

## Sunnyvale teen, San Jose senior show for every gift, there is a giver

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They are several generations apart and have never met, but Madison Frame and Robert Linburgh each spent Christmas the same way: giving up their holiday to make the day meaningful for others.

For Linburgh, that meant pulling on a Santa hat and parking himself at the keyboard to provide the holiday cheer at a San Jose senior center, just as he's been doing for the past 15 years.

For Frame, it meant not opening the usual pile of Christmas gifts. But the Sunnyvale teen wasn't disappointed or surprised.

She'd planned it that way.

After reading about some needy young people -- former foster children who had been homeless with kids -- the 15-year-old asked her parents if they would buy presents for those families instead of her.

A nonprofit group called Unity Care just opened two fourplex apartment buildings on Roundtable Drive in South San Jose, and those families badly need household basics.

"I already have a lot of stuff -- like a desk and space to do homework and a TV and lots of books and my own cellphone and a mother who stays home and a family," Frame said. "They don't have anyone at all."

Her parents agreed to let her spend \$150 at Walmart, which wound up being about \$163 with tax, her mother, Lynn Frame, said.

Madison bought some decidedly unglamorous gifts -- stuff like sheets, cotton blankets, utensils, a block of knives, a broom and a laundry basket.

"My shopping cart was a lot different than

everyone else's," she said.

So was her meaning of Christmas. For everyone who received an unexpected gift, there was a giver. For everyone who sat down to a scrumptious feast, there was a chef and a server and a dishwasher. And for everyone who tapped their toes to "Jingle Bells" and "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" at the Roosevelt Community Center, there was Linburgh.

Rocking a ponytail and orange shoes, the 87-year-old keyboard player had no trouble getting through a six-hour gig Sunday as nearly 1,000 seniors enjoyed a Christmas meal. Yes, he has a pacemaker and is losing his eyesight so he must blow up his music charts to huge type so he can see the notes. But he's been banging out the classics here on Christmas Day on his beloved keyboard ever since his wife died in 1995.

"I look forward to seeing him," said Marolyn O'Neill, who has run the Christmas Day lunches here for two decades. "I know he's got family he could go to, but he comes here. Robert brings the music."

"I just decided to give back to people and play for them: That's like my going to church," Linburgh said of his Christmas tradition. "I'm pooped when I get through, but it's a good feeling."

Though he regularly gets about a half-dozen bandmates to play with him at other senior centers throughout the year, recruiting for Christmas is tougher. A saxophone player, Jim Carvalho, showed up; others were at church, or never wrote back to Jim's letters requesting their accompaniment.



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"Some die and new ones come in," he said of his band over the years.

Linburgh said the thanks he receives from his fellow seniors in the crowd is worth the time he may miss with his family, including his two children and stepson. But it's hardly torture for him.

He's been playing the piano since he was a teenager. He performed in the Navy and owned a piano bar in Campbell, where his wife would join him by singing along. After trading in the keyboard for more traditional jobs to support his family -- he worked in the procurement department for Stanford researchers, and he was a salesman, among other positions -- he has come "full circle" back to music since retiring, said his daughter, Deborah Cunningham.

"On Christmas day he likes to give back to people who don't have a family or a place to go," Cunningham said.

Back in Sunnyvale, Madison's selflessness overwhelmed Andre Chapman, the president and CEO of Unity Care.

"I was just blown away by her level of awareness about giving back," he said.

Madison said she doesn't think what she did is a big deal. But then, she also volunteers at an after-school program for lower-income kids.

"What Americans expect of teenagers is we just go to school and goof off and go to the mall," she said. "But it's like, 'It's better to give than to receive,' right?"

Former foster child Marquita Whitsett sure is grateful for Madison's generosity. Now 28 with a 4-year-old son, Noah Williams, she's had a tough year. Her father, with whom she reunited when she was 17, died suddenly of heart failure, leaving her with no close relatives. Then a truck slammed into her Toyota Corolla. The crash left her with three bulging discs that may require surgery. And she had to stop working until she slowly recovers.

Until last week, she, Noah and his father, Jordan Williams, had been living for a few months in a cramped bedroom. Now they have a two-bedroom, one-bath apartment, and Marquita is walking around touching everything, she's so thrilled.

"I'm truly grateful to Madison," she said. "When I heard about it, I said, 'She did this for us? She doesn't understand how much this means to me. It's really these kind of values we're trying to instill in our son Noah.'"

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