A Coat of Paint

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As Secretary of Spanish Club of my high school, I was assigned the job of picking a community service project for the Club to participate in. Our school was having a “service day” and different classes and clubs were picking various projects around the community to do on this day. Some groups were going to play with kids at Safe Place, while others were serving food at the Soup Kitchen, and still others were volunteering to pick up trash around neighborhoods. I saw all of these projects as needs that our community had, but I had the desire to help an individual, or even a family; someone who needed something done, but could not do it themselves. I wanted to make a more personal impact; I wanted someone to feel like we had dedicated our day just to them. That was why I ultimately decided to get involved in a Christmas in Action project. I contacted the organization and we were assigned a house to repaint. I honestly did not think that repainting someone’s house could make much of an impact on their life, but if that’s what needed to be done, then that’s what we were going to do.

We pulled up to the address we had been assigned, and immediately saw that this house needed a lot of work. Not only was the paint chipped and even missing in most parts, but the grass had grown up to the rotted porch, and the fence had missing posts. We made our way up to the front door, and knocked loudly. After several knocks, an older lady made her way to the door. She struggled to open it because the hinges were rusted and the glass door had been shattered. When we told her why we were there, her face lit up with excitement, and she hugged us all with tears in her eyes. I could not believe that a simple coat of paint could make someone this happy. Her reaction provided great motivation for us to begin the task ahead. We began to scrape what was left of the original color of the house and put a fresh coat onto the newly surfaced wood. After applying the first coat of paint, we realized that the house would need a second coat. Our service day had fallen on a Friday and we knew that if we were going to wait for the paint to dry in order to apply another coat, we would have to come the next day. We were all more than willing to return that Saturday if that meant seeing the excitement on the lady’s face once again.

We still had several hours of daylight left after we had finished painting the first coat of paint. We decided that in those hours, we would make the repairs to the rest of the house. We made a trip to Lowe’s and made the purchases necessary to repair and repaint the fence, replace the front door, and restructure and rebuild the porch. The lady did not know we were doing anything but painting the house, so when we showed up the next day, she was very surprised. After we told her what we had come back to do, she began to sob and could only manage to repeat the words “thank you” over and over again. We had only thought she had expressed excitement the day before, but now her gratitude was overwhelming and even had some of us in tears.

We began the second day of work even more eager than what we had the day before. We began applying the second coat of paint, repairing and repainting the fence, replacing the front glass door, rebuilding her porch and mowing her lawn. We had only worked for a few hours when the lady came out of her house with homemade burritos. We were very thankful; not only because we were hungry, but because the lady had offered what little she had just because we were helping her with some repairs to her home. After our second day of work, we looked at what we had accomplished. The lady’s house looked entirely different than what it had only the day before. The lady was overjoyed with the outcome; but I think we had gained even more than she had. She had gained some repairs to her home, while we had gained the internal accomplishment of helping someone who could not help themselves...and to think it all started with a coat of paint.