



Children's Clothing Drive: Repaying a Cosmic Debt

by Mariah Orchid Kelley

One evening, after having finished eating dinner at my boyfriend Alex's house, his mother asked about the status of my CAS activities. CAS is one of the required programs that defines the I.B. program at Sturgis High School, and stands for "Creativity, Action and Service."

Regrettably, I admitted I was failing CAS. Mrs. Taubert raised her eyebrows at me, and tossed a pointed glance Alex's way.

"Well," she began, rearranging the silver bracelets on her wrist. "There's a clothing drive going on at the Mattacheese Middle School, and I told the woman I would have Alex help her. She told me they mostly get girl clothes as a response to the drive, so I thought that it would be nice to have a female aspect of the project."

"Oh, that sounds neat," I responded. A silly choice of words, I'll admit, but it really did get me excited. I'd been blessed with older siblings who were happy to give me hand-me-downs, but I'd also known others that hadn't been as lucky.

My skin tingled with excitement at the thought of the possibility of helping individuals like the ones I'd known.

"Does this sound like something you'd be interested in?" Mrs. Taubert's voice jolted me back to the present.

"Absolutely, yes," I answered. "It sounds like lots of fun."

As I imagined possibilities for the clothing drive, I realized Mrs. Taubert had probably asked me to join Alex as a second source of motivation, a suspicion that was proved true when I tried to talk to him about it.

"How should we publicize it?" I wanted to know. "How long should we leave the box in the pit? How are we going to get a box?"

"I dunno," he answered.

I think it might have been that moment in the hallway at school when I realized this project would test my personality against his. I'd inherited my controlling, type-A personality from my mother, and that day in the hall I could see the patience already wearing thin in the eyes of easygoing Alex.

It was a challenge for me to keep in mind that the project was really Alex's, and I was there merely to help him.

"Well..." I took a deep breath, thinking. "I still have a blank poster board left over from my history project. We could use that to make a sign. Why don't you come over tonight and we'll work on it?"

"I have basketball practice."

I laughed, unable to help it. "Okay," I sighed. Alex caught my tone and shook his head, smiling at me.

"We'll get it done," he assured me.



I smiled, because he was right. My excitement had overtaken me. The urge to get as far as we could on the project right away had seized me and carried me off.

As Alex and I walked our separate ways to class, I found myself hoping that the other students in my school would be as excited about the clothing drive as I was.

My parents always worked hard to keep my siblings and myself from needing aid. I admit I was no help as a child, always getting sick and piling on various medical bills. They succeeded, though, with hand-me-downs and creative dinners. As I considered this, I thought of the parents of those children Alex and I would be helping through the drive.

I wondered many times throughout the process of the drive if the children were aware of their economic situation. I never was when I was young, and I'm not sure I'm aware even now, at 18 years old.

I wondered if the parents of these children dragged themselves from work in the evening to sit with their children around the table and have everyone be content with what they have.

The more I thought about these families - the hardworking mothers and fathers trying as hard as they possibly could in order to make the best life possible for their children - the more I wanted to help, to be part of it and to take whatever burden I could off their tired shoulders.

Alex and I collected clothing for three weeks, filling a four-foot-tall box to the brim by the end of each week. On the weekends, we sorted the clothes into categories and stored them in my garage.

When the time came for the clothes to be delivered, my mother volunteered the use of her truck.

The girls' "Shopping Spree" was already underway when my mother and I arrived at the school, and girls were skipping and giggling between three classrooms with clothes piled high on desks.

Members of the middle school community had also collected clothing, and between Sturgis' donations and those of Mattacheese, there were more than enough articles of clothing.

As I watched the happy faces of the girls picking out clothes, I wondered. If there had been such a program when I was younger, would that have taken some of the burden from my parents?

I decided to tell myself yes; if there had been such a program, my parents would have welcomed it with open arms and been relieved that their children were getting the "new" clothes they needed.

I wanted to convince myself that the parents of these children would be relieved, that when the young girls went home that night, they would share their finds with their parents over smiles and excited recounts of the event.

After Alex arrived to take some pictures for the reporter from the Register, we left in what was possibly the most un-melodramatic exit I'd ever made. The exit didn't seem worthy enough of the great pride and meaning I felt as I left the building.

Not only had I quelled my most crippling personality trait in order to fulfill the activity, I felt I'd also repaid some sort of cosmic debt I owed to the world and to society.

My parents had worked so hard when I was younger, and on this particular day I was able to help other parents like them.

I also realized that this clothing drive activity is one I hope to take to college with me in the near future. If children on Cape Cod need clothes, children everywhere need clothes.



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