

Remember These Children During the Holidays

I stared into vacant eyes as I took my seat next to her nervous, guarded frame. She wore a zip-up hoodie, shorts, and flip-flops on this below-20-degrees December day.

Christmas was just around the corner, and while most kids love talking about all of the joys and lights and sweets and gifts that come with this time of year, this ten-year-old didn't.

While most kids had a Christmas tree lighting up their living room, she didn't. She didn't even have the living room.

While most kids had gifts from mom and dad that they were eagerly awaiting, she didn't. She didn't have anyone that she called *mom* or *dad*.

While most kids would wake up in their homes, with their families, on Christmas Day, she wouldn't. She was homeless.

The home and the family she used to know, way back whenever, had never been a supply of joy or lights or gifts. Not at Christmas, not ever.

She'd been abused, so severely that her parents' rights to her had been legally severed. The government had pinned her with the title "ward of the state," and she was shuffled to and fro from foster home to foster home, from group facility to group facility.

Now, on a bitterly cold December day, I sat a table with her, bringing with me a heart and a prayer for one little girl, and a bottle of nail polish.

She shyly exposed her nervous habit, showing me nails that had been bitten down past the quick. Each finger was flushed pink with a few sores. But she wanted them painted. Orange. Her

favorite color. And so we both got orange nails that day.

I came back the next week with a deck of cards. Then the next with some artsy-crafty things. Then the next with a couple of good children's books. And so it became a bullet point scheduled into my weekly routine.

▪ *Sunday from 1-2pm: visit Kacie.*

She lived in a group home with more than forty other children, all with similar stories. All needing a place to feel safe, to belong.

All needing someone to simply tell them that they matter, and they aren't forgotten; someone who would speak life into their darkness; someone who would bring words of truth into little worlds that had been filled with so many lies.

So I would paint her nails, and tell her how beautiful she was. I would look at the pictures she drew, and gush over her creativity. I would read her stories, and make comments between pages—*I enjoy spending time with you ... You're so valuable ...*

On Christmas Day, I got permission from her facility to take her out for hot chocolate. I came with gifts in my hands, throwing the tiniest seed into the great chasm of her aching lack, praying it would multiply somehow.

Christmas Day was the last day I ever saw her.

The next week, she was moved. *Again.* It's what children in foster care do. It's one of the injustices they live under, among oh-so-many more. Permanence is ground these wanderers don't walk.

A taxi had picked her up. And she, a ten-year-old girl with a trash bag filled with a few belongings, rode alone with the driver-stranger to a city several hours away where she was delivered to her new group home.

Like this little girl, multitudes of abused and neglected children move through America's system, with more than **400,000** making their home in foster care this very day, and more than **100,000** of those in need of an adoptive family. Most feel like a lost face, a lost life among the masses. But among those masses, *today we single out one child, and we remember.*

Kacie is not forgotten.

She's one among many. And let us remember still more.

Look for that child in your church, in your neighborhood, in your child's school who needs a father.

Look for the group facilities scattered through our cities that house so many of our nation's unseen fatherless. Connect with your region's foster care agency and find these group homes, find ways to serve these children.

We may not be able to embrace the masses. But we can embrace one.

We can't step into the lives of 400,000. But perhaps we can step into the life of one.

And perhaps some of us—and prayerfully, many of us—can bullet point our schedules to give even *one hour a week* to visit one fatherless child in his distress and show him that he matters, that there is a good Father in Heaven, that his life is not forgotten.

For this is pure and undefiled religion.

(*Kacie's name and age were changed for her protection.)

Kinsey Thurlow *is a minister at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. She is an advocate for the fatherless and her husband, Jon is a worship leader and minister at IHOP-KC.*