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**Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 79**  
**The Kindness Project**  
**Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/79](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/79)**

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown podcast episode number 79.

Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert, Theresa Loe.

Theresa: Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe, and this podcast is about living farm fresh without the farm. I usually talk about things like canning up the harvest, or raising backyard chickens, fermenting, yogurt making, backyard food growing in small spaces, or just simple ways that you can live a more sustainable lifestyle. As always, if you want to dive deep into any of these topics, or learn about my online Canning Academy, or any of the other things I have cooking up, just visit my website [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

Today's episode is a little bit different from the norm. If you are a first time listener, just know that I usually dive right into a how-to project, or a DIY project, or I interview an expert in the field of like artisan food crafts, or organic gardening. Today, I wanted to shift gears a little bit because this episode is coming out on December 2nd, and that means that for many of us, our already busy lives are about to get even more hectic. As you know, holidays can mean a lot of hustle and bustle, there's holiday parties, you're probably going to start shopping until you drop, and there's tons of things on your to-do list, from sending Christmas cards to cleaning your house for people coming over. You know how it is. It just like the list gets longer and longer during the month of December.

For me, I actually have my birthday in December. My birthday is three days after Christmas, and I started a practice on my birthday several years ago that was such a hit both personally and for my family that last year I expanded that practice to include the entire month of December. It was a very impactful and meaningful thing, and it ended up being an antidote to the hustle and bustle. That's why I decided to do an entire podcast episode on this practice because perhaps the idea will resonate with you too.

To understand really what I'm talking about, I need to share a little bit of my story so that maybe you'll understand why it made such an impact on me. As

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many of you may or may not know, I am a breast cancer survivor. A few years ago, the holidays and my birthday came up right when I was smack dab in the middle of cancer treatment and several surgeries. What ended up happening for me during those holidays was that the holidays that year ended up having zero stress. For the first time ever, I simply enjoyed the holidays because there were no expectations because I was going through so much at the time. I had enough stress, I didn't have to stress about the holidays. No one expected me to put on any parties. I didn't have to do anything other than spend time with my family and friends. I have to tell you, it was incredibly freeing to simply enjoy my time with my family and friends and not worry about finding the perfect gift, or putting on the perfect meal, or the perfect party. To be honest, it really wasn't that other people had been putting that pressure on me to do those things in the past. What I came to realize was that I had been putting those pressures on myself. Every year I was stressing out trying to do it all during the holiday time.

The year that I was battling cancer, that all changed for me, and I took the pressure off myself. It really puts it all into perspective. Of course, naturally when you go through cancer, things get put into perspective whether you like it or not. Just as everyone tells you, that is definitely what happens, and that's a good thing. It's a good thing. That's one thing that comes out of something like this is that you definitely learn to have a better perspective on life.

Right after the holidays, my birthday rolled around just three days later. I knew that that particular year, I wanted to do something really different for my birthday, number one, because I was so grateful to still be here, and second because I did not want gifts. I didn't want stuff. I wanted just to continue to have wonderful memories, and to do things with my family that were meaningful to me. I was trying to come up with what to do that year, and it was a little tricky because naturally people still wanted to give me a present. They still wanted to give me something. Especially because I had been going through such a devastating illness or hardship, they wanted to give something. I was trying to come up with what I could do instead. I was thinking, "Do I have them donate to a cancer charity? Do I have them donate food to a food bank?"

I was trying to come up with all these different things, and it was about this time that I stumbled upon a blog post on, for a better lack of a term, a "mommy blog" that was about The Birthday Project. Now, I'll be sure to link, in the show notes for this episode, I will link to The Birthday Project and to some other things that are related to this particular episode. The idea of The Birthday Project was to celebrate your birthday just by doing random acts of kindness, and I absolutely loved this idea. My boys at the time, I have two boys and they were 11 and 13 at this time, and so my husband and my two boys decided to make an entire day on my birthday where all we did was

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random acts of kindness. We spent several days beforehand coming up with all the different ideas for what those random acts of kindness would be on that day. I had no gifts. Any money that would have gone to gifts was put towards random acts of kindness. I had some of my friends get in on it too. They would do random acts of kindness in honor of me on that day instead of giving me a gift. Does that make sense? Okay.

