



HOLIDAY HEROES

Generosity is a superpower

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It's almost Christmas, and Anthony Palmer is in his living room dressed as Spider-Man.

Palmer says he usually dresses as Batman, but tonight he was told that the family he's visiting is a "Marvel family" (Batman is DC Comics). Palmer and his mother, Renee Borello, call their act "Batman and Alfred" because she drives and he delivers the gifts in costume.

This is the third year the mother-son duo have picked five families having a tough time and delivered Christmas gifts with Palmer in superhero garb.

Palmer says the idea was initially inspired by stories such as that of the "Baltimore Batman," a man named Lenny Robinson who dressed as the superhero character and visited children's hospitals in Maryland. "The fact that they went out of their way to do good for people, it was inspiring to me," he says. "It felt like they really embodied the heroes that they portrayed."

Palmer's a dedicated comic book fan. "Pretty much every single one of my friends calls me 'Cap,'" he says in reference to Marvel Comics superhero character, Captain America. "I kind of follow the same sort of values myself," he adds.

"He doesn't smoke. He doesn't drink. He doesn't do drugs," Borello says. "He's always the one to look out for everybody else."

A junior business major attending UO on a Pathway-Oregon scholarship, Palmer works at International Fitness and Pizza Hut, living at home to save money. The bookshelves are lined with cooking books, though comic book figurines obstruct the view of them. There's superhero memorabilia on every surface, a Thor's hammer on the coffee table, a Captain America shield hidden behind the couch. "I can't complain," Borello says, joking. "Look how many cooking books I have."

The duo says this is the first time anyone has gone along to document their feats of kindness. Borello says they do their gift giving because they hope to take a little stress off of the holidays. "It's a time of year when people shouldn't be stressing," she says. "And yet, everybody stresses. The holidays bring a lot of stress."

When Spider-Man or Batman arrives at the door, "The moms think it's neat; the dads just love it," Borello says. "They're always in shock that there's a superhero at the door," she says.

Palmer adds, "Everybody has grown up on these superheroes, at this point."

Out of the five families they helped last year, they've



TOP: ANTHONY PALMER (LEFT) AND HIS MOTHER, RENEE BORELLO

BOTTOM: TWO OF LAST YEAR'S GIFT RECIPIENTS HELP 'SPIDER-MAN' GIVE OUT THIS YEAR'S GIFTS



only kept in contact with one, Borello says, pointing out that the costume helps with the anonymity. "I don't go to the door, because I don't want them to feel weird about it. We just try to keep everything anonymous so no one needs to be embarrassed."

Palmer and Borello purchase the gifts themselves, usually about \$100-\$150 worth of gift cards per family, but a few friends have started pitching in with gifts of their own. They rely mostly on word of mouth to find the families they help. "We talk to people, to see if there's anybody that needs help," Borello says. "We don't do it for attention, so we don't tell a bunch of people."

Borello's no stranger to hardship. She was emancipated at the age of 15 and worked at a Sears service call center, she says, attending independent study in the evenings to complete her education. "I've always struggled," she says. "I always had to work a couple jobs to put food on the table. I worked really hard."

The U.S. Census data for 2014 estimates that more than 21 percent of families with children and more than 34 percent of single mothers in Lane County live below the poverty line. A single mother herself, Borello says, "Now that I'm in a situation where I don't have those struggles, it feels good to help those who are struggling, because I know what it's like."

Borello used to work as a manager at a financial firm in the mornings, delivering pizza in the evenings. She lost her job at the financial firm in the recession and enrolled in the culinary program at LCC shortly after. Now she's a baker at Palace Bakery.

Although Palmer draws much of his influence from superheroes and the values they embody, he says, it was the work ethic and values his mother instilled in him that ultimately motivate his lifestyle.

"It's always nice to know that I'm where I'm at because of my mom," he says. "She did so much and did so many awesome things for me growing up."

"It makes me proud," Borello responds with tears in her eyes. "We've always done things to help people, whether it be volunteering to feed the homeless or just dropping off things to help feed the homeless. This just shows that he paid attention to the importance of helping others."

While we live in a world divided by groups that believe in imposing their will and lifestyle on others, Palmer offers an innocent remedy: "As much as I like and feel comfortable with my values, I know not everyone is going to share that idea," he says. "I just do what I can." ■