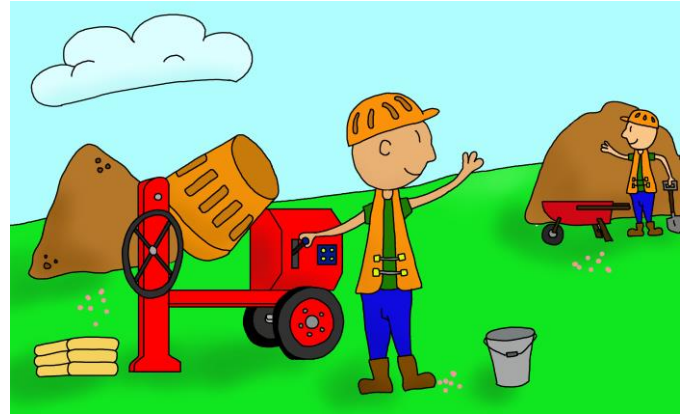


**Character
Construction
Crew
(Stories 1-10)**



Character Construction Crew stories

—20 More Stories, Part 1—

(Stories 1-10)

(ISA-inspired from Above)

By CQ (unedited and unproofread)

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(Imaginary story)

On a Bench

It had been an exhausting day. Tom Truckalong had worked hard shovelling wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow load of dirt to all the new flower beds that surrounded the town square. It was one of the last things to be done before the project of fixing up the area was complete.

A small pond had been built, and goldfish were swimming in it. Benches had been added, and even a barbeque area set up. There was a nearby playground made for the children, built out of logs. It had a cubby house up high that could be climbed up to, a slide, and other climbing structures. A load of soft bark mulch had been dumped and spread on the ground for the safety of lively climbing children. Tomorrow the gardeners were going to plant the flowers, so the dirt needed to be in place before then.

Finally his part of the job was done for the day, and the wheelbarrow, shovel, and all that Tom Truckalong had used was loaded into his pickup truck. He then sat down on one of the new benches to enjoy a cold drink of water, and rest while looking at the sunset. He opened up a snack he'd saved, and listened to a song on his player.

However, he'd been too tired to acknowledge and say hello to another person who was also sitting on the bench. He didn't realise it was his friend, as Tom Truckalong just wanted a few quiet moments before going home.

Jerry sat there for awhile, wondering why Tom Truckalong wasn't talking to him. "Maybe he's just tired... or maybe he didn't recognise me...or maybe he actually doesn't want to talk to me... did I do something to upset him?"

Jerry started to get worried, and the more he thought about it, the more he felt sad. Now, Tom Truckalong wasn't upset at him or anything like that at all. What was needed here was just some simple communication.

Jerry nearly just got up and left, without saying anything. But as he stood up he waved at Tom Truckalong, and said "Hi! How was your day?"

"Oh!" Tom Truckalong looked up with surprise. "I didn't recognise it was you," he said, taking his earphones out of his ears, so he could chat. Jerry sat back down, and they both enjoyed the sunset while talking about how things were going with Jerry's sports team. He was a trainer for cricket, and the team had met for a good practice that day.

“Nice seeing you again!” Tom Truckalong said, as Jerry was leaving.

“Yes, you too,” Jerry said and then paused, wondering whether to say what he was thinking. He decided to.

“Thanks for chatting. I actually was wondering what you were thinking before, as you weren’t talking to me. I thought for sure you’d noticed I was there, but thought that perhaps you were upset at me and didn’t want to talk to me or something.”

“Oh, no, not at all!” Tom Truckalong quickly said. Now it was his turn to express his thoughts.

“I should have taken more notice, but I was just so tired from my work today, and just needed to have some quiet time, to sit and rest. But seeing you was great! Talking to a friend is a nice way to end a busy day. Thanks for getting my attention. It would have been sad to think that you thought I didn’t want to talk with you.

Thanks for the chat, and for initiating the conversation. It really helps to ask and find out, instead of imagining what someone might be feeling—especially if it’s something that’s making you feel sad. It’s very likely not to be the way you think it is,” Tom Truckalong said.

“You’re right, Tom,” Jerry agreed. “I’ll see you some other time. Bye!”

“See you, Jerry,” Tom Truckalong said, heading to his truck, looking forward to seeing his children at home.

“Talking and expressing our thoughts is real important,” he thought, “especially if we’re using words that are helpful, kind and true.”

(Imaginary story)

A Dream

“What an odd dream I had last night,” Jeffery Just-in-time wrote in his diary. “In the dream people didn’t want to talk to others. When things were going wrong, no one spoke up and said what they thought should be done to change it. When someone was sad, no one stopped to find out why, and they never told anyone what was bothering them either. When cars were going too fast, no one told them to slow down.

