

My gifts from God are many, but the gift of compassion is my greatest. I use this gift by showing love to God's creations and leading others to show the same compassion. Sometimes people get too busy in their lives to find time to show compassion. Animals are one of the most vulnerable creatures of God. They rely on humans for love and survival. When I help an animal in need I feel like I am serving God. When I hold a hopeless animal I feel deeply for all who struggle. A person with a handicap or a student with a learning disability, an aging grandparent or a baby in the womb are examples of those among us who need our love and compassion. They are not an inconvenience or a mistake, they are a blessing. Last year my family and I fostered over twenty five animals. Most were abandoned and many were orphaned kittens that were only days old. They had to be fed every two hours which meant we had wake up all night long. Sometimes I would have to wake up early before school to bottle feed them. We spent hours cleaning their litter boxes, feeding them, and showing them a lot of love. It was also our job to find them the perfect homes. We would not give them to a family unless it was the right fit and sometimes that meant keeping them a long time.

Fostering is a big responsibility but it is a rewarding experience to care for a fragile life. We did not just keep them in a cage and give them food. We welcomed them into our family and loved them like they were our own. Happy endings were amazing. Giving strength to a helpless animal and finding a loving home was what we strived for. But a happy ending wasn't always the case.

Gaga came to us with her sister Jojo. They were four day old, orphaned kittens. They both were starving and suffered from respiratory and eye infections. They needed excessive care. Every hour of every day we put warm compresses on their eyes, and eye drops. They could not go to the bathroom on their own so we had to put a warm cotton ball on their bottom to stimulate them. Mom cats do this when they lick their babies. The kittens also needed medicine and breathing treatments. They were so weak that they could barely suck on the bottles we fed them. Sometimes we had to use a dropper to get them to eat. We held them and loved them constantly because they mattered and were worth the time, energy, and effort. Jojo continued to get stronger with only a few setbacks. Gaga struggled. We knew that there was a chance she probably wouldn't survive. One day my mom had to run an errand so I held Gaga while she was out. Her breathing was slow and she was so sick. She was dying and we didn't want her

to be alone. I sat quietly with her against my chest. I prayed for her and hoped for a miracle. I looked at her as she took her last breath in my arms. I'll never forget how hard she fought and how sad it was to hold a lifeless body. I wrapped her in a blanket, placed her in a box and buried her that night.

Showing compassion for Gaga made me feel the Holy Spirit. Helping all of these animals brings me closer to God. This compassion for animals has helped me think deeper and love with my whole heart. I am able to show kindness and compassion daily to my family, friends, classmates, and even strangers.

I am thankful to the Meinhardt family for being leaders in our community. Your message of "better not bitter" helps me every day. Your commitment to Sophie's Angel Run helps so many children that deserve our attention and compassion.