

Real Life Treasure

by Carol Gibbons

My business as an antique dealer has brought me into many a basement, garage and attic here in St. James. Always in search of hidden treasure, something with a little age that tells a story. Whether it's at an auction, or a yard sale or an estate sale I can usually find something to add to one of my many collections. What I found on my own a few weeks ago was so much more.

About 10 weeks ago my neighbor, Ann Marie Vitale, was diagnosed with leukemia. Ann Marie is a beautiful young wife and mother of three boys, Jack who is 3, Adrian is 1 1/2, and 10-month-old Luke. The news spread like wildfire down Grove Avenue, with all of us shaking our heads concurring that this should never happen to anyone, but especially not Ann Marie. The worst of it being that she was denied treatment at Sloan Kettering Memorial Hospital by her insurance company. Within the week I received a flyer in my mailbox announcing a fundraiser yard sale to help defter the cost of this young mother's treatment. Diane and Doreen, the "new families" who lived down the block, sent the note. I didn't even really know these people, but this was for a good cause and what the heck, my basement was getting a little crowded anyway. I called them up and offered my help.

As it turned out everyone did, all 18 residents. The day before the big event people were carrying armloads of treasure down the street to the big 10'x20' tent. Some people had so much treasure that they had to load their car and drive it down. Before long that tent was full, as well all the tables, but almost magically more kept coming. Tents, tarps, umbrellas, picnic tables, folding tables and card tables were all assembled and utilized. The weather forecast was not in our favor. However, it did not dampen the spirit of my neighbors. Young and old we worked into the night unboxing, pricing, and tagging. We tried to anticipate anything that tomorrow would bring. The children made cookies, cupcakes, cardies and lemonade. Gift baskets were assembled, ready to be raffled off. That night as I went to bed I offered up a silent prayer "da mihi animas," which is Latin for "send me the people." Someone must have heard, despite the cold and rain, for they came! They bought, they donated, and they sent well wishes. Shoppers and volunteers alike spent the weekend laughing, and crying together, feeling that we can make a difference. We made new friends on and off our street, and each person was touched in a special way. The Vitale family came by, and were overjoyed by the love of their neighbors. The weekend was topped off with the appearance and coverage of Long Island News 12.

Almost \$4,000 was raised that day but a lot more was accomplished. Neighbors put aside their differ-



Ann Marie with husband, John, and her children.

ences and came together for a common cause. I bought some vintage wicker for my porch, but I walked away with a lot more – a true sense of what our town here in St. James is all about – community. Those "new neighbors," they're pretty great. I'm glad I live in St. James. This weekend I learned, the price of a yard sale lamp; \$10 – good neighbors: priceless!

Editor's Note: Carol Gibbons is co-owner of The Willow Cottage 415 North Country Road, St. James, specializing in vintage linens, monochrome and depression glass. Call 584-5776 or stop in for any additional information.

***If you would like to make a contribution to the Ann Marie Vitale fund, please call Carol Gibbons at 584-5776, or mail your donation to:
The Ann Marie Vitale Fund
PO Box 632, St. James, NY 11780.***