

Gerald Butler and Brian Truitt,

I was thrilled to read your article published in the April 13th USA Today "sharing in the USA" section regarding volunteerism...or as you put it so succinctly "giving back".

I have evolved after years of living as a somewhat sub human. I am a corporate citizen and most importantly, a mommy. I had my first true "giving back" experience three years ago.

Regardless of the illusion of knowing I was doing my part, you know, taking Jane's calls, arranging for pick up's and placing the unwanted garbage that others may enjoy for recovery direct from my door step. They make it so convenient; our various unwanted or gently used items are carried away just from receiving a call. For years I thought Jane was a real person and that we had a relationship! I have to share, I did give up a brand new iron still in its original package thinking it would be a treat for someone else...obviously, I had no interest in using it.

So, On March 30, 2007...and for the first time, I looked up from my simple perch on a Saturday morning to realize my family had scattered. My boys were off; gone for an overnight and my husband (live in lifer, at the time) had just jumped a bus heading to Albuquerque to coach a Rugby team to victory.

Naturally my first reaction was...grab the remote, lie back against lots of feather pillows, smack in the middle of a big bed and look around knowing "it is all mine"... sigh. Well, on went the TV.

My show was immediately interrupted by breaking news; a tornado had just touched down in Holly, Colorado. "Decimating homes in the small town of...killing one, others hospitalized" This is Colorado! The next think I know, I grab a large pocket book, shoved in an extra shirt, brush and jeans and threw it in the car with a pair of old cowboy boots (thinkin hard toe?!) and a light Rugby jacket. **OH, I am unemployed at the time, flat broke and empowered to Help?! I didn't think gas, food, hotel...AND (thank g-d I didn't MapQuest before leaving, it IS a big state and Holly is on the farthest SE corner bordering Kansas, not close...but, is the home town of my friend Governor Roy Romer, I learned later) My free mommy day was my best day...**

I found myself stopping at every Wal-Mart and Dollar General on my route to Holly. It was only a six hour drive, south to Pueblo and then East until the state ends, no problem. As I was making stops, I was sifting change (coin) thrown about my car and I was good. I found an old credit card with about twenty bucks on it and I was set. I bought baggies, hefties, brooms, kid's toys? (I guess to keep them occupied and to replace what I thought they may have lost in the storm) I purchased lots of water. So each place I went I asked Wal-Mart staff what the town requested, thinking they have a Tornado Registry like Target does for Weddings- Just call in your wish list and you will receive. NOT! It took them three days to finally give it up and frankly it was the local Safeway that was happy to donate burger meat, water and other items. Yeah Safeway!

The detail of the next long full day is too hard to find the words to express. Such a series of moments is not possible to share meaningfully but, extremely relevant so trust me and keep reading.

I met the most giving people the world holds, those that were victims of the Tornado and those that traveled like I did...not knowing what you are going to do until you get there but, you made the effort to go there. I made friends for life; with the local Channel 2 news folks, church peoples from Loveland, CO, Boy scouts from Kansas, students from Boulder and a famous Rodeo Cowboy who trailed an entire block party on scene with all the fixings' to include a DJ to lift spirits.

I have never seen such devastation close up and never have worn a gas mask, gloves, boots combo before AND not worried about how I may have looked (where are the casting Directors when you need them, thinking...Invasion of the Bionic Ants.) Oh, and yes, I have been to Israel during very sensitive times; this still was worse.

We saved collectables for 80 year old women, cleared homes and trailers for people who weren't home to save their own belongings. We found family photos from the turn of the century, a 43 year old bottle of Crown Royal, jewelry, love letters, ancient Christmas cards, bills, etc...people save the most interesting things.

The city was so appreciative and grateful for the effort and real work, yes, hard labor that was performed by complete strangers. I learned a great deal that day. I have never felt happier, full, dripping kindness; **that was my first day giving back and on that day, my life changed.**

Since that time, I have become employed by a worthy financial institution. I began a mentorship program for young women with me, myself and Irene in a beautiful country in a small town outside Entebbe, Uganda. It has been two years since I started my work in Uganda with the students of Ulrika School of Home Economics, cultivating relationships with the students and the Sisters in Kusubi. I now save all my airline points to continue to travel to be with them. The convent community is run by Catholic nuns, my new family; they thrive. The students are enrolled in a two year vocational program recognized by Uganda and participate in a school curriculum that points them toward higher education and/or career pathing. This is the new model followed with the support of my involvement. What a joy to have just returned from my students graduation that took place on February 26, 2010. What an honor and a privilege to join members of Parliament and the Church to recognize their successes and their future... They have given back to me more love than I can ever articulate. I am more fulfilled in so many ways, I could never have imagined. The cycle does continue and I have just had the pleasure to dance with the new crop of incoming students. They are respected and are properly prepared. Unfortunately, we/they still need internet access. Some things seem so simple, OY.

PS. For those of us who thought that just by being a mom provides an upgrade nonstop ticket to heaven with premier accommodation...think again ladies. Try leading by example, and give back, not just to your family but, to your world. Your children will be better for it. Take them with you. See Mommy make a difference, see Jane again...the orchestra seat will indeed be waiting for you!