When I was a child, I was extremely familiar with my mother tongue, Tamil, to the point where my mother worried I wouldn't be able to communicate with my peers at school. Tables turned, however, and once I started school, my declining fluency in the language prompted her to enroll me in a local branch of Los Angeles Tamil School. Not only did I complete the course and graduate from here, but I decided to return as a student volunteer two years later.

My return was motivated by a desire to share what I had learned about my culture through my language to the students in my class, almost all of whom were unfamiliar with Tamil and had been forced to attend. In a way, their disinterest in learning reminded me of my younger self who did not understand the importance of improving my literacy in the language. I hoped to play a part in bringing to them the same transformation I had gone through in my appreciation of my mother tongue.

One day, the main teacher had taken a sudden absence, and I was tasked with leading the class. It also happened to be test-review day, meaning that if I didn't do well, the children's test scores would suffer. When I arrived at the classroom, I tried not to express my nervousness and started with a game. I split them into groups and created a point system: the winning team would receive a prize the following week. After establishing the incentives, I ensured full participation by pinpointing those who remained passive. Soon they were nearly jumping out of their seats, ready to blurt out the answers.

The next week, I discovered that all the students had earned their highest test scores. They also started to come out of their shells and attempted to involve themselves in future classes. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life to be able to instill in them a desire to achieve and spark their interest to go forward in their journey with Tamil, similar to what I had gone through.