The money that would have been spent on gifts went towards the random acts of kindness, and many of the acts that we came up with didn't cost anything. We had a long list of to-dos. My kids got really into this. It started off they were a little tentative, but by the end of the day they were so hooked and so into it. First, we printed out these little notes that explained to whoever was the recipient of the random act would understand what we were doing, and all we asked was that they return the favor in some way by doing another random act of kindness in the next 30 days. That way we were getting people to pay it forward.

On the big day, we were all very, very excited, and we ran around doing all these things. What kind of things did we do? Well, we took crisp, brand new \$1 bills and we went to the local library and the boys picked out all their favorite children's books that they had loved growing up, and they would put a \$1 bill inside each book with this note. I went to a different book section. I went to the section on surviving cancer, and I put dollar bills in those books with a note. Then we drove down to the local shopping center where there is parking meters with handfuls of quarters, and the boys ran around and put quarters in the meters where the cars were about to get a ticket. It was surprising how many cars were very close to getting a ticket. We did that. We went through a drive thru at a Starbucks and we bought the order for the car behind us.

Then we had wanted to go up to the snow that day. We needed some snow sleds, so we ended up buying four new snow sleds so the boys could have two, and then we brought two extra to share. We went up to the snow for a few hours, and the boys had so much fun sharing those sleds with other kids that most of the time, they weren't even sledding. They were just taking the sleds to different kids asking them if they wanted to play with the sleds. The boys were supposed to keep two of those sleds, but they were so touched by the reaction of some of the families that couldn't afford nice sleds like what we had brought that they wanted to give all the sleds away, so that's what we did. When we were done with our day in the snow, we told everybody they could keep the sleds and then we went on to do other projects.

One of the other things that we did was we went out to lunch, and we noticed there was one waitress who was working so hard. She had this huge table of people who were a little unruly. They were a little demanding on her,

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and we noticed it. She stayed so calm and polite to this table, and never complained. When they left, I don't even know if they left her a tip, but they left her a huge mess. We wrote her a note and we left a tip for her as well as for our own waitress, and we complimented her on her patience and gave her a tip even though we were from a different table.

One of the other things that we did was we went to a local chain restaurant, an inexpensive restaurant where someone might go if they didn't have a lot of money, and we purchased a gift card. Then we looked around the restaurant for a table that seemed to be most in need. We let the boys pick, and they saw a table of a dad with several kids. He seemed to be all by himself trying to handle a baby, and kids jumping all around in the booth. Then we turned around and we told the cashier that we wanted to call up the waitress for that table. When we got the waitress there we asked her to please use that gift card to pay towards that table's meal, so that way it kind of helped him out a little bit, and we left a note as to what we were doing. Then we ran around at the local grocery store and we collected shopping carts because it was raining. We ran around and collected all the shopping carts so that the store worker wouldn't have to collect all the shopping carts in the rain. My kids actually really liked that one. They loved getting all wet and soggy.

The entire day really was dedicated to different acts of kindness. What I saw happen with my kids on that day was really amazing. They were running around opening up doors for people. They would get really giddy with excitement trying to come up with all these new ways that they could do something nice that didn't involve money at all. They also kept going with it even after my birthday. That was probably the most touching part of all is for weeks and months afterwards, in fact, really forever, different situations would come up, and they wanted to do something that was a random act, especially if it didn't involve any money, it was just something nice to do for someone. They started doing nice things for some of the neighbors, bringing in their trash cans, or raking their leaves without them even knowing, just going over and raking up their leaves and cleaning up their yard for an elderly woman that lived down the street. They just came up with these things on their own, and it was absolutely so touching to me to see that they got it, that they understood that doing these nice things made them feel good, but it really felt good for the recipient.

When their birthdays rolled around, they wanted to do random acts of kindness as part of their celebration, without me even asking them, which really meant a lot to me. Now, I'm not saying that they said they didn't want presents, because that did not happen. They still wanted presents, but they certainly did want to also give back, and without me prodding them to have to do that. That meant something to me. I thought that was really good that

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they understood about being on the receiving end and on the giving end on their birthday.

Then what happened was about, I guess it was a few years later, I ended up being on the receiving end of a random act of kindness right when I really needed it most. At that point, I really understood how impactful doing things like this can be, because you never really know how much of an impact you are making on the person that you're giving to. On one particular day, I was having a very, very bad day. My father was in the hospital and it was not going well. I was on my way to the hospital to visit him and I had decided to drive through a Starbucks on the way to grab a coffee. I don't know if it was just a coincidence, or if the person in the car in front of me noticed that I had been crying, or if they just felt the need to do something nice, but when I pulled up to the window to pay for my order, the barista told me that the order had already been paid for by the person in front of me.

