

SAMMIE VANCE
Episode #15 Transcript
Written by Gabrielle Mirabella
Music by Ernie Bird

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INTRO MUSIC.

GABBIE: Hello! And welcome to this month's special edition episode of #GivingTuesdaySpark: "Ladies Who Lead"! I'm your host Gabrielle Mirabella and together with composer Ernie Bird...

ERNIE: Hold it!

The music cuts out.

ERNIE: This intro needs more... *Spark!* (SFX: Voice echo?)

GABBIE: Okay. But, how do we do that?

ERNIE: Easy. Like this!

New intro music begins!

GABBIE: On today's episode we follow the journey of #GivingTuesdaySpark Youth leader Sammie Vance, an organizer looking to eliminate loneliness through friendship and recycling. This episode was written & narrated by myself with music & production by Ernie Bird.

ERNIE: Now, that's what I call *Spark!*

GABBIE & ERNIE: Enjoy!

THEME SONG PLAYS:

*"What will she do next?
What will she do next?"*

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*Her aim is true but will she see it through?
Oh, what will she do... next?"*

Before Sammie Vance became a leader, public-speaker and organizer, she was just a regular kid. From a young age, Sammie had a great passion for reading, writing and listening to Broadway musicals, like her favorite show, Hamilton.

Inspired by the creativity of Hamilton's composer, Lin Manuel Miranda, Sammie began to write her very own music, and also began to dream of being onstage herself.

But, unlike those Broadway characters, Sammie sometimes found herself feeling a bit shy, while at school and on the playground. And, because of this feeling, she also found herself feeling lonely, too. Sammie didn't like this feeling, and wanted to change it, but she didn't know how. That is, until one day, at the age of 8-years-old, Sammie found a way to help herself and to help others in the process.

TRANSITION MUSIC.

It was while at a church camp that Sammie Vance first heard about the Buddy Bench Project. A Buddy Bench is a place for someone to sit when they are feeling shy, lonely, or bullied, or if they are just looking for a new friend to play with. When other kids see someone sitting on a Buddy Bench, they then go over and ask that new friend to play with them.

A Buddy Bench was exactly the sort of tool that could help Sammie overcome her shyness and also help other kids in her community. Sammie was so excited at the idea of the Buddy Bench that she immediately shared the news with her family!

Asking her family for help, Sammie's Mom soon found a company that could help bring a Buddy Bench to her school! The company explained to Sammie and her Mom how the benches were made. They were created not by using metal or wood, but by taking plastic caps and recycling them. The bench itself was made entirely by recycled materials which was great for the environment!

Sammie was so excited and couldn't wait to get this bench made and brought to her school. She next went to her school's principal to share the news! But, after Sammie told her principal that the school would have to collect 400 pounds of plastic bottle caps to make a bench, the principal shook their head.

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“It’s going to take a long time to collect that many caps!” the Principal responded. “Probably well over a year.”

“A year?” Sammie responded. That wouldn’t do at all! There were so many kids at her school that needed a Buddy Bench right away! There had to be some way to collect the bottle caps sooner, she thought. But, how....?

TRANSITION MUSIC.

Sammie Vance needed to find a way to collect over 400 pounds of bottle caps in order to make a Buddy Bench for her school. But, first, she had to figure out a way to get started.

Sammie was unsure how to collect so many caps, so she started small. She began by asking family friends to collect caps with her, then classmates. Soon, she started asking around at local stores that her and her family would visit, places like the pharmacy and coffee shops.

The collection process started small, but with the help of her community, the project began to skyrocket! In just two months Sammie collected over 1,600 pounds of plastic bottle caps! That would be enough for not just one, but three buddy benches!

Sammie was so proud of her community and excited too! Not only would these Buddy Benches help people to make friends, but they would be helping the environment, too! Sammie thought of this as a win, win.

In just a short time Sammie not only created a fantastic opportunity for the kids of her school, and for the environment, but she found herself changing, too.

At the start of the project, Sammie felt shy and had a hard time speaking to strangers and to crowds of people. But, through her work, she found that it became easier to speak to strangers while asking for bottle caps. The idea of putting herself out there and having a voice was now exciting to Sammie, not scary like it used to be.

With a successful first attempt at charity and organizing, Sammie was now ready for more. She was on a mission to spread kindness, and she was just getting started.

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Over the next few years Sammie Vance, with the help of her family, created even more Buddy Benches. Over 150 of them! Thinking about the many children who would use these benches to find new friends made her smile.

Initially, Sammie asked local shops and stores to help her collect plastic bottle caps. Now, she was asking big companies all over the country. Companies like Walgreens pharmacy, which donated over 75 Buddy Benches to schools all over Indiana. And the shipping company UPS helped Sammie to send 13 Buddy Benches to 12 different states!

But, in the Spring of 2020, Sammie was faced with a new challenge. Schools were now going virtual, and the Buddy Benches *were empty*.

TRANSITION MUSIC.

Sammie had to find a way to continue bringing smiles to kids all over the country, but now she had to do it without the Buddy Benches.

This is a tricky challenge, thought Sammie. But, with every challenge, there is always a solution.

So, Sammie turned to something she loved doing. Writing! She began to write encouraging letters to kids and adults all over the country and called them "Sending Smiles by Sammie". She was certain that this small token of kindness would go a long way in someone's life. And this made *her* smile.

Sammie also started her own podcast, called Sammie Smiles. On her weekly show, Sammie interviews people that inspire her and shares their stories with her audience. She has even used the opportunity to create her own musical theme song! Following in the footsteps of her favorite composer, Lin-Manuel Miranda.

TRANSITION MUSIC.

Today, Sammie is still sharing kindness with others. She continues to raise money for charitable organizations and is busy with her podcast.

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Through her work as a leader and organizer, Sammie learned the power in helping others. She was able to see firsthand how her work and efforts created positive change, and also how she herself was changed in the process. At first, Sammie started out as shy, but now she is able to speak in front of large groups. Sammie was interested in the Buddy Project because she was in need of a buddy. Now, through her own charity, she has been able to meet new friends from all across the country.

And, what can we learn from Sammie's story? What questions does her incredible journey raise? Perhaps we can ask ourselves if there is something in our lives that we would like to change? Maybe there is something that we are afraid to do, like make new friends or speak up? And once we pinpoint this, then we can ask ourselves, is there a way to make these things less scary? And perhaps through your own personal change, maybe you can find a way to help others with that very same problem too. Then together, we can all make life a little less scary for everyone. And together, we can smile.

Today, we've learned all about Sammie Vance and her incredibly giving journey. Now, I wonder, what will you do next?

TRANSITION MUSIC.

If you would like to learn more about Sammie's work, here's some information to get you started on your own giving journey. And, to help us out, here's our leading lady herself! Hey Sammie!

TRANSITION MUSIC.

Just like Sammie, women have a long history of giving.

Women like Oprah Winfrey - Born on January 29th, 1954 in Kosciusko, Mississippi. Known as one of the world's most revered journalists and talk-show hosts, Oprah Winfrey is also the greatest Black American philanthropist in American history.

Starting in 1998 with her charity, "Oprah's Angel Network" Winfrey soon raised more than \$80 million dollars to help those in need through special projects and financial grants.

Following the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, Oprah once again used her celebrity and power to raise more than \$11 million dollars for those affected, creating new homes and distributing necessary relief.

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By 2012, Winfrey had given away over \$400 million dollars towards educational projects and in 2013 she donated \$12 million dollars to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

She was later awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama and she continues to give today.

End of Episode.