11 amazing acts of generosity

These unexpected acts of kindness may inspire you to open up your heart, and your wallet, to help out a stranger.

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**Big-hearted gestures**

It doesn't take much to make a stranger feel special in our society. Just holding the door open for someone or letting a fellow shopper back out in a crowded parking lot can go a long way. It seems like we don't see even those basic levels of courtesy quite often enough.

That's why it's so noteworthy when someone makes a real difference. When people open their pocketbooks or make a decision that is so striking, so jaw-droppingly generous, that they change lives forever. It happens, in big and small ways.

We've pulled together several examples of people going out of their way for others. They made large donations of money that they could have used themselves. They helped neighbors in crisis, or young people with medical problems. They spent money just to put a smile on someone's face.

And the funny thing about this kind of goodwill is that it can spread like a virus. In some of these cases, one generous act was the spark that spurred on a spree of similar kind-hearted gestures. People wanted to keep the momentum going, to maintain a pattern of giving that is all too rare.

Read on to see 11 amazing acts of generosity.

**Buying coffee for 500 strangers**

A man walked into a **Tim Hortons** ([THI](http://investing.money.msn.com/investments/stock-price?symbol=thi)) coffee shop in Edmonton, Canada, in July and ordered a large "double double" and a Boston cream doughnut. That was not at all unusual.

But then he asked the staff how many large coffees they typically sell in a day, [according to Metro Edmonton](http://metronews.ca/news/edmonton/746691/mystery-man-visits-edmonton-tim-hortons-pays-895-to-buy-coffee-for-500-strangers/). "A lot," the clerk answered.

The man said he wanted to buy a large coffee for the next 500 customers who ordered one. He paid $895.28 with a debit card, and walked out.

It seems the entire country took the idea and ran with it. A wave of copycats "pouring it forward" soon hit, and benefactors from Saskatoon to Chestermere to Calgary began buying hundreds of cups of coffee for strangers, [reports CTV news](http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/outpouring-of-canadian-coffee-shop-generosity-puzzles-inspires-1.1384550). In Ottawa, a man gave $860 to Tim Hortons cashiers and told customers to order whatever they wanted.

Most of the donors remained anonymous, but one woman who bought 800 coffees in Edmonton said she just wanted to up the ante after hearing about the first case.

**Leaving $500 tips**

Seth Collins' brother Aaron died last year at age 30, and asked in his will that his family go out to dinner and leave an awesome tip.

"He said, 'I'm not talking about 25%,'" Seth Collins [told NPR](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=199632903&ft=1&f=1001). His brother was thinking more along the lines of $500 for a server at a pizza restaurant.

So Collins began raising the money, and made a video about the experience. The video went viral, and people began donating more money to keep the goodwill going. Collins decided to continue giving the tips, and wants to visit a restaurant in every state to honor his brother.

Collins is blogging about his travels at the website [Aaron's Last Wish](http://aaroncollins.org/). He posts great videos of servers looking astonished and incredibly happy after receiving what will very likely be the best tip of their lives.

**Giving away $5 bills at an intersection**

What do you do when you see a man holding a sign at an intersection? If you pretend to fiddle with the radio or suddenly notice an interesting cloud in the other direction, you would have missed Doug Eaton's birthday celebration.

Eaton turned 65 last year and decided to celebrate by spending 65 minutes handing out $5 bills to people in Oklahoma City, Okla.

He stood at an intersection holding a sign that said: "I have a home . . . and a car . . . and a job. Do you need a few bucks for some coffee?"

People didn't know what to think, [reports](http://kfor.com/2012/07/11/man-gives-money-instead-of-begging-at-intersection/) Oklahoma City news station KFOR. "I think this is the craziest guy I've ever seen in my life," one driver told KFOR. "It's fantastic. I'm enjoying the moment out here."

Eaton also described the experience as fantastic. "Some people who don't take the money just say, 'Man, I love what you're doing. I won't take it, but would you give it to somebody who needs it?'"

