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Blood donation experience memorable for me

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Several months ago, I received a phone call from a man who was an officer in an organization called Blood Donors of America, Inc. (BDA). The primary purpose of BDA “is to promote blood donation, blood education, healthy living and community service.”

He asked if I would be a principal speaker at their annual convention in Atlanta over Memorial Day weekend.

I found they were a fully-accredited charity under federal and state law, and while young in years, had a good record. I agreed to attend.

As I began to connect with several of the officers including the president, I noted that they each had Far Eastern names. Living in Florida, the melting pot of the nation and world, I wasn't troubled, each fascinating person spoke excellent English.

A letter of thanks came from the President of BDA, Dr. Nanda Regmi, a research scientist in the department of Neurology and Neurotherapeutics at the University of Texas Southwestern medical Center at Dallas. The letterhead read “Assimilation with Society through Blood Donation.” I liked that.

Arriving at Atlanta Hartsfield, I was greeted by a host of men and women from all over the U.S. Each introduced themselves and gave a warm greeting. Arriving at the convention site, I realized all of the 411 members and attendants were of Nepalese Heritage.

I met most attendants, all either naturalized citizens or legal immigrants, friendly, each committed to serving this country and saving lives through whole blood donations.

I also discovered that as a group, each was accomplished, highly motivated, educated, and industrious, yet not wealthy people. They were “one of us.”

The officers of BDA confirmed that there were no paid employees of BDA. All corporate expenses, and administrative work are done or borne by the members, who give of their time and funds gratefully. I found that inspiring, even if difficult.

Their mission statement attests to a “non-political non-religious charity” dedicated to community service through education on healthy living, the value of donating life-giving blood in all states. They presently have units in 28 states each conducting blood donation drives year round.

As I sat upon the stage with many of the officers of BDA, I was emotionally touched. When the convention opened with the playing of “The Star Spangled Banner,” every person present stood with pride with hand over heart. They also played the Nepal National Anthem. We proudly stood for that also.

On Saturday, there were the open meetings of the convention at which I heard a number of moving speeches about community service, commitment to charity and country. There were organizational meetings for each of their committees each laying out their programs and education, for the future. During the Convention “50 or more pints of whole blood donors,” were recognized.

The convention closed Sunday with an afternoon blood drive by professional staff in Atlanta. I marveled at the enthusiasm and patriotism, both for this country and their native land. I did research relating to Nepal history, a small country, population just above that of Florida.

I discovered that the people of Nepal (among the 20 poorest nations in the world) had lived under a despotic Kingdom from 1768 to 2005 (sound familiar to our Founders in 1776). They founded a Republic with interim Constitution in 2005, and revised the constitution in 2015. It is a sovereign Republic, a Federal bicameral legislature, Provincial (State) Unicameral. The second president of the Republic of Nepal, installed in 2015 was a woman.

I better understand who and what BDA is, and these “Bleeding Heroes” now living throughout this country. I learned much from the BDA members. I believe each of us living in America could learn something from their commitment to doing good things in and for this country,

John Sheppard is a resident of Fort Myers and a former The News-Press Luminary Award winner. He has given over 44 gallons of blood, a Guinness Book of World Records achievement.