

**Congratulations to Maisie McPherson, this year's winner in the
2011 Character Counts Essay Contest, sponsored by the Laguna Niguel Police Department.**

Character Counts - Caring
Maisie McPherson

Prologue

Once there was a little girl. She was born on June 11, 2005. She started St. Anne as a kindergartner in Mrs. Dickmann's class. She had a passion for the ocean. She cared about all the sea creatures but her favorite was a sea turtle. Her eyes sparkled inside of her round glasses, a light blue color. Suddenly everything changed for her. You may know this little girl, or heard of her and her story. This little girl was Maddie James.

Maddie James was my friend. Her mom and my mom are friends. When they mentioned her name at Mass, under the people you should pray for, I had all the rights to be concerned. "Hey mom," I asked. "Is Maddie okay? I heard her name at Mass....." She interrupted me. "Maisie, Maddie has a tumor. A brain tumor." I saw her trying to hold back all of the tears. "Mommy, what is a brain tumor." I asked, but my mom's face told me that it wasn't a good thing. "Mais, a brain tumor is a cancer in your brain." Now I could see my mom's tears swell up in her eyes. *No*, I thought.

Every day and every night, I prayed and prayed for her. Kajsa, her mom, started a charity called, The Maddie James Foundation. Their goal was raise to one million dollars before her 6th birthday, to name the new segment of the Ocean Institute "The Maddie James Seaside Learning Center." For Valentine's Day, I got her a monkey beanie baby. I was touched in every part of my enormous heart when my mom told me she named it "Maisie Monkey." After a long time of staying strong, something tragic happened.

It was March 14th, a little more than a week after my birthday. I remember it exactly. I had heard many rumors, but I didn't believe any single one. Then at about 10:20, Mr. Adams (our head of school) came in Miss Wallace's 4th grade classroom. "Death was upon us over this weekend." *NO! NO! NO!* I shouted inside my head. *It can't be true!* "Maddie James had passed onto a new life in heaven with God, the saints and all the angels. She is now one of them." I could feel the tears rolling down my face. "She will always be remembered," Mr. Adams said. He was also choking down a tear. I didn't care if nobody else in my class cried. I wasn't the least bit of embarrassed. All I thought about that second was making sure that she had her dream come true.

All the events were still on though, which was good so her dream could come true. The biggest hit though, was the "Mile for Maddie." Every person was on a team. Each team participated in the walk, and each team had to raise at least \$1,000. My team raised about \$2,500. Individually, I raised \$2,200. I felt really good because this little girl's dream might be able to come true. Then, there was the gala. The gala made the dream possible. It achieved \$1,000,000! Once my dad told me the news, I thought in bed, *I helped make this little girl's dream!*

I didn't want this to happen. My family didn't want this to happen. Nobody in this world wanted this to happen. But through this tragedy, this little girl taught us all something. She taught us something more important than any of God's gift. She taught us love. She taught us to be caring. She even taught us to help one of our neighbors. Because of this tragedy, everyone who helped her learned the true meaning of love. That was my story of how I showed compassion, caring, and love for Maddie James.



Maisie McPherson accepting the award this week.