CHAPTER 1

ANGEL TREE RE-IMAGINED

Angel Tree 2020 was different than any other Angel Tree event Hollywood Impact Studios Ministries has ever held. Covid-19 changed many traditions, and our Annual Angel Tree Event was no exception. Although it was different, it might have been one of the best ever.

An amazing ministry of Prison Fellowship, Angel Tree volunteers from the community go out and buy, wrap and deliver Christmas gifts to the children of the incarcerated. These gifts are not from the volunteers, but from the incarcerated parents themselves – we are the messengers. As their mission statement says, “It is a program that serves incarcerated parents by providing a pathway for strengthening and restoring relationships with their children and families.”

Hollywood Impact Studios Prison Ministry has been participating in Angel Tree for the last 10 years, and we believe we are the only prison ministry with formerly incarcerated individuals actively participating in this event.

“With Flashlights in hand, and presents in tow, bumbling, stumbling, off we go!”

Normally, we all gather at In N Out Burgers for a time of food, fun and fellowship, load onto the “Grace” bus and drive to the homes of the Angel Tree children where we
deliver gifts from their incarcerated parents while merrily singing out of tune Christmas Carols.

Then came 2020 and Covid-19...everything changed! We couldn’t gather at In N Out or travel together as a group. How could we deliver gifts to the kids, give them a special day of hope and love letting them know their incarcerated father or mother was there for them – a miracle was needed.

“There’s no mingling or gathering on sidewalks or streets; No singing or playing – Oh, what a defeat!”

After much prayer we had an idea – how about a “contactless drive-through” event during daylight hours. And so, our first Christmas miracle was born. But, in what form and where would this event take place? All of our children were located in the Palmdale area.

“So, we internet searched and drove through the streets, A storefront, the sidewalk? No - take a beat. Then all of the sudden, a light shined so bright, Victory Outreach, a Church in Palmdale - that’s right! Their mission addiction, incarceration too. We partnered with them and our ministry grew.”

Having re-imagined our event and finding a location, we now wanted to make the event special for the kids. We didn’t want to have the families drive through, collect gifts and go home. We wanted them to be involved, making it a family celebration.

“Now miracles happen, though world on its’ face, but this one was special - it now had a place. From one tiny gift, then two joined along; Now three, as we all celebrated with song.”

So, we joined with “Make Music Day” Celebration, a global event of music appreciation and celebration that occurs every December 21st. Our event was called Car -o-ling in your neighborhood. We figured, why not?

“With Angel Tree Gifts and Holiday Songs, Merrily, did we all sing along. Make Music Day donated bells and kazoos And Cyndi’s quartet made music too! What a wonderful way as families drove through, to give something special Merry Christmas to You!”

Chapter 2
The Day of the Event

Our masked volunteers got there early to set up “the stations” as Christmas and Praise music blasted over a loudspeaker. Cyndi’s quartet arrived and was practicing before our
traditional In N Out Burgers were delivered. After lunch, our annual Angel Tree event was underway.

The first family drove up and stopped at Station One where Victor checked them in. Station 2, every child received a pre-wrapped handbell or Kazoo so they could “sing along.” As Victor announced the family over the walkie-talkie the family drove to Station Three where the HOLLYWOOD IMPACT STUDIOS “Choir” serenaded them with socially distanced Christmas Carols as kids rang their bells and played Kazoos from car windows. Then came Station Four, where a live string quartet of 2 violins, viola and bassoon played more Christmas Carols- window serenade turned up-side-down. Looking at the expressions on kid’s faces told us that many had never heard or seen music performed liked this.

Next, Station Five, where Richie and his family delivered the gifts to the children, a children’s Bible and just as important the Christmas message from their incarcerated parent. As they drove off, they were again serenaded by “We Wish You A Merry Christmas”. We repeated this many times during the day.

If this was all that happened, it would have been an amazing day... but so much more occurred.

First, while we were setting up, two of our guys, Tony and Matthew saw a homeless man pushing a shopping cart down the sidewalk in front of the church, they went out to talk with him. Here are two formerly incarcerated, former addicts sharing Christ’s love with “the stranger”. They invited him to join our party. They gave him food, fries and a drink, but so much more. They talked to him about the path he was on. They offered much wise council and offered to find “Jon” housing and brought him into our group. Jon stayed all day, singing Carols and receiving fellowship from each and every one of our guys. Tony will be picking him up to bring him back to Eden Ministries Sober-living house next week.

Second, was two car loads of families, asked if they could just drive through our event to hear the Christmas music. Although we didn’t have any toys, we did give the kids Angel Tree coloring books, Bibles, children’s stories and of course hand bells and kazoo.

Next, I witnessed as Richie delivered those Christmas messages from their incarcerated parents. Richie knew firsthand how tough it was to be an incarcerated parent and his reading of those messages were filled with compassion and love.

And lastly, as we were cleaning up, I had a chance to thank Victor for being the “check-in” guy. Not the most glamourous job, but important. He looked me in the eyes and said, his kids had benefitted many times from Angel Tree and finally he was able to
experience it from the other side. To finally be able give back to all those Angel Tree volunteers who had shared the love of Christ with his children meant so much to him.

It was quite a day, a good day, a great day... Merry Christmas!

Celebrates

MAKE MUSIC

WINTER

Car-o-ling in your Neighborhood
Angel Tree gifts and Holiday songs for children of the incarcerated - Everyone Sing Along!