



Gifts that Keep on Giving

by Annemarie Eveland

You know the kind-- the ones that aren't material and fade or break or become useless after we tire of playing with them. The kind that, when we recall those gifts, rekindle all the warmth, joy, satiated longing, gladness and smiles that we may have forgotten, as their memories fulfill us again.

Those gifts which no adventure or amount of money can top. They are simple in their experiences, but profound in their effect. They linger in our hearts and our memories of their sweetness is a great treasure. They remind us of the godness of the human spirit. They help us feel good about ourselves.

Such gifts may have been experienced for only a moment but, somehow, we capture and relish the realness and depth of their profound caring. Their power is sometimes deeply stirring, sometimes remembered from seeing something or someone outside of us. But they are such a significant part of our human experience that we refuse to let them go.

Let me give you a couple of examples from my own life, knowing that you have many from your life too.

It was cold that winter day as I dashed into our little country store for a can of soup. There she was. She startled me with her warm, genuinely enthusiastic "Hello! Merry Christmas!" Her eyes sparkled with sunshine, her voice engaged with warm-hearted care. Then she smiled and revealed a mouth of broken, crooked and missing teeth. Her gaping mouth startled me. It was then I saw her ragged clothing too.

Although I thought I showed no shock, she must have felt it. Her mouth quickly closed to a tiny line. But still she smiled at me with her dancing eyes, and I felt my heart humbled before her. Her unabashed reaching out to cheerfully wish me well was truly a gift. She was unafraid her

sunshine smile would be unwelcomed. That day, I learned more about giving wholehearted greetings instead of noticing personal appearance. Even today, this tiny ragged lady who stood in the Habanero chili section, reminds me to be loving and give the gift of my smile---regardless.

Another time, when I had little monetary reserves; not even enough to pay the utility bill, I went to the mailbox, dreading the “disconnect notice” that might be lurking there. But, instead, there was a plain white envelope with my name on it. Inside was cash...enough cash to pay my entire electric bill. To this day, I *still* suspect everyone!

This single event, from long ago now, has prompted me to become an anonymous “gift giver” also. I love finding places where there is a need but there is *no* need for me to receive a thank you or reciprocation. You likely have found yourself a secret gift giver also.

I remember when I was a child and, at that time, they didn't have automatic cash registers to tell the clerk how much change to make (this must reveal my age!). My Dad gave the cashier a fifty-dollar bill to pay for groceries. She gave him back change from a hundred-dollar bill. True to his honorable nature, he simply handed her back the over-payment, saying “You gave me too much.” No fanfare. The clerk effusively thanked him as she would have had to make up the difference in her till. He shrugged nonchalantly – it was the right thing to do. No discussion or thanks needed. He always seemed to do the right thing, regardless if someone was watching or not. It was a great gift to me to see the character of my Dad in action. Values he taught me by doing the right thing.

Dogs know how to give gifts also. They give us unconditional love – no matter what, their tails wag energetically just seeing us. Recently I saw a photo of one dog leading another dog with its leash in his mouth. That wasn't so special, except I learned that the dog being led was blind. It's always good to have a friend who cares and this was a good example of canine kindness.

I see the loving gifts of kindness everywhere and every day. It may be captured in the person who drives a lady down to the valley for cancer treatments without any thought of compensation. Our Rim Country has wonderful people who volunteer their time in many organizations as well as individually lending a helping hand.

It is witnessed by the many times someone holds a door open for you or waits for you to pass by them. Or the kind person who tells you to get ahead of them when in line at the grocery store – because you have only a single item, not a basket full of groceries. Remember that extra cup of coffee the waitress gave you without charging you? The driver who motions for you to go ahead of them, so you can get onto that busy highway. Or the people who pass by when you are walking and say, “Good morning. Have a nice day!” Gifts of little gestures that cheer us up and inspire us to keep it going by giving to another person.

Very often nowadays, I will be thinking of someone and not long after, they call or contact me. The great gift of friendships is another unseen joy but always felt as a welcomed treasure in my life.

One Christmas, we invited people who didn't have family to share the holiday with us in our Rim Country cabin. I got to hang stockings for them, feed them and play Santa. I loved sneaking around at night and secretly filling all their stockings and leaving little Santa gifts under the tree for them. It was a fun memory that I fondly recall as my gift to them and their squeals of delight when they discovered their fat stockings were a return gift to me.

A gift is when a store clerk takes extra effort to help you find just what you need. Their attentive caring reminds me of the intrinsic value of human kindness.

Once when a friend died, her relatives told me of a card I sent her many years before her passing. She kept it on her dresser mirror and every day read my message on the card. I was surprised and overjoyed that something written so long ago would be so treasured a gift. We often never learn about how we touch another human being with our simple caring words. My gift was that I was lucky to find out what touched her so.

Another little gift I received was when a professional audio-visual repair man took two minutes to fix something I had been struggling unsuccessfully with for hours and said, "No worries. No charge." What a gift!

As a young child, throughout the years, we saved and repaired our toys, clothes and miscellaneous items to wrap up (in recycled ironed gift wrapping and ribbons) and took to the San Xavier Mission so that other children could have a surprise and Merry Christmas. We loved this special holiday outing out to the Mission. We loved the gifts we gave to the mission children. We thought we were financially well off to do this, not noticing that all our clothes were hand-me-downs also. And so, we learned that giving is another side of receiving gifts. Our unseen gift was feeling good about what we did.

As we grow up, our ideas of "good gifts" morph into other less concrete wishes. They often take on the form acts of kindness and caring. If you think you have nothing to give this holiday season, you are most assuredly wrong. Your PRESENCE is indeed one of the most valuable PRESENTS.

I realized this even more when I sat beside a dying person in the hospital; a sterile and flat environment indeed. But I took a deep breath in, and breathed out all my concerns about ME. I instead focused all my love and attention on her. Suddenly her eyes lit up, she feebly smiled, and whispered "Thank you." Then a soft swooshing sound and she was in spirit. A reminder to be "present" in our day when seeing any one. It may be their last gift.

Every day, we have an opportunity to take a moment to be truly present for someone. They don't have to be dying (although many times we die a little each day with unkind, uncaring moments.) *Your* moment of kind caring may be all someone needs to shore them up the rest of the day.

I was stunned one day to learn my moment of kind presence with one of our Rim Country residents made all the difference...it was his decision-making moment and because he felt cared about, he did not commit suicide.

Greeting the new day with love in your heart and a willingness to be an ambassador of goodness and kindness will be a far-reaching and treasured gift for anyone you meet. And besides, when we share our openhearted presence, it feels so good, doesn't it? We truly *are* a gift for all seasons.

What do I want for Christmas this year? I wish for all of you, more evidence of those gifts that keep on giving. Have a most memorable holiday season – that lasts throughout the coming year!