

Celebrity photographer Linda Solomon's Pictures of Hope help the homeless

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Linda Solomon helps Devon Thompson, 3, as he holds her camera during a workshop called, Pictures of Hope at Salvation Army's Door of Hope in Linda Vista, California.

The average age of a person living in a homeless shelter is 7, Linda says. She strives to help. Pictures of Hope, the program she started, has impacted the lives of homeless people in 49 cities.

Linda's done an about-face from her earlier career. She made a living and a national reputation as a celebrity photographer. Tony Bennett, Robert Redford and Morgan Freeman are some of the celebs who commissioned her. Author Elmore Leonard once said of Linda, "her photo on the jacket of my book is the finishing touch."

In 1990, Linda and mom Mona Rappaport were shopping at Kmart. They came across cameras on sale for \$3. Linda bought them all, gave them to friends' children, and told them to photograph what made them happy. One shot her kitty cat, another his room, another her brother. Linda, of Franklin, MI, mounted an exhibit at the nearby Birmingham Camera shop. The show was well-attended and publicized. Linda sent news clippings to Joe Antonini, then chairman of Kmart. Could they meet?

"What was my risk?" she says. "He wouldn't call."

He not only called; he introduced her to marketing chief Mike Wellman. She convinced Mike to give cameras to Pontiac, MI, school children. The resulting exhibit, in a Pontiac Kmart, drew hundreds of visitors and much publicity. Wellman gave her another challenge. K Mart was opening a store in Plano, TX, "a tough market," the headquarters

of JC Penney. And Linda must handle the p.r.

Linda found Houston Elementary School. She assigned 5th graders to photograph what made them happy. She timed the resulting exhibit, at the new Kmart store, for September when journalists were looking for back-to-school stories. The **Dallas Morning News** ran 6 columns on the exhibit. The girl featured had classmates befriend her for the first time.

Kmart was impressed by the business and publicity garnered in Plano. They teamed up with Kodak and rolled out the program in 2,500 stores in 1991. (Linda visited 10 cities and sent a video to the others.) 250,000 cameras were donated each year for 4 years.

Linda organized a similar program for Eckerd Drugs. In 2005, Linda teamed The Taubman Company (shopping mall developers) with the Salvation Army to help homeless people. Linda's husband Barry, an employment and labor relations specialist, suggested the theme: What do you wish for?

The program, Pictures of Hope, featured children from the Salvation Army Detroit Denby shelter. The Denby exhibit drew attention from Oprah, NBC Nightly News, CNBC and more.

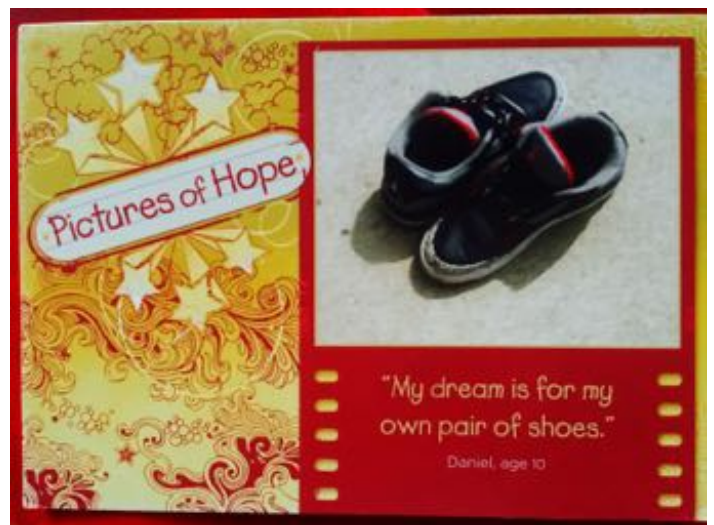
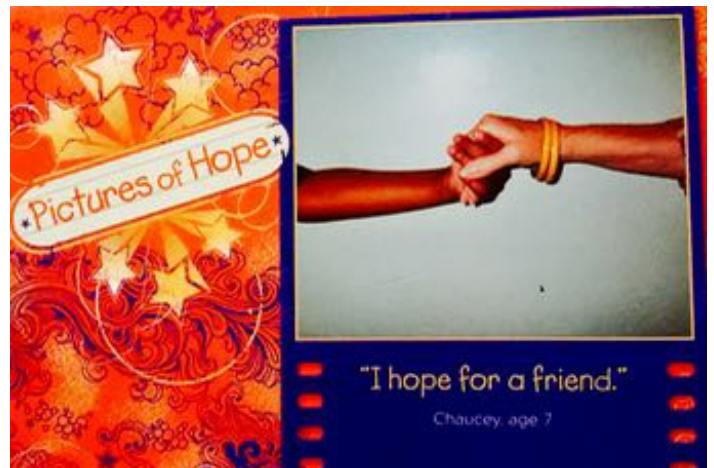
Once a correspondent for ABC-TV, Linda does her own p.r. She says, "The key is umpteen phone calls and a story that's heartfelt."

