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Miles of Smiles

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Work ethic hasn't wavered for Berg

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Garden City (Kansas) man stays busy in his workshop, making wooden toys for relief organization.

BY SCOTT AUST

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Ed Berg greets the visitor to his garage shop with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye.

Gesturing at his workshop, filled with 50 years worth of stuff, he tilts his white hard hat back and says, "I'm always bumping my head. That's why I wear a hat."

Berg, 87, of Garden City, recently completed making by hand more than 1,265 small wooden car toys that will eventually be sent to children around the world as part of a shoe box ministry called "Operation Christmas Child," sponsored by Rev. Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse international relief organization.



Berg, an avid woodworker for more than 50 years, learned about the program about three years ago through an affiliate organization called, "Toys for God's Kids." That organization provided the toy patterns, an ink stamp and a wood-burning tool.

All of Berg's toys soon will be taken to Dodge City, a collection point for all the shoe boxes from western Kansas. From there, boxes and toys are trucked to Denver to the Operation Christmas Child process center, where each shoe box is inspected.

Each box contains supplies like a tooth brush and toothpaste, pencils and paper, soap and a shirt. One of Berg's cars will be included where space allows. The boxes then are sent to poor children all over the world. Linda Berg, Ed's wife of 50 years, said that when children receive boxes, they also are told the message of Jesus Christ.

Berg said he's thankful to God to have the strength to make so many toys for a good cause. He made 400 toys the first year, 600 the second, and 1,265 this time around.

"If you keep at a job, you can accumulate quite a bit of stuff," he said. "It's a fun job. I don't have much else to do. I get to be creative."

Berg said he gets some wood for free from a business that makes trusses, but he sometimes has to "beg" for wood from places like cabinet shops or others that have wood lying around that they don't need anymore.

The Bergs, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary over the summer, moved to Garden City in an old pickup

and car nearly 40 years ago. They have two grown children, Mark Berg of Wichita and Kay Mack of Denver, and several grandchildren.

Berg has been an avid woodworker for nearly as long as he's been married.

"He would build all kinds of stuff for the children when they were little," Linda Berg said. "Tree houses. Playhouses. Merry-go-rounds. He's built stuff ever since we were married."

As for the toy cars, Berg estimates he could build one, start to finish, in about 45 minutes. But that's not the way to build more than 1,200 of them. Harkening back to a past job working on a General Motors assembly line, Berg said he makes each part for the toys — body, axle, wheels — in batches of around 100.

"That's really the biggest job, making all them wheels," he said.

Between January and the end of June, Berg had reached the 1,200 mark.

"I was only going to make a hundred a month, but it was going so good, so I just kept on going. I feel if the Lord gives me strength, I'll try to do 2,000," he said.

A native of North Dakota, Berg grew up in hard times. He was one of 10 children raised during the Great Depression. His father was originally a farmer, but lost everything and worked as a blacksmith and as a cook for rail workers to bring in enough income to feed his family.

"They starved a lot," Linda Berg said. "Terribly hungry. Sometimes they just wouldn't have enough to eat."

Berg's father died when Berg was 9. He began working, doing odd jobs for people, at the age of 11.

One of those jobs was gathering cow chips, a good source of fuel due to the scarcity of trees on the northern plains.

"I'd put those cow chips in a burlap bag and haul them on this little wagon. I'd bring some home and stack 'em up, like sandwiches," he said. "Boy, they were quick to burn. I always compare them to the microwaves we have now. You put a bunch of chips in the stove, and the coffee pot starts bouncing around right away."

When he got older, Berg traveled to California to seek better work opportunities.

"I got there on a Sunday night, and on Monday morning I had a job," he said.

Berg worked at a General Motors plant for 17 years, building and assembling cars and car parts. But he said the smog was so bad at that time that it always looked like a person was crying, and his nose would run constantly. → After moving to Garden City, Berg worked in maintenance at Garden Valley retirement and continued to do odd jobs.

