

**Honorable Mention
Amelia DiGiantonio**

11th grade, Green High School, Green Local Schools, Green

Title: *An Act of Giving*

We have all heard the saying that it is better to give than to receive, but how many of us truly believe in it? Although I wouldn't call myself selfish or voracious, I must admit that there were times in my life that I put my own welfare before others. I would wallow in my own self-pity whenever something wouldn't go exactly the way I intended. As I look at myself now, I am not ashamed of my past, but rather pleased at the thoughtful individual I have become.

When I was in the eighth grade, my class was required to participate in a community service project. We were divided into several groups and assigned to different locations. None of us were thrilled by the idea to begin with. The only thing we looked forward to was getting out of school for we anticipated to be a day of doing, well, nothing. Little did we know that we were all in for quite a wake-up call.

My group was sent to work at a shelter for women and children who needed a safe place to stay for whatever reason. When we arrived there, we were each given various tasks to complete in order to fix up the place. I was assigned to clean and organize the children's play room along with my best friend, Danielle. The lady who showed us to the room explained that the children didn't have many toys to play with. She also told us that the children really enjoyed watching movies, but the shelter's VCR had recently stopped working. Since they were on a short budget, they didn't have the money to buy a new VCR or toys.

Before we could ask her any questions, we found ourselves at the play room door. It was the most gloomy and depressing place I've ever seen. The walls were a dull grayish color, and the only source of light was from two grimy windows. There was a yellow plastic table in the center of the room with two red chairs. The carpet was worn down to the point that you see the matting that held it together. Broken toys were scattered about the floor, making the room appear to be the site of vicious combat. Danielle and I began our work by sorting through the toys and throwing away all the ones that were beyond repair. It didn't take us long to realize that our trash bags were filling up all too quickly.

We noticed a pair of wide eyes peeking out from behind the door frame. A small girl shyly crept out from her hiding place and stood in the doorway. She had beautiful maple skin and a mass of curly, dark-brown hair. We told her that we were just cleaning up and that she was welcome to come in and play. She smiled and sat down at the yellow table. When Danielle asked her how old she was, she held up four chubby fingers. For the next hour, she played quietly with the few remaining toys while monitoring our every move. Throughout our scrubbing and polishing we tried to make conversation with her, but her shyness graced us with only smiles.

When it was time for us to leave, the girl was still sitting at the table. She looked so content with what little she had, but we couldn't help but wonder where the other children were. As we left the room, I asked her where were friends were. She turned her head and replied, "These are my friends."

Danielle and I didn't say much to each other on the way back to school. We were heartbroken by the girl's few words that had left such a mark on us. After seeing the few things the children had, we decided to take some action. We organized a toy drive and asked all the students at our school to bring in any toys that were in good condition. We successfully collected over a dozen bags full of toys, games, and videos. It was then that we were reminded of the broken VCR at the shelter. Since our small allowances were not enough for such a costly item, we asked our parents if they would split the cost of a brand new VCR and donate it to the shelter. Fortunately they agreed, and we were overjoyed at our accomplishments.

One of the teachers at our school found out about all the extra things we had done of the shelter. She stopped me in the halls and informed me that she was having the newspaper come to our school to take pictures of us with all the bags of toys and the new VCR. Politely I thanked her, but explained that to her that we really didn't want to make a big deal out of simply doing something nice for someone else. To my surprise she started screaming at me, demanding to know why I didn't want people to know about the "good deeds" Danielle and I had done. I tried to make her understand my reasoning, but the concept of doing something nice without making it into headline news was beyond her knowledge. She continued to put me down until I burst into tears and walked away from the scene.

In today's society we are so caught up in fueling our own personal gain that we often forget how important it is to help others. Some people only do thoughtful things so that they can brag about them and wear them like medals around their necks. For me, the satisfaction of having impacted someone else's life in a positive way is its own reward. I've learned that a life-changing act isn't always necessary, for sometimes it's the simple things that really count. The VCR was donated anonymously to the shelter, the way it was meant to be. I only hope that one day the little girl will remember our kindness and pass it along to someone else.