

“Service is the Rent We Pay for Living”
Mary Stuart “Molly” Hackett
Mercy Montessori 8th Grade

I realize how lucky I am. I've been blessed with good health, a good family, a nice home and a good education. But I also realize not everyone is as lucky as I am. For many people, life is not so easy – every day is a struggle. Sometimes children are born with life-threatening illnesses. Sometimes women and children are abused by husbands and fathers. And, sometimes the elderly are forgotten about.

My mom has always taught us that it's important to give back. She has this quote she always shares, “Service is the rent we pay for living.” And, she means it. Mercy Montessori, where I went to school for kindergarten through eighth grade, also taught me how important it is to give back.

My mom helped me start volunteering when I was really little. Because my sister and I loved our American Girl dolls so much, Mom signed us up to be in a fashion show for the Aubrey Rose Foundation. I was only five at the time, and hung on my sister's dress and wouldn't let go, but Mom explained that we were doing a good thing and helping raise money to help others in need.

Since then, I've done a lot of other volunteering, without hanging onto my sister's skirt. Some of my best memories have come from volunteering at Cincinnati's Ronald McDonald House and from mission work I've done with my church. One of my favorite memories from Ronald McDonald House is the day we took Jeremy, a 12-year-old cancer patient, to the Cincinnati Bengals' training camp in Georgetown, Kentucky. Shayne Graham, the Bengals' kicker, had invited Jeremy, his mom, and others from Ronald McDonald House to come to practice to celebrate the first anniversary of Jeremy's bone marrow transplant. All day, Jeremy was so excited and so happy. He was so happy I would never have known he was sick. That whole day, Jeremy was just a kid having big fun. I'm still in touch with Jeremy. I love knowing that I made a friend and helped make him happy while he was so sick.

My other favorite Ronald McDonald House memory is one evening when I volunteered with my church youth group to cook dinner and host a game night. We made lasagna for the families at Ronald McDonald House. I'll never forget how grateful the families looked as they came through the line for dinner. It felt good to help so many families who were going through difficult times. They all looked so tired, but also very grateful that someone had a hot meal for them after a long day at the hospital.

During my Summer 2008 mission trip, I went to Appalachia. On the first day, we visited a nursing home and cleared out a tree that had fallen in the courtyard. We planted flowers and landscaped the courtyard. The older people who lived there came out to see what we had done. They all looked happy, not just about the courtyard, but also because they had visitors. Later that day, we also visited some of the residents in their rooms and sang to them as they had lunch. The smiles on their faces told me they hadn't had company for a long time. I was glad that day that my friends and I made them smile and let them know other people cared about them.

The second day of my mission trip, we helped out at a church that didn't have much money. We helped re-paint some of the rooms in the church, mowed the lawn and mulched the gardens. Three friends and I even polished all of the wood in their sanctuary. When the pastor and his wife came to thank us, the looks and smiles on their faces told us how glad they were that we had helped them.

On the last day of our mission trip, we painted a playhouse and painted sidewalk games for children living with their mothers at a battered women shelter. The staff who operates the shelter sent each of us individual thank you cards. I am still very happy knowing that I helped brighten some lives that day. I can't imagine how it would feel to have to leave my home to escape danger and violence. I know that a brightly painted playhouse and some new sidewalk games made these children feel like kids again.

These experiences, and others like them, have taught me how good it feels to help other people. Whether it's a sick kid, an elderly person who feels forgotten about or women and children who have left their homes just to be safe, they all deserve kindness and respect – and smiles on their faces. I think the least we can do for others is what we would want if we were in the same situations.

My goal in sharing these experiences, is not just to win an Aubrey Rose Foundation high school scholarship, but also to motivate others who might read this to volunteer to bring smiles to the faces of those less fortunate.