Hello everyone,
Well, we did it!!!
You all ROCK!!!!

Let me start at the beginning...ok not really the beginning, kinda the middle. I am floored every time I think of the amount of goodies we accumulated. You all have such big hearts. Just have a look at the items we got. This was before we decided to get organized.

On Monday we began pretty early. Such a good thing we did. It took more time to do than I surely had expected. There is no way I would have been able to get everything together in enough time for my BD without help from my office family, Lydia, Rachel and Chris.

Lydia and Chris started and not too long afterward I was guilted into joining in; after all it was me that started all this, lol. It just wouldn’t be right if I just sat there and watched...right?

When Jack arrived he rearranged a few things, putting it all in order, he put the entire “take one” together and then the “take two” and up were in another location (very ingenious Jack). He barked some other random orders, which we promptly disregarded (sorry Jack), and then he too pitched in.
We worked for some time getting prepared, but with such stellar organization and Jack whipping us into shape, packing the bags was a breeze. The assembly line worked without a hitch. First we bagged the hats, socks and gloves. At this time we decided to separate the presents into men and women. Very ingenious...whoever thought of that one. That separation was done according to the pink hats and ladies socks. Thanks for those gifts, Eddie.
See what we ended up with.

The MEN.

The WOMEN.

We added the toothbrushes, the women got pink and the men got what was left. Then included some personal hygiene for each gender...or is it sex, hmmm? You know what I mean.

Now take a look at what all of you have done!!

The photos throughout will show how amazingly generous all of you are. It was overwhelming to see the amount of items we had.
We were a bit worried that the bags wouldn’t be big enough. But, oh boy, are we good or what?! We had everything packed neat and tidy. The women’s presents were even tagged for easy detection. Every bag was full to the brim.

Finally...Suzanne arrived, making it just in time to have the honour of packaging our last bag. Not sure she didn’t plan it that way ;) Suzanne, is your timing always that perfect??? LOL. We love you. So with the final bag packed, for now, we called it a night.

Realizing at the end of the evening that, I forgot some items in my car. Sorry Cynthia, your applesauce was one of those. It was well chilled. So...we weren’t done yet.

We corralled our bags into boxes and waited till Wednesday morning to make the final additions.

Wednesday we added the missing applesauce, the clementines that we were keeping fresh in the fridge and a few random leftovers from the night before. Lydia loved this little bit of distraction. Thanks for getting job that done Lydia.
Each bag contained,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Kleenex (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crackers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiseptic wipes (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crackers and cheese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applesauce (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Drink boxes (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana chips</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fifty cents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band aids</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gloves (for all)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthday note</td>
<td></td>
<td>Granola bars (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candies/mints</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand sanitizer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cereal bars</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knit hat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese stick</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kool-Aid jammer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clementines</td>
<td></td>
<td>PB pat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cookies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rah man noodles</td>
<td></td>
<td>Raisins (2)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rice Krispy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sanitary products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap</td>
<td></td>
<td>Socks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spoon/ knife (plastic)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Toothbrush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail mix</td>
<td></td>
<td>Toothpaste</td>
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I am sure I have missed some things, sorry, tried to remember them all.

There were some donations that were very large and difficult to put into our bags, cans and boxes of soup and baby wipes, Razors, Deodorant. These were boxed separately. The next day I took them to the Food Hamper on Guelph Street for distribution to needy families. This seemed like the best way to get those things to those that needed them.

Byron had donated 17 pairs of very, very warm gloves. We decided to keep these with us and take them along on our walk. They were bagged separately and as we moved through the streets, we gave them to those we believed were in need of such warm gloves. As it turned out, these gloves were like the icing on the cake for the people that got them. Ashlee took control of this task and did a wonderful job of offering this little extra. Incredible seeing what deep appreciation a pair of gloves could generate.
We transferred the gift bags into big, big carrying bags and boxes. Piled them high, ready to pack in the car.

Lydia brought in her granny cart...Oops, sorry Lydia, her “art cart”. Very handy for carrying all of your bag lady needs, ahemmm, I mean art needs.

So, not to be outdone, Jack brought down his striking red cart. I think it is the drunken man’s version of the granny cart. Right Jack 😊 Then, to top it off he supplied a great dolly. Perfect for our bins of bags, there were 5 of those things, not so easy to carry.

Clinton arrived at the end of the day to help get our goodies to the car. We really needed the help. Thanks Clinton. Clinton was sure all of it would never fit in my little Mazda, but we kept piling it in, deliberately ignoring Clinton’s concern of my field of vision through the rear window...Oh yeh, it fit just fine!
After the car was loaded Lydia and I took off for our starting point. Deposited some money at Mr. Sub along, snagged some water and continued on our way. We reached the King and Frederick Street parking lot, with no adverse losses and no rear window hindrances, and with time to spare. So, we waited for our partners in good deeds to arrive.