While making toys for the Operation Christmas Child program, Berg's

thoughts can't help but turn to his own past Christmases. → His father died on Christmas Eve, but neighbors brought a Christmas tree to the family.

Berg and his siblings did receive gifts, and though they usually came from the Salvation Army, they were made of cast iron and were much more durable than today's mass produced plastic.

"And we played with them for the longest time," he said.

Berg's father also brought home gifts when he could.

"Dad would come home from work, and once in a while he'd bring us kids a treat. He'd buy one box of Cracker Jacks. We'd rotate on who'd get the prize, and they were pretty nice back then," he said.

In fact, Berg still has one of those tiny prizes, a green cast iron tractor not much taller than a quarter stood on end.

Growing up where and when he did caused Berg to develop a strong work ethic. He still does odd jobs and fixes things for people, even at 87. He usually can be found in his shop from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. most days, with several coffee breaks thrown in.

And at about 6 each morning, Berg walks about a mile round trip to have coffee at McDonald's. Barring an illness, he doesn't expect to stop working.

"It's hard to be idle," he said.

This article originally appeared in the November 5, 2012 issue of The Garden City Telegram.

Sincere thanks to reporter Scott Aust, who allowed us to reprint his original story. Photograph courtesy of Brad Nading/Garden City Telegram

Notes from TFGK's Central

Our first task is to welcome the many new SmileMakers that have joined Toys For God's Kids since the beginning of the year. In a renewed effort in the Phoenix, AZ area, **Tom Jonger, Fritz Lydens, John Sloan, Bernie Swier, Tom Van Wyke and Cliff Vanderley** are turning out high-quality cars in large quantities along with veterans **Jerry Clark and Ron Van Gelder**.

Across the country in Ft. Myers, FL, Sand Point community residents **Bill Reiff, Ken Treiber, Fuzz Farrel, and Pete Bickett** have formed a new smile-making, car-making operation. Bernie Thompson in Kettering, OH reports he is building an operation to rival Denver. Recently he has added 14 new SmileMakers to his crew: **Bill Harding, Buzz Gorman, Dan Halliden, Dick Hull, Jane Lieberth, John Schneider, John Speranza, Pete Black, Steve Cimprich, Steve Datz, Tom Weller, Vern Hein, Terry Holdcraft** and 8th grader **Seth Pierce**, who will help assemble cars.

Stan Furce in Montgomery, TX now has his new shop in order and received his first request for cars. Thanks to TFGK Vice Chairman Jerry Krupp, Winston Salem, NC has a new SmileMaker, **Don Eppert**, who is just starting up with three SmileMaker helpers.

We hope we are not overlooking anyone. These additions bode well for meeting our goal of delivering 130,000 cars this year. Incidentally, in 2012 we passed the **one-half million** mark for cars delivered since we began in 2000. Give yourselves a hand because you helped deliver over 108,000 cars last year.

More news from TFGK Central: The Board is working hard to organize our operations so TFGK can grow in an orderly fashion. Our Treasurer, Lawrence Kitchen, with the

sterling help of our bookkeeper **Roy Hoffman**, has upgraded our financial accounting system. It allows the Board to have a timely and more detailed look at our financial situation. Also a new database for keeping track of our SmileMakers and other Friends of TFGK has been installed. It makes it much easier to send out e-mails, letters and correspondence like this newsletter. We also have set up a new, central e-mail account. So if you have questions of any nature, please e-mail them to TFGK Central at "**toysforkids@gmail.com**" and we'll try to get you an answer. If you want to let us know what's new in your shop, something that might be of interest to all of us, send it to Faye Kitchen, our *Miles of Smiles* editor, at "**Lkitchen1@hotmail.com**".

You should know that the e-mail "**toysforgodskids@aol.com**" which we have been using for most e-mail contacts will remain Marlin's personal e-mail. Use it if you wish to contact him directly.

