

A Sweet Way TO GIVE BACK

Anna Grace Kennedy of Katy starts a fundraising
bake shop to help African orphans

Written by Julie Estep | Select Photography by Jason Lehecka

Anna Grace Kennedy, a 14-year-old homeschooled student, has always had a heart for orphans, especially after her family adopted a little girl last year. When the Katy teen heard about the many parentless children in Kampala, Uganda, she came up with a way to combine two of her passions: raising funds for orphans and baking. Only 13 years old at the time, Kennedy started Anna Grace's Bake Shop. With a little help from friends, family, and her Katy neighbors - who've eaten their fair share of tasty cupcakes in support of the young altruist - Kennedy baked her way to Africa not once, but twice, while also raising money for solar lighting at the orphanage. "These people don't have what I have," shares Kennedy. "I can give a little time for them."

Eager to Help

Anna Grace was at family friend Tanya LaTorre's house when she sat in on a meeting about Kirabo Seeds, started by the LaTorre family after they adopted a child from Kampala. The nonprofit organization helps educate and provide shelter to the Ugandan orphans. During the meeting, a group of missionaries were planning their next trip to Uganda to help with the nonprofit's undertaking.


Kennedy remembers her heart started beating with excitement and purpose listening to them describe the trip. Before leaving the house that night, she was pulled aside by LaTorre. "Ask your parents if you can go," LaTorre recalls telling her. "I reserved a flight for her just in case she could go with us. I had a feeling."

Baking Her Way to Africa

With the June 2011 trip only a month away, Kennedy found herself with a slight issue of money... and time. She decided to turn a favorite pastime into a serious fundraising venture, working from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day baking and decorating her creations. Kennedy persevered to meet her goal, even when her oven broke and she and her mother had to carry trays of uncooked batter over to her grandmother's.



Katy teen Anna Grace Kennedy visits with children at an orphanage in Kampala, Uganda



"The Ugandan culture is so different. Everyone is so **HAPPY** and **JOYFUL** despite having much less than us. When we first got off the bus to get to the orphanage, there was a stampede of kids climbing over us and **HUGGING** us. Then, they put on a **SHOW** for us."

-Anna Grace Kennedy

Only 14 years old, Anna Grace Kennedy has raised enough money through Anna Grace's Bake Shop to fund two mission trips to Uganda, as well as solar lighting for an orphanage

Her older sister Joy helped her create a Facebook page, and Anna Grace's Bake Shop, with its signature cupcake of the month, was up and running. "We buy cupcakes whenever we can," LaTorre says. "They're delicious." Despite giving up on the idea of lazy summer days, Kennedy never complained. "The kids of Kampala get up at 4 in the morning and do chores till 10, and I can give back to them," she says.

When all was said and done, Kennedy gave more than just her time. Her bake shop raised enough money to buy solar lighting for the orphanage. The lights were already installed by the time she journeyed to Uganda last summer. "The orphans would come home from school, and it would be pitch black and they weren't able to do schoolwork," she explains. "So now, they can flip on a switch and have light for dinner and schoolwork." Having the solar lighting "is a great blessing," LaTorre says.

A Life-Changing Experience

Kennedy describes her first trip to a third world country as life-changing. "The [Ugandan] culture is so different," she says. "Everyone is so happy and joyful [despite having much less than us]. When we first got off the bus to get to the orphanage, there was a stampede of kids climbing over us and hugging us. Then, they put on a show for us."

Along with making crafts, playing games, and caring for the babies, Kennedy even spent a night at the children's home where 14 orphans live, waking up at 4 in the morning to feed the chickens and milk the cows and make two trips for fresh water. This past June, she returned to Uganda for 16 days to teach the *Book of Esther* and fun songs with biblical lessons to various schools and children's homes. The second time around, she got to add a safari to her growing list of life experiences.

Donate to Anna's Cause!

Visit [Anna Grace's Bake Shop Facebook page](#) to order the cupcake of the month!

The Icing on the Cake

With two mission trips under her belt – or, you might say, her baking apron – Kennedy now hopes to spend a season of her life as a missionary. Also on her bucket list are working up the courage to slaughter a chicken for the children's dinner and riding a tame hippo. "Anna Grace has got this wonderful sense of humor, never complains, always is willing to help and work, and never stops smiling," LaTorre says. "I'm hoping when she grows up, she can work for Kirabo Seeds." Whatever path Kennedy decides to pursue in life, there is no doubt that this business-savvy teenager with a big heart will find a way to make it happen. **KM**

JULIE ESTEP was born and raised in Katy, Texas.

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