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What Every Parent's Talking About

# parentingOC

A young girl with brown hair, wearing a red sequined dress and a red headband with a floral pattern, stands in the center of the frame. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a dark night scene filled with warm, golden lights, likely from a holiday festival or event. In the distance, a blue-lit castle with multiple spires is visible. The overall atmosphere is festive and celebratory.

## THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

Gift Ideas for the Nice • Surviving Holiday  
Naughty • Plus Nutcracker Ballets, Santa  
Photo Ops & Yuletide Events for All

SPECIAL SECTIONS: HOLIDAY PLANNER, EDUCATION GUIDE, ACTIVITIES



# Local Hero

By Linda Vujnov

## “I Will Make this World My World.”

**Diagnosed with Sickle Cell at birth, Alyssa Simmons is on a crusade of compassion for sick children.**

A typical Saturday night for most teen girls might bounce between boys, bantering on social media, and blasting beats through their earbuds. However, Alyssa Simmons, Laguna Hills High School freshman, is not your typical teenager. Her weekends are spent selecting the next hospital to visit in order to lift the spirits of children suffering through illness and pain. After all, Alyssa can relate.

At birth, Alyssa was diagnosed with Sickle Cell Disease, a chronic blood disorder which is extremely painful and incurable. She has spent much of her life in and out of the hospital undergoing different types of treatment to combat her pain. These days, she makes a deliberate choice to visit the hospital even when it isn't required.

Alyssa's volunteering journey began when she was selected as the spokesperson for “All About Tots”, a program designed for Sickle Cell patients in order to provide toddlers with frequent hospital visitations, custom blankets, toys, and to assist families with free childcare. “I acted as the voice for that age group,” she said. “It felt good because some kids didn't have an advocate like I did, and I wanted them to get the same chances I got.”

Since the age of three, Alyssa has made it her mission to turn the pain she suffers into helping others. Her motto, “It's temporary!”, and insatiable optimism is contagious. She encouraged little ones to “take your medicine to get better and stronger”.

During one of her many hospital visits, Alyssa noticed that some of the kids were alone and said to mom, Star, “I feel so bad that their parents are not here.” Her mother explained that parents have to work or care for other children. Alyssa saw the situation as an opportunity to use her gift of encouragement and loving presence to help other children. She began to regularly schedule visitation appointments with kids whose parents were unavailable.

By the age of 10, Alyssa had designed and implemented a hospital visitation program with tutoring courses. This all came naturally for Alyssa. She found that being herself; pleasant, caring, and compassionate to the families and children in the hospital brought



*Alyssa is a ten gallon blood donor, an impressive feat at any age.*

them a glimmer of hope. Her empathetic character has since made a difference in the lives of hundreds of children and adults.

During visits, Alyssa discovered that many of the children and their parents were Spanish speaking. This was great news to Alyssa, who is bilingual. With this skill, she has been able to translate to the doctors on behalf of the parents, talk openly with the children, and let parents know, in their native language, the struggles and challenges that their children may be experiencing in school, with friends, and in the hospital.

By the age of 13, Alyssa, with the support of the Sickle Cell foundation, executed a special accommodations program for children living with chronic disease. She has been given the opportunity to share her insight as a teenager living with Sickle Cell Disease and chronic pain, sharing how it has impacted her student life.

Alyssa has authored two books and inspires Sickle Cell patients to journal their experiences and pain. She will encourage anyone who needs it with a message, a hug, a book, or a high five.

In spite of missing 34 days of school due to her illness, Alyssa had banked a remarkable 1200 hours of visitation in one year and maintained a remarkably high GPA.

This past year, Alyssa was handselected, out of 29,000 students, for the Prudential Spirit of Community Award, a nationwide program that honors teenagers for their volunteerism. She was named the 2016 State Honoree for California based on her personal initiative, effort, impact, and personal growth.

Alyssa, a unique young lady, declares that she is on an assignment to not think about herself, but to think about others above herself.

“I will make this world, my world,” says Alyssa.

She will go wherever, whenever, and to whomever is discouraged and disheartened, needing courage, hope, and prayer.

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To learn more about the Sickle Cell Disease Foundation of Orange County, please visit their website at [www.sdcfoc.com](http://www.sdcfoc.com).