On the production side, **Ed Vanderhorst** of Monument, CO, who was the subject of a profile in last quarter's *Mile of Smiles*, has developed a tool that standardizes the making of wheels in quantity. This becomes particularly valuable when we make parts for assembly sites like retirement homes. We're looking into how we can make this more readily available to other SmileMakers.

We don't want to give you all the good news at one time so we'll save some for the next issue of *Miles of Smiles*. In the meantime, keep up the good work. It means a lot to a lot of kids.

Marlin and your Board

TOYS FOR GOD'S KIDS in ETHIOPIA

by Mary Lou Miller and

Jenna Simonton

Photos courtesy of Loretta Miller and Jenna Simonton

(Mary Lou begins the story of how 611 small wooden cars traveled 8,334.9 miles and made Christmas bright for children in Ethiopia--Editor)

Last September, our great niece's life-long wish came true when she began a year-long mission to work with children in Ethiopia. We immediately thought of TFGK and hoped that perhaps we could send toys to Africa for the children.



Photo by Loretta Miller

TFGK provided two Miller families an opportunity to share love and toys with

children half way around the world.

Norman and Paul, brothers and SmileMakers, were busy making cars. The SmileMakers and their spouses decided to forego purchasing Christmas gifts for family and in place of gifts, embarked on a family-Christmas mission. We began by asking for and receiving Marlin's blessing to share TFGK with children in Ethiopia.

Norm's and Paul's great niece, Jenna Simonton, a Salesian Missionary, and her peer, Paula, teach school at Don Bosco Catholic School in Soddo, Ethiopia.

Together they have more than 400 students and approximately another 150 children from the village who come to play at the school when it is not in session.

We emailed Jenna to ask if she could accept TFGK cars to distribute to the children at her school for Christmas. Jenna was very excited and cleared the project with her Salesian Missionary superiors at the school. We informed Marlin that the project "was a go," and he generously provided cars for our project. The challenge was "how to ensure delivery of toys to a remote location in Ethiopia."

By mere chance coupled with our Guardian Angels working overtime, a friend was visiting an elderly lady in assisted living in Aurora and told her about our project. An employee at the facility, a lady from Ethiopia named Emmabet, willingly shared information to us on delivery of the toys. Emmabet and her husband (a Deacon at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) knew a member of their church was visiting the USA and planned to return to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in a month. Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, is the only city in Ethiopia with an international airport. We worked with Emmabet to have this member of her Church carry a bag of toys to Ethiopia. The airlines charge \$200 for a bag which we would have paid plus rewarded the traveler for his kindness in taking the bag.

As of December 1, we had 611 TFGK packed in bubble wrap, inside a new suitcase ready to travel. Our plan was to send the suitcase of TFGK with the Ethiopian traveler when he returned to Addis Ababa. The Salesians have a Mother House in Addis near the airport and would pick-up the toys at the Addis airport and hold for Jenna's superiors to make the five-hour trip from the school to bring the toys back to Soddo. January 7 is Christmas in Ethiopia which gave us more time to work out shipping issues. If this plan failed, we had to consider domestic shipping for backup. We were stunned at shipping quotes, from \$800 to \$1500;

Therefore, other avenues had to be pursued. We received several donations to help with shipping costs but the balance was to be paid by "The Millers."

Because shipping through the Ethiopian church was not firm, we began gathering backup shipping information. Paul's friend, Jay Snodgrass, works at FedEx and we approached Jay to check FedEx shipping costs. Our Guardian Angels were again working overtime because within several days, Jay secured FedEx approval and informed us that the toys could be shipped to Ethiopia "AT NO COST!" We were elated and delivered the cars for immediate shipping. The cars shipped on December 10, from the Denver FedEx facility beginning the 8,334.9 mile journey to Ethiopia, first



Photo courtesy of Fed Ex

traveling from Denver to Memphis, the FedEx hub, followed by a flight to Paris, France, with a two-day stop (wish we could have gone along). Next, the cars were flown to Dubai, Arab Emirates, and remained there two days. The cars reached Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, within seven days; it was exciting to track the journey! We are extremely grateful to FedEx for its generosity and kindness by opening and demonstrating its “big heart” to ship the cars (47 lbs) free. FedEx confirmed its “caring and sharing attitude” and, in our opinion, truly was an extra special Santa to the children in Ethiopia. May God bless FedEx!

