



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 23, 2021

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The Goodness of America

120 Gallons of Platelets

Marcos Perez of San Antonio, Texas, reached an incredible milestone in March with a donation of platelets that brought him to a total of 120 gallons of donated platelets throughout his lifetime.

Perez was motivated to begin donating platelets in 1984 because a transfusion had saved his life as a premature baby.

“Back then there was no blood bank,” Perez said. “My dad had to go around and ask his family members, my aunts and uncles, cousins, friends to go donate blood and only one man stepped up to the plate.”

That man was Perez’ father’s co-worker, Tony Aguilar, Fox News reported.

Since becoming old enough to donate, Perez has donated platelets 962 times, with his donations helping nearly 3,000 people, according to Ashley Frolick, a specialist at South Texas Blood and Tissue Center.

“Donors like Marcos that come in regularly make sure we have an adequate blood supply,” Frolick said. “It’s really that dedication that helps patients.”

Platelet donors must wait two weeks between each donation, which means they can donate up to 26 times per year, Frolick explained.

Hearts for Lamere

When seven-year-old Lamere Johnson of Johnston, South Carolina, needed a heart transplant, his elementary school helped raise funds to make sure the family could afford the surgery.

Johnson has struggled with heart problems since infancy, having been born with a birth defect called hypoplastic left heart syndrome that affects normal blood flow to the heart. He had his first surgery to treat the issue at just five days old, with two more open-heart surgeries since then.

When Johnson had surgery in May 2017, his family was told it would be his last, but all that changed during a cardiology check-up last year in which the family learned his heart was not functioning as well as it should have been and that he would likely need a new heart.

Johnson’s mother, Contessa Culbreath, immediately created an account for her son with the Children’s Organ Transplant Association (COTA), which helps raise funds for transplant-related expenses for “families who have a documented financial need related to the transplant.”

“My transplant journey started when I was inside my momma’s womb,” Johnson’s profile reads. “I had a sister with the same heart condition as me, but she wasn’t as strong as me so God called her home at 2 months old.”

“I really need my new heart so I can play football,” the profile adds.

Johnson’s school family wanted to help in any way they could. Makinzie Corley, a paraprofessional at Johnston Elementary School, decided to lead a campaign to help raise money for Johnson’s surgery. The campaign, dubbed Hearts for Lamere, sold paper hearts for \$1. The funds for the hearts went directly to Johnson’s COTA account.



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“We started with Hearts for Lamere and it just kind of stuck,” she said. “We started by cutting out hearts on our little machine in our workroom, and we were just selling them within our school.”

But support for the campaign spread rapidly. Before long, the local middle and high schools began to participate.

“And then other elementary schools started getting involved and then people literally started walking into our school saying, ‘I would like to donate,’” Corley added.

And still, the generosity did not stop there. According to Fox News, the elementary school began receiving mail donations from people across the country. Even Kansas City Chiefs cornerback Antonio Hamilton made a sizable \$30,000 donation.

The initial goal of the campaign was \$45,000 to cover the cost of the surgery and any medical-related expenses that will follow the procedure. As of the start of April, the account already sat at more than \$76,000.

Johnson is currently on a waiting list at Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, but with the funds now safely in his COTA account, he is ready for his new heart whenever it becomes available.

Surprise Birthday Party

Jose Villarruel was a substitute teacher in California who had been living out of his car since the start of the pandemic — that is, until he bumped into a former student.

“I decided the school situation has changed completely and I believed that a job of a substitute was over,” he told Fox 11 Los Angeles. “I managed to do all of the paperwork, all of the arrangements to get my pension. I got my check, but that check didn’t last long because I had debts already.”

Sadly, by May of last year, Villarruel was living out of his 1990s Ford Thunderbird.

Meanwhile, former student Steven Nava, 21, took notice of the familiar-looking man living out of his car in a parking lot near Nava’s home, Fox News reported.

Nava reached out to help, giving Villarruel \$300 and setting him up with a hotel room and a nice breakfast outing.

“It’s sad to see one of your own teachers go through that so it only makes you want to help out more,” Nava said, recalling how Villarruel had helped him during his high-school career.

“I said to him you helped me work on my study guide and you helped me eventually pass a math test,” he said.

It was during that breakfast together that Nava learned Villarruel’s 77th birthday was approaching. Nava knew he wanted to do something extra special for his old substitute teacher.

Nava set up a GoFundMe page in the hopes of raising some much-needed money for Villarruel. “Mr. V was a great funny and helpful educator and substitute teacher in the Fontana Unified School District,” the profile read. “He’s struggled with getting back on his feet after the pandemic hit and has been living in his car ever since despite the brutal weather and living conditions. This fundraiser is to help him out financially and getting back to normal life.”

The page brought in an astounding \$27,000. As part of the surprise, Nava set up an outdoor birthday



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party on March 11 for Villarruel and invited his fellow former students and other members of the community. At the surprise party, Villarruel was presented with a check for the money raised on the GoFundMe page.



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