Me, Martin, Donna, Ashlee, Alex, Tom, Jane and, Jack and Lando in the foreground. Lydia was the photographer. (Lydia is in other pics, later on.)

Look at this magnificent group of good doers.
Anticipation does wonders, eh!
Or maybe it was naïveté that was making us look so good?
Even Lando, Jack and Marty’s perfect pooch, was excited to get going.
We unloaded all 50-gift bags and each of us had a cart or a grocery tote to carry. There were just enough shoulders and hands to manage it all.
The evening was beautiful; like the weather knew we would be out for a while so it was calm and mild.

Loaded down and ready to go we set out. We were eager to make an initial contact. I know I was feeling a little nervous, was this too much? Was I nuts to think that we would recognize anyone that needed this helping hand? Would I insult anyone with an offer of assistance? What if there was no one to help? The first block was quiet, empty, and no people yet, really...no one. What’s with that? But, not daunted by the lack of bodies we pushed on. As we reached Queen Street, everyone decided to throw my original route out the window (thanks) and keep walking down King Street. Confident we would see people to help, we continued in the direction of City Hall. There would definitely be more people there, right? That was our target.
Our first bag went into the motor cart parked outside of the tiny bar on Queen Street. I ran that up to the cart and placed it in the basket. Waiting for the man I have seen there on many occasions. I knew it would be appreciated when he found it. That kicked off our night and the enthusiasm just grew from there.

As we moved along, our targets became more obvious. We selected anyone we thought needed a helping hand. Those that needed it were so grateful. I got many happy birthdays from our recipients. And we were blessed over and over again.
Oh Lydia, you’re going to fall behind!!!

Know what? Our hearts inflated with delight. This did not at all boost our ego, puff our chests or swell our heads. It warmed our hearts and nurtured our souls.
Those that did not need our offer, politely declined, knowing someone else could use it more. Pretty amazing!
We reached City Hall, with a few gifts gone. Jane leans in, to point out a person lying in the shrubs at the front of the grounds. I kinda thought she was nuts, I didn’t see anyone. As we got to the pond/ fountain/ rink area I saw him. It was a bit unnerving; I asked Jane if he was alive, she assured me she had seen him move. As we approached, he popped up. Probably a bit startled to be surrounded by an entire group of strangers.
Ashlee offered him a present. “Hello, today is my mom’s birthday and we are handing out presents for her birthday. Could you use these items?” This young man was, to say the least, surprised. He said he had no money to pay. “No. You don’t have to pay, it is a gift for you” Looking at the bag, he asked if it was all for him, “Yes. It’s all yours”. Knowing he was really in need we offered him a pair of extra warm gloves. (Thank you Byron). He was so grateful. He could hardly calm his excitement. We were blessed and thanked and we walked away knowing we all had a hand in putting just a little sunshine in a strangers life. So empowering.
I hope as you read these accounts you feel just as empowered. Your involvement is what made it all come true.

We moved on. Ok...so we were at that particular moment standing there but we did move on.
We reached King and Charles and decided our next stop should be the bus terminal. So, off we went.
Don’t you love this crossing; it should be walked across like the Beatles. We tried, so sad that our old minds do not retrieve these great ideas fast enough and the young’uns don’t know those iconic moments.
That was the best we could do...next time, may be better?
Thanks Tom for trying.

Just an FYI, those granny carts are not the easiest things to maneuver.
I think I hit every, and I mean every, light standard on our way. I think Jack would like you to know it’s just the driver that has the problem; I disagree. I need a bit more practice before I actually need to begin using one.

When we reached the bus depot, we saw a group of teens that we offered gifts to. They were surprised but took a few. We were really guessing if they may have needed something, but decided that we could not begrudge any one the opportunity to feel happiness, joy and worth.
We move on. Tom, one of the young gentlemen with us, is approached by a woman asking if he has some change to spare. “No, sorry I don’t. But it’s my friends Birthday and I do have this bag of items. Could you use any of these things?” A big smile shows on her face and a resounding “Yes”. She says that she definitely can use these items. Tom asks her to hold on a minute, the bag he was holding was for a man. He would get her one of the bags we had for women, because he was going to give this man’s gift bag to a man standing over there. She said to Tom, “That’s my husband and we’re both homeless”. They were both so thankful their happiness was tangible.

The night, from this moment on, was simply MAGICAL!!!

With all the alterations...thanks guys...in my original distribution route, it took a bit but we finally made it to the Working Centre. There were a couple of men inside that were very grateful for their presents. It is so awesome to see the look of disbelief and then the flush of delight come over a haggard face. We were so energized to move on and do so much more.

