

BY DEAN GREENE

"Daddy, I want to help the sick kids." You never know exactly what to expect from a six year old. Sometimes you just listen and then try to keep your balance, or if you're driving, you try not to run out of the road. But this wasn't one of those wild announcements or unanswerable questions, so I played along. "What sick kids, Katie?" I asked. "The ones at the [Levine] Children's Hospital who can't go home for Christmas", she explained. "How would you like to help them?" I asked. "I want to buy them some toys to play with, so they'll feel better. I saw these little toys while we were shopping, and I thought in my head 'I wish I could give one of these to all the sick children, so they would be happy.'"

Evidently she had already discussed the idea with her Mommy, and Elizabeth had been supportive and had forwarded Katie along to me. I was for it too. You just have to be for that kind of thinking. It made me proud of her, but it hurt at the same time. I knew she would need to raise some money, and I wondered to myself how much I would be able to help her, considering that I had been unemployed for several months. I also knew that whatever we chose to do, we needed to do it in a hurry. "God will provide," I told myself, and I made the decision not to worry about it.

"Sweetheart, I think that's a wonderful idea, but you know you'll have to raise some money to make it happen," I said. "I can do that," she replied with confidence. "And we'll have to call the hospital and find out what types of gifts that the children are allowed to have," I continued. "Mommy's already said that she'd do that tomorrow morning," she said. "Well if we're going to do this thing, we'd best get busy," I said as a cue for action. Katie began to make a list of people to call and ask

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Katie Greene, 6, delivers gifts to the Levine Children's Hospital. Katie wanted to help the kids who couldn't go home for Christmas so she started her own fundraising project.

Led by a child

for donations – grandparents, other family members, friends, people at her school – "Daddy," she said, "I want to put in the money that I've been saving to buy a puppy. Will that be OK?" Katie's been praying for God to heal Elizabeth's allergies so that she can have a puppy, every night for three years. "Yes Child," I said, "if that's what you want to do." She smiled.

Katie began to make phone calls, and Elizabeth called the hospital Volunteer Services office. She spoke to the coordinator, Miss Deana, who was thrilled to hear about Katie's idea and promised to e-mail us a copy of their "Wish List". We studied the list – art supplies, craft kits, games, gift cards, party supplies, puzzles, blank journals, bead jewelry kits – all

kinds of stuff for kids of all ages. There was plenty to choose from, and the money was starting to add up, so we planned a shopping trip.

The first stop was at Chick-fil-A, where Katie bought gift cards to be given to some of the older children. There we were waited on by a sweet young lady named Miss Lauren, a student nurse who also works with the kids at Levine. Somehow that coincidence seemed to be a "seal of approval" on what we were doing. After Chick-fil-A, we headed toward Michael's for art and craft supplies – two buggies full. Katie bought art sets, calendars, stickers, bead sets, wooden models, card games, paint sets, modeling clay, and I don't know what else. As we filled the buggy, Katie told her story to

a lady with a thick Jersey accent, who was stocking shelves nearby. A short while later that lady found us in another part of the store. "I think what you're doing is wonderful, and I want to make a donation to your cause," she said as she stuffed a \$10 bill into Katie's hand. Katie was so surprised that she couldn't speak, but finally we all managed to say "Thank-you". I can't remember a time when the actions of a stranger have had such a profound impact on me, but it was almost like being a child on Christmas morning again.

At the check-out a young lady named Miss Madison was extraordinarily patient with us as we counted out ones and fives and almost eleven dollars in change –

much of it in pennies. And as she worked, she told Katie how sweet and good she thought that the idea was, and how glad she was that Katie had come there to buy her gifts. As they counted, I thought of the big deal that's sometimes made concerning the amount of the donations to some charities that actually gets to the people in need. I read somewhere that 50% was a good number, and that often it was considerably less than that. Well, on that scale Katie's project was exceedingly efficient, as she managed just over 100%. When the grand total was finally compared to the piles of coins and crumpled bills on the counter, Katie was a full thirty-eight cents short. She looked up at me, of course, and I happily made up the difference. As we left, Madison said, "You're really going to have a blessed Christmas." I still wonder how she knew.

There was one more stop, for journals and party supplies that had been provided by a friend, and then it was time to go see Miss Deana at Levine. With Katie in her Santa hat and with two gift bags (the size of lawn and leaf bags) full of presents, we arrived at the Children's Hospital. Elizabeth took pictures and I stood aside to watch as Katie presented her gifts to Miss Deana who accepted them on behalf of the children. "What

sort of things do you have in there?" Miss Deana asked. "Well, there's art sets and stickers and Chick-fil-A cards and games and all kinds of stuff," Katie replied through a smile that reached from ear to ear. As we gathered in for additional pictures, Elizabeth spoke for all three of us when she said, "We are so thankful for this opportunity to help out." "Not as thankful as we are," Miss Deana replied. "These presents will mean more to the little people here than you can imagine, so please keep us in mind whenever you want to help children."

As we drove home, I reflected on the day and how incredibly well it all had gone. "It really is more blessed to give than to receive," I told myself remembering what Madison had said in Michael's. And there was something else, another quote from the Bible, but I couldn't remember it all - ". . . and a child shall lead them." Well, Katie had led us this time, and we had all been blessed accordingly. Thinking on further, I wondered how many blessings I had missed, because I had allowed worry, embarrassment, or fear to prevent me from taking part in worthwhile activities. How many times had I said, "There's no way this or that can happen", when I knew in my heart that God plus one is a winning team?" In the words of the reformed Ebenezer Scrooge I prayed, "God, forgive me for the time I've wasted." Then, as the burden was lifted and my good humor returned, another line from that story came to mind, one from Tiny Tim - "God bless us - everyone."

P.S. So far she's up to eleven cents for 2008.