

**'Not My Duckie!'**  
**BY SALLY MARKS MCKEE**  
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Ouch!" I cried as I pulled one of the seven dwarfs from my foot. I looked at my daughter's toy and inwardly cursed. The same bedroom that I had cleaned that morning was now littered with stuffed animals, crayons and books.

"Why can't you keep your room clean, Brittany?" I asked my 4-year-old.

"I wanted to play," she replied innocently.

"If you have so many toys that you can't pick them up off the floor, then I think it's time to get rid of a few things," I said, nastily.

A glutton for punishment, I decided to inspect my 9-year-old daughter's room. To my chagrin, Alicia's room was worse than Brittany's. My anger swelled. The combined aggravation of working, embarking on my new Buddhist practice, taking college courses and maintaining a reasonable sense of order in the house seemed to engulf me in a tidal wave of frustration.

"That's it!" I announced to my children and husband. "Tomorrow we're going through the closets and giving half of these toys away. No two children need so much junk."

I quickly tucked the girls in bed, carefully watching the floor on my way so I wouldn't step on another toy. A sinister sense of satisfaction entered my heart as I thought of carting away bags of useless toys — I love getting rid of junk more than most people enjoy collecting it.

The following day my husband, John, and I began rummaging through the girls' toys. John and Alicia went through her things, while I went through Brittany's. But the task was more difficult than I had imagined. Brittany did not want to part with anything.

"Why are you saving this egg carton?" I asked.

"Don't throw that away, Mom," she cried. "It's an apartment house for my little dinosaurs."

"Nope," I said as I threw the carton in the trash. "Looks like your dinosaurs will have to live someplace else." I picked up a stuffed animal and threw it in a bag.

"Not my duckie!" Brittany howled.

I looked at the duck, trying to imagine what was so special about it. It had all its parts and it still played "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," but Brittany hadn't touched the toy in ages.

I threw the duck back in the bag and Brittany fished it out.

"Brittany, that's a baby toy," I said, trying to appeal to her desire to act like a big girl.

"I don't care," she countered. "I still want her."

"You haven't played with it since you were 2 years old."

"Yes, I have. I just couldn't remember where she was."

I wasn't getting anywhere with Brittany. I waited until she wasn't watching and I stuffed the duck back in with the outgoing toys. After an hour or so we finished going through the closets and had come up with two bags of junk and four bags of decent, but neglected, toys to donate to the local child crisis center.

John and I loaded the bags in the trunk and we all hopped into the car to run a few errands, grab a bite to eat and make our final stop at the child crisis center.

It was late by the time we finished eating. Everyone was so tired that we considered skipping the toy run and going straight home. However, I knew I couldn't rest until the toys were out of the trunk.

John parked in front of the child crisis center. He wanted to go inside, which would have

been the proper thing to do, but I insisted that we drop off the toys at the door and leave. I didn't want to talk to anyone or wait for a receipt.

I jumped out of the car, unlocked the trunk, quickly grabbed the bags and placed them by the front door, trying to work as fast as possible so no one would see us.

As I grabbed the last bag, a few things tumbled out. I started quickly stuffing them back in the sack. But there, unfortunately, on top of the heap, was Brittany's duck.

"My duckie! My duckie!" she cried with pain in her voice. "No! Don't give them my duckie! I love my duck. I love that toy. Give them something else...please." She climbed out of the car and tried to rescue her duck.

Quickly I put her back into the car, in my haste accidentally shutting the door on her finger, adding further misery to an already unpleasant situation. Ignoring her cries, I told John to hurry and drive away.

"We can look at her finger later," I said. "Let's get out of here. I don't feel like talking to anyone."

We drove off. Brittany's finger was fine, but she kept wailing endlessly about her duck. I tried to reason with her. I told her about how some poor kid really needed her duck, how she was behaving selfishly — but she would not be placated. I used psychology, reasoning and a generous sprinkling of guilt, but she was adamant. She wanted her duckie back.

When we arrived home I remembered something that I had been told about the power of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Although I had only started chanting a few months before, I had seen many positive changes in my life. I reflected on the words of my seniors in faith who had always encouraged me to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to overcome my problems — even the simple, mundane struggles that occur in life.

"Brittany, come here," I said. She slowly walked over to me, eyeing me with suspicion. Her eyebrows knit into a frown above her brown eyes and she folded her arms tightly across her chest.

"I think we should chant together," I said. At first Brittany didn't cooperate and it was obvious she didn't trust me.

"Brittany, if you chant with me I will make you a special promise," I said. "We'll pray with all of our hearts to do the right thing about your duckie. After we get done chanting, you will know in your heart what is the right thing to do — and then we'll do it."

She walked over to me and climbed in my lap. We sat together and faced the Gohonzon. I confidently watched my daughter as she clasped her little hands together and chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo several times. When she finished, she looked at me and smiled.

"Were your prayers answered?" I asked.

She nodded.

"What did the little voice in your heart say to do?" I asked gently.

"To go back and get my duckie!"

I was shocked. I had been certain that chanting would work. I wasn't going to go back on my word, so I instructed Brittany to get in the car and we would go back and get her duck.

The child crisis center is close to our house and I figured that the duck would probably still be outside the door. As I backed out of the driveway, I watched the garage door close and several thoughts flooded my mind: Could it be that I was the selfish one? Maybe I shouldn't have forced Brittany to relinquish her stuffed animal. What were my real motives for wanting to get rid of the toy? I wasn't concerned about the poor kids; I was sick of picking up after my children.

I also wondered what I would say if the folks at the center had already brought the toy inside — but it didn't matter, I knew I would think of something. I had made Brittany a

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promise and I had faith that we were doing the right thing.

We drove to the end of our street and Brittany reached out and touched my leg.

“No, Mom, wait,” Brittany said. “Go back home. Let the poor kids have my duckie.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yep,” she said, without a trace of doubt in her voice.

I looked at my dainty daughter and her wide grin and stopped the car to give her a big hug. I was so proud of her. She had made the decision to give up her little duck entirely on her own, without any pressure from me. And she had made a huge sacrifice for a 4-year-old.

Our prayers had been answered, but not in the way I had anticipated.

That night, as I tucked my children into bed, I could feel a change in myself. I thought about how lucky I was to have such a wonderful family. I kissed Alicia goodnight and went into Brittany’s room. Suddenly I felt a sharp object under my foot. I pulled a miniature, plastic Cabbage Patch Kid from between my toes.

I placed the little doll on the bookshelf, kissed Brittany goodnight and turned out the light. No yelling, no threats, no anger. My preschooler wasn’t the neatest kid in town, but somehow it didn’t seem so important. She was a fine little human being. That was what mattered the most.

*Post script: The above incident happened eight years ago. The “neat freak” mom in this story, Sally McKee, is currently a district leader in Arizona Territory. Her older daughter, Alicia, is an honor student at Westwood High School, a junior group leader in Desert District and an active member of the high school division. Brittany, now 12, is an active member of the junior high school division, an accomplished violinist in the Concert Orchestra of her school and an honor student.*

*Her bedroom, however, is still a mess.*

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