

DUE DATE: *February 19, 2020*

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God has gifted me in many ways, and I remember this every day. A couple of years ago I had to have surgery and stay in Cincinnati Children's Hospital for a week to recover. It was not fun, but I got through it because I got to play games and I won't prize while playing games with child life. At the time I didn't bother to think where the prizes had come from but later I started thinking, where did these gifts come from? I asked my mom and she explained to me these prizes were donations from people who are not in the hospital. People who want to help kids get their minds off being in the hospital. Then BAM that's when my idea came to me 2 years ago, starting a toy drive during Christmas called "Raise to Praise".

The first year I did Raise to Praise (2018), my mom help me, and we put a video of myself on Facebook asking for donations for the kids. We had people dropping them off at our house and leaving items on our porch. I collected 200 toys for the children in the hospital. I felt so good dropping off all the toys to Children's Hospital knowing that I was making a difference in kids lives. These items were going to brighten someone's day.

This brings me to this past Christmas (2019), I wanted to go big! I told my mom I wanted to double what I got last year. We started 6 weeks before Christmas with a video of myself again to place on Facebook asking for donations. This time though I had a great idea to do an Amazon wish list. This way people could purchase the items and send them directly my house. This proved to be amazing. Channel 19 news and Cat Country radio heard my story on Facebook from everyone sharing it online. The news came to my house and interviewed me, they placed the Amazon wish list on their web site and spoke about it on the news. This led to boxes and boxes being delivered to my house. I remember the day after being on the news we got 50 boxes! People would write notes to go with their purchases encouraging me and telling me what a great thing I was doing. This made me feel so good, I was just a 12-year-old girl but I was making a HUGE difference.

The week before Christmas I made my donation to Children's Hospital, it totaled in 1,264 toys and \$1,467 in cash donations! I felt so good inside it was amazing! The staff at the hospital were thanking me but I should have been thanking them for this awesome opportunity to help others. I knew I was going to change many kids lives but the feeling I got was just the best feeling in the world.

Giving praises God's character, he say's it's always better to give then receive. I couldn't agree more. Next year I plan to do this all over again and each year improving my efforts to better other people's life's.

Ava McErlane

St. Jude