

Gifts of the Heart



Barbara and Burt spent nearly half their lives at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island where the institution's neglect and maltreatment of its 6,000 residents made it a national icon of shame.

The couple met in 1978 — the year Willowbrook closed permanently — when both moved to Volunteers of America community-based homes for adults with developmental disabilities. They met on the bus that took them to their respective jobs at a sheltered workshop, and they fell in love. It took seven years, with Volunteers of America advocating on their behalf, for the state to grant them permission to wed, and on June 8, 1985, they did just that. The groom was 59 and the bride 42. Burt and Barbara celebrated their 23rd wedding anniversary this past June 2008.

A couple of years ago, Burt found himself in the hospital on Valentine's Day and his only worry was that he did not have a present for Barbara. He gave a nurse \$5.00, all the money he had, to buy something at the hospital gift store. When he presented the gift and the card to Barbara, she was thrilled.

Burt and Barbara were blessed to find each other, but there are many others in our community who do not have family or the resources, to make the holidays and other important occasions like birthdays, special.

Volunteers of America is a lifeline for thousands of people who might otherwise be alone in the world including older adults living alone and with limited means, adults with special needs including veterans with acquired brain injuries, and adults with developmental disabilities like Burt and Barbara.

This year, Volunteers of America's *Gifts of the Heart* program will ensure that every adult in our care who lives by themselves, has no involved family, and runs the risk of being alone during the holidays, will not be forgotten. *Gifts of the Heart* asks companies to invite their employees to hold gift drives, collecting and wrapping small, thoughtful gifts and attaching loving notes to them, or participating in our virtual gift drive, at www.GiftsoftheHeart.org where employees can make donations toward gifts.

GIFT IDEAS

- Blanket throw
- Hat
- Scarf
- Gloves
- Socks
- Toiletries
- Perfume
- Picture Frame
- Big Print Book
- Gift Cards

