

AN ANSWER TO HIS PRAYERS

I was not feeling the Christmas spirit. It was December of my senior year in high school, and college applications and my final Laurel project loomed before me. I hoped to find a volunteer opportunity that would flesh out my college applications and double as my Laurel project. Luckily my student council adviser asked my friend Jessica and me if we would organize a school toy drive for a local charity.

I delegated most of the work to the project committee. I had them create a bulletin board featuring a large thermometer that indicated the number of toys donated. We thought that was enough advertising, and we spent each lunch period collecting donations. Students donated few toys, however, and the thermometer remained low.

Strangely, our adviser began setting aside some toys. When Jessica and I asked what she planned to do with them, she told us that a teacher at the school had recently been diagnosed with cancer. After struggling to teach while going through treatment, he had decided to take a leave from work. With the holidays approaching and medical bills piling up, his family wouldn't have much of a Christmas. Our adviser suggested that we wrap the set-aside presents for them.

My heart was touched. I had been looking at my service project as a means to serve only myself, not others. I decided to triple our goal for donated toys and to start a monetary collection

for the teacher and his family.

Jessica and I visited classrooms and championed our cause. The response was enormous. Teachers, staff, and students gave toys and money to help the family. We soon surpassed our toy goal, which amazed the charity. We also collected more than \$1,000 for the family.

As we carefully wrapped the gifts we had collected and purchased, I realized that the testimony of service I was receiving was just as great as the gifts we were giving. I can't express the thrill I felt as we secretly watched the family discover the gifts we had

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anonymously left on their porch.

A few months later, Jessica and I were asked to teach a seminar on service projects. We explained what we had done without mentioning the teacher's name. A girl raised her hand and stood. Tears flowed as she spoke. The teacher was her uncle, and she described how much our service had meant to him. She said it was an answer to his prayers.

What a joy it was that holiday season to come together in heartfelt service and know we had made a difference. ■

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