“The postmen didn’t have any work to do, because no one wrote to others. By the end of the dream things were in a pretty sad state. Roads were crazy; people were sad and lonely; no one could learn anything from others because no one wanted to teach and explain things. People had to learn things on their own, and it sometimes took years to figure things out, instead of learning it right away from someone else who knew.”

As Jeffery Just-in-time thought about his day, he realised that there were lots of times when he could or even should say things, but he just chose not to—like saying hello to others, and saying a kind word, instead of only thinking about his work.

And there were other times when he wished he'd said nothing at all—like when he thought of a foolish joke that made someone feel embarrassed, or when he got upset and spoke unkindly to someone.

“Communication and being able to express things properly is really important,” he thought. “Knowing when not to say anything at all is good too. My dream made me appreciate the gift of being able to communicate with others, and to use it to make the world a better place.”

So as Jeffery Just-in-time arrived at the worksite and began his job of mixing a batch of cement, he made sure to acknowledge and greet each one working with him. It seemed to bring smiles to their faces, and the day was sprinkled with laughs and kind deeds. He also mentioned a new idea to his work overseer—something he thought would make things easier that day and save time.

“Instead of going all the way over there to get the sand needed for this job here, I was thinking we could use Tom Truckalong’s pickup truck to bring the bags to a closer spot. If we just take a few minutes to work together we could clear a space for the sand right

here. Then we could all load up the truck and bring it on over. It would help save time, I think,” Jeffery Just-in-time suggested.

Thankfully the overseer was good at listening, and good at trying out others’ ideas—not just his own. Jeffery Just-in-time’s idea worked great, and saved time and energy.

When Jeffery Just-in-time was getting ready to go home he spotted one of the guys on the team—Jason—who seemed to be rather down about something. Wanting to just go home, Jeffery Just-in-time at first didn’t want to take the time to talk with him to see if he was okay.

However, as he took the kind step, Jason explained that he was feeling badly, as it seemed everyone else on the team could do their jobs so much better than he. Since he was new to the job he had lots to learn and was feeling discouraged, like he might never catch up to being able to do things as well as the others.

Jeffery Just-in-time encouraged Jason, telling him what it was like when he first started off as a workman.

“It took me quite awhile to learn things,” Jeffery Just-in-time said, “but after awhile I caught on.” Jeffery Just-in-time told Jason to just be patient, to not compare with the others, and that doing things carefully, diligently and to the best of his ability was what was important. Jason felt a lot better. Jeffery Just-in-time had been not only at the right place at the right time, but had said the right thing in the right way. He was glad he’d stopped to talk—and to listen, to learn about what someone else was feeling.

“Communication is a tool that helps us all do a better job,” Jeffery Just-in-time thought, as he whistled on his way.

(Imaginary story)

Parking a Pick-up Truck

The work team arrived on the new site. It was their first time to begin working on this new project. Together they looked over the instructions and plan, to get an idea of what they were helping to build.

“Can we really do all that? It looks like a huge job!” some of the workmen were saying.

The team overseer said, “Well, it doesn’t have to all be done today! You don’t have to think about everything all at once. That will just overwhelm you. Just think about the first step. Let’s plan that.”

Each team member received their job assignment for the day, and began to tackle the huge job—one little part at a time. They were trying to build a four-level parking lot. Two level’s underground, and two above ground.

Gordie Go’n’do-it wasn’t one to wait around thinking about how difficult something might be. His motto which he was often heard to say was, “It’s better to do one good thing—if that’s all you can do—than to do nothing at all.”

His job for the day was to use the bulldozer to push stumps and roots of the old trees out of the ground, to help clear the way. “I’m off to start,” he said, and put on his hat. The others made a start too.

By the end of the day, as they parked their vehicles and looked at what progress had been made, they were all pleasantly surprised.

“What a great day of progress we had today!” Gordie Go’n’do-it exclaimed. “I love starting new and seemingly ‘too big’ jobs, because it is great fun to see it actually get done. Each time I see it happen I get more confident that nothing is too hard, no matter how it looks. It wouldn’t be as fun to only do the simplest things that you know are easy and can be done real fast.

“Doing something new that even looks too hard is more exciting. –Partly because you aren’t totally sure of the outcome, and you are interested to see how things turn out, and partly also because it is so fulfilling and courage-strengthening when you accomplish it.”

That night Gordie Go’n’do-it had a dream. He was driving a pick-up truck through the town. His son was driving with him. They were going to go hiking in the nearby hillside, but first they needed to get petrol and some food for their picnic lunch. In the dream they

were driving around and around town, but there was no place to park. So Gordie Go'n'do-it and his son had to park far away, and walk back to the town to get what they needed for their day of hiking.

