train aisle and give me a high five. There was also the 12 days of Christmas which was very fun too, because we needed to run up and down the aisles doing gestures for every single item for the 12 days. The Ho Ho Ho contest was to see who had the best Ho Ho Ho and, the cherry on top for the kids, was getting to see Santa. I even got to sign a polar express book because some kids wanted my autograph! By the time we were back to the station for them to unboard that boy who at the beginning who claimed it was all fake was so excited and said that he thought it was so cool that they actually went to the North Pole. He now believes in Santa which made it all worth it by the end of the night.

This experience was beneficial because it was a live performance that was unscripted. I was able to use my improv skills to help children believe. I was scared at first but then when I got into character it became easier to act the part. I believe I did a good job and connected with the kids on the train. It also was also a good experience to know if I would like working with children. I really enjoyed seeing the joy on their faces and their belief that it was real. I wanted to do more nights but my schedule would not allow it this year but I hope to be able to do this again in the future.

