



Community Boost

Staci sat her Jamba Juice down on the table, and I heard someone ask, “What kind of boost did you get?” For those who don’t know Jamba Juice, here’s what you’re missing: Jamba is a juice/smoothie company that creates heavenly fruit drinks which you can “boost” with a variety of powdered supplements. They offer a Vita Boost, an Energy Boost, a Protein Boost and, best for the winter months, an Immunity Boost. But I had never heard of the boost Staci had chosen. She replied to Meg’s request, “A community boost.”

Actually she said, “An immunity boost,” but I heard “community.” As I glanced up from my place at the table and absorbed the fullness of my house, brimming with light and laughter, community was certainly alive and well in my living room.

The room held wall-to-wall tables stacked high with art paper, glue dots, scissors, stamp pads and paint. There was a leather bound book and a small box of pictures. Pictures of a baby girl only twelve months old, sporting more hair than my husband (which isn’t saying much), but really, how often do you see a one-year-old with pigtails? She had the biggest brown eyes—eyes that pierced your soul. And she had a long scar running down her chest.

Many of the pictures were taken in Ryane’s hospital room at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. The last pictures were taken on her first birthday, there in the hospital, five days before she curled up with her bottle and took her last breath. Now, one year after her passing, our community was gathered in my living room.

Our mission: To put together the most beautiful scrapbook you have ever seen for a family whose beautiful treasure had been ripped out of their arms. And it was beautiful. I don’t just mean the book we made or the pictures we placed. I mean the community we experienced.

Central was Toni—a mom grieving the loss of her beloved baby girl. Surrounding

her was Toni’s prayer group. Four women who persisted in calling Toni even when the grief was so overwhelming that she couldn’t return their phone calls. When the thought of going on with life and love and laughter was appalling and sacrilegious. They didn’t quit—they never left her alone.

Embracing that group of five was my small group. Six women who have walked through fire and rain together. Facing dark nights of the soul with honest fear and tenacious faith. Embracing victory with celebration and thanksgiving. Six girls who love each other deeply and challenge each other if necessary.

So, here we all were. Crammed into my living room on a Saturday afternoon. Oohing and ahing over the sheer beauty of Ryane. Giggling over photos of Halloween Bumble Bee costumes and food-on-the-face high-chair poses. Shedding tears over the vacuum left in our souls. At the end of the day, Toni had her book.

And we all had something else. We had our community boost. The divine love of God in flesh and blood. And I will never be the same.

The experience reminded me of a picture in my daughter’s scrapbook. It shows a bunch of kids dressed in red, white and blue playing Red Rover. It was from a 4th of July party. The caption underneath, scrawled in kindergarten handwriting, reads, “This is the church.”

At the tender age of five, my little one understood that church isn’t just a place to go on Sunday morning. The church is a community joined in spirit and in soul. It’s a gaggle of kids playing Red Rover and a group of women gathered in a living room to honor a life taken too soon. The church is “his body; it is filled by Christ, who fills everything everywhere with his presence” (Ephesians 1:23).

His presence filled my house that day. So, if you need a boost, order up some community. Don’t attempt to do this life on your own, because even the best Jamba Juice in the world will never truly fill you. □

—Susan Reedy

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