

Conversation with an Operation Shoebox Processing Center Coordinator
Transcribed June 27, 2020

Christy: Hi, Lisa! Thank you for your willingness to answer our questions about shoeboxes and fillers. So let's talk about full shoeboxes first. When the boxes get to the processing center, do the volunteers take everything out of each shoebox to check them and then put them back in?

Lisa: Not everything is taken out. Most is though because it has to be gone through so nothing stops the box from getting through customs. Everything acceptable gets put back in the box though.

Christy: But my boxes are REALLY stuffed!

Lisa: Mine are too! Don't worry. Stuffed boxes DO get put back together. There are stations with 2-3 people checking boxes, so there are helpers to get items back in a shoebox if need be.

Christy: OK. I'm glad you told me that.

Lisa: We have to look for things like used items and liquid items that aren't allowed. I found more than one pair of tennis shoes that were previously worn.

Christy: That makes total sense. I won't worry about mine any more. I just didn't want anything taken away or added.

Lisa: I feel the same way. However, if a box is in need of fillers, they get some at the Processing Center. That is up to the people checking the boxes.

Christy: That brings us to the main topic. Fillers. What are they?

Lisa: Fillers are items sent to the processing center to fill boxes that aren't full.

Christy: Why aren't all the boxes full?

Lisa: Sometimes space is made in a shoebox when items that are not allowed are taken out. Other shoeboxes are donated half full.

Christy: Is that common?

Lisa: Yes. Probably 50% of the boxes come in with a lot of room for more items. So that's why we need fillers.

Christy: I've been thinking a lot about fillers and what I can send this year. This is a list I came up with so far: complete sets of marbles with string, flip flops, small LEGO sets, yo-yos, decks of cards, matchbox cars, socks, underwear, hats, whistles, harmonicas, school supplies, combs,

balls, soap, lovies, and stuffed animals. What fillers do you recommend, personally, now that you've worked at the processing center?

Lisa: Those are great fillers! I think one of the best are a plush stuffed animal, especially ones for boys. There are so many boxes that have nothing soft in them.

Christy: That's really good to know.

Lisa: Plush dolls or small dolls for girls would be good. Also, Barbie dolls are good fillers.

Christy: OK. What else?

Lisa: Definitely more filler items for boys are needed. Extra school supplies are good too. Also filler items for 10-14 girls are needed.

Christy: This is all very helpful. What else should we know?

Lisa: Can I mention what NOT to pack?

Christy: Yes! Of course.

Lisa: Do you know what hand warmers are, the ones you can buy in the winter that you squeeze and they heat up? Those aren't allowed.

Christy: Have you seen a lot of those?

Lisa: Yes. I took out more than one pack of those from shoeboxes.

Christy: Are all camouflage items taken out?

Lisa: No camo clothing, backpacks, bandanas, are allowed but camo pencils, wallet, and socks are allowed. No cowboy-type guns. Also pink or colored camouflage is allowed.

Christy: What about squirt guns?

Lisa: Squirt guns are allowed as long as they don't look like a real gun.

Christy: Action figures were allowed for the first time last year. Are there any limitations on those, regarding weapons? For example, the Ninja Turtles always seem to have weapons.

Lisa: Strictly speaking, the Ninja Turtles items are allowed. However, someone at the Processing Center who doesn't know the detailed rules that allow Ninja Turtles may remove them.

Christy: This is all very helpful. What else can you tell us about your experience at the Processing Center?

Lisa: I think some of the neatest items I saw in boxes were the handmade blankets and purses. Not everyone can sew, but they were neat!

Christy: Yes. Tell us more!

Lisa: Just seeing the boxes that were full of quality items was amazing! I could just feel the love that had gone into those.

Christy: Oh, wow! That would be incredible!

Lisa: And stopping every hour to pray over the boxes was just incredible! Everyone stopped what they were doing and prayed.

Christy: I didn't know about that. Wow, that's great! What do you think about sending flip-flops? I've sent Old Navy flip flops before because they are high quality and inexpensive. I've heard some people say that it's better to send more sturdy shoes. But then someone told me a moving story about a young man who had his flip-flops for years and cherished them.

Lisa: I think flip-flops are great! Plus they don't take up much space.

Christy: Were there a lot of soccer ball boxes?

Lisa: I didn't see a lot of soccer ball boxes at our station. There could have been at others though.

Christy: One last question. Do you think pencil packs with erasers and sharpeners are useful as fillers? Or do most of the boxes have enough school supplies?

Lisa: Yes! I don't think they can ever have enough school supplies. Some boxes have only 2 pencils and many don't include sharpeners for the pencils they include. I remember seeing one box with a small coloring book, but no crayons!

Lisa: Also, Colored pencils are great to send also—the ones you can color with. There is a shoebox recipient video where the young man says his favorite thing in his box was the colored pencils!

Christy: I always put those in my boxes. I'll buy extra this year! Oh my! You have given me a lot to think about. This is such good information. Thank you! We just launched a website, blessingsinashoebox.com. I think you'll like it. May we use this information for our web site?

Lisa: Sure!

Christy: Thank you so much for having this conversation with me. Thank you for all your help!

Lisa: It's been my pleasure.