**Selling lemonade to help a neighbor**

When you're 8 years old, it can be tough to help out anyone financially. But that didn't stop Johnny Karlinchak last year after a giant oak tree crashed through his neighbor's house in Springfield, Va.

Karlinchak first went to his piggy bank and gave his neighbor, Elissa Myers, $1.25. Then he set up a lemonade stand to raise more money, [reports the Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/after-storm-springfield-8-year-old-aims-to-help-four-years-after-his-own-loss/2012/07/14/gJQAJTJukW_story.html). He made $21 the first day, then $108 when he tried again, and $233 on a busy Saturday.

"I lost many, many things that day," Myers told The Post about the storm. "But things did not make me cry. The overwhelming kindness of Johnny did." The storm caused about $200,000 in damage to her house.

Karlinchak's 6-year-old sister Kelly had died four years earlier in a car accident. His neighbors supported the family so much that they didn't have to cook a meal for nine months, The Post reports.

**Sending pizza to a hospital room**

Hazel Hammersley, all of 2 years old, has been fighting an ongoing and exhausting battle with cancer. Her mother, looking for a moment of lightheartedness, used medical tape to write this message on the window of her daughter's hospital room: "Send pizza Rm. 4112."

The photo turned up on the website [Reddit](http://www.reddit.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), and soon the pizzas started arriving at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. At least 20 pizzas were delivered before an overwhelmed Hammersley family thanked everybody and said that they had received quite enough.

On Aug. 21, doctors successfully removed Hazel's stage-3 neuroblastoma in a five-hour operation, People magazine reports. Though she must still endure a stem cell transplant, radiation therapy and more chemotherapy, doctors are optimistic.

Her parents are already planning a big pizza party for the day Hazel can finally go home.

**Donating class trip money to a tornado victim's family**

Students in the Transitional Life Skills class in South Pittsburg, Tenn., worked hard to raise money for an overnight trip to Tybee Island, Ga., in 2011. Some of them had never been to the beach before, and the class was thrilled to be going.

But when they heard about a boy in Bridgepost, Ala., who died in a tornado that year, they decided to donate the $2,000 to his family instead, [reports the Chattanooga Times Free Press](http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2011/may/31/south-pittsburg-students-generosity-tornado-victim/). All of the students live below poverty level, [reports Savannahnow.com](http://m.savannahnow.com/news/2011-05-23/tenn-students-generosity-inspires-tybee).

It didn't take long for news of their donation to get out, though, and soon the school was bombarded with offers to help the students go on that trip. They got money for the bus ride, a free two-night stay at a hotel and free restaurant meals. They had dinner with the mayor of Tybee Island, and the town named a day in their honor.

A classroom aide at the school was especially touched by one email she received during the flurry of goodwill. "It read, 'When you love without asking, you receive without knowing,'" she told the Times Free Press. "I thought that was appropriate for the situation these kids are in."

**Sending a stranger $500 in grocery gift cards**

A user on the Reddit website [wrote a post](http://www.reddit.com/r/reddit.com/comments/kg2ox/a_boring_story_about_my_mom/) last year about how his mother moved into a two-bedroom house after his parents split up. One of his siblings stays in the second bedroom, and the other sleeps in the basement. He sleeps on the sofa in the living room when he comes home from college to visit.

He said his mother asked him if the new house felt like home. "I told her that I don't need a bedroom to feel at home; she is the reason the old house felt like home, and she is the reason this house feels like home," wrote the user, who goes by the name Spooof.

Another Reddit user, touched by the post, sent Spooof [two $250 gift cards](http://imgur.com/a/7Q0Dk) to the grocery store chain **Kroger**([KR](http://investing.money.msn.com/investments/stock-price?symbol=KR)).

"I'm still in shock that someone can make such a kind and generous gesture to a complete stranger," Spooof [wrote on Reddit](http://www.reddit.com/r/offbeat/comments/o4z49/a_redditor_sent_me_500_in_kroger_gift_cards/). "Someday when I have the means to do so, I promise to honor this gesture by doing something similarly generous for someone else in the hopes that they will also know how this feels."

