

When Little Becomes Much

By Kristi Joy Matovich

In February, 1884, the Ohio River overflowed its one thousand miles of already flood torn banks, requiring the American Red Cross Association to gather a great deal of money and supplies. Clara Barton, feeling that she needed to see the floods for herself, joined the relief effort along the river's path. There she received money and resources in enormous quantity from "All sides and sources..."¹ One of those sources was Waterford, Pennsylvania, home of six children who soon became known as the "Little Six", starting the significant involvement of young people in the Red Cross.

Hearing of the people suffering from the destruction in mid-western states, these children wanted to do something to help them. According to the *Erie Dispatch*, "[S]ix children of Waterford gave a public entertainment for the benefit of the Ohio flood sufferers... they themselves suggested it..."²

From this play, which they reportedly thought of and carried out of their own accord, \$51.25 was raised. This, they mailed to the *Dispatch*, requesting it be sent, "where it would do the most good"³. The paper forwarded the money to Clara Barton, who spent several weeks looking for a special place for the money, wishing to use it as the children would have desired. On finding a widowed mother of six children living in a corn crib, Miss Barton added to the children's sum making one hundred dollars - enough for them to build a dwelling. Clara described her actions in a letter published by the *Dispatch*. The children replied as follows:

Dear Miss Barton:

We read your nice letter in the Dispatch, ...we are so glad we little six helped six other little children, and we thank you for going to so much trouble in putting our money just where we would have put it ourselves.

Sometime again when you want money to help you in your good work, call on the 'Little Six.'

Joe Farrar, twelve years old.

Florence Howe, eleven years old.

Mary Barton, eleven years old.

Reed White, eleven years old.

Bertie Ensworth, ten years old.

*Lloyd Barton, seven years old.*⁴

This act started an important tradition of youth fund-raising for Red Cross aid efforts. Youth auxiliaries were soon attached to many standing Red Cross societies, and by 1917 the Junior Red Cross was officially formed, acquiring eleven million members in just two years. During World War I alone, less than thirty years after the "Little Six" put on their play, the Junior Red Cross contributed \$3,677,380 to the Red Cross fund⁵.

All this happened because six children raised fifty dollars. Can we even put into monetary terms the amount of good they commenced? Lives have been changed, people helped, and republican governments aided that those "Little Six" never could have dreamed. Now we, too, are encouraged by them to do our "Little", knowing little is much, and will not be in vain.

"And [Jesus] said, 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.'"
Luke 21:2-3⁶

¹ Clara Barton, The Red Cross - A History of this Remarkable International Movement in the Interest of Humanity (J.B. Lyon Company, Albany, N.Y.) p. 116

² The Erie *Dispatch*, Monday, March 24, 1884

³ Ibid.

⁴ Clara Barton, The Red Cross - A History of this Remarkable International Movement in the Interest of Humanity (J.B. Lyon Company, Albany, N.Y.) pp. 132-33

⁵ The History of Young People and the American Red Cross, found at:
http://www.redcross.org/services/youth/0,1082,0_28_00.html

⁶ The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers