DAWN HATTON

People Power

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Katie Hatton

Hold the dolls, please. Some people are just hard to shop for. "What do you want for your birthday?" you ask, and they demure. You end up scanning the stores desperately for something that might catch their fancy: a wind chime with bells shaped like clouds? A Hawaiian shirt?

As a rule, though, it's the adults who send you browsing through specialty can-opener catalogs, longing for the ease of kids' typical mile-long, plastic-toy-filled wish lists. But Katie Hatton of Palm City, Fla., shows maturity beyond her years when her birthday rolls around each February.

By then, she explains, her dad's six brothers and sisters have already given her everything she wants for Christmas. "And since I'm a girl," says the 11-year-old, "everybody thinks I'm going to want Polly Pocket stuff, but I'm more of a tomboy." (We hear you, sister.)

Since Hatton was eight years old, she's made it clear to friends and family that she doesn't want dolls for her birthday.

She wants dog food.

Dog food?! Don't worry—it's not for her to eat. Katie's a doggie diehard: "Her whole bedroom is dogs, and she has a stuffed animal she's carried around for years that's been through the washer I don't know how many times," says her mom, Dawn Hatton. When she wanted to help real live dogs at her local shelter, the Humane Society of the Treasure Coast, Katie started asking would-be gift givers to bring dog food, blankets, towels, or money. Over the years, she's brought more than 1,000 pounds of dog food to the shelter; on her 10th birthday, she passed on $200 in donations.

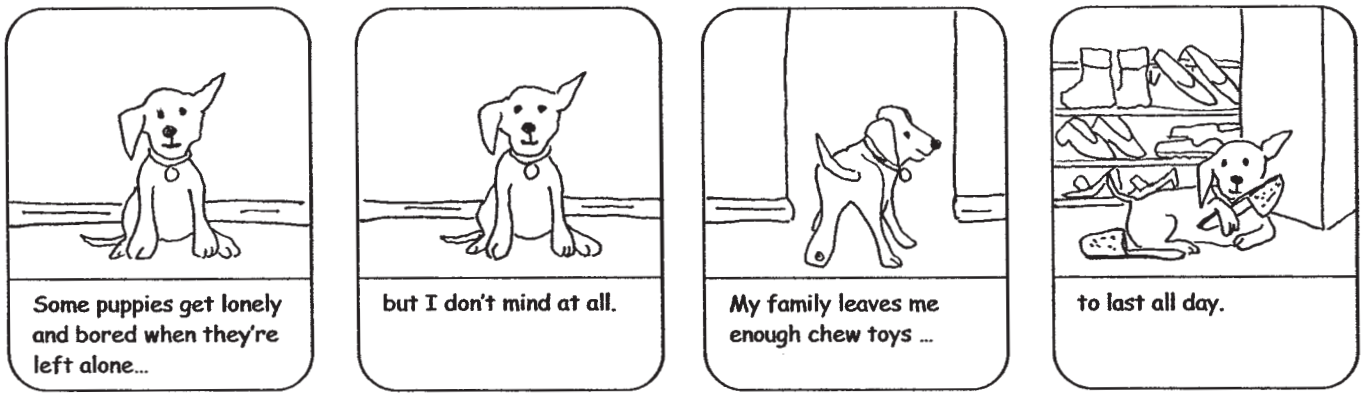
Gifted in more ways than one. Not only is Katie generous to the animals of her community, she's also a member of the flag corps and a black belt in tae kwon do. (Think about that next time you consider getting a girl a Polly Pocket toy!) She doesn't know what she wants to do when she grows up, but she thinks being a dog-walker at the shelter might be a fun career. (She's waiting for her 13th birthday, when she'll finally reach the minimum volunteer age.)

A credit to her family—and to the shelter's outreach programs. Because of a family emergency that thwarted the last fundraising fête, the family was planning to try it again later and hoping to break the previous record.

"It has raised the awareness of her and her friends for the need to support the local humane society," says Dawn Hatton.

The shelter's 50-plus community initiatives include training classes, pet-assisted therapy, humane education for preschool through high school students, and a program that allows kids to read to animals. Katie's one of a number of kids in the area who support the organization—in fact, the shelter did a recent feature in their newsletter on kid-driven philanthropy, says Amy Christensen, the shelter's community outreach director. "It's amazing what kids will take it into their heads to do," she says, noting that other local children have done bake sales or gone door-to-door to solicit donations. "Katie, in the true spirit of philanthropy, flew under the radar when she brought her donation. These kids can be so selfless—it's a lesson I wish a lot of people would learn."

Dog Park



By J & J Hubal