Talk about heartfelt. 10 year old Darius photographed a bed for his second wish. His first: to see his mother smile. Dre Bly, retired cornerback for the Detroit Lions, saw Darius on TV and bought him a bed. And Darius' mother surely smiled when Bly also gave them a refrigerator and oven. Anything else? Bly asked. Darius said, "I wish for a lamp so I don't have to do homework with a flashlight."

"Children in shelters never wish for anything trivial," Linda says.

John Comerford, president of Blackburn College, a liberal arts school in Carlinville, IL, caught NBC Nightly News' Making a Difference feature on Pictures of Hope. Linda was working with "the same population we seek to serve," Comerford told the **Arizona Daily Star**. He contacted Linda and offered 5 complete college scholarships to Pictures of Hope participants in 2016 and more in 2017.

The first Blackburn recipient, Leilani Martinez, 14, hopes to be a doctor or lawyer. She and her mother have lived in Tucson's Our Family Services transitional housing for 5 years. Her mom, Lupita, works in bookkeeping and worried about how to pay for her daughter's education. One of the first dreams Leilani depicted was to help the homeless. Her recent dream: to believe in herself. Linda Solomon and John Comerford sure did. They surprised Leilani by announcing the scholarship in front of 300 people at Our Family Services' annual luncheon.



"I started crying," Leilani said. "I thought they were playing with me."

3 more scholarships have been granted to Michigan kids.

GM has also sponsored Pictures of Hope. Leaders in business and media have become mentors to individual kids in various cities. Ex-Detroit Mayor Dave Bing is a Pictures of Hope mentor.

Kroger of Michigan is currently sponsoring 3 programs. Linda has formed a 501c3 and is seeking more sponsors. All 49 cities where she has run Pictures of Hope programs want her to return. "The needs are so great," she says. "How can I tell them I can't come back?"

2.5 million children are homeless in America, she says, the highest number since the Great Depression.

Expenses include exhibiting the children's Pictures of Hope, printing of greeting cards she creates from children's photos, the cost of digital cameras and more. All proceeds from greeting cards sales benefit the shelters in each city.

Linda and her equally stunning sister, Jill Rappaport, have published 5 books. Jill was a reporter for The Today Show and NBC Nightly News. One of their books, **The Key**, includes secrets to life of Barbara Walters, Katie Couric and other celebrities. Proceeds benefit breast cancer research.

Linda and Barry never had children. Linda traveled for her career and was "totally dedicated." She's made up for not raising a family with a program that has affected the lives of 1400 children.

"One life at a time," she says. "If you can change one life, give one person hope, everything changes. You've impacted a family. Pictures of Hope touches the soul of each child. They know their dreams matter."

According to a Chinese proverb, "It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness." The saying is often attributed to Confucius. Adlai Stevenson quoted it about Eleanor Roosevelt in an address to the UN in 1962. Linda Solomon lives the message every day. With talent, determination and savvy, she has lit candles in the lives of hundreds of children. She longs to light them for thousands more.

Blessings, girlfriend. Thanks for sharing your story. And for brightening the world.