

HER VIEW

Experiences warm the heart

Shopping with children is always an experience, one that Hillsdale Kiwanis Club members do annually as part of their Christmas party for Head Start students.

It's one of the club's biggest events, exemplifying their commitment to children by taking them shopping for family members at Walmart, then treating them to a party where they meet Santa and munch on homemade cookies. They receive some presents of their own at the party, as well as some one-on-one attention from club members and volunteers.

I like to volunteer since I love kids and get a kick out of the things they say and do. I've been fortunate to have sweet little angels who crack me up with their facial expressions and matter-of-fact comments.

Even with my absent mindedness of thinking I lost my camera bag in Walmart, the event was one I wouldn't trade. Always on the first Saturday in December, one of the busiest Saturdays of the month, I wonder how I will fit in, but it always turns out to be a positive experience that warms the heart.

Fellow club members with active children to keep an eye on were more than helpful when assisting to find the camera bag, when it was on the bus the whole time. I think our minds find more to worry about when schedules are tight and there's more to get done. The key is to remain calm and laugh at life, then usually things straighten themselves out with more gained than given.

My first experience of shopping with families came more than a decade ago when I volunteered to do the Warm the Children program. The program reminded me of how many there are in our county who need a little extra assistance to keep children warm during the winter season. At that time, so many had lost jobs and what was once taken for granted was not there for many.

The program, then instituted by the Hillsdale Daily News and the Hillsdale County Community Action Agency, provided many disadvantaged children facing the cold season with a little more reassurance. As a volunteer shopper on my first experience, I was given the task to meet an assigned family at a store after determining a mutually agreeable time. I knew that with all the



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snow and cold temperatures that year, "the sooner the better" was definitely better. So, the phone call was made right away.

Saturdays are always busy, but seemed to be the best day for all involved. Between play practice for our church Christmas program and making cookies with my girls, I was determined to accomplish the deed, but figured I was in for a long haul. To my surprise it was simple and quick, not as I had anticipated.

I was assigned a family with five children and had envisioned five shopping carts filled to the brim and myself with a calculator punching in price after price as to not exceed the limit.

To my delight, the mother was nearly finished shopping when I arrived at the appointed time. She had begun the process early so her children could try on coats, clothing and boots without the hassle of rushing around.

And, she had written down each item to be purchased for each child on five separate sheets of paper, along with the price each cost. She was organized!

It helped that I had gone over the items she was allowed to buy while on the phone. That way, she thought out what each child needed beforehand, making sure the items were practical.

As she shared what she had found, I listened intently, for I, too, am a cost-conscious mom. We talked about how great a deal it was to find a large package of socks for under \$8 and how the price of coats had soared. It was like we were sisters, chatting about making dollars stretch. I remember thinking how well behaved her kids were and how simple the task was on one of the busiest days of the season. The time was well spent and reminded me of the reason for the season.

May your heart be warmed this season with gifts of time, love and friendship. And, may you find the joy in helping others while taking time to listen to the laughter of children.

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