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Princess Pearls has powerful impacts

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By DANIELLE NYE POULTER

Newsnet Staff Writer

Wendy Bird has seen a lot of changes in the past 18 months — changes in her own life, and in the lives of others.

The changes started with her garage: it began gradually, with a small mound of clothes in the corner and a bag of old toys a neighbor dropped by. Before she knew what was happening, stacks of 2-foot-square boxes jammed with school supplies, second-hand toys, church materials and more filled Bird's garage.

Every few months Bird's Lehi-based company, My Princess Pearls, ships the 150-pound boxes to a village in the Phillipines.

Bird has come to terms with the loss of a covered parking spot, as well as the sacrifice of a lot of other things for a cause she never intended to embrace.

My Princess Pearls started when Bird and her husband, Richard Bird, were looking for a product to start a direct-marketing business to employ stay-at-home moms.

"We needed to have something worthwhile for people that they would want to hold on to," Bird said. "Pearls were the ones that caught our hearts. It's timeless and generational, it's something that won't go out of style."

Richard and Wendy Bird searched the Internet for a pearl supplier. After nine months, their search ended with an e-mail to Amara, a Filipino woman who not only had pearls to sell but a cause of her own.

Amara, who goes by just her first name, is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Amara worked as the director of an architectural firm in the Phillipines, but was prompted to leave her job and go to the poverty-ridden villages to help other members of the LDS church.

The first person Amara helped was a woman she visit taught.

"This woman was poisoning her five children," Bird said, recounting the story from Amara. "Her husband had abandoned her a month ago and this woman's thought process was, 'I don't have a job, I don't have a way to feed by children, they're starving to death anyway, I'll just help the process along.'"

Amara stepped in and took the family to the hospital. Then she taught the mother how to make pearl jewelry as a way to earn a living for her family.

Bird's e-mail to Amara came at the perfect time. Amara began exporting pearl rings, necklaces and bracelets to Bird. The work that Bird's sales provide make it possible for families in the Philippines to eat, Bird said.

"They feed their families day by day, through the work they get each day," Bird said.

Bird benefits people in the Philippines not only with the work she provides, but also with needed humanitarian aid. She encourages the donation of items by offering a 10 percent discount to her customers when they donate needed items.

The cost of shipping is funded entirely by Bird and her company, but Bird said the sacrifice of time and money for the sake of people she has never met is worth it to hear about the joy they receive.

"Our workers and their families are so excited," Amara said in an e-mail after receiving a shipment from Bird. "We have a lot of families who are short of clothes, shoes and school bags."

Bird said the need in the Philippines is great, but the work that My Princess Pearls is doing brings some relief.

"That was definitely not the original intent of the company, but now it's the best part of the company," Bird said. "It's just amazing because all of the sudden you realize I'm not lining pockets, I'm feeding families...I'm changing lives."

My Princess Pearls has changed lives in America as well. Bird said the company is perfect for women who want to be home with their families.

"I have been a very much stay-at-home mom the entire marriage, and I love my kids, we have a blast," Bird said. "That was the best avenue we could think of, was some kind of home-based business."

Wendy Minks, of Eagle Mountain, is a distributor for My Princess Pearls. She said after meeting Bird she couldn't stop thinking about the good she was doing.

"That combination of being able to offer a product that's at a huge value to the consumer, and then being able to help people, I couldn't say no," Minks said.

But of all the lives she's changed, Bird said the greatest change has been in her own.

"There were a lot of things that happened for the right reasons," Bird said. "The way it's all turned out, I've become a completely different person."



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