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photo by Chris Fritchie



## A Simple Act of Kindness

By Tricia Musslewhite

ON A RECENT warm and clear fall afternoon my two young daughters and I went for a walk through our neighborhood. We were on a mission. My seven-year-old's second grade class was studying rocks and minerals and her mission was to find a "really cool rock" to share with classmates the next day. My mission had a higher, more covert purpose.

I was sent on the mission by Frisco resident Debi Jenkins, founder of Operation Neighbor's Porch, a local Christian ministry whose purpose is to spread the message of God's love with a simple act of kindness. Operation Neighbor's Porch participants secretly leave a plant or flowering basket on a random neighbor's front porch. Attached to the plant is a card that explains to the recipient that the gift is from a neighbor, secretly doing this deed not to draw attention to themselves, but to the message of God's love for us. The

recipient is directed to the Operation Neighbor's Porch website, where he or she can post an anonymous thank you to the neighbor, share a comment or learn more about God's gift of salvation.

"It is my hope that your neighbor will be blessed and encouraged and a seed will be planted in their heart if they are not believers in Jesus," writes Mrs. Jenkins on her Web site. "If they are believers, it is my hope that they will leave a plant for one of their neighbors and continue to keep the message going."

### LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

Growing up Mrs. Jenkins parents emphasized the importance of missions and she watched them work closely with them. A few years ago Mrs. Jenkins, who is also a kindergarten teacher at Legacy Christian Academy, traveled to Honduras with daughter Emily, now 10, visiting orphans and distributing clothing, food and toys. Her husband, Blake Jenkins,

M.D., has volunteered in Honduras and Alaska. The family hopes to travel to Honduras again when daughter Molly, 6, is a little older. But even with this work, Mrs. Jenkins had been struggling to find her own way to bring others to God – to tell others about God's love. The answer, she found, is in the second commandment.

"Jesus tells us that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. I realized how we really don't even know any of our neighbors. Most people go about their daily busyness and rarely find out who their neighbors truly are. I don't know if one of them may be going through hard times or good times," says Mrs. Jenkins.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Matthew 22:36-39

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

Matthew 6:1

The idea to start Operation Neighbor's Porch came to Mrs. Jenkins late one night in July. "I thought about how neat it would be to leave a surprise for a neighbor with God's message of love," she says. "Most things people leave on porches are flyers and business cards that probably just get thrown away. But, if a neighbor received a beautiful plant or flowers, would they throw those away? No, they would be reminded of someone's kindness that they didn't even know."

Awake for hours with ideas running through her head, Mrs. Jenkins drew from her experience in the Internet industry



*The Jenkins family  
photo provided by Debi Jenkins*

## MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

I was nervous the afternoon I carried out my mission. I didn't know where to go. I didn't want to be noticed. I knew that I should place the plant on a random porch, but my heart kept telling me to bend the rules a little bit. I had heard of a family in my neighborhood that was experiencing a difficult time. I decided meeting Mrs. Jenkins was an answer to my prayer of how to help this family, who I do not know.

As we approached the house my mind was racing. What if they are outside? What if they see me through the window? What if they confront me? I love the fearlessness of children. My daughter said, "Just go, Mom." So I did. I went on the hope that the plant would be well received. I went with faith that my simple gesture would give this family whatever solace they needed that day.

From its small beginning, Operation Neighbor's Porch has spread around the world and Mrs. Jenkins continues to help the ministry grow. She is working with area churches and would like to see other types of organizations get involved as well. She says, "All we have to do is plant a seed. All you are required to do is show God's love."

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*Tricia Musslewhite is a freelance writer living in Frisco.*

to start the website. "I absolutely couldn't sleep," says Mrs. Jenkins. "This was heavy on my heart."

Mrs. Jenkins delivered the first Operation Neighbor's Porch plant, hopeful that something as simple as leaving a beautiful plant with a note attached could brighten someone's day. She prayed God would lead her to the right porch and selected a home in her subdivision. Mrs. Jenkins believes an e-mail received later that day was a sign that she was doing the right thing.

Mrs. Jenkins says, "The person's e-mail really touched me and now I always choose this response as a wonderful testimonial to what this ministry can do for others."

*"Dear Neighbor,*

*I received one of your baskets of flowers on my front porch today. I am very humbled and grateful for the message of God's love. I am a Christian but I have been going through an extremely difficult time in my life. I don't know how you came to choose my house but I believe that God led you to me to deliver his message. I am so touched by your heart and by God sending his message so clearly to me through you. You will never know how much I needed this. I sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart."*

*Anonymous, Frisco, Texas, July 11, 2007*

## PLANT A SEED

Mrs. Jenkins continued to deliver plants

and began to spread the word about the ministry's purpose through friends and family. E-mail messages were forwarded and soon the Operation Neighbor's Porch website began receiving visits from points all over the U.S. and even Paris, France. Soon this personal, grassroots effort may expand to Honduras.

A family friend and full-time missionary in Danli, Honduras, heard about Operation Neighbor's Porch through Mrs. Jenkins' parents. Trisha Teague-Munoz works with Extreme Missionary Adventures, an organization Mrs. Jenkins' father is involved with. Mrs. Teague-Munoz grew interested in Operation Neighbor's Porch because she believes it provides a simple way for people who would like to minister to someone but don't know how to begin. She says, "Debi's idea is a great way to share love with people in your community and it is in a way that can open doors through a unique act – just simple kindness, thoughtfulness and prayer. I don't know many people who don't respond to simple acts of kindness."

Mrs. Teague-Munoz is having the Operation Neighbor's Porch plant cards translated into Spanish and will then place a plant on a porch in her neighborhood. "I look forward to placing the first plant and seeing what God does with the seed of kindness and God's love we may plant in the person's heart and mind that receives the gift."

## Operation Neighbor's Porch Website Statistics

Locations that have visited the site

**U.S. VISITORS:** California

Colorado

Illinois

Missouri

New York

North Carolina

Ohio

Oklahoma

Texas

Virginia

**INTERNATIONAL VISITORS:**

Paris, France

Honduras