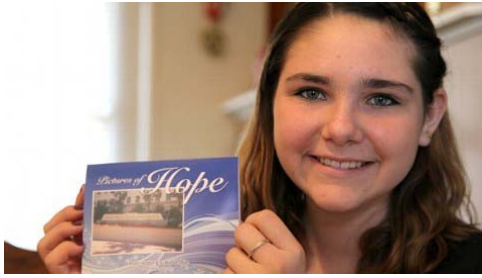


Homeless Children Offer Pictures of Hope

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(courtesy: Jake Whitman)

The first thing you notice about 14-year-old Brittanie Pemberton is the sparkle in her blue eyes and her wide smile. Both belie the difficulty she has overcome in her short life.

A few Christmases ago, she and her family were homeless and down on their luck.

"When I used to tell people I was homeless, they would look at me differently," she said in a quiet voice. "So I stopped telling them."

After a drunken driving arrest, Brittanie's father, the family's sole provider of income, entered rehab. The family could no longer afford their home, so Brittanie, her mother and younger brother moved into The Door of Hope - a well-kept complex of efficiency apartments - temporary housing, run by San Diego's Salvation Army.

At that point, Brittanie had trouble picturing her future.

"It was kind of rock bottom," she said.

But, one person and one photograph changed everything in a way Brittanie never imagined.

Celebrity photographer Linda Solomon made a career focusing on Hollywood's biggest stars. Now, with a grant from General Motors, she travels to cities around

the country working with homeless children. Solomon asks the children what they dream of in life, and then has them capture their hopes and dreams on film. She supplies disposable cameras and her young students do the rest.

The photos are turned into holiday cards, sold to benefit programs like Door of Hope that help families get back on their feet.

"It empowers the children," Solomon said. "When they're asked to capture their hopes and dreams, this is a way to not only see a dream, but take a photograph of that dream so it puts them on a path to achieving."

Their wish lists are touching, and sometimes heartbreaking. In San Diego, 8-year-old James Galindo told us he searched for hours to find the perfect house, and then took a photo of his mother sitting on the front steps.

"My dream is me and my mom having our own house and our own rooms," he said.

Claire Luckett, a bubbly 8-year-old with a sweet smile shows us her photograph.

"My dream is to help children find homes," she said.

Kiernan Donnelly, 12, snapped a picture of an old photograph of his family's poodle, Rocco. His dream? A reunion with the family pet he and his mom had to give up when they lost their home.

"We had to give him to a friend of ours, and they gave him away without asking, so we're trying to find him and get him back," he said. "It's been pretty hard. I miss him a lot."

Solomon said the wishes of homeless children never cease to amaze her.

"You never see iPads or iPods," she said. "These are the dreams of children who live in shelters - they dream

for others to have a home, they dream of a education."

When Brittanie Pemberton snapped a photo of the outside San Diego State University, she dreamed being the first person in her family to go to college holiday card found its way to the president of university, who was so moved he offered her a scholarship.

"My heart was beating out of my chest," she said. "I thought this could never happen ... and it did, it was amazing."

That photo and the miraculous offer of a scholarship gave Brittanie's family an extra boost, too. Her father turned his life around and now runs his own business. Brittanie's mother found work with the Salvation Army and the family moved into their own home.

Brittanie is earning good grades, and has even taken up figure skating.

Her mother, Tanya, says her daughter's photographs transformed life for their entire family.

"Everything goes right back to the picture," she said. "Everything in our lives that is here and good goes to that picture."

For homeless children, Solomon hopes photographs can provide the chance to picture a better life.

"They're on the road to hope once they can see it that's what is so empowering for them," she said.

Brittanie's mother Tanya agreed: "These kids, they're not homeless. They're kids. It doesn't need to define who you are. It's just a stepping stone and a time that can turn out better than where they are right now."

To purchase Pictures of Hope Holiday Cards, visit [Linda Solomon's Web site](#).