When Gordie Go'n'do-it woke up and thought about his dream, it made him glad that they were building the new parking lot. "I may be real glad it's there one day," he said. He eagerly got on his work clothes and headed off to the work site, ready to make new progress for the day.

Something Interesting

As Larry Laughinglad sat eating his lunch at his work break, he fixed his eyes on something intriguing. “How do they do it?” he wondered, as he noticed a spider on a nearby bush, making its web. “Fascinating,” he whispered. “Without a blueprint or instructions, or any work overseer it just knows what to do, and how to do it. And it probably builds one each day. Amazing!”

It was rare to get to see it.

“What are you up to?” asked his friend, Colin, who came by just then for his park ‘n’ lunch break too.

Colin sat down beside Larry Laughinglad, who pointed out what he was watching.

“You always seem to find new and interesting things around you, and no matter where you are you always find something to learn,” said Colin to Larry Laughinglad.

“Sometimes I just run out of ideas of things to do, and I even get the silly idea that I already know and have learned nearly everything that is important to learn. I know there is actually so much more to discover.”

“Ha, ha,” laughed Larry Laughinglad. He knew how funny it would be if someone thought they had learned everything there was to know, or thought there wasn’t anything new to find out about.

“Well, I guess I just like learning new things, and I just know that no matter where I am or what I’m doing there’s something I can discover. It doesn’t have to be big or seem real amazing. Even tiny things can teach me something. Like this little spider. I was starting to get bored with my job on the work site thinking there wasn’t anything special about it, but this spider taught me to think differently,” said Larry Laughinglad.

“What’s your job?” wondered Colin.

“It’s often my job to hold the sign that tells the cars to go slow or to stop, when we are working on a road, and I help to put up and take away the road cones. Other times I help to put up the fences around the work site if it’s on a bigger lot of land. I also help to carry supplies that are needed here and there,” explained Larry Laughinglad.

“And what could a spider help you to learn?” asked Colin.

“Well, I guess it does its job day by day, doing the same thing all the time. It doesn’t give up, or do a poor job just because it’s not as fancy as some other creature. It makes its web as nice as it can, and does the best it can, every day,” commented Larry Laughinglad. “And really, no day or activity is really totally the same, everyday. There is always something new or interesting to try, to experiment with, to learn, to invent, to see, no matter where we are, who we are with, or what we are doing!”

“You’re right!” said Colin. “I think today, instead of just doing things the same way I usually do them, I’ll dream up a better way! My job is washing the dishes and helping with cutting up the food for the restaurant cooks. Maybe I can invent a machine that…” Colin’s mind was starting to think. “I can hardly wait to get started, that way I can have a chance to find new and better ways to do things. Bye, see you later, gotta go now!”

“Bye, Colin! Thanks for coming by. See you next time—and I can hardly wait to see what you’ll figure out!” Larry Laughinglad smiled and returned to his job.

Then something caught his eye. It was a coin. A new shiny coin, there in the mud. “I wonder how it got here?” he thought. “And more importantly, I wonder why I was the one to find it. Interesting. There must be something I’m to do with it.”

As he was holding his sign that day to tell the cars to stop or go slow, his mind was thinking of cool ideas. There was so much he wanted to do to make this town a better place. There were people to help, places to fix up, trash to clear, children that needed sports areas and equipment and so forth. He was getting excited! There was so much to do, and he didn’t know where to start.

After he prayed the idea came to him: Play music on the street corner, and have people drop coins in a hat or bowl for him. When he had enough money he would use it to give to some under privileged people who were often just sitting around with nothing to do. In return for his gift, they could help to clear the park and sidewalks of trash. The ideas were starting. His life was getting more interesting by the minute—even though he was still just standing there holding a sign. But he was also praying. He knew prayer would change things and make all these town improvements possible.

Rest Day—Best Day

Wilden Wilbeethere was feeling very sick today. It was the week end, and he couldn't do much of anything, or so it seemed. He looked out of his window at the partly cloudy sky, between coughs.

He was trying to distract himself from the way he felt. "Well, at least I can see, and hear, and I can move! I'm not really that bad off. I just feel unwell, but in time I'll feel strong again."

Wilden Wilbeethere wasn't going to allow himself to get too down about having to remain resting, and having to cope with all the discomfort that the illness brought. His main problem was wondering what to do. It was hard for him to just be still and do nothing much.

Soon, though, he fell asleep and had a good rest.

"Ah, now that's better!" Wilden Wilbeethere said when he awoke, though he was still coughing a bit. "That sleep was just what I needed. I know I need to keep taking it easy if I

want to recover quickly. I'm just not sure what to use my time for. I could choose to be grumpy about not being able to go on the outing that I had planned with my cousin this weekend, or I can choose to get a new idea of what else can be done even while I'm lying here resting and not able to do much at all."

