



# A Gift of Love

*She didn't like it when we sang. So why were we standing at her door on Christmas Eve ready to share a gift of music?*

BY CHASTMIER OKORO

**A**fter the collapse of my father's catering business, my family faced a serious financial situation. I remember my mother coming home with tears in her eyes, not wanting to tell us what was wrong even after I asked her what the problem was. Soon we had to move into a small one-room apartment because that was what we could afford.

Before then, the Christmas season had always been a time of intense cooking, new clothes, parties, visits to interesting places, and gifts to be shared and received. My mum had a knack for being, as we called her, "Mother Christmas." She loved to give, and each Christmas she would enthusiastically and lovingly share with those around her. As we got older, thinking of others more than we thought of ourselves became a trait that we also tried to develop.

But that year we did not know what to do. Mum became concerned because it would be our first Christmas outside of our own home. She worried because there was nothing she could think of to share with others. However, we encouraged her because we knew that we could, in our own small way, do something to spread the spirit of Christmas.

Still, we were barely getting by, and we were also struggling to keep the peace in our new surroundings. Our landlady was not a Christian, and she was upset with us because we would wake up early to have family prayer and sing hymns. Our singing would awaken her because our room adjoined her room. Often she complained, so

we tried to sing softly and not disturb her. When she saw that we weren't going to stop having our morning family prayers, her complaints gradually ceased.

Then a thought occurred to my dad. He felt that we should sing Christmas carols to our landlady as our Christmas gift to her. Everyone was thrilled with the idea—except for me. I strongly objected, reminding my family of the complaints she had made over our family prayers. I suggested that we sing for someone who would appreciate it and not for her.

But my dad insisted, explaining that it would be an avenue for us to show her that we were her friends despite belonging to different religions. I had no choice but to join my family in choosing and practicing carols to sing for her.

On Christmas Eve we stood at her door and knocked. She did not open the door, and I was about to get angry and remind my dad of our wasted effort. But as I looked around, I saw that all the members of my family were smiling—they were happy about what we were doing. I felt a desire within me to experience that same feeling.

Eventually the landlady opened her door, and for a moment she did not know what to do. My dad quietly told her that we would love to sing for her and that, if it was all right, we would love to come inside her apartment. She stepped aside, and we went in. We sang all the Christmas songs we could remember—both the ones we had rehearsed and ones we had not. Soon there was a wonderful feeling in the room. Although we knew that she might not understand the meaning of the words, she smiled as we sang. She also told us that she had been feeling lonely and seeing us together made her long for her own family. Before leaving, we wished her a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. She thanked us, and we went back to our room.

ILLUSTRATION BY DILLEEN MARSH





As I was trying to fall asleep that night, I pondered on what had happened. It occurred to me that a real Christmas gift is not necessarily store bought or even homemade; it is actually the attitude and the desire we have to do what we can to make our fellow human beings happy. I realized that the greatest gift we can give at Christmastime doesn't require a lot of money; instead, it is a gift of love.

That night I knew that my family had felt the spirit of Christmas by offering a small service to a lonely neighbor. ■