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Former Homeless Teen Awarded for Mentoring Children

Brittnie Pemberton, who just turned 16, received the “Spark of Hope Award” and a brand-new 2014 Chevy Spark on Tuesday, Sept. 17

By [Monica Garske](#) | Tuesday, Sep 17, 2013 | Updated 5:30 PM PDT



NBC 7 San Diego

San Diego teen Brittnie Pemberton, 16, was awarded the “Spark of Hope Award” for her work mentoring other kids. She was also awarded with a brand new car.

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A San Diego teenager who was homeless in her younger years had one of her biggest dreams come true on Tuesday: she was given the keys to her very own brand new car.

Brittnie Pemberton, who just turned 16, was awarded the first-ever “Spark of Hope Award” by photojournalist [Linda Solomon](#) and Chevrolet for her work mentoring children.

After being honored with the award at Jimmie Johnson Chevrolet on Balboa Avenue, the teen was also presented with a brand new 2014 Chevy Spark, much to her surprise.

Pemberton had no idea she would be getting her

own new set of wheels.

When U.S. Vice President of Chevrolet Don Johnson gave the teenager the keys, she was speechless and could not stop smiling.

“My heart just stopped. I mean, it’s amazing. It’s like every 16-year-old’s wish – a car,” said Pemberton. “It’s awesome because a car was on my [wish] list that I made when I was 9 and it came true.”

The big gift was extra meaningful to Pemberton because her young life has been far from easy.

The big girl has extra meaning, she's embertion because her young life has been hard from early.

When she was 9 years old, Pemberton was homeless. While living at The Salvation Army's Door of Hope with her mother and brother, Pemberton became involved with Solomon and the photojournalist's project, "[Pictures of Hope](#)."

The project encourages children living in shelters in San Diego and other cities to share their hopes and dreams through photography. The [photos are then turned into greeting cards](#), and the proceeds benefit shelters and facilities in each city.

At age 9, Pemberton was given a disposable camera and told to take pictures of her aspirations. The child photographed the entrance to San Diego State University in order to illustrate her dream of one day attending college.

Over the years, Pemberton has mentored other children through Solomon's "Pictures of Hope" program and Salvation Army Programs, including volunteering at a summer camp for low-income children.

Her family is also no longer homeless.

On Tuesday, Solomon was thrilled to present Pemberton with the "Spark of Hope Award" and commended the teen for her determination, hard work and triumph over adversity.

"Brittne is a wonderful young lady and her photograph changed all of our lives," said Solomon.

As Pemberton's family looked on, Johnson then gave the teen the brand new car.

"It was a huge surprise," Pemberton said. "I thought we were giving an award to Linda Solomon for her 'Pictures of Hope,' and it turned out I was getting a car."

Sitting in her shiny new ride for the first time, Pemberton was overwhelmed with joy.

She also had a message for kids going through tough times, just as she once did:

"I would say that there's hope for the future, and things get better – always – and time really makes everything better," she said. "[Kids] need to have their hopes and dreams and never give up on them because they do come true."

In the future, Pemberton plans to continue her work with children.

She said she'd like to one day become a child psychologist and help children who went through similar situations as her. Of course, she plans to attend SDSU to earn her degree in psychology.

"I just really hope to bring joy to other kids, like Ms. Solomon has," she said. "Things do get better, no matter what, and there's always hope for the future."

Pemberton's dream of going to SDSU is within reach, too.

When the SDSU Alumni Association saw that photograph Pemberton snapped at age 9, they worked with the college president to grant Pemberton a four-year, fully-paid scholarship if she stayed in school and kept up her grades – which she has.

In the meantime, between helping kids and working towards college, Pemberton will be enjoying her new car. The teen said she plans to "show it off" and cruise around town, though she admits she's not sure where, exactly, she'll drive to first.

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