Wilden Wilbeethere chose to do the latter, but he was out of ideas. Things kept popping into his mind of activities that would require him to be up and around to do them. So he stopped to pray.

"Lord, I know You are right here with me, and this is where You want me to be today. I want to thank You for giving me this opportunity to be here. I now get to do something I wouldn't have gotten to if things had gone just the way I thought they would or should. What can I use this time for now, Jesus? What would be a fun and good use of my time?"

After his prayer Wilden Wilbeethere paused for a moment to listen to Jesus, and as he did a new thought came to him.

"Oh, that's right! I had completely forgotten! I'm so glad that I paused to pray!" Wilden Wilbeethere exclaimed.

A month before he'd promised to write down the stories of his adventures while hiking and travelling all over the country a few years back. His nephew, Sean, who lived far away, had wanted to hear all about it. Wilden Wilbeethere agreed to do it in time for his nephew's birthday, as a gift. There was now only two weeks left to get it done and sent off in the mail.

"A promise is a promise!" he told himself, and was feeling a bit better that he was right where he was, with time on his hands while resting. This time in bed gave him time to think, to pause, to reflect and to most of all remember all those neat things that had happened, and to write them down.

Wilden Wilbeethere sat up with his pen and paper, and the stories began to flow. He laughed at some of the memories—like the time a large bird took off with his sandwich that he'd put down for a minute in order to tie his shoe! Or the time he was trying to cross a stream, walking on the rocks, but slipped and got all wet, and spent the next while trying to dry his clothes by a fire. He shook his head at other memories, remembering some of the things he'd learned—like the time he forgot to fill the rented car with enough petrol and found himself stuck on a dirt road.

Thankfully a farmer came driving past after a while, and helped fill his tank with a can of petrol, giving Wilden Wilbeethere enough to keep him going until he got to the town.

After about 1½ hours of writing Wilden Wilbeethere had filled up 12 pages with stories! “I’ll get this photocopied before I send it off to Sean. Then I can share them with others too, who want to hear about the trip,” Wilden Wilbeethere thought.

It was hard work in some ways, though not as hard as working at the construction site, for sure. Wilden Wilbeethere was ready now for some warm soup and another nap. Before he did so, he paused for one more prayer.

“Jesus, thank You for giving me that idea. It was a great and fun use of my time. Please show me anything else that I can do today, after my nap. I sure like to know I’ve got neat things to do. It helps to keep me happy and inspired!”

This time Jesus told him that he should take some time in prayer for the many people he’d heard about in far-off countries which were experiencing very difficult weather conditions.

Wilden Wilbeethere took a few moments to jot down a list of all the people and situations he would take time to pray for later on that afternoon.

“I’m going to be a world traveller this afternoon!” he said with a smile. “I’ll send my prayers to help people in places that I never could go to, all in one hour, even if I tried to zoom there on the fastest aeroplane invented. Through the power of prayer the help will get to them so much faster! Even if some prayers take longer to be fully answered, I know the second that I call out to Jesus, and ask for His help, He gets to work right away!”

When the day was over, Wilden Wilbeethere felt like it had gone by rather quickly, and that it was actually a fun day, after all! He was glad he’d learned that no matter what was happening, or what he had to do, there was always room for a good idea, something that made things better—he just had to ask the best idea Man ever!

Silly Ideas

“I felt like I would cry,” Harolt Hoowalhelp was telling his best friend Bob about what had happened that day. “It all started off fine. But then things got worse, and by the end of the day everything I had tried to do was a wreck!”

Bob took a sip of his tea and nodded his head. He knew what that felt like. “Go on,” he said.

“Well, at first I thought it was a bit of fun. We were messing around, playing rather unsafely with the tools before work time. But I think that’s where we missed it. If we had been mindful of the important job, as well as the dangers, and were thinking, praying, and focusing on doing a wise job, things might have turned out better.”

“What happened?” Bob wondered.

Harolt Hoowalhelp explained:

“We didn’t mix the cement properly, and it just turned to muck. The Crane truck’s hook wasn’t loaded safely and dropped its load. I got a big scrape on my arm from tripping over

tools that weren't put away properly. Not only didn't we do the job we needed to do, but we have extra work tomorrow to fix up the mess we got into."

Jeffery Just-in-time came into the cafe just then as well. The two motioned for him to come and join them.

"I learned something today," Jeffery added to the discussion, "that we can have the Lord's help and protection as long as we are working together with Him on the team. If we aren't listening to His instructions, then we get ourselves into difficult or dangerous situations, that could have been avoided."

"You're right," Harolt Hoowalhelp said.

"It has a lot to do with what we are thinking about. Whatever we are thinking, affects what we say. What we say affects what we do. What we do affects if we have a nice day or an especially difficult one. But if we shoo away the foolish thoughts and ideas, and don't just do whatever comes into our mind, and instead try and work together with Jesus, as the wisest workman there is, then even if things are hard, they turn out for good."

