

Just Do What You Think Is Right

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“Let’s help!” Most school staff have made that statement at least once in their career. But it is usually harder to actually *do* something and continue to do something when we see families in need. Everyone’s time seems to be very valuable and hard to give away, especially to strangers. The secretary, Patricia Douglas, at Briarwood School in Camden is the exception. Mrs. Douglas has been employed at Briarwood for more than 20 years and I’m sure she has seen her fair share of children that are in need.



Karen Hudson

December 2008, we met a family that was living in our local motel. The mother had 4 children and the 5th one was coming soon, and they had nothing. The community and school staff came together and said “Let’s help!” Everyone collected furniture, refrigerator, television, washer & dryer, clothes, tables, pillows, rugs...everything you would need to make a house a home. As we helped arrange the items, all the children were overjoyed and could not wait to see what we were bringing in next. Finally, we had succeeded. The house was now a home.

Mrs. Douglas became friends with the family and would visit them often. And at each visit, she began to form a bond with one of the girls, Lani. Lani was a 2nd grade student and she too seemed to have a special bond with Miss Trish. (That was the name Lani gave her). Now keep in mind, Mrs. Douglas has a family of her own but nowhere in her family was there a little girl. Her son was a Sr. in the local High School and would soon be going away to college. So as Miss Trish had the opportunity to include Lani in her family events, she would.

As time went on, Lani’s life and her parent’s lifestyle was one that Miss Trish had never witnessed before. She always knew her students probably had hard lives but she was seeing it first hand with Lani and she became very determined she was going to give Lani some life experiences she may never have the opportunity to have...not anytime soon anyways. Without me writing details, just imagine very little income, lots of siblings, police, parent drama, and limited morals.

Miss Trish’s heart broke for Lani. She knew Lani was a sweet child that needed some attention and opportunities to do great things. So Miss Trish continued to help Lani and her family on a regular basis. The more she helped, the more she became attached to Lani.

Miss Trish began to give up some of her afternoons to help Lani with her school assignments because she could tell Lani was struggling. Lani had a history of missing school and moving schools. But Miss Trish felt like she could work with her and get her caught up academically.

At one point the family fell on some real hard times, so Miss Trish took Lani into her home to live. Lani loved it ~ Miss Trish loved it. Lani worked hard to please Miss Trish. Miss Trish would



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tell us Lani was a pleaser and adored her for it. She made great gains with her assignments and even began to make 100's on her spelling test for the first time. At home with the Douglas family, she learned about cooking in the kitchen, about Jesus and his love because they attended church regularly. Lani became very proud to be striving to have perfect attendance. On the farm she learned the value of helping and how to drive the four wheeler. Miss Trish also knew Lani needed help with hygiene and dress. So you were not surprised when you saw those two on a girl's night out to the mall or at the local salon. Lani learned quick that she liked Justice and The Children's Place. Keep in mind Miss Trish was giving her new life experiences daily. One of the kindest things she did was register Lani to play in the local girls' softball league in hopes to help her develop friendships and understand teamwork. Miss Trish stayed dedicated to taking her to practice, giving her extra practice, and being her biggest fan for the whole spring season. It didn't take long for us to refer to Lani as "Little Trish". Lani stayed with her for months and she became part of their family.

Summer came and things changed. Lani went to stay with her dad. The Douglas family was heartbroken, and Miss Trish so missed Lani and the time together. Miss Trish would see Lani on occasion at the local Wal-Mart or Lani would stop by her home to get some clothes, but things just were not the same. Lani had changed. Her environment had changed. Her role models had changed.

Lani is now in another school but in the same county. Miss Trish still worries about her and secretly checks in on her. She prays that some of the things she tried to instill in Lani will make a difference and what she did was the right thing.

Miss Trish is to be honored because she saw a family in need and helped and helped and helped...when days were rough, she still helped. She learned a lot about families, their struggles and their lifestyles. She reminds us quite often that children are gifts and there are a lot of things out of their control. So take each moment you have and make a child feel special. You may be just what they needed! And it makes you feel pretty good too. If you ask Miss Trish I am sure she will still say "Let's help"!