

THE GIFT BOX



BY SCOTT LUEBKE

When I was seven, I thought I had the true meaning of Christmas all figured out. Christmas was more than just receiving gifts. You had to be willing to give a gift if you expected to receive one in return.

Each year our gifts to friends and neighbors were Mom's holiday cookies and candies. Her walnut divinity was famous. My sisters and I would pitch in to help deliver plates of treats around the neighborhood. The neighbors would reciprocate by delivering their own favorite treats to our house—completing the exchange program.

That year the last of the neighbors came by with their gift on Christmas Eve. However, instead of a plate of cookies, they gave us a small, beautifully wrapped

present. They instructed us not to open it until we had opened all the other gifts under the tree the next day.

I used my best detective skills to try to determine what was inside. But the only clue I could find was a gift tag that merely added to my curiosity: "To the Luebke Family—the Greatest Gift of All." That was quite a promise for such a small box—especially when all we had given them was homemade cookies and candy.

Christmas morning finally came, and we opened all our presents.

Then, as we sat in the carnage of torn wrapping paper and opened boxes, Mom brought out the mysterious gift and read the tag. My sister and I fought

over who would open it. I don't recall who won, but I clearly remember my disappointment when I saw what was inside the box—nothing except a card. I had been skeptical that this gift would really be "the Greatest Gift of All," but I had certainly expected more than a handwritten card. Mom, on the other hand, was visibly touched by the card.

The next year when the Christmas decorations went up, the little present was back under the tree, like an unwanted fruitcake. I lifted the lid, hoping that I had missed something the year before. But it proved again to be an empty box with a simple card in it.

As the years went by, that little gift became a family tradition. Every year it was the first present under the tree and the last one opened on Christmas morning. In my teenage years my attitude began to soften toward the little gift.

The first Christmas after my mission, I headed home for the holidays after a semester at college. As I walked through the door, the memory of many Christmases at home came flooding back. As I looked in the living room, I saw it, that unusual little present, alone under the tree. It showed the wear of having many heavy packages piled on top of it over the years. I picked it up with a reverence I had never shown it before. The tag was still attached: "To the Luebke Family—the Greatest Gift of All." As I lifted the lid and read the card inside, I now had a testimony that it truly did represent the greatest gift our family could ever be given. It read, "From Jesus Christ—The Gift of Eternal Life."

I am grateful for the family who gave us this family tradition that has blessed our Christmases by reminding us of the greatest gift of all. **NE**

Every Christmas a small gift box appears under our tree. It's a fabulous present. How could one little box hold so much?