

Kate's Big Legacy

The Layman Family's Mission to Deliver 'Books from the Heart' for Kate.

Too young for speech and so weakened by congenital heart and lung defects that therapists had to teach her the simplest of movements, tiny Katherine Anne "Kate" Layman was an unlikely person to leave a legacy.

Her lifetime totaled 568 days, and over 150 of them were spent in a hospital bed. And yet her name has been carved on the hearts of the many people who are responding to the ministry established by her parents, Krista and Andy, and brother, Seth, 4. Kate's Kart, the not-for-profit organization they founded to supply free books to hospitalized children, has drawn responses from as far away as Australia.

Kate's story began in June 2006. Shortly after birth, she was diagnosed with a heart defect and rushed to St. Vincent Hospital in Indianapolis. Tests revealed a combination of heart defects and pulmonary obstruction associated with a chromosomal deletion. Cardiologists were guardedly optimistic.

Friends and relatives rallied around the family. Prayer chains were activated. Krista discovered online support groups, and other "heart moms" offered encouragement, advice, and understanding.

Krista began recording Kate's progress, sharing prayer requests, and pictures of Kate with her favorite Popsicle treat.

The Laymans put Kate in God's hands. As Kate's condition deteriorated, their faith deepened. They learned to "enjoy ... embrace ... appreciate ... and acknowledge each good thing," trusting that God works through both good and bad.

In December 2007, Andy's dad succumbed to cancer. A month later, on Jan. 15, Kate's fragile heart failed. She was laid to rest next to her beloved Grandpa.

"I couldn't be angry with God," Krista says. "She brought us so much joy. We had a choice — to wallow, or to do something good."

Memorials to Kate were being held in escrow by Grace Point Church of the Nazarene while the Laymans considered options.

"We wanted to do something simple but significant," Andy says, "something with her name, ... something that would be ongoing." Kate loved books, and the idea of Kate's Kart was born.

Local attorney Carrie Gutman assisted with incorporation procedures and establishment of nonprofit status. Longtime friend Laura Tranbarger developed the Web site (www.KatesKart.org).

Brother Seth created a logo on the family computer. Stickers for the back of the books were designed and ordered: "This book is compliments of Kate' Kart, Books from the Heart," complete with Seth's logo. The first books were collected. Progress was slow, but steady - until April 22.

Dirk Rowley, "Majic in the Morning" show co-host at radio station WAJI, 95.1-FM, recalls the conversation that morning with his co-host: "Hey, Jeannette (Rinard), that thing Oprah did (the Big Give) turned out pretty well. We should steal that..." and Dirk and Jeannette's Little Give was launched.

They were curious to see if "\$100 seed money could grow in the same way Oprah's \$10,000 seed money did," Rowley says. "Jeannette and I thought the contestants could double the money. ... We were blown away by the results."

Local resident Shannon McClure signed up for the Little Give without a clue how she would multiply the \$100. A chance conversation with co-worker Dalen Tranbarger introduced McClure and her mother, Jenny Teders, to Kate's Kart.

Little Give lasted 10 days, and enthusiasm for the mission of Kate's Kart spread like wildfire. Mitchell Books, U-Haul, A Party Apart and Bisque It Pottery contributed to a "fill the U-Haul" event, which netted cash, gift cards and thousands of books — many from complete strangers. Canterbury School and Fort Wayne Community School students and teachers donated books. Fort Wayne Storage provided a climate-controlled storage unit for the books.

Preliminary results, announced May 6, revealed the \$100 had multiplied to more than \$31,300, including more than 5,500 children's books.

Kate's Kart will begin distributing books to hospitalized children Wednesday at Lutheran Hospital. A call for volunteers to help with the project drew 27 people for a training session. Additional training will be announced on Kate's Kart Web site.

The Laymans also have ordered four more book carts because Parkview Hospital, DeKalb Memorial Hospital in Auburn, Jay County Hospital in Portland, and Ball Memorial Hospital in Muncie are asking to start Kate's Kart programs.

"I still have eternity with my daughter," Krista says wistfully. "This whole thing has just made heaven more enticing because I know she's there waiting."