

## Kathy's Commentary: Abby In Action

*"We were comforted by reading to Abby while she was hospitalized. We hope that parents and their children can share a simple moment together and enjoy the books donated in memory of Abby."*

*~ Mary & Will Kearney*

*Abby's Parents & Founders of Abby's Book Corner*

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May 12, 2008. No one can imagine the heartbreak of that day – for Will & Mary Kearney, it lasted forever.

That's the day their beloved daughter Abby died after a sudden, brief battle with a non-vaccine strain of bacterial meningitis.

Abby was just 13 months old.

Mary and Will always read to Abby. They are big believers in reading to children – even from infancy. They had read suggestions by the American Association of Pediatrics, which recommends reading to children every day as a way to jump-start early brain development and foster the bond between parent and child. With Abby, her parents knew early on that she loved books. "In her short life, she showed a love of books," Mary remembers.



For those few hours she was hospitalized at Medical City Children's Hospital in Dallas, Mary and Will wanted to read to Abby. Unfortunately, there was no children's library in the facility. Will's sisters Bernice and Elizabeth cleaned out the hospital's gift shop of the few books it had, giving them to Will and Mary to read to their daughter in the hours before Abby died.

Several months later, Mary and Will came up with a way to honor Abby's memory – through a [book drive](#). “We began with just an idea of how we can best honor Abby. I wanted to celebrate her life,” Mary said.

[Abby's Book Corner](#) was born.

“We thought it would be a great idea to organize a book drive so that the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at MCCH could have books,” Mary said.

The community in Dallas rallied, and what began with a goal of 300 books in late 2008 has blossomed to include a [full library at Medical City Children's Hospital](#) – called Abby's Book Corner. It was dedicated April 9, 2010 in Abby's memory, on what would have been her third birthday.

But the Kearney family didn't stop there.

After seeing how many books were donated in Abby's memory in Dallas, her aunt Bernice – who helps write for our monthly newsletter at KMAC and Associates – decided to see if they could expand the book drive to [San Antonio](#). Methodist Children's Hospital of South Texas happily signed on, and the first book drive was held November 17, 2009. It kicked off with the monthly meeting of [The BMPR Social Media Community](#) in San Antonio, during which all those attending were asked to bring a book to be donated to Abby's Book Corner-San Antonio. “When I heard Abby's story, and Bernice educated me about the paucity of books at local children's hospitals, I felt an instinctive call to action for BMPR,” Donna Tuttle, San Antonio Business Journal Projects Editor and co-founder of The BMPR said. “This tribe is all about harnessing the energy and passion of the social media community for the good of San Antonio.”



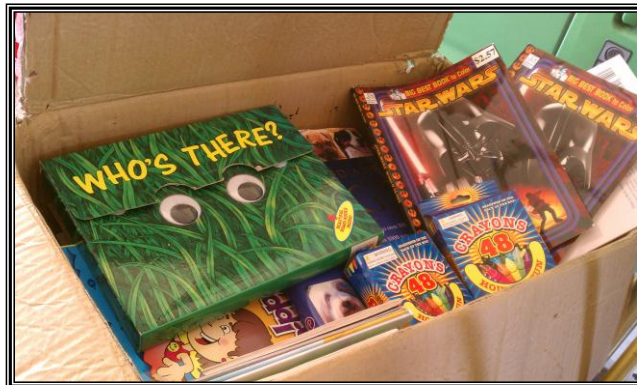
**Boxes of Books for Abby's Book Corner – San Antonio**

During that first book drive – one hour in the middle of a November afternoon – more than 500 books were donated to Abby's Book Corner. “Moms, dads, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles all understood the power of books to transport small patients to magical and imaginary places during their scary hospital stays. I think, too, we felt the courageous spirit of Abby and her special Auntie Bernice,” Donna said. “And so a few

weeks of Tweets, posts and emails flooded the digital community, and BMPR people bounded in on event day.” KLRN donated several bags worth of books, The Apple Store gave away some goodies as a thank-you to those who donated, and ABC-SA was born.

The community’s support of San Antonio’s chapter of Abby’s Book Corner continues.

The [Holiday Inn](#) learned about ABC-SA from the BMPR Kick-Off, and organized a book



drive this spring conducted by its employees. “The hotel has a committee that works on various projects through the year to help support community efforts,” Bernice explains. “Abby’s Book Corner was one of their projects this year. Theresa Lucas (the Director of Catering) heard me speak about ABC last year ... and reached out saying she was interested in helping.”

The [Adventure Club of San Antonio](#) – led by Dirk and Beverly Davidek - hosted a book drive for ABC-SA at one of their monthly meetings last year, and collected books last week during a club function. “I went to college with Bev – in fact, I was in their wedding a few years ago,” Bernice said. “Beverly and Dirk were eager to help, and their club members donated a carload of goodies.”

After attending a [book labeling party](#) at Bernice’s house, one of her young friends wanted to help, too.

Alisa Rodriguez and members of her Girl Scout Troop [gathered up hundreds of books](#), coloring books, games and activities donated by the St. Gregory the Great Catholic School Community.