Bob surmised, “We all get silly ideas, and thoughts that aren’t that great. But it seems if we can stop ourselves from continuing to think about them, to talk about them, or from doing them, and instead think ‘What are Your thoughts right now, Jesus?’ that we’d not only be happier and safer, but the job would get done faster.”

“I think I’m going to try that tomorrow,” Harolt Hoowalhelp decided.

“Me too!” agreed Jeffery Just-in-time.

And they did! There were lots of silly ideas, and not-nice-words and unpleasant thoughts that were trying to bother them. But every time they would just shoo them away with an “I only want to do things Your way, Jesus”. And it was amazing! Not only were they able to fix their mistakes from the day before and do the job for that day, but they got half of the work for the next day done as well.

“Yippee!” the team shouted.

“See you all tomorrow, for another great day!” said Harolt Hoowalhelp.

Nature Time

Ben-Jim Bennifits had just put on his jogging suit and shoes, and had filled a bottle of water. He was all set now.

“Off to the park I go, for some good exercise!” he called out to his wife and children.

“We’ll see you there in a bit! As soon as we’re done eating we’ll come and join you,” said Milly his wife.

The park had a big grassy area, and it was just a two-minute walk from their house.

“Sure is pleasant to have a bit of nature so close to our home,” Milly thought while she gathered the items needed for their morning at the park together.

“Please put on your shoes and hats and get a good drink of water,” she instructed her children after breakfast.

No time was lost. They didn’t want to miss a bit of this refreshing outing.

When they had joined in prayer for their trip, then out the door the children and their mother went.

“There he is!” shouted Patrick. “Daddy’s over there! I see him jogging. Let’s go and chase him!”

“Yea!” said his brother Eric, and off they went, playing a game of trying to catch up with him. They had a good time of running and exercise in the fresh air and cheerful morning sunlight. Afterwards they walked around exploring this great natural environment.

“Mummy, mummy!” called out Selene as she went to give her mother a handful of dandelions that she’d picked.

“Can we save these for later, please?” Selene asked. “I want to tape them onto a piece of paper to make a card for my friend Anita.

“Alright then, I’ll put them here while you play. And if you like I can help you find some other wild flowers around that are delicate and are good for pressing. If we press some of the pretty flowers we find they’ll last a long time and are nice to add to cards—or even to put into a picture frame. Would you like that?” mother asked.

Selene smiled and thought that would be so nice. Together she and her mummy found some more wild flowers to add to their collection.

“Shhh!” Eric said to his brother, holding out his hand to indicate for him to stop running and to look.

“I think I saw something moving in the bushes there!” Eric whispered.

Ben-Jim Bennifits had caught up to his boys and quietly listened and watched along with them. Just then a rabbit hopped out of the bush and was gone in a flash.

“Did you see that?” Patrick asked.

Daddy and Eric nodded.

“I wish I could run that fast too,” said Ben-Jim Bennifits. “I’d complete all my running laps in a very short time!” he laughed.

“Shall we explore this trail a bit then, and do some hiking?” Ben-Jim Bennifits asked his sons.

“Ouch!” Eric said, before he could answer his dad.

“I think I have something pokey in my shoe,” he explained.

Sure enough, a prickle that was discovered.

“Well, being out in nature isn’t trouble-free, and not everything will be easy—but it’s safer than a whole lot of other things that people are doing in this modern world. You just need to make sure you are dressed right, have good shoes and keep an eye open for anything unsafe,” Ben-Jim Bennifits commented.

“And pray!” added Patrick.

“Yes! The One who made the grass, the trees, the mountains, the animals, and all these things that we are seeing here today knows how to help us explore it safely. It sure is a lot more fun than working on a busy work site! One thing that does is make me enjoy it so much more out here!” Ben-Jim Bennifits said.

“But why do you have to work to take away some nature and to instead build roads and buildings?” Eric wondered.

“Well, God put us here on Earth to live, but things aren’t as perfect as they were when He first created the World. Due to consequences that came as a result of choices that were

made, there are now things that people need to protect themselves from. Can you think of some?” Ben-Jim Bennifits asked his boys.

“Too much sun!” Patrick answered.

“Cold winters, and rain, wind, snow and hail too!” added Eric.

“That’s right! It’s hard to live outside in some parts of the world as the weather isn’t easy to cope with and would be too harsh for most people,” Ben-Jim Bennifits commented.

“Oh, I know, some animals aren’t very friendly, or would get into our food supplies if we didn’t have good places to keep things,” Eric said.

“And pests and other bothersome bugs would make things hard for us. A house or tent keeps things like flies and mosquitoes away a bit more than when you are out in the open. But what about roads, what good are they for?” Patrick asked his dad.

