

The Secret Giver

BY CHARLOTTE GOODMAN MCEWAN

Based on a true story

“God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9: 7).

I love everything about Christmas: the lights, carols, time with family—everything we do to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Oh, and I especially *love* getting presents. I start making my Christmas wish list in September.

One year my list was about as long as my arm. And I kept thinking of things to add to it. I was excited to show it to my dad.

“Well, David, I see what you want to *get* for Christmas,” he said as he looked it over. “But what are you going to *give*?”

“I’m making gifts for you and Mom at school. On Friday Mom is taking me shopping for Shannon’s and Jon’s gifts. So I’ve got it all planned out.”

“Hmmm,” was all Dad said. For some reason he didn’t like my answer. I didn’t like the sound of “hmmm.”

The next family home evening, my parents discussed the idea of giving and getting and the true meaning of Christmas. I could see my wish list getting shorter by the minute. They asked us if we had any ideas to help us remember to be more giving. Shannon waved her hand excitedly. My older brother, Jon, and I groaned. With Shannon, ideas usually involved doing things for other people, like weeding our neighbors’ gardens.

“Let’s choose some people who are lonely or in need and anonymously leave presents on their doorsteps,” Shannon said with excitement.

“Not a bad idea,” Jon said. “It would be top secret.”

“This might actually be fun,” I thought.

We all agreed that it would be a great plan. We chose two families. One was the Swenson family in our ward. Since Brother Swenson had gone back to school, they never seemed to have enough money. They had lots of kids too, who would love getting Christmas surprises. The other family was Mr. and Mrs. Perez, an older





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couple who lived down the street. They always seemed a little lonely.

We all went shopping for the gifts. We agreed to buy them using some of the money we would have used for our own presents. That was fine with me. I was having way too much fun choosing toys for the younger Swenson boys. Somehow my stuff wasn't that important anymore.

We decided to give one gift a night to each family starting 12 days before Christmas. When the first night came, I dressed in black from head to toe, and Jon drove me over to the Swensons' house. I quietly put the first gift on the porch, rang the doorbell, and ran away as fast as I could. I jumped behind a fence just as one of the kids opened the door. I could hear their surprised voices as they discovered

the present. I felt like I would explode with excitement and joy. My life as a Secret Giver had begun.

Things only got better—and harder. We had to go at different times every night and sometimes even in the morning because the Swenson kids started looking out the window to try to catch us. And every time I crept up to the Perez's doorstep, I imagined Mrs. Perez waiting there, ready to fling the door open, give me a hug, and tell me how wonderful I was. I definitely had to avoid that. Keeping a secret was half the fun.

Well, that year was only the beginning. The Christmas after that, we chose a family



"As we seek Christ, as we find Him, as we follow Him, we shall have the Christmas spirit. . . . We shall learn to forget ourselves. We shall turn our thoughts to the greater benefit of others."

President Thomas S. Monson, "In Search of the Christmas Spirit," *Ensign*, Dec. 1987, 5.



whose daughter had been in the hospital 11 times that year and another family whose mom had cancer. Wow—I didn't realize that some people had it so tough.

Now that Christmas is here again, we've decided to help three families. The hardest part is choosing them. There seem to be so many people who could use a little Christmas cheer.

As for my own list? Each year it has gotten a little shorter. I'm so busy making my Secret Giver plans that I don't have much time to think about myself. There are gifts to choose and strategies to plan.

One thing is certain—it's great doing things for others. Nothing beats the feeling I get when I see the surprise and excitement on the faces of the people we help. Giving has become one of my favorite things about Christmas. ●

