

A colorful illustration of a winter scene. In the foreground, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark blue jacket and a purple scarf, holds a large red backpack. He is looking towards the right with a slight smile. The background features a snow-covered street. To the left, a building with a sign that says "Library" is visible. In the distance, there are green trees and a large, snow-capped mountain under a blue sky with falling snow. To the right, a wooden gazebo with a white railing and red bows is decorated for the holidays. The overall atmosphere is festive and cozy.

The Legend of the Christmas Backpack

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Christmas
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*This book is dedicated to Phil & Barbara DeLorme,
the best neighbors anyone could ever have.*

Jeremiah 29:11

Many years ago, I looked out the airplane window and saw the snow falling. It was almost Christmas and I had flown to Piqua, Ohio, to visit my old neighbors. I hadn't seen Phil and Barbara in years. As I left the airport and grabbed a taxi, I wondered what this trip would bring.



Piqua is a small town. I asked the taxi driver to let me out by the post office. Carolers were singing on the corners of High and Main Streets. A horse dressed in a bright harness with jingle bells pulled a carriage up Main Street. A large tree on top of the library was decorated with bright lights. Snow covered the ground and icicle lights dripped off the store fronts. The town glittered with Christmas cheer.



Then I noticed something else. Along with Christmas lights and decorations, backpacks were everywhere! They were sitting in store windows, in a pile at the library, and one bright red backpack sat in the town's garden gazebo. I wondered what was going on. School had begun months ago and yet it looked like a back-to-school party had invaded Ohio.



“Hey, neighbor!” Barbara called when I entered the local coffee shop. This had been her traditional greeting for me since I was five years old and lived next door to her and Phil back in Virginia.

“Chuck, it’s so good to have you visiting us here in Ohio!” Phil said while grabbing me in a big hug.



“I’m delighted to be here! I really wanted to visit at Christmastime!” I told them while still thinking about the backpacks.

“I’m curious about something. Why are there so many backpacks all over this town in December?”

“Oh! Phil and I are collecting backpacks for the children of the Appalachian Mountains,” Barbara said.

“We’re asking our neighbors to fill them with toys, books, and food. On Christmas Day we’ll deliver them to the children who need them the most. Many are very poor.”



“Let’s take a walk. We can show you what we’re doing,” Phil suggested.

They led me around Piqua and showed me the different stores that were helping. Many were offering promotions. The coffee shop offered a free cup of coffee when you donated a backpack filled with supplies. The bank would give a free piggy bank when you filled one of their backpacks. Even Piqua’s elementary school had joined the excitement. If the students collected 250 backpacks, they wouldn’t have homework for an entire week!



The backpack tour ended at Phil and Barbara's house. "Come on in, Chuck—welcome to our home!" Barbara said.

We walked into their living room. A big, beautiful Christmas tree was surrounded by colorful backpacks. Instead of shiny, round ornaments, the tree was decorated with school supplies. I saw packs of pencils, boxes of crayons, rulers, glue sticks, and kid-sized scissors.

"Sit down, Chuck. We have a movie that explains more," Phil invited. Barbara patted the couch cushion beside her. I sat with her as we watched a movie about little children of the Appalachian Mountains.



This movie made me so sad! The children had little food, just a few clothes, and never got Christmas presents. I couldn't stop thinking about them. Before going to bed that night, I prayed and asked God to show me how I could help those kids.



Every day in Piqua I saw more backpacks. The waitress at the restaurant wore one while she took our orders. The mailman carried one while bringing a box to the house. The front of the church sanctuary was lined with backpacks on Sunday morning. Everywhere I looked there were backpacks.



Piqua Pharmacy

Christmas Eve arrived and it was time to fly home. There was something that I needed to do first. Before going to the airport, I went to the gazebo. The bright red backpack was still there. I took it to the store and filled it with toys, books, crayons, an RC Cola, and a MoonPie. The zipper barely closed.



I returned to the gazebo and thoughtfully put the stuffed backpack in its place. Who would receive it? Would the child like the items I had chosen? I wished I could know the child's name. I put a Christmas card in the front pocket and prayed that this backpack would make a difference somehow.



With a sigh, I left the gazebo and walked across the street to the coffee shop. While drinking hot chocolate with giant marshmallows, I saw Phil and Barbara at the gazebo. Barbara picked up the bright red backpack I had just filled. I saw her open it, look inside, and wipe away tears from her eyes.



I flew home that afternoon to celebrate Christmas at home. I hoped that the children of the Appalachian Mountains would have a good Christmas too.



A few days after Christmas I got a letter in the mail. It read,

Hi Mr. Chuck,

Thanks for sending a red backpack with the RC Cola and MoonPie! Red is my favorite color. My grandpa and I used to sing church songs and he'd tell me stories from the Bible. We shared a MoonPie and RC. He died and I miss him. He taught me how to pray and I've been praying for God to send me an RC and a MoonPie to let me know that Grandpa is doing okay in Heaven. Could you please send some more backpacks for other kids in the holler? They need your help too.

Love,

Your friend Chuckie

P.S. I think it's cool that we have the same name!



With tears in my eyes I called Barbara. Before I could tell her about the letter, she said, “Chuck, I’m so glad you called! You won’t believe what happened! We drove up to the mountains on Christmas Day with all the backpacks. The children were very excited to get them. After we handed them out, I noticed the bright red one from the gazebo was still there. A little boy came up and asked if I had any more backpacks because he got there late. His name was Chuckie.



“He opened the red backpack very quickly and screamed when he saw the RC Cola and MoonPie! He had been asking God every night to send him those things because his mother can’t afford to buy them. They remind him of spending time with his grandfather. Chuck, God used you to answer a little boy’s prayer — and He did it with a soda and a cookie!”



CHRISTMAS BACKPACKS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

“DON'T TELL ME HOW MUCH
JESUS LOVES ME,...

...SHOW ME HOW MUCH JESUS LOVES ME.”

You are invited to join with thousands of other families and churches who are making a difference in the lives of children living in poverty through the Christmas Backpack program. To learn more go to christmasbackpacks.org.

HOW TO PACK A BACKPACK:

1. Start with a NEW, zippered backpack
2. Choose gender and age on provided label
3. Fill with NEW gifts
4. Securely tape label to the outside of the backpack
5. Pray specifically for the receiving child
6. Take your backpack to a designated collection site

GIFT SUGGESTIONS TO INCLUDE:

TOYS: Small cars, balls, dolls, stuffed animals, small music instruments, yo-yos, jump ropes, sidewalk chalk, toys that light up or make noise (include extra batteries), card games, etc.

HYGIENE ITEMS: Toothbrush, toothpaste, mild bar soap (boxed and in a plastic bag), hairbrush, comb, washcloth, ponytail holders, hair clips, etc

OTHER: Children's Bible or Teen Bible, hard candy (no chocolate), lollipops (double bag all candy), mints, gum, socks, T-shirts, hats, sunglasses, hair clips, toy jewelry, watches, flashlights (with extra batteries), age-appropriate Christian books, pop-top cans of food, etc.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Visit the Christmas Backpacks website for more information, free downloads, and participation forms or contact your state convention office.

christmasbackpacks.org

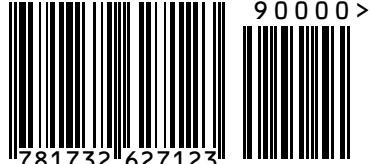




Piqua Public Library

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