Ben-Jim Bennifits began to talk about it, as the team of hiking boys walked around the nature trail.

“Sometimes there are too many construction projects happening all in one area, and then there isn’t enough nature to keep the right balance of fresh air and beautiful surroundings that are so important to people’s health and well-being.

“Also, roads with many cars can cause a lot of trouble too. There are road accidents and fumes that make people unwell. In some areas where trees and growth are cut down too much it makes it hard or impossible for some species of creatures to continue living there, and soon there aren’t many of them left.

“So it’s a tricky thing to get just right—people need safe places to live, and so do the animals. And the world needs lots of good clean air that the plants help to produce.”

Ben-Jim Bennifits continued to explain:

“However, there are many good uses for roads and so forth—for example ambulances and fire engines and rescue vehicles can get to places faster and relief can get to areas that might not be reached if a road wasn’t there. People are able to transport goods and supplies to faraway places, so that people get to benefit from foods and products that others produce. Friends and families can visit each other and can go to new places without having to take a lot of time just travelling there.”

Eric and Patrick listened to their dad explaining things, and enjoyed the beautiful surroundings—the smell of the pine trees, the songs of birds, and the many interesting things they noticed along the way. It felt good to be out in nature.

“So, the best thing, I’d say, my boys,” Ben-Jim Bennifits concluded, “is to keep a good balance when building plans are being made. Make sure both animals and nature, as well as the people around, have what they most need. See to it that neither is crowding each other out, or causing troubles.”

As they rounded the last corner they saw the park again, as the trail had looped back to where they started out.

“There’s Mum and Selene!” Patrick was the first to spot them.

“Looks like it’s picnic time!” Eric added, and the two boys raced over to enjoy it!

A special building project

The summer heat was rather overpowering at times, as Charley Churrusting brought the next load of bricks by wheelbarrow down the narrow street to the structure that was being built. This wasn't a city construction project, but rather a deed of kindness that a team of workmen chose to do on the weekends. There were enough people helping that they took turns working on it, so no one had to work each weekend on it.

There wasn't an actual road that led to the small plot of land that they were building on, but just a dirt pathway, so all the building materials needed to be carried by hand to where the work was being done.

“Guess I can be glad it's not the rainy season yet—or this pathway would be very difficult to manage, as muddy as it must get then! I suppose the next thing we should do is plan to make it a gravel pathway.” Charley Churrusting thought as he wended his way down the path and arrived to the rest of the team that was happy for the next batch of bricks.

Charley Churrusting smiled as he straightened out his back and wiped the sweat off his forehead. A lot of progress had been made that weekend, and things were taking shape. It had all started a few months back when Charley Churrusting was taking his dog for a walk, but his dog Burley had taken off on a run and Charley Churrusting was panting to catch up to him and found him here at this very place. Months earlier it didn't look anything like what it did now. Back then it was an overgrown plot of muddy land, filled with prickles, thorns and a fair bit of trash thrown in as well.

As Charley Churrusting held the leash tightly and began walking home his thoughts started racing. "What if this place was transformed into a place for shade and rest, a place to read and relax. The houses around here are so small and run down—in some places they would hardly even be called houses. I'm sure those living in this underprivileged area would appreciate a place to take their children, a place to go when it's raining, a place to do arts and crafts. It could be like a small community centre. I wonder who owns this piece of land. Whoever does, might be glad for something good to be built on it."

Just then he passed by a mother holding her baby. Neither of them were well dressed at all. She was trying to hang her ripped and stained load of washed laundry that she managed to lug from the nearby river.

Charley Churrusting added to his thoughts. “Perhaps it could have laundry washing facilities as well.”

From that day forward he and his fellow workmen friends set out to make that area a bit better. It wasn’t hard to find out who the owner of the land was, and he readily agreed to their plan. Anything to make this area better was great.

Next, the team met to talk about the plans and to draw the simple blueprints for the building they wanted to make.

Charley Churrusting was sure to bring out the points about it being a good strong place that wouldn’t leak in the rainy and wet season, nor flood the floor. What it was to be built out of, and how and where to get the supplies were important points discussed.

An ad was put in the local newspaper for anyone who wanted to help on the weekends, to build the new centre, to contact Charley Churrusting, who would manage the project. Also a plea for supplies and materials or funding to be given towards it was added in the article.

It was only a month after their first discussion and planning meeting when they were able to actually start the work. It was going to take quite a while, as all the digging and building and material carrying had to be done by hand. But it was fun work, as the goal of having a happier neighbourhood and better cared for children made it worth the extra struggle.

Every time the men got to work the children of the neighbourhood would come by to watch the progress. Some of the older boys and teens even offered to help. On the days they did, much more progress was made.