Ironically, the day the cars were shipped by FedEx (December 10), we received a phone call from Emmabet, our friend from the Ethiopian Church, who informed us that a church member was going to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the following Saturday. He was willing to take the cars along as an extra piece of luggage. It was truly amazing how we went from “famine to feast” in regards to shipping the toys; again, we absolutely believe there was “Divine intervention.”

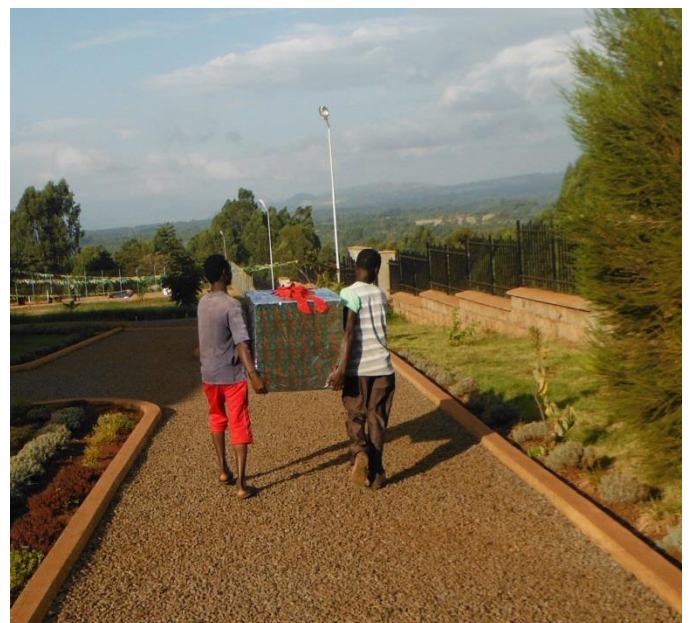
After the cars reached Addis Ababa, the Deacon from the school in Soddo drove five hours to Addis and picked up the cars, returning to the Soddo School.

(Jenna Simonton, Mary Louise’s niece continues the story in the next column,

telling what happened after the toys reached Ethiopia.)

The cars arrived safe and sound in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, after being shipped via FedEx. They then made the journey to Soddo, Ethiopia (about a 5 hour drive, southwest of Addis Ababa) in the back of a pickup truck. Upon reaching their final destination, I was excited to open the big box of cars.

It immediately filled my room with the aroma of fresh wood. I unpacked the cars and planned to distribute them at the Don Bosco Catholic School annual Christmas program, January 8. I repacked the cars in the FedEx box (thanks for the “gift wrapping,” FedEx ☺), and wrapped it like a huge gift. Two of the high school boys carried the box down the hill to the Christmas program, where we placed the box on the stage next to the Christmas tree.



Along the way, students (dressed in their Christmas best, and some “cultural clothes” for the occasion) approached me asking, “Miss Jenna, what is it?” To which I responded, “Telik sitota – It’s a big gift” (Telik sitota means “big gift” in Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia).

At the end of the Christmas program, after explaining that we had a gift that came all the way from America for each child, we invited one student from each grade (1st-6th) up to the stage to unwrap the gift.



Once unwrapped and opened, I tipped the box toward the audience so all the students could see. After lots of “ooooohhhs!”, “awwwwws”, and very excited faces (complete with one 3rd grade student in the front row showing me his approval by a very expressive thumbs up), students came up to the stage, lined up by class. One-by-

one, Paula and I handed each student a car. They responded, “Thank you! Thank you!” with big smiles. They all sat back down, admiring their new treasure, trying out the wheels on the floor, or holding them up for a picture.



