

## **A Christmas Gift from my Dad**

I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that in most families, moms are the ones who buy the Christmas presents for family and friends. In my case, I do all the shopping for everyone while Joe, my husband, only buys presents for me. I'm not complaining; I'm just stating a fact. If it had bothered me, I have had 40 years to do something about it, and I have not.

Such was the case in my family when I was growing up. Mom bought all the presents while my dad sat expectantly on Christmas morning, surprised as all of us about what was inside each gift. My mom was a 'stay-at-home' mom, so she had the time to plan, shop, and wrap all the presents. Back then, it was just 'normal' – at least for us.

That was until one year (and I have no knowledge as to why) my dad decided to buy gifts for us kids. Maybe it was because Mom was sick (she had chronic asthma and winters were particularly hard on her, and they didn't have the wonder drugs they do now for asthma). Whatever the reason, Dad bought a gift for each of his three girls. I don't remember what my sisters, Pat and Marlene got, but I do remember very well the gift that my father bought for me.

I was about eight or nine years old. We had a silver aluminum Christmas tree in front of the window in the living room that had a light facing the tree and a rotating colour wheel that as it turned, the tree went from red to green to blue to yellow, and back again. These trees were all the rage back then! You may remember them. Presents were put under the tree before Christmas Day because by this time, we no longer believed in Santa Claus. My sisters and I were known to scour the gifts under the tree to see which ones were for us. We would feel them, shake them, and even peel the tape a bit to try to reveal the contents of the package. As we did every year, we would wait until Mom and Dad went bowling on Monday nights, to check out the gifts. You can imagine our surprise when we each found a gift with our names on it

with a tag saying in his handwriting, “Love Dad” (not love Mom and Dad, just Dad).

We were amazed that Dad had bought a gift for each of us by *himself!* Now our imaginations were peaked more than ever. I looked at the gift addressed to me. It was rectangular in shape, wrapped haphazardly in unmemorable Christmas paper. But when I picked it up and shook it, it *rattled!* And so, I shook it some more...and it continued to rattle. Try as I might, I could not figure out what could possibly be inside. Every day after school, while my mom was in the kitchen, I would sneak under the tree, find my present, and shake it. I did this every day until I could finally open it on Christmas morning.

Christmas morning arrived as it does each year. We all sat around the tree in our pyjamas. Mom had made coffee for dad and as he sat cradling his hot mug in his hands, he waited excitedly to see what was in all the gifts that Mom had bought and wrapped all by herself. I unwrapped all my presents from “Mom and Dad” but kept the one just from Dad to the last. I wanted to savour the excitement I was feeling. Now, we all know the saying, “It’s not the gift that counts, but it’s the thought.” When I opened my gift from Dad, I must admit, I was a bit disappointed. In this case, the expectation or idea of the gift was actually better than the gift itself. My gift from my dad was a plastic necklace with a plastic chain. It had some kind of cartoon character or perhaps a Barbie face in the middle of the pendant. It was in a cardboard and plastic container. Hence, if you shook it while still in the cardboard and plastic container, it rattled. I don’t know what I was expecting or hoping for, but it wasn’t that!

I’m thinking now about our upcoming Christmas. I’m thinking about all the presents (way too many!) I have bought for my kids and grandkids. I’m thinking about the gifts I bought for my kids when they were young. Maybe they weren’t all that they had wanted or expected. I think in some cases, they may have even been a bit disappointed because Santa couldn’t bring everything on their wish list. But I am also thinking about the gift my dad

bought me on his own so many years ago. I wore the necklace a few times to make Dad think I liked it, but I don't think it lasted very long because it was only made of plastic. But today, when I think about that gift, it is like it was made of gold, even more precious than gold...because it was chosen for me by my dad.

I have more memories of that gift than all the expensive, "it's just perfect", or "I couldn't have asked for anything nicer" gifts I have ever received. And so, the saying, "It's not the gift that counts, but the thought" really is what Christmas gift-giving is all about. I hope this Christmas morning when the kids open all their gifts, that they are not disappointed. But if they are (even just a bit), I also hope that they know how much *their* parents have thought about them with *their* hearts so full of love, just like my dad did in choosing that gift for me so many years ago.



Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy new year!