Finally, after eight months the work was complete! A neighbourhood party was held. Banners and simple decorations were strung up, with balloons and music playing from the loud speakers of Charley Churrusting's pick-up truck. Donated snacks were served and it was a happy time. It gave everyone that lived there the hope that things would get better. Just the thought that someone—or several people cared—and not just cared but worked hard on their time off in the hot sun, to make things better for those who lived there, encouraged everyone so much. It made everyone want to live in love and help each other so much more.

They'd seen the example of kindness and concern put into action, and they all were enjoying the change that love was having on their poor neighbourhood. They didn't need to be rich to be happy. If they all just put some more effort into helping each other and doing their part to make things better and easier for each other, things would improve a whole lot more!

The next weekend the team met again, this time with a bigger team—some of the people from the neighbourhood, parents, teens, and an elderly couple. New plans were to be made for whatever was the next most important change that would be appreciated by those living there. There was lots to do, but working together to help those in need was a great way to live, and everyone was finding their hearts filled with more joy than they had known before.

The dinner

“Ding-a-ling, Ding-a-ding” the sound of the bell was heard of the man holding a can who was asking and hoping for donations. It was nearly the end of the year, and it was a time when people often thought more about giving to others than at other times during the year.

Ben-Jim Bennifits had walked to the shop with his sons, Patrick and Eric, and now were starting to head home.

“Let’s stop and give this man whatever coins we have, shall we?” Ben-Jim Bennifits asked his sons, who agreed. “We may not have all that we want or even sometimes all that we feel we need right when we want it, but we get along—and it seems the more times I choose to give to others who have even less than I, the more I get, in many ways.”

Patrick wondered what his dad meant. “How can you get more if you give things away?”

Ben-Jim Bennifits explained it like this: “It’s like those putting on a circus—the more tickets they give out, the more people will come to their circus. The more who come, the

more people they will then go and tell about people about it—and then even more will come to see the next performances. And the more funds the circus team will get from those who buy tickets to see it.

“Giving in the ways we can—whether it is coins to the needy, or a hug to someone who’s sad, or it’s giving the best seat at a show, or giving your place in a line to someone who would appreciate not waiting so long, or whatever is like giving away a ticket to a show. What is the show? You are showing love, and when you show love you are showing what Jesus is like. Then, when you need help, either those you chose to give to will also give back to you—or Jesus will give to you in some other amazing way, in return for your gift of showing Him and His love to others, and inviting them to see a bit of what He is like.”

Patrick and Eric dropped the coins into the man’s tin and told him, “God bless you!” before carrying on their way.

“We don’t always have money or things to give away, and that’s not even the biggest need of those we meet or hear about.” Ben-Jim Bennifits mentioned. “But if we are ready to give whatever we can, putting the needs and wants of others above our own, then this is being like Jesus.”

“Daddy, what does it mean to be ‘generous’? Sometimes I’ve heard you use that word when we are at the market—like the man who filled a bag of rice for us. You said he gave us a generous amount.” Eric asked.

“When you give not only what it seems you should, but you even throw in a bit more, that’s being generous. For example, if you and your brother were taking turns with our new kite, and one of you let the other one have an extra long turn, even more than you got, that would be giving generously. Or if I went to get a snack at the café, and rather than me the just receiving the regular amount of food I paid for, I was also given an extra piece of fruit for free, that would be generous.” Ben-Jim Bennifits explained.

“But daddy, what if some has more than we do, are we supposed to be giving and generous with them? Or is it their turn to give to us?” Patrick asked his dad.

“No matter how much it might appear to you or others that someone has a lot—or even too much—there is always something that they don’t have. If someone has a lot in the physical, there’s a pretty good chance that they don’t have all they need in the many other areas of their lives. It may seem to them like you are the one who gets the best things. Perhaps they don’t or didn’t have a family like you do. Or perhaps they or one of their

loved ones are handicapped in some way. Or maybe they haven't ever heard about Jesus and a God who loves them immeasurably, and they know nothing of the joy of being allowed to go to Heaven," Ben-Jim Bennifits explained.

When he and his boys arrived back at their house they found a generous spread awaiting them at the table.

"Thank you Milly and Selene!" Ben-Jim Bennifits said to his wife and daughter who had made a wonderful family meal, all nicely laid out.

When everyone was settled at the table Ben-Jim Bennifits said a prayer of thanks.

"Dear Jesus, Thank You for how bountifully and generously you have provided for us today. We are so very grateful for Your wonderful and loving care. Today we celebrate how freely You gave to us all, by coming down to Earth to show us your love and to save us. Please fill our hearts with Your spirit of giving, so that we might freely give to others, as you have richly given to us in so many ways. We have love, we have life, we have each other, and we have Heaven and joy forever. Amen."

