The Birth of Operation Dreamkeeper

The birth of Operation Dreamkeeper came about through the vision of the late Robert Thurber, a volunteer at the Good Samaritan Training Center. Having grown up without parents, he believed that every child’s dream was to be love—yet there are thousands of children for whom love is difficult to find due to poverty, sickness, and sometimes death. Christmas for many can be a day of blissful excitement, but for some it is their worst day of all. Unfortunately, there are children who wake up to the gift of nothing under their little tree of hope. Mr. Thurber, who grew up as one of those children, felt something needed to be done for today’s children in need. On December 21, 1993 the Good Samaritan Training Center, along with the help of the community, hosted its first annual.

This Good Samaritan Training Center Newsletter’s color edition has been generously provided by:

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My Life is Complete  By Ronald Daniels

My name is Ronald Daniels and at a young age in my life I had a chaotic lifestyle. I felt incomplete. As a teenager I had friends that were drug dealers. I started dealing drugs at 16 and I was into armed robberies.

In my 20’s I started using the drugs I sold. Later in my 20’s I met my wife and got married. I was still pulling armed robberies and she didn’t know about my lifestyle. We had 2 children together. When she found out about my secret lifestyle, she divorced me. I had joint custody of my 5-year-old son, and he was influenced by the way I lived. I wasn’t spending time with him like a father should and he followed my footsteps and started breaking the law. He was using drugs, partying and pulling robberies. In his 20’s he got arrested on a robbery charge and was sentenced to 8 years in prison. I was devastated.

As my life spiraled out of control I cried out to God. I felt his presence drawing me. He helped me make profound changes in my life. I can go back and change my past and how I raised my son but now I am living differently. I go to church regularly and I volunteer at the Good Samaritan Center intaking clients. I’ve been faithful for quite some time and started influencing my grandson in the way I now live. I have taken him to church a few times and I just got him a ticket for the Operation Dreamkeeper Christmas program. It’s a great Children’s program that is centered around the birth of Christ. My grandson’s name is Kamari. I know that this program will continue to bond me and my grandson in the new life that I now live.

The Word of God teaches us how to live our life and function. His Word teaches we’re complete with Him in our lives. I’m thankful to Jesus that I have a new and different way of living and that’s what I’m passing on to my grandson in hopes that my children will follow suit.

Loud and Clear  By Erma Smith

My name is Erma Smith and I have seven great grandchildren. I am seventy years old and on a fixed income that only provides my necessary needs. I am raising my grandson’s children and have no money to buy presents for Christmas. I am a born-again believer and my faith is in God and the Good Samaritan Center has always been a help when I’m in need. My children have tried to create problems for my grand and great grandchildren but the Lord is my help and the Lord changes it for the good.

One of my great granddaughters, Eve, who is eight years old spends a lot of time at UC Davis Children’s Hospital. She is a special needs child that is dependent on a wheelchair. She has had ten surgeries breaking her bones to reset them so in the future she can walk. I try to encourage her pointing out her abilities and not her disabilities. The Lord Jesus uses Eve’s mouth to testify of God’s goodness. The Operation Dreamkeeper staff stated they were going to buy her nice Karaoke machine so she can continue her testimonies about Jesus loud and clear.
**Tidings of Comfort and Joy**  
By Melissa Ramirez

My name is Melissa Ramirez and I am 54 years old and disabled and on a fixed income. For two years now I’ve been off drugs. Three months ago, I got a phone call from my daughter-in-law in Houston, Texas informing me that my son was murdered. They shot into his car seven times while he was driving home from work. My daughter Jessica and my two granddaughters live with me because my daughter got laid off because of COVID. She has no income right now but is looking for work. There’s not enough money to have any Christmas right now without help. All of these problems are really hard to deal with and I’m facing them sober. I’m so grateful for the people at the Good Samaritan Center that counseled me and prayed for me through this difficult time. It brought peace, comfort and a sense of stability and I feel so blessed that their program Operation Dreamkeeper will be able to help with my granddaughters Aaliyah and Ariels Christmas.

When my granddaughters and I got the Dreamkeepers there was a line of families to go inside. They had a booth outside serving hot chocolate and cookies for us. As we continued moving through the line we saw giant Holiday inflatables—a snowman, penguin, and a dog all dressed up for Christmas. After we passed by, we were greeted by “fogi” bear and instead of him looking for a picnic basket to eat for himself he handed us candy! The closer we got to the door the more excited we got and wondered what was inside. I told my grand daughters that some kids were going to win a bike inside. Aaliyah said “I’m going to win a bike; I’m going to win. I claim it!” As we were asking to enter inside, we turned toward the Nativity—it really looked beautiful. Then a lady read the Christmas story out of the Bible about the birth of Jesus. We all felt the Spirit of God! As the story ended, we turned to receive our brand-new wrapped toy. Then Aaliyah was called by Chris and Rhonda Larsen and declared her as a winner of a brand-new bicycle! She jumped on the bike and shouted “I feel awesome!” At this program I felt the tidings (giving) of comfort and joy.

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**The Director’s Perspective**  
By Loretta Clopton

Operation Dreamkeeper is dear to my heart and also to God’s heart. It’s a wonderful opportunity to help the poor and needy in our community and share the true story of Christmas. We distributed around 950 tickets for disadvantaged children ages 5-10 using our Community Centers throughout the city of Stockton along at the Good Samaritan Center. The Delta Variant of COVID caused our event to be held once again at the Good Samaritan Center facility. We used staggered times on the tickets to ensure an even flow and crowd control.

The event began at 9:00 AM with families lining up out front our building. Outside in the line area we had a booth to give out hot chocolate and cookies. We placed large blown-up Holiday yard art to contribute to the festive atmosphere. Since the Good Samaritan Center is located on busy Fremont Street, we stationed pedestrian security to ensure the families were safe as they arrived in line. Also, our volunteer Tamara dressed in a bear Mascot suit and was there to greet the children and give them candy.

As the families entered into the lobby, they viewed the large porcelain Nativity Scene as a volunteer shared the story of Christmas and Bible verses about the Birth of Christ. As the story ended the families turned to our toy distributors Michelle and Jessee, and they handed them their age and gender appropriate brand-new wrapped toys. We are also able to give-away 38 bikes to random children. Also, several families received prayer and counseling that we offered in private rooms.

We at the Good Samaritan know that many children wouldn’t have had any kind of Christmas celebration without the help of Operation Dreamkeeper. We could see the families felt the love and care of our giving and felt the joy of Christmas. Special thanks to Lighthouse of the Valley Church for their burden and help along with our volunteer staff at The Good Samaritan.
Chris and Rhonda Larsen helped distribute 38 bikes to children at our event.

Travis Holman from the NorCal Honda Trail Riders donated several new bikes for the 2nd year.

2nd Chance Thrift Store manager Mike Thomas had a very successful toy drive.

Sister Jessie Carranco again gave a barrel full of toys.