



A CHRISTMAS EVE TRANSFORMATION

The Christmas spirit helped me overcome my grief.

On Christmas Eve, I waited at the bus station in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, to pick up my parents after their five-hour bus ride from Vernal, Utah, to spend Christmas with my sister's family and me. The bus arrived very late—two hours in fact.

While I waited, I thought about how difficult this holiday season had been for me. I had tried to focus on my preparations for Christmas, but this year my children were traveling with their own families and my husband had passed away, and I soon discovered that no amount of shopping and wrapping or beautiful Christmas music could lighten my heavy heart. However, I pushed these thoughts from my mind when I saw my parents get off the bus.

Soon my mother and I were chatting, waiting in line to pick up their baggage. She casually mentioned that a grandmother on the bus had traveled all the way from Chicago, Illinois, USA, to connect with another bus that would take her to her final destination in Pocatello, Idaho, USA. This traveler was sad and upset, however, because she had missed her connection. Even if she boarded the next bus to Pocatello, she would still miss Christmas with her daughter and new granddaughter.

I pictured in my mind a disappointed grandma alone in a hotel room in a strange city on Christmas Eve. I felt a terrible sadness for her and wanted to do something to help her.

I soon found her talking on a pay phone to her daughter. I walked up to her, gently tapped her on the arm, and asked if I could speak with her. She looked startled but put her hand over the receiver and said, "Yes?"

"Are you the lady who missed the connection to Pocatello?" I asked.

She responded, "Yes."

The next words out of my mouth surprised both my mother and the stranger. "Will you ask your daughter if she is familiar with Tremonton, Utah?"

With hesitation in her voice, she asked her daughter the question. "Yes, she knows where that is," came the reply.

"Ask her if she could drive there tonight. That is about halfway from Salt Lake City to Pocatello."

She again relayed my question to her daughter, and again the answer was affirmative.

"You two decide on a time to meet," I said, "and I will have you there—but give her this phone number in the event that something goes wrong and we need to communicate."

I couldn't hear any more of the conversation, but after she hung up, she looked at me in utter amazement. My mother, too, was in shock as she said to my stepfather, "Harold, make room in the back of Myrle's car for this lady's luggage. She is going home with us."

I introduced myself and my parents to the stranger and learned that her name was Vanessa Black. My stepfather loaded Vanessa's bags into my little car, Vanessa climbed into the only spot left, and then we all headed to my sister's house for dinner before leaving for our destination. My heart was joyful as I kept reassuring her that she was no inconvenience (just 80 or so miles [130 km] out of the way).

Our arrival at Tremonton was greeted by an empty town. The service stations and restaurants were closed, and everything was dark as we looked for the place where we were to meet Vanessa's daughter. Meanwhile, the daughter, who had understood that we would be arriving a half hour earlier, was anxiously trying to contact us by phone. We pulled up to a phone booth, and as my car lights shined into the booth, there stood Vanessa's daughter. When she saw the lights of my car, she came running, and Vanessa jumped out of the car to embrace her sobbing daughter.

After a short introduction, I said, "Well, we both have a drive ahead of us, so we will leave you now. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas."

Her daughter threw her arms around me and in a teary voice responded, "We will, thanks to you! Merry Christmas to you too."

When I look back on that Christmas, my heart warms at the memory of the most joyous, peaceful Christmas I ever had. My gift to Vanessa Black was a perfect way for me to remember the birth of the Savior, who said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). That Christmas, I received the best possible gift to brighten my Christmas—the gift of giving. ■