Before the meal could begin there was a knock at the door. A family with a few small children were asking for donations of any kind. They were struggling to get by and had many needs.

Milly answered the door and then told them to wait for a few minutes while she went to see what she could find.

“What should we give to them?” she asked the children and Ben-Jim Bennifits.

“We could give some of the food,” Eric offered. “There will probably be left-overs anyway.” And he jumped up to get a container from the cupboard, and chose a bit of this and that to add to the food gift.

“Be generous,” whispered Patrick. “Remember, when we give to others, it’s like we are giving to Jesus.”

Meanwhile Selene and her mother found a box and added an extra towel, a few sheets, and a bag of clothes they had grown out of and were planning to give away.

Ben-Jim Bennifits pulled out his wallet and took what he could spare out of it to give. He didn't really have much to spare, but these folks had even less. He knew the Lord would repay and they would manage.

Someone had recently given Milly a nice new sweater as a gift, but since she already had a few others, she chose to add it to the box.

"Mummy, we have this extra blanket that we don't really need, it just sits in the closet most of the time, we can spare it I think," Selene suggested, and into the box it went.

A bit of fresh fruit and a package of dried beans were added and the package was complete.

This family took it to the door to give to the family in need. Gratefully the father took it and thanked them.

"Now it's really like a celebration!" Eric said, as they went to sit down to their slightly smaller, but sufficient meal.

"Because we gave a big gift away—just like on real birthdays, you always give gifts to the one who's birthday you are celebrating." Eric explained.

“Happy Birthday Jesus!” the family chorused then laughed. It felt good to share—generously. Looking around them at all they still had and the great food they were able to enjoy, it was obvious that Jesus gave more to them than they had given away—and kept doing so, as they were a family that chose to share with others all they could.

(Imaginary story)

Vegetable Garden

“It’s amazing how a little bit of kindness can change the way you feel—sometimes for the rest of the day!” Harolt Hoowalhelp said to the children he taught on Friday late afternoon.

Besides being a construction worker, he was very good at horticulture. He had a nice garden in his back yard where he grew an assortment of plants, some of which were vegetables as well. He knew so much about plants and what each of them needed.

On Friday afternoon the children who wanted to learn from Harolt Hoowalhelp on how to keep a garden would come over to talk. Depending on what season it was the children would learn about growing various types of vegetable and what different plants needed in the different seasons of the year.

Part of the time was sitting in his large green house on little stools sipping fresh mint tea, from mint Harolt Hoowalhelp grew right there. They would relax and talk and ask

questions. Today someone had asked if plants have feelings too, and can react to the feelings, words and behaviour of those around them.

“If you want your plants to grow well you need to care for them lovingly. You must treat them with kindness and genuine concern. Of course that’s not all you need to do, as it helps to know a bit about what you are doing, and that’s also part of kindness—to study, read and research, and talk to others about what is the best way to care for that plant.” Harolt Hoowalhelp explained.

He then went on to say how people are much the same way.

“Kind words and behaviour, and giving people hope that they will do well at something, can really make them thrive and live more happily.”

At the end of their visit and class the children thanked Harolt Hoowalhelp for teaching them all they knew. But before they left Harolt Hoowalhelp had one more thing for them, that he’d saved to surprise them. He had prepared something special for each of them.

“I’ve prepared a gift package for each one of you!” Harolt Hoowalhelp said and began handing the packages out to each of the children.

“Oh wow! What’s in here?” the children wondered.

“Since it’s spring, and the perfect time to start a vegetable garden, I’ve put together a starting kit for each of you, of the right kinds of seeds to plant at this time of year, along with instructions on how to sprout them and care for them! I’ve also included a pair of gardening gloves, a trowel and garden fork. There are also some plastic containers to plant the seeds that need to be sprouted first, and then the seedlings transferred to your garden later on.” Harolt Hoowalhelp happily announced, as the children opened their packages and took a look.

“Oh! And one more thing I forgot to tell you. If you need some good soil with compost added to it, you can let me know. I have a bit to spare, if that’s what you need to improve the soil in your garden.”

“You’re so kind and generous! This was just what I was hoping for!” Mandy said, and the others thanked Harolt Hoowalhelp as well.

It felt good to give—especially to those who would put the gift to good use and it would benefit them in many ways.

“I hope it works out well for you all!” Harolt Hoowalhelp said. “And remember, if you have any questions, I’m happy to help and answer you whenever you come next. Bye-then!”

The children waved and Harolt Hoowalhelp could tell they were eager and excited about their new garden project.

“Just think of all the food we could grow with all the seeds Mr. Harolt Hoowalhelp gave us!” one boy said.

“Maybe when the vegetables grow, we could return the favour and surprise him by bringing him some to eat for his dinner on that day!” Elaine offered.

The children smiled and nodded. This was going to be fun!

