



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 19, 2011

Anonymous Donors Pay Off Layaways for Struggling Kmart Customers

In Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, for example, an employee at the Kmart confirmed that an anonymous donor sent a \$500 gift card to pay \$100 on five different layaways. Store manager Barb Winowiecki then randomly selected which accounts to fund through the gift card.



“Those with layaways are in for a happy surprise when they come in to pay on their account,” Winowiecki observed. “We’re not informing them ahead of time, so they can have a happy surprise.”

“Unlike giving to organizations,” she added, “people who anonymously donate this way know exactly where their money is going. It seems to be contagious. A local resident paid on another person’s layaway.”

According to that donor, he vacations in Sault Ste. Marie and therefore wanted to help families in the area.

Another Sault Ste. Marie resident said she also knows of someone who is paying off layaways for strangers.

Though the phenomenon seems to have originated in Michigan, the trend is spreading. *Soo Evening News* [reports](#),

At retail stores across the country, Santa seems to be getting some help: Anonymous donors are paying off strangers’ layaway accounts, buying the Christmas gifts other families couldn’t afford, especially toys and children’s clothes set aside by impoverished parents.

Similar calls are now coming in across the country in cities like Nebraska, Michigan, Iowa, Indiana, and Montana. Donors are specifically asking to have their money applied to customers who have been putting aside items for younger children.

“It is honestly being driven by people wanting to do a good deed at this time of the year,” said Salima Yala, Kmart’s division vice president for layaway.

One of the lucky recipients of such generosity is Lori Stearnes, of Omaha, Nebraska, who said she first thought it was a joke when Kmart called to say that someone had paid off her layaway account, which included toys and outfits for the youngest four of her seven grandchildren. She indicated that she intends to pay the stranger’s kindness forward, and will take her money from her paycheck on Friday to pay another buyer’s layaway. “It just gives you a warm feeling,” she said. “With all the things going on the world, just to have someone do that is so — I don’t know. It’s hard to put into words.”



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Another story of layaway generosity was [reported](#) on Fox News. According to Edna Deppe, an assistant Kmart manager at an Indianapolis store, a young father stood in line wearing dirty clothes and worn-out boots. He had with him three small children, and asked to pay something on his bill because he knew he would not be able to pay it all before Christmas. A woman who had overheard the conversation between this man and the Kmart employee behind the layaway counter stepped up and said, "No, I'm paying for it."

Deppe recalled, "He just stood there and looked at her and then looked at me and asked if it was a joke. I told him it wasn't, and that she was going to pay for him. And he just busted out in tears."

That same generous donor then decided to pay layaway orders for as many as 50 people, and then handed out \$50 bills to various customers throughout the store. When she came upon a woman in line at the cash register who had two carts of toys, she paid for those as well.

Deppe explains, "She was doing it in the memory of her husband who had just died, and she wasn't going to be able to spend it and wanted to make people happy with it."

The donor did not wish to be identified, and only asked people to "remember Ben," presumably her late husband.

Deppe reported that she has never seen anything like it in her 40 years in retail. "It was like an angel fell out of the sky and appeared in our store," she said.

Karl Graff, an Omaha, Nebraska Kmart store manager, indicates that at least one of the Good Samaritans was inspired to pay off a variety of layaways because of sad memories of layaways in her past. "She told me that when she was younger, her mom used to set up things on layaway at Kmart, but they rarely were able to pay them off because they just didn't have the money for it," Graff said. When Graff later called one of the recipients of the gifts to inform her that her layaway account had been paid off, she apparently began to cry and revealed that she was unsure if she would have been able to pay off her layaway and was fearful that she children would not have anything for Christmas.

In Missoula, Montana, one donor gave \$1,200 to pay for six different layaway accounts that were about to be returned to Kmart's shelves as a result of late payments.

Roberta Carter of Plainfield Township, Michigan learned that an anonymous man paid all but 40 cents of her \$60 layaway last week. A mother of eight children, Carter cried upon learning of the man's generosity and told one of the store managers, "My kids will have clothes for Christmas."

Though reports are coming mostly out of Kmart stores nationwide, a spokesman from Wal-Mart indicates that a few of his stores in Joplin and Chicago have witnessed similar incidents of layaway accounts being secretly paid off by Good Samaritans.

The generosity of these humble donors who do not seek credit or attention brings to mind a passage in the book of *Acts*, which reads, "We must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"



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