We reach the corner of King and Queen, turn down the street and head for our new target location, The House of Friendship. On our way we see a man sitting on a flower garden ledge, listening to an incoherently babbling woman. She is clearly intoxicated, high and distressed. We all stop, leaning over her as she crouches on the ground, and between hollers I finally get her attention and offer her a gift. Even in her confused state, all of us could clearly see she was happy and thankful. Hugging the bag of goodies close to her cheek in one hand, she shook my hand with the other wishing me a happy BD. Not loosening her grip, she began telling me about her friend who had just died the week before. Her friend was a street girl, who she spoke of with passion and concern. She wanted us to know that she was hurting from this loss and that her friend was not a bad person and deserved our sympathy. We listened. The babbling that may have originally made us hesitate wasn’t scary any more; her stumbling didn’t cause worry. All of us saw her pain and felt her loneliness. All that we felt was compassion for her. As we walked on she continued to yell and cry, making little sense. No sensible words were required, we could see that our gift to her was so appreciated; she clung to that bag, like a lifeline. How absolutely moving.
Composed, we moved on.

Just around the building, shielded from the wind is a group of men, looking like a street version of “coffee club”. We approached and offer our gifts announcing that this is for my 50th Birthday celebration, that these are presents for them. Every one of them was surprised. Not very often do we have to assure someone of a gift being just for them. I got the warmest hug from one of the gentlemen, a sincere God Bless, Thanks and a Happy Birthday. What more could one ask for? We shook their hands and learned their names and accepted their gratitude. Telling them to have a great birthday night, enjoy the goodies and keep warm...we moved on.

There were a few young adults hovering on the corner. We tried to decipher their need; it’s so hard to tell sometimes. I think this evening, so far, had taught us that there is no insult in offering help, and if help is not needed people will respectfully decline. So, we offered our gifts to them. Wow! Immediately we knew these things were going to the right people. The kids politely thanked us. And off we go again.

Remember, there is goodness in giving and we should never be apprehensive in offering.

We cross the intersection toward the street girl corners of the city. With a bit of hesitation we head to Cedar Street. Ok...so there was NO hesitation with Jack, he was all gung ho, nothin’ to worry about. He convinced us it would be ok; after all we were in a group and did have Lando there to protect us. So knowing there is comfort in a group that I am sure we would not have felt otherwise, and promising to stick together and not to leave anybody behind, we moved on. We pass random folks, most of them in a hurry to get somewhere. That would normally be moving so quickly through the streets and not really noticing anything or anyone along the way.

A boy walked by slowly, his head hung low...he had such a sad face. Jack looks at me and we are both wondering. You know, it was a tough decision; he really looked so sad and lonely, but I may be not so receptive. I had seen the same boy earlier that evening in our travels on another section of King
Street, and I know for me that was what made my mind up to go after him. Jack ran to catch up to him, and I stood there waiting and watching...You may not know this, but big ladies don’t run. Jack seemed to be with this boy for longer than usual. After all, don’t most teens hate to speak to old strangers? Lol. Love ya Jack.

Jack returns, with the gift still in hand, heartbroken. He said he was sure the boy could use the items; that he looked at everything being offered with such intensity, but for some reason, he couldn’t bring himself to accept our gift. He never said to Jack, that he didn’t need it or that someone else could use it more than he could. The boy declined and moved on with his head hung low and a very sad look on his face. It was heartbreaking.

Further down the road, Tom holds out a gift bag to a man passing on his bike. I think at first the guy thought Tom wanted something from him. I am sure the guy was saying no, I don’t have anything, but as soon as he realized that he was being offered something he screeched to a halt. It was probably one of the shortest transactions all evening, but so energizing. He pushed out thanks and with a quick Happy Birthday he was off.

Onward!

We reached Cedar Street. Just like you hear in the news, standing on the corner, very obviously, is a prostitute. Behind her sitting on a brick planter ledge is a grubby older man with his dog. Standing beside him is a younger man. Three of us move in and make our offer to each of them.

The woman thanks us and begins to examine the bag; her smile grew with each discovery. She thanked us again for her gifts, and tells us how much these things will help. The older man with the dog is so grateful; he blesses us all. The younger man declines; there are others that could use it more. We wish them a happy Birthday and a good night. I turn around to join the others and as I’m walking away I hear one of the men say, “Isn’t this great, at least we can eat tonight.” OMG!
We all walk down Cedar Street to Charles. On the way, a teen standing by his bike looks aimless; a gift might make it better, even for a second. I ask him if he could use the things we’re offering. You know what? At first I wasn’t sure he really needed the things, after all he had a bike and a cell phone. Is that the sign of someone who is in need? Well...I can tell you this, when he saw what I was giving him, a meek child looked back at me and I knew.

We round the corner on our way to The House of Friendship. As we get closer we see 5 men standing on the front porch, we ready ourselves and make our offer of gifts to them.

