



Goodness of America

An Early Christmas

When local residents in Concord, North Carolina, learned that their terminally ill neighbor may not make it to Christmas, they rallied together to give her a chance to celebrate her favorite holiday one last time.

In October, Michelle Fadel learned that what started as breast cancer had spread throughout her body and that she would not likely make it to Christmas.

Fadel told [today.com](#) that she was devastated because she wanted to celebrate the holiday with her six grandchildren, but her husband, Dan, had a plan. He began putting up Christmas decorations and lights at their home on October 8. When neighbors spotted him, he explained his reasoning and word quickly spread throughout the community. The response was immediate.

Dan Fadel recalls, "When I came home from work and I pulled into the street, I saw all these lights and decorations from everyone, and it tore me up."

More than a dozen homes were decorated for Christmas in a month when Halloween decorations would normally adorn the properties. The community even took it a step further, offering Christmas cookies and cards to the Fadels, despite it only being October.

"It may look a little strange this close to Halloween but we hope it makes her happy and we hope she knows we're thinking about her," neighbor Tim Hawkins told ABC affiliate WBTV.

Though the Fadels have only lived in their home for two years, the neighborhood has embraced them like family. One neighbor, Sarah Connor, told [today.com](#) that Michelle Fadel was the "happiest person I've ever met."

"She says, 'If I'm alive I'm happy, and when I'm not alive I'll be happy with God,'" Connor said. "The only thing she's ever said to me about it is that she'll miss her grandchildren having a grandmother, and that weighs on her mind more than anything."

What's more, carolers have visited the Fadels several times to sing Christmas songs to Michelle.

Despite her grim diagnosis, Michelle has been uplifted by her community and remains positive. "It's been a blessing," she said. "The more I can think about what Christmas means to us, it's more hopeful." According to [People.com](#), home fronts featured decorated Christmas trees, lights, and nativity scenes.

Redeemed Birthday

Strangers, including an acclaimed children's author, Jeff Kinney, gave a little boy in Bend, Oregon, a birthday he won't soon forget.

Mahlon Layne had just moved from Portland, Oregon — where he was homeschooled — to Bend, Oregon, where for the first time he began attending public school. According to [Oregon Live](#), he was excited to celebrate his October 23 birthday this year because he was going to have a party and for the first time would have friends from school to invite. The party's theme was in honor of his favorite book series, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

Unfortunately, to Mahlon's utter disappointment, no one showed up for the party. His mother, Kristen,



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took to her blog, entitled “Life on Peanut Layne,” to share the tale of her son’s devastation.

“I write this post with swollen, puffy eyes, still raw and burning from crying myself to sleep on my pillow,” the blog began. “What was supposed to be a fun filled birthday party weekend, complete with pizza, cake, games, prizes and friends, went horribly wrong.”

Layne explained that she had not received any RSVPs to the party in the days leading up to it, but simply assumed that Mahlon’s classmates would attend nonetheless. Being new in the area, they did not have any of the classmates’ phone numbers, so they could not make contact with any of the parents. Still, she could never have imagined such a scenario as the one that unfolded.

“Seeing my heartbroken little boy sitting all alone at his brightly decorated, empty party table was more than I could take. I briefly excused myself to my bathroom and sobbed quietly, as I didn’t want to upset him any further,” she wrote.

Layne used her blog to plead with parents everywhere to never ignore RSVPs and birthday invitations from their children’s classmates, to prevent something like this from happening to another child.

“I know you’re busy, tired, stressed, have a million and one other things to do, etc ... but please the next time you’re tempted to ignore the handwritten invitation from a classmate, please remember that there could be a child sitting at an empty party table, crying into his napkin, feeling unloved and rejected,” she wrote.

Somehow, her story reached Jeff Kinney, author of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. Amazingly, Kinney reached out to Mahlon and turned what was a terribly sad ninth birthday into a memorable one for Mahlon.

“Not only did Jeff take time out of his super busy day to talk to him, but he FaceTimed him as well and gave us a personal tour of his office/studio,” wrote Layne in a follow-up post.

Kinney also sent Mahlon an advance copy of his book *Double Down* before it was available to the general public. And, perhaps the best surprise of all, Kinney flew Mahlon and his family out to Seattle so that they could meet in person and explore the city.

“I cannot even begin to thank Jeff Kinney enough for reaching out to our sweet boy, and to a couple of very special people who helped connect him to us, in order to make all of this happen,” she wrote.

What’s more, people all over the country reached out to Mahlon to offer encouragement and stories of their own failed birthday parties, *Time.com* reported. Many sent birthday wishes and anonymous gifts.

“We are so humbled by the number of people who just wanted to make sure that our son had a happy birthday and to know that he is loved, so thank you from the bottom of our hearts,” Kristen wrote. “This will truly be a birthday that none of us will ever forget.”

— Raven Clabough



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