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# WEEKEND BREAK

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# THE GIFT OF LOVE

## Christmas of 1988 illuminated the true meaning of giving

By DENISE REED  
 For The Daily Astorian

In December 1990, when I was living and working in Canada, I entered the “Best Christmas” contest advertised in the Edmonton Journal.

The Journal was looking for the best-Christmas-ever story — “the funniest, the warmest or whatever ingredients combined to make a Christmas for you or your family something to be remembered the rest of your life.”

Here is a shortened version of the story I submitted.

### My son and the tree

I cannot say that my Christmas of 1988 was the most joyous, but it was certainly the most memorable, for it illumined the true meaning of giving during this special time of the year.

The previous years’ Christmases had been filled

with giving to appease, giving to forget hurtful things said and done, and giving to replace love. These were not my only reasons for gift giving and getting, but they played a significant role in the overall Christmas-giving process.

The Christmas of ’88 found me divorced, in a new city, with a new job that paid less money, and alone. I couldn’t afford to buy a ticket for my daughter, who was in college, to be with me at Christmas, and I was forced, with promises of future child support payments, to send my son to his father’s for Christmas.

Knowing I had insufficient funds in the bank, I used a check to secure a reservation for a \$350 airplane ticket for my son. When the money for this ticket would finally appear in the form of a check from my employer, I knew the balance would not leave me anything to have a Christmas close to the ones I had when the family was all together.

But the question in the back of my mind: Were my

previous Christmases what I really wanted to repeat?

As the time drew near for my son to leave to spend Christmas with his father, you could hardly tell by my recently rented home that Christmas was coming. Our meals were skimpy, mostly consisting of tuna fish salad and frozen pizzas. I knew things would get better, but that didn’t make the current situation any more tolerable.

One evening I arrived home to find, to my surprise, a 3- or 4-foot evergreen tree with a few lights and homemade ornaments made of white copy paper. My son had left a note that he was with a friend and would be home later.

As I examined the drawings on the ornaments, I knew they were my son’s, and I was so touched that, although he would not be home with me for Christmas, he had wanted me to have Christmas anyway.

When I later found out he had ridden his small dirt bike about a mile to a tree lot, then carried the tree and the lights on his bike home, I was moved to tears. (He later told me that several motorists had asked if he wanted a ride when they saw him with the load.) The money he used was what I had given him to spend on himself when he visited his father.

Now I knew: This was what Christmas was all about, and from now on all of my Christmas giving would be motivated *by* love and *not for* love.

On the day my son was to leave, we arrived at the ticket counter at the airport to check in, and the check that I had used to pay for the reservation had bounced. My son looked at me and said, “Ma, am I still going?” Fortunately there was a bank in the airport, and I was able to withdraw the cash for the ticket. My son made his flight on time, and I returned to my house to spend Christmas alone.

But I wasn’t alone. My son’s love, and God’s, was with me, both were given unconditionally, and I would continue in my life rejoicing each Christmas with assurance of His love, and that I am never alone.

### The most meaningful of gifts

I didn’t win the story contest two years later, but on the page of the contest winner’s entry, the editor, Liane Faulder, wrote about what my story meant to her.

“To me, Ms. Reed’s story has much to teach all of us. It says that love can thrive in the midst of pain and that a gift of love is the most meaningful of all gifts. It also tells me that such gifts can thrive in today’s world too, and they don’t have to be cookie-covered to be good.”

Take what you wish from this story as you rekindle your own memories of past holiday celebrations. I wish you a New Year filled with both gifting and giving.

*Denise Reed is the conductor of the North Coast Chorale and a member of the Oregon Humanities Board of Directors. She teaches opera and music appreciation, along with world music and the histories of some of America’s popular styles of music, at Clatsop and Tillamook Bay community colleges.*

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