Wow. I just burst into tears the minute she told me. In fact I still get teared up even talking about it because that small little act that they did on such a horrible day that I was having was hugely impactful to me and getting me moving forward, putting one foot in front of the other to get through the day. Those little random acts of kindness can truly make a difference. When I told my mother about this story, she decided that from that day forward, every single time she goes through the drive thru at Starbucks, and usually it's one of us driving her through because she doesn't usually drive anymore, but when we drive through a Starbucks, she always pays for the car behind us. Not just like, "Oh, here's a few dollars towards the car behind us," she wants to pay for their whole order. Luckily she doesn't do the drive thru too much so it doesn't get too expensive, but it really made an impact on her and she knew what a difference it made for me, and she always does that whenever she goes through Starbucks.

All of this to say that last year I changed the practice a little bit. I did this for several years, the random acts of kindness on my birthday, but last year I changed it a bit, and that is what I wanted to talk to you about today. In our Christmas decorations, we have this wooden, I guess it's a little wooden house. It looks like a birdhouse, but it's actually an Advent calendar. It has 25 little wooden doors that open up, and behind each door is a little cubby, just real small little cubby that could hold like a little piece of candy or a note. When my children were very small, I used this little house when they were really little to put a little candy behind some of the doors, and every night they would open one of the doors as we counted down towards Christmas. A typical Advent calendar.

Well, last year I changed it up a little bit. That Advent calendar is now a random acts of kindness calendar, and behind each door is a little note which

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prompts the person to do something to give back on that day. I fill the little cubbies with these notes. My kids still open those every day, but they are little prompts. Most of them are really simple things like the note might say, "Offer to do someone else's chores." Hopefully they'll pick mine, but to offer to do someone else's chores at home, or "Take in the neighbor's trash cans." Things like that. A few of them are more involved like, "Think of something who is special to you and write them a quick note telling them so." Now, if it's something that takes a little bit more time, or is more involved, I try to put those notes so that they fall on the weekend so that my kids can do those things on the weekend.

The thing about these notes is, they open them up and see what they are, but everyone in the family tries to do it. All of them are super easy, simple, random acts, but they're also very heartfelt. When we did this last year, I again noticed a huge change in my teenage boys, and I also noticed a change in me. It kind of changes your perspective. It just helped to keep the focus off the getting part that can happen at the holidays, and instead keep them more focused on the giving part, which is so much more important, right?

I wanted to tell you in this podcast about this project that we do now ever year, the Random Acts of Kindness Advent, or Holiday Project. I wanted to tell you about it because it's so super easy to do. To make it even easier, I created a free PDF for you that you can print out, and it has prompts on it, and ideas for what you or your kids can do on each day. Now, all the prompts that I have work for children or adults, or both if you want to do it together as a family. What I suggest you do is you print it out and cut up the prompts into individual squares, and then just stick them in an envelope. Then each day that you want to do this, you don't even have to do it every single day, but each day that you want to do this, either you or your kids pick one prompt for the day, and then follow through on it.

What we do is we paste it to the refrigerator for the day so we know what our little prompt or our project for the day is, and that's it. If you have more time, you can pick a more involved prompt, and if not you just pick a fast and simple one if it's a real busy day anyway. At the end of the month, you'll have 25 acts, or however many you decide to do, stuck to your refrigerator that you did that made a difference in someone else's life this month. You can do one each day, or you can just do them on the weekends, or every other day. Whatever you want to do, there's no rules. You certainly don't have to do them all, but just having those little things, especially if you have little ones that can get too wrapped up in the taking and not the giving, it's a really fun project, and it makes you feel good inside too.

To get your printable Random Acts of Kindness Prompt Sheet, that's hard to say, just go to [livinghomegrown.com/79](http://livinghomegrown.com/79). If you go there, I will have a link to



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that, and a link to The Birthday Project, so you can read more about how the whole birthday idea of doing random acts got started. That's it for this week. Just a little prompt from me for you to spend part of the month doing random acts. The thing is is that you start out doing it for others, but you'll be amazed at how much it does for yourself. It really does lower your stress level when you are focused on the right things. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown podcast. Visit [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com) to download Theresa's free Canning Resource Guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown podcast.