



BY JAN WEBB MC QUISTAN

OFTEN I HAVE BEEN SO wrapped up in hectic preparations for the celebration of Thanksgiving and Christmas that I've had little time left for considering the deeper meaning of these holidays and reaching out to those who are less advantaged.

"Whom Can We Help?"

"Are you headed home?" Sandy, one of the brokers I visit in my southern California territory, sensed I was almost finished with my sales update.

"Actually, I'm headed to San Bernardino to mentor some children," I replied. She wanted to know more, and as I shared a little about my ministry of tutoring and mentoring needy children her eyes lit up.

"Do you know any families our agency could adopt for Christmas?" she wondered.

"You bet I do!" My friend's enthusiasm energized me. Quickly my mind raced over the families I work with. I thought of the children of a recovering drug user I had worked with during the past few years. But I knew I could continue to provide Tommy, Laura, and Billy with their usual Christmas gifts.

Next I recalled another family I stay in touch with on a less regular basis. Several years ago, while another woman, Sue, was in a drug rehabilitation program, this family provided a foster home for her children. As I continued mentoring and tutoring Sue's children, I became acquainted with them.

Water For Christmas

Sometimes we who live with a lot forget about those who don't.

These parents, Greg and Linda, are also recovering drug abusers. Though not on welfare, this family usually managed to find work but hovered just above the poverty line. I knew that some friends and business associates of my husband, Roger, would probably sponsor Greg and Linda for Christmas, as they had in the past.

As I drove to Sue's apartment to work with her children, I thought of all the other families in the run-down complex. I'd been feeling guilty as I walked past the obviously needy children playing on the broken-up asphalt driveway each week on my way to Sue's apartment, knowing that I lacked the time and resources to share with everyone.

Enlisting Assistance

"Sue," I asked, "how would you like to do something special for the families in this apartment building for Christmas?"

"Well, what?" Sue was curious.

"I have a group of friends who would like to provide Christmas presents, but we need to know who the children are, and what size they wear."

Sue enthusiastically joined in the project. Thrilled to be able to have a part in doing something special for someone else, she presented me with a list at our next visit. She had carefully detailed each family, the children's names, sizes, and their toy wish list.

Soon I was back in Sandy's office with Sue's list of 13 children and all the information she and her colleagues needed to go Christmas shopping.

Thanksgiving Rounds

Sandy's and Sue's enthusiasm continued to energize me. At Thanksgiving my husband and I met a friend who was struggling with cancer at our church's Community Services office. We piled her pickup with sacks of food.

Next, Roger and I took the remaining food and headed for the home where Greg, Linda, and their six children lived. I knew that Greg had lost his job with the railroad during the summer. When we delivered the Thanksgiving baskets, I discovered that the family's electricity, water, and natural gas had been turned off for lack of payment. Unemployment compensation was almost enough to cover the rent, but this family was obviously in need.

"Linda," I asked, "what are you going to do?" She told me she had figured out a way to pay for the gas, and hugged me when I wrote a check to the electric company. But they still had no running water. Linda borrowed water from her neighbors, and sent her children to her parents' apartment several blocks away for baths.

Holiday Office Party

A few days before Christmas, I had the joy of attending the Christmas party at my broker friend's agency. These people exuded enthusiasm and warmth as they shared how much fun they had shopping for the children they had sponsored. The huge bags of gifts barely fit into the trunk and seats of my car.

With squeals and giggles of delight Sue's children helped us deliver gifts to each child in the apartment complex. Doors flew open, children's eyes opened as wide as saucers, and parents' eyes filled with tears as they saw not just one gift, but enormous sacks overflowing with gifts.

Next, my husband and I drove over to Greg and Linda's home. We delivered the gifts, but there was an atmosphere of sadness and desperation that I had not felt in that home before. Normally a fastidious housekeeper, Linda was obviously struggling to keep a clean house with no running water.

"Linda, are you OK?" I asked. She looked awful. Dark circles hung around her eyes, and her skin looked pale.

"The doctor says I have a bladder infection and a kidney infection," she shared. We talked about how long it would be before they could scrape enough money together to pay the water bill.

That night as I was preparing for our own family reunion, I kept thinking, *Linda needs water. It's Christmas, and the family has no running water.*

Encouragement From a Friend

The next day, in the midst of packing to leave for our vacation, I happened to leave a message for my friend, Donna. She called back a while later and said, "By the way, my husband and I have been enjoying your CD so much, I'd like to buy one for a Christmas present for my daughter."

I told her that would be wonderful, and I mentioned that the proceeds go to our mentoring ministry. I was still thinking and praying about what to do for Linda when Donna called back. "You know," she said excitedly, "my husband and I have made out our Christmas list, and we're wondering if we could purchase a CD for each person on the list. We figure there's no better way to handle our Christmas shopping than when the money is going for such a good cause."

"Lord, You've answered my prayer," I breathed. "This is just the encouragement I need." I was still not finished packing, but overjoyed, I immediately called Linda and said, "Can you meet me in an hour? We're going to go pay your water bill."

The Spirit of the Season

Greg met me, and we headed for the water utility office. Normally very quiet and shy, he poured out his heart as we drove, sharing the frustration and pain he felt at not being able to support his family properly. We drove up to the office and spoke to the person on the other side of the glass.

"We'd like to pay a water bill," I said.

"Are you the tenant or the owner of

the property?" the woman asked.

"Neither," I said. She disappeared for a moment and returned with her supervisor.

"Now let me get this straight," the manager said with an incredulous look on his face. "You're not the landlord, and you want to pay this person's water bill?"

"Yes," I insisted.

"Well, you're going to have to pay for two months, plus a deposit."

"No problem," I replied. "Just tell me what we owe." I knew my friends were helping me, and God would provide the rest.

To my surprise, the man continued to ask questions. "I'm just curious," he said. "Why are you paying this family's water bill?"

"Well," I had to think fast, "it's Christmas. I want to do something nice for someone who could use the help."

The supervisor and all the staff who had gathered around the window broke into huge smiles as they accepted my check and entered the account as "paid" on their computer.

The Joy of Giving

As we left that afternoon headed for our family reunion, my husband and I felt a deep sense of joy and satisfaction. In a 24-hour period 30 children were blessed with Christmas presents they needed and wanted, and Linda, Greg, and their family finally had water. Linda told me later that when the water was turned on, the children ran from faucet to faucet, turning them on and crying, "Water! We have water!"

Because of the love and generosity of many people we all enjoyed celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the source of living water.

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