

## My first Christmas as an officer

*by Sarah Smuda and Stephanie Garcia, Lieutenants*

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### **It's not about me**

*By Sarah Smuda, Lieutenant —*

While I have been with The Salvation Army for many years and have also been a kettle coordinator, being a single commanding officer at Christmas is a completely different story. Our corps in Hanapepe, HI, is small with lots going on. We have a soup kitchen, food pantry, thrift store, kids' programs, an outpost and regular corps activities. Adding Christmas activities to the mix was a terrifying thought.

I entered the Christmas season nervous and slightly afraid, not knowing what would happen. However, just as in previous years, all the children received gifts, and our kettle receipts were up over last year. I believe God has a sense of humor, for he motivated an anonymous donor to drop a gold Kruggerand in our kettle that is worth over \$1,200.

A contractors' association generously adopted a large family whose father had been laid off. The mother came in to pick up toys for the kids and left with a van filled with everything the family could possibly need. The thing she was most excited about—a large supply of diapers!

Even though it is a busy and exhausting time, everything seems to come together. Why? I believe it is because the Lord must be glorified. It is not by our merit or intelligence—it is simply because he is good and he desires that we raise the money and get the toys we need, so he pours out his grace on our overwhelmed minds and bodies. This season I learned it is not about me and my talents. The Christmas effort works out simply because we are trying to be obedient to God. We are only his hands and feet. It is not by anything we have done, but it is because God is good.

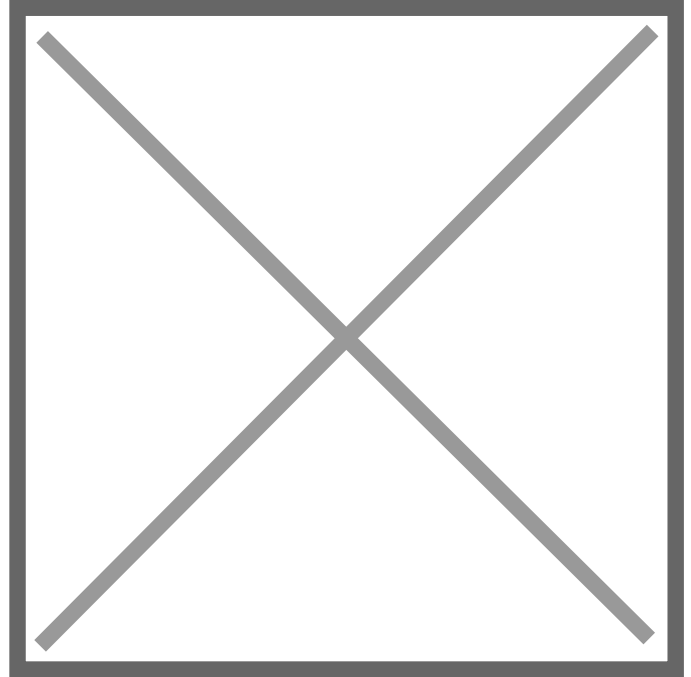
### **God planned Christmas**

*By Stephanie Garcia, Lieutenant*

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This past year was my first Christmas as an officer. I'd heard numerous tales from officers about how hectic the season could be, so my husband and I got together with our staff here in Wenatchee, Wash., and tried to plan everything out—from the way our Christmas application process would work,

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to how many tables we would need for our toy distribution. I thought we did a pretty good job preparing ourselves.

Once everything was well under way, something happened. An application came in from a lady who, together with her teenage daughter, was homeless. Our social worker passed the application on to me, hoping we could do something more for her at Christmas. She was already in the process of finding housing, but without our help she would have nothing for Christmas. However, we didn't have any gifts for teenagers her daughter's age, and all we could really offer was a food box. But I wanted to do more—what, I didn't know, but I kept the application close at hand during the weeks leading up to distribution.

The day of distribution came, and still nothing had presented itself. I knew the woman would be coming in soon for her food box, so I scanned the tables of toys, looking for anything that might interest an older teen. Just 30 minutes before she was to arrive, we received an unexpected donation. A local furniture company delivered bags of brand new winter coats, snow boots, and shoes, along with bags of new gloves, hats, and scarves. As I looked through it in amazement, praying that something would fit the young girl and her mother, someone told me she had arrived. I showed her the recently arrived donations, and told her, "Take anything that fits you, or your daughter."

Overwhelmed, she began to look through the bags with me. We found shoes and winter coats for both her and her daughter. Another bag happened to contain a brand new set of towels, and a few sweaters that were just her daughter's size. We chatted about her daughter, and, eyeing the bags of footballs and basketballs set aside for the boys, I asked her if by any chance her daughter was interested in sports. Her mother said yes, her daughter did enjoy sports, but what she especially liked was flag football. So much so, in fact, that she was currently trying to convince her school's coach to start a girl's team. Just then I opened a bag, looked down, and saw a flag football set.

She left that day, with tears in her eyes, proclaiming that she would never forget what we had done for her. But all I could think about was how despite all my plans, and all the toys I had counted, and all the tags I had made, God had Christmas planned all along.