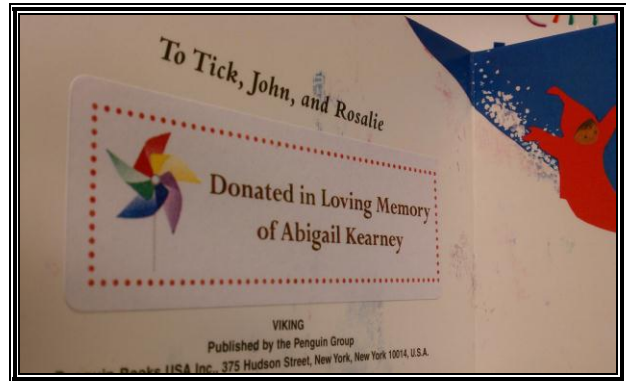


Twin daughters of Bernice's co-workers also got their Girl Scout Troop involved in Abby's Book Corner.



### Girl Scout Troop 723 Donating Books at Methodist Children's Hospital of South Texas

Girl Scout Troop 723 donated hundreds of items to ABC-SA, labeled them and took a tour of Methodist Children's Hospital of South Texas, so they could see how their donations to Abby's Book Corner already are at work.



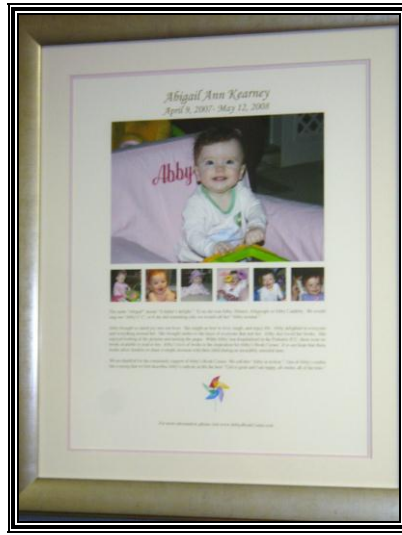
After hearing about Abby's Book Corner and reading their story, Navarro Intermediate School 5<sup>th</sup> Graders, taught by Lisa Barry, added ABC-SA to the list of organizations they support through their ["Tolerance Tweens" unit](#).

Individuals – some whom Bernice knows through social media circles, others who have heard about Abby's Book Corner through the community – have donated books, games, even huge bags of stuffed animals – all to help ease the pain and stress of being hospitalized, or having a family member hospitalized.

And, it doesn't end there.

Abby's Book Corner has expanded to other cities in Texas. Book drives for Abby's Book Corner have now donated books to Dell Children's Hospital in [Austin](#), where it was NACE Austin's Cause of the Quarter (May, June, and July 2010). Will's best friend Michael

McGuff has organized book drives in [Houston](#) to benefit Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital, and work is underway to expand the book drive to the Rio Grande Valley. As Mary & Will Kearney like to say, “It’s Abby in Action!”



The Kearney Family knows the importance of connections and relationships as the journey of Abby’s Book Corner continues. Through the power of friendships and networking, they’ve been able to tell the story of Abby Kearney and the little book drive that could. “We are continuously humbled and amazed at how many people wish to donate books in Abby’s memory,” the Kearneys say.

As long as children are hospitalized, as long as they have young family members sitting for hours on end in hospitals, there will be a need for the kind of outreach that Abby’s Book Corner provides. “When Abby was in the hospital, it was heartbreaking to see Will and Mary struggle to find a way to soothe her,” Bernice remembers. “In a small way, the books we were able to get for them that day were a comfort.”

### **How you can help**

The work of Abby’s Book Corner is an ongoing effort, and continues today. As you continue enjoying your summer, and getting your families ready for the upcoming school year, consider going through your kids’ books; are there any they’ve outgrown? Consider donating them to Abby’s Book Corner this month. You can drop off any gently-used or new books at [Next Generation Water](#) – a water-based wellness center [located in the Vineyards Shopping Center](#). The shop will be accepting book donations for ABC-SA at their location the entire month of July.

There is an overwhelming need for Spanish-language books, books geared toward pre-teens and teenagers and books and activities for special needs children and their families. Additionally, movies, activities, games – anything that will keep a hospitalized child focused, or the sibling of a hospitalized child entertained – is especially appreciated. You can also consider buying books off the [Abby’s Book Corner – San Antonio Amazon Wish](#)

[List](#) – those donations will be shipped directly to Bernice, and labeled for donation to Methodist Children’s Hospital of South Texas.

Additionally, Bernice is always eager to work with school groups, youth groups, organizations and individuals who are willing to help continue providing gently used or new books, games, crayons, activity books and other support services to Abby’s Book Corner (she throws a mean book labeling party for youth groups and girl scouts). If you would like to contact her about a book drive for your group, you can email her at [bernicekearney@att.net](mailto:bernicekearney@att.net).

Those of us at KMAC and Associates are so pleased to be able to support Bernice and her family in their efforts – and we congratulate and thank the family for all they do for our communities.



*"Goodnight stars, goodnight air, goodnight noises everywhere."*

*~ Margaret Wise Brown, Goodnight Moon*

*(Quote from Abby Kearney’s Favorite Book)*

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