

ALL BECAUSE OF A SHOEBOX

Life Care Centers of America became a national sponsor of Operation Christmas Child in 1995 after Forrest and Kathleen Preston saw Franklin Graham, president and CEO of Samaritan's Purse, describing it on a television talk show.

The next day, Forrest challenged company leadership assembled for the annual management meeting to participate. With our nationwide footprint, we helped Samaritan's Purse jumpstart the program with our centers acting as drop-off locations for churches, schools, businesses and families. Several years later, churches took on that role. While we no longer canvass the community, many associates still choose to participate. The national collection week this year is Nov. 16-20, with the final collection day of Monday, Nov. 23. You may find information about the program and drop-off locations in your area by going to the Operation Christmas Child website.



The idea is to take a simple shoebox, fill it with a quality “wow” item, such as a stuffed animal, soccer ball with pump or a clothing outfit, as well as additional items like personal care articles, school supplies, crafts and activities, etc. This year we face different challenges due to the coronavirus, but Samaritan's Purse is reminding us that we can build a box online. One great feature about building a box online is you can still write a personal note and include a picture. You may find the build-a-shoebox link on the website as well.

Samaritan's Purse collects and distributes these gift boxes to more than 150 countries plagued by hunger, natural disasters, disease or the ravages of war. More than 178 million children who might not otherwise have received a Christmas gift have benefited from this program.

Life Care has developed a wealth of stories of children blessed by this outreach. Elisabeth Freeman, writing in *Christianity Today*, told about Claire Peterson, a 5-year-old girl whose alcoholic mother abandoned her in a Russian train station. Claire grew up in a Russian orphanage. At the age of 13, she received her first Christmas gift, a shoebox from Operation Christmas Child. She cried over the box, filled with toys, hair clips and candy.

But the greatest gift she received that Christmas was when the American missionaries who gave her the box told Claire the story of Jesus. She believed in the words they shared with her and began praying to know God more. She hid in her closet to pray, knowing that if the workers in the orphanage caught her praying, she would be beaten. “My only hope was God,” she said.

(more)

The orphanage had a rule that girls were forced to leave that institution at age 16. Many girls who couldn't find work or safe shelter turned to prostitution. It was cruel and debasing work, but many of the girls felt it was their only choice. So as an alternative, Claire prayed for a family. At age 15, she was adopted by John and Marie Peterson from Texas. The Petersons have five adopted daughters, all from Russian orphanages.

Today, Claire is doing mission work herself, sharing God's love with other orphans. And it all began with a shoebox filled with love and anointed by God.

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1 John 4:16 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter