

Christmas Magic

Article by
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A family project brings Christmas to life and gives to those in need



Christmas was always much anticipated and loved by my family. My parents made every moment of Christmas Day special. Dad and Mom, on very limited sleep, would wait in anticipation listening for the whispers and squeals of delight from their three little girls discovering the magic, which was meticulously laid underneath the tree by Santa. My sisters and I were never in bed later than five o'clock Christmas morning. My mother had been up just an hour earlier stuffing the bird, and putting it in the oven for Christmas dinner. It was promptly served at noon, as dictated by my paternal Grandfather. My dad, having assembled doll buggies and cradles for me, and gas stations and car tracks for my tomboy sister Lora, had most likely gone to bed right before my mother emerged.

Sleep never came early or easy on Christmas Eve. But as soon as there was a hint of the sunrise, we would urge our parents to get up from bed so we could get on with our day's activities. My mother would hop up to put on the much needed coffee, and my dad would linger in bed just long enough to hear the complaints and grumbles from his children. He knew the value of delicious anticipation. Presents could not be unwrapped before breakfast, and breakfast could not be eaten until the grandparents, my dad's parents, arrived.

Dad was always the breakfast chef on Christmas morning. He could whip up a batch of homemade pancakes like none other I've tasted since. On any other day of the year, they were anticipated with enthusiasm, and devoured as they came off the griddle, but not on Christmas morning. My sisters and I had already eaten the contents of our Christmas stockings. The apple, the orange, and the green and red ribbon shaped Christmas candies, combined with excitement, did not lend itself to an appetite.

We had to wait for Grandpa and Grandma to arrive, which took an eternity. In reality, it probably took less than a half hour. My dad singing Christmas carols in a key that was not yet discovered by the music community, while flipping

pancakes, brought much entertainment to us all. We would never admit it though, because grouching about how long we had to wait before tearing into our presents was all part of the game. My grandparents' arrival would bring the festivities to their heightened state, and the energy in our small three bedroom ranch style home was electric. By Christmas night, my poor mother looked like she had run a marathon, but my dad, ever the life of the party, was on the floor having a tea party with the new dolls, while simultaneously racing cars. It was glorious!

I have wanted to recreate that feeling of exalted joy and fun for my children, but I have come to realize the impossibility of this task. My parents were amazing people, and had the ability to make magic. I'm simply not that talented. As my family has matured the allure of the gift laden Christmas tree is something of the past. The magical Christmases of yesteryear are precious memories stored within my heart. Nonetheless, I keep trying to make Christmas special to all who reside within my home, my heart, and my community.

Last year, my kids and I decided to do something meaningful for the holidays. Instead of over spending on gifts for family and friends, we made a plan to stuff stockings for the homeless folks out on the street corners. Here in the Denver Metro area, there are many, many people in need. I asked my friends and family to donate gently used Christmas stockings, and personal use items, such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, lotion, lip balm and like items to go into those stockings. We added candy canes—what's a stocking without a candy cane—as the finishing touch. My intent was to make twenty-five stockings to hand out to the people on the streets.

Much to my amazement, our little project grew, and eighty-three stockings were stuffed to the brim. My house was bursting at the seams with Christmas music and Santa's Helpers stuffing those stockings. Adults and kids alike were joyous in their work, and most everyone couldn't wait to take their stockings to give. Watching this group of people come together to create a project of giving was more than I could have hoped for, but I had only seen the tip of that proverbial iceberg.

The very next day one of my friends called. She had just given out her first stocking, less than twenty-four hours after it was made.

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“I wish you could have been there to see this guy’s face!” she said. She recounted the story of opening her car window and handing one of the stockings to a man she had seen numerous times on the street. He looked at her with eyes opened wide, and a smile spreading across his face.

“Is this all for me?”

As she drove away, she looked in her rearview mirror and watched as he took the contents, one by one, out of the stocking. She then relayed how she had to stop her car to wipe away the tears. “It was amazing!”

The stories began to filter in fast and furiously. All were told with the depth of knowing the meaning of giving. As I listened to each person’s story, I realized the Christmas magic created by my parents was not in the giving of the gift itself; it was much greater than the gift. It was in the giving of their love.

My children, my friends, their friends, and family members will gather once again this year to stuff stockings for the homeless. A local school has volunteered its gym for the event, as my home is far too small to host all of Santa’s Helpers. We will all gather in the gym, and sing Christmas carols as we stuff stockings. We will eat good food, and know how fortunate we are to be warm, full, and helping others. One by one our stockings will be given out to those far less fortunate than we. I will wait by my phone ready to drink in all that is told to me by the helpers. My Christmas, this year, will be filled with magic!

—Cindy Charlton, an inspirational and motivational speaker, lives in Denver, Colo., with her two active teenage sons. She is a published columnist for inMotion magazine, has just finished writing her first children’s book, and is working on her memoirs.