Since then, many students have brought their little cars to school with them, complete with added personalized flare (marker or pen colorings). They race them down the ramp during lunch break. Many students have come up to me since the program, with big smiles excitedly saying, “Thank you! Thank you!”

Thank you to all who helped with this endeavor and መልካም ገና (pronounced “Melkam Gena,” Amharic for “Merry Christmas”)!

SMILEMAKER REPORT

Eldon Peters

Article and photograph by
Marlene Dorhout

Nestled in the countryside outside of Lynden, Washington, Eldon Peters lives alone. Yet, he has numerous people visiting him for Toys for God's Kids. Eldon magnanimously shares his garages and workshop for all the activity necessary to make this ministry work. So every week, toy makers and wives bring their toys to his place to dip, dry, and bundle the wood cars in donated potato bags. All pickup and delivery occur there, too. Eldon enjoys the company.



Eldon has not always lived alone. His first wife of thirty years died of cancer; and eventually, he remarried in 2000. Josephine had been a friend; in fact, the two couples did many social activities together. Jo lost her spouse, too. Eldon and Jo spent several wonderful years together.

Then in 2005, Eldon had an accident breaking his back and leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. No longer working and confined to a wheelchair, Eldon felt useless. Jo heard about Toys for God's Kids and its founder Marlin Dorhout who was visiting Lynden to recruit toy makers. They met, and Eldon and some friends began making wood cars; Jo enthusiastically joined in, compensating for any areas difficult for Eldon. Soon this began a group effort, a team putting out thousands of cars each year.

Sadly, in 2010 Jo was told she had pancreatic cancer. She couldn't go out to the shop with Eldon anymore and tried to prepare him for her pending absence. Then in 2011, Jo died. Eldon now lost two wives to that dreadful disease.

"I had to do something after she died so I continued making cars as therapy," Eldon explained. "It keeps me going."

Even though Eldon has ten step kids, twenty three grand kids, and fourteen great grand kids, most of whom are grown up now, he still thinks about children who have so little due to poverty or tragedy in their lives. "I am so thankful that I can do something by making toys for kids somewhere else in the world." He admits, "It keeps me going!"

Eldon has been blessed by his toy making; the kids, blessed by his toys. Both are smiling!

The TFGK Central Organization

President and Founder

Marlin Dorhout

Toys For God's Kids Board of Directors

Chairman – Andrew (Andy) Morris

Vice Chairman – Jerry Krupp

Secretary – Rita Krupp

Treasurer – Lawrence Kitchen

Fundraising - David Berger

Administration - Marlene Dorhout

Technical Support - Alvin (Dutch) Van Maaren



Board of Directors: (Left to Right) Standing: Marlin Dorhout; Dutch Van Maaren; Lawrence Kitchen; Dave Berger Sitting: Marlene Dorhout; Andy Morris; Jerry Krupp; Rita Krupp

photo by Gloria Berger

SMILEMAKER ALERT:

We realize that there are many Smilemakers who are not getting credit for all the work that they do for Toys for God's Kids, simply because nobody knows their facts. We would like to recognize these Smilemakers in future issues of Miles of Smiles. If you are a Smilemaker or know one who needs recognition, please contact us.

We would also like to include your information in Miles of Smiles. Below are some questions to get you started if you'd like to put your information into report form. When finished, email your report to LKitchen1@hotmail.com or send it to: Faye Kitchen, 61 Toppler Drive, Castle Pines, CO 80108. **Thanks for your help!**

Where are you located?

How many Smilemakers are in your group and what are their names?

Explain what you do. Are you a body maker, assembler, distributor, etc.

Do you participate in any Senior Center Activities to produce cars?

Where do you donate your cars?

Do you have photos you can share?

What special things would you like us to know about your group?

How can we provide better support?