



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 9, 2020

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## **The Goodness of America**

### **Citizenship Celebration**

When Florida elementary-school teacher Annmarie Small took her oath of citizenship after 13 years of living in the United States, the courtroom was packed with her students, both past and present, who wanted to be there for her big day.

Small was born in Kingston, Jamaica, where she struggled as a teacher raising her five-year-old son. She came to the United States 13 years ago in hopes of a better life. "I was struggling financially in Jamaica and even having a master's degree, I wasn't able to make ends meet," she said.

She was hired to teach at Cornerstone Learning Academy, a small, K-8 private school in Tallahassee, where she says she found enormous support in her path to citizenship. "I've had the support of Cornerstone since day one," she told ABC News.

In a speech to the courtroom, she said her school was what taught her about being an American. "They have shown me that America ... is more than a place of glamour, fancy cars, red carpets, ball gowns and stilettos — though I do love my stilettos," she said. "America is beyond just the material things."

In attendance at Small's January 16 ceremony was her entire fourth-grade class, as well as the school's fifth-, sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders, most of whom Small has taught. In fact, she had so many guests that some had to wait outside of the courtroom. "It's so special to me because it's not just one particular group," Small added. "Every year, I've had students and teachers and parents rooting for me."

ABC News reported that the middle-schoolers waved American flags and cheered as all the 75 new American citizens came out of the courtroom.

Small's students and colleagues knew how much becoming a citizen meant to their teacher and wanted to share in her joy.

"I'm really proud of her and I think she's pretty proud too," one of Small's current students, Kalliope, said.

"It's cool to see all the work and the final product," said Taylor Phillips, another student in Small's class.

The students and Cornerstone's director, Jason Flom, surprised Small with an "American party" at the school, which included apple pie and an all-American playlist.

Small told WTXL the first thing she did after the ceremony was register to vote.

### **Smile, You're on Camera!**

A Michigan FedEx driver has gotten loads of praise for a small act of kindness on January 23, CNN reported.

Melvin J. Marlett was delivering a package to kindergarten teacher Jodi LaFreniere at her home in Manistique when he noticed her front porch was covered in snow. Without giving it a second thought, Marlett picked up LaFreniere's shovel and cleared a path.



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Unbeknownst to Marlett at the time, LaFreniere saw the entire thing from her doorbell cam app. She was very moved by his good deed, especially since she didn't know Marlett, as she is not typically home when she receives her deliveries.

LaFreniere was able to track down Marlett on Facebook and publicly thank him for his kindness.

When FedEx learned of the story, the company applauded Marlett for his actions. "We commend our courier, Mel Marlett, who went above and beyond to help shovel snow for our customer while making a delivery," FedEx spokesperson Heather Wilson told CNN.

Meanwhile, Marlett contends his actions were not extraordinary.

"I would hope it's something that anybody would have done," he told CNN. "If you take care of your customers, they take care of you."

## **Sleep in Heavenly Peace**

Tyler Sliz of Libertyville, Illinois, had a strange request for his fifth birthday last October: bedding. His reason, of course, is why he's featured here.

Ahead of his birthday party last year, Tyler posted a video asking guests for bedding so he could donate it to Sleep in Heavenly Peace, an organization that builds, assembles, and delivers beds to needy children, MSN reported.

Tyler's mother, Jackie, told CNN he outright refused any other presents for his birthday. "He told all of the guests that if they brought anything else, he wouldn't play with it," she said.

Tyler received 30 pieces of bedding on his birthday, ABC News reported.

"At first, I was concerned he would feel disappointment at his birthday party when all he received was bedding, but he surprised me with his giving heart," she told ABC News. "All he truly wanted for his birthday was bedding so that he could carry it to Sleep in Heavenly Peace."

Tyler even bought more bedding with the birthday money two of his guests gave him.

And what started as a birthday initiative has grown into an all-out, ongoing campaign, MSN reported. Tyler has helped donate 125 pieces of bedding to the organization since his birthday, and continues to secure more donations.

Tyler's become a fixture at the Libertyville chapter of the organization, says Dan Harris, co-president of the chapter. "[Tyler] is just a ray of joy," said Harris. "Everybody in the chapter loves hearing about Tyler and seeing him drop off the bedding."

Tyler told CNN his next goal, now that he has surpassed his initial goal of 100 pieces of bedding, is to fill "my whole houseful" with bedding to donate.

Jackie told CNN the family learned of the organization through their church, St. Joseph Catholic Church. While Tyler wanted to help build the beds, his age made that too difficult — the rules state you have to be 12 years old. But he knew he wanted to do something. So he turned to bedding.

"The one place kids go for refuge is their bed," Harris said. "Parents have to sometimes choose between having food on their table or heating their homes or a having a bed. So we make it easier for children to have a bed and we give the child something of their own."



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CNN reports Tyler has turned his cause into a family-wide project. Last October, four generations of the Sliz family participated in a build day, and Tyler was able to fulfill his wish of becoming an honorary bed-maker.

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