**Returning a $4,000 engagement ring**

Billy Ray Harris, a man who frequently panhandled in Kansas City, Mo., was surprised to find a diamond engagement ring in his cup one day. A woman named Sarah Darling had taken off her ring and put it in her coin purse, and later dumped the change from her purse into his cup, [USA Today reports](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/03/24/homeless-man-engagement-ring-family-reunion/2015777/).

Harris took the ring to a jeweler, who offered him $4,000. But he didn't sell, choosing instead to wait in case Darling came back. She did, and he gave her the ring.

"My grandfather was a reverend," Harris said, according to USA Today. "He raised me from the time I was 6 months old and thank the good Lord, it's a blessing, but I do still have some character."

Darling was so moved that she went public with Harris' good deed, establishing a fund in his name. It raised $185,000. The best part? Harris' younger sister Robin, who hadn't talked to her brother in more than a decade, saw the report and was able to reunite Harris with his four siblings.

**Donating retirement funds to help volunteer fire departments**

Carol Landau, a former city clerk for Lighthouse Point, Fla., began donating tens of thousands of dollars to volunteer fire departments after she was diagnosed as terminally ill, The Sun-Sentinel [reports](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2013-07-11/news/fl-lighthouse-point-dying-clerk-donates-20130710_1_volunteer-firefighters-retirement-savings-motor-home).

Landau had been saving money for her retirement, but when she received the news, she began paying for equipment and protective gear. She sent the Odum, Ga., volunteers an $11,200 check, for example -- far more than the $9,800 they ordinarily have to work with each year.

"We consider her an angel to us, and that's my whole community," the chief of the volunteer fire department in Ludowici, Ga., told the newspaper.

Landau has no children, and has been told by her doctor that she might not survive this year. "I want it to go where it will do good for people for years to come," she told the Sun-Sentinel, referring to her retirement savings. "Years ago, I decided I wanted my epitaph to be: My life made a positive difference."

**Giving $15,000 to a Lyme disease victim**

A 30-year-old woman named Kimberly Leigh has a serious Lyme disease infection and a host of other medical problems. She established a [fundraising campaign](http://www.gofundme.com/1569z8) last year on GoFundMe to cover medical treatment in New York.

"I am sick right now and can't do anything at this moment besides ask for help," she wrote on the site. Michael Kenny came across the site late one night while researching alternative treatments for his own illness, and said that Leigh's words resonated strongly with him.

"I decided that evening that I would donate to her struggle to get healthy and get her life back," Kenny told MSN Money. "I exchanged a couple of simple emails with her and then surprised her a couple of weeks after our first contact with the $15,000 donation. Needless to say she was quite shocked and grateful."

Kenny had recently sold his own business, an online travel business in Asia, and said he couldn't imagine going through the stress and uncertainty of a chronic illness without the financial resources to pursue promising new treatments.

On her personal blog, [Leigh writes](http://updatedlymesupplementlist.blogspot.com/) that she has returned to work full time, and her immune system is back to 100% after treatment for some parasites in her colon.

**Donating $15,000 to a Boston Marathon bombing victim**

Jeff Bauman's legs were amputated in the days after two bombs exploded at the Boston Marathon this past spring. His friends and family turned to online fundraising campaigns to help with medical expenses, and the ["Bucks for Bauman"](http://www.gofundme.com/BucksforBauman) page on GoFundMe has received more than $800,000 in pledges.

Strangers donated as little as $5 and sent words of encouragement from all over the world. But one donation stood out among the others: $15,000.

A separate fundraising site started by Bauman's upstairs neighbor saw anonymous donations of $500 or more. "There were people donating $500 anonymously, people who have never met Jeff," the neighbor, Sayer Usher, [told the New York Daily News](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/crowdfunding-sites-boston-marathon-victims-article-1.1322359). "It just goes to show how much people rally together when you have somebody in need."