“Hello. It is my friends 50th Birthday and to celebrate we would like to give you a gift. Do you think you could use these things?” Lydia passes a gift bag to the man at the foot of the stairs. He is surprised and asks what the note is that he sees in the bag. Lydia explains it is about my friends Birthday and what we are doing to celebrate. He reaches into his pocket and retrieves a small eyeglass lens, just the lens, and begins using it as a magnifier to read the enclosed note. Lydia removes her reading glasses, she needed them to see to take the pics all night, and she offers them to him to use. He puts them on, joyously claiming “these work great, that’s much better”. He reads the note and wishes me a happy Birthday. He asks me if he can give me a hug. Sure, I’ll always take a hug.

Today I am celebrating my 50th Birthday. After the last two years of struggle, I am finally in a good place. I did not want anything for my Birthday this year...I have all I need right now. That makes me happy. What I really want is to share my happiness; and who better to pass this to than those who, at this moment, may need it the most. All I can say is, Happy Birthday to You! I hope the next year holds satisfying happiness for you as well.

He thanks Lydia for her glasses and hands them back. “Are you sure? Let me pay you for them”. She assures him they were his now and there was no need to pay. Amazing! One small, selfless act can change every life that witnesses it. A feel good moment we can sense over and over again.
Standing on the stairs is a man in black; beside him is an older man. I asked the man in black if he had a bag, “Yes, thank you so much”. I try to get the old man’s attention; he doesn’t even acknowledge that I’m there. The man in black tries to help, he too gets no response. The man in black laughs, “He is too into his cigarette. He can’t hear us”. With that, the old man puts out his cigarette and goes into the building. Well I was not going to let that stop me from passing on some joy so I asked the man in black if he would give the old man a gift bag for me. He takes the bag “Sure, I can do that”. Just before we leave, the man in black goes in the front door and I see him talking to the old man. When he comes out, he tells me that he told the old man that I wanted to give him something for my Birthday. He said he didn’t think any of that was for him. The man in black told us he wanted to thank me and wish me a happy 50th. Persistence pays off!!!

By this time we had handed out almost all our 50 bags. Can you believe it? If I remember correctly there were 7 left at this time. We decided to head back to King street to see if there were any new faces there that we could help. Determined to give out our last gifts we walked on.

As we approach the corner of King and Frederick Street we could hear our earlier recipient intoxicated woman. She was huddled in a corner of the building with the contents of her bag spread out on the sidewalk in front of her, whaling that she needed help. “Please someone help me”. We moved on, unsure there was anything we could do. All we could think of was to call the police and it was questionable if this would do anything to help. It was disturbing, not because of fear, but because of sadness and concern.

We proceeded down the road. Looking for our last lucky beneficiaries. Across the street, at the Walper Hotel is a man leaning on his bike, weighed down with bags that seemed to hold his life. Tom runs across the street to pass on our gifts. He was so happy. Then he waves to us, wishes me a happy Birthday and passes on his “God Bless. People like you are what make a difference in the world.” So feel good knowing YOU are one of those people.
Words cannot describe the joy we felt, so close to the end of our night, a bit tired but at the same time so energized. The streets are filled with gracious and humble people. I think not a bit what most of us expected.

Our final bag was for a woman, so we were on alert for that final recipient. Soon there was a worthy benefactor across the street. Around 8:00 we handed out our last goody bag. Tom ran across the street, as he had done pretty much all night. Tom runs a bit goofy, he says cause he is trying not to be intimidating and scare anyone, but I’m sure it’s really cause he’s trying to keep his pants up. He tells the lady it’s my BD and offers her our present and asks her if she could use these items. The woman looks up and seems a bit confused. It takes a bit of convincing from Tom that this is really for her. She waves to us and smiles. We all wish her a Happy Birthday of her own and wave back.

Our evening has ended and my Birthday is over.

Back to our cars, we unload. Then head off to Tim Horton’s to have hot chocolate and celebrate our adventure.

We talked about the misconceptions we had going into this evening and how they were very quickly blown away. We discovered that the act of giving directly to someone results in instant delight and creates remarkable memories. We talked about how humble and unassuming all of our recipients were. We learned what real appreciation feels like.
If you ever get the chance to be part of something like this in the future, please get involved, you will never regret the time spent. Even the smallest participation yields maximum results.

Thank you to everyone that helped out, donated things and wished us well. Know that you had a profound impact in someone’s life that day. Carry that joy with you.

The next time you see someone on the street, alone, isolated and cold, don’t be afraid to offer a helping hand. You will be amazed what you get in return.

If you see one of us, ask for a rundown of our night. I am sure there are things I do not remember and moments that need to be heard. Be prepared for some amazing feel-good stories. You all deserve to hear and sense the effect you have had.

Thank you for making my Birthday the absolute best ever!!!!!
I love you all.

Nancy