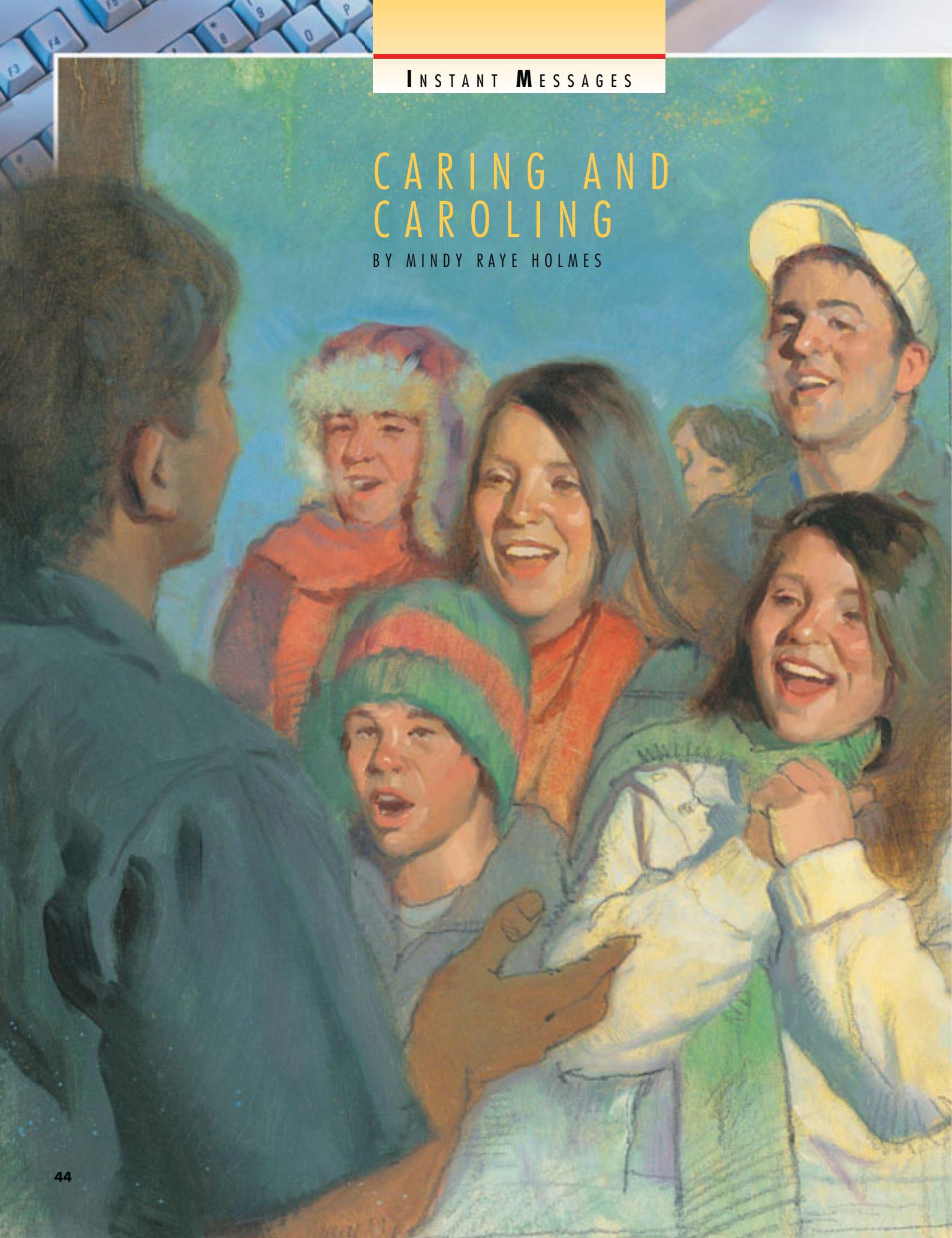


INSTANT MESSAGES

CARING AND CAROLING

BY MINDY RAYE HOLMES



My missionary companion and I were eating a quick dinner at a member's house one Sunday evening in December when we heard a knock on the door. There were the youth from the branch singing. We were serving in the Joliet Illinois Second (Spanish) Branch. It was nice to see the youth serving and to hear them singing familiar Christmas carols.

Later that evening we were visiting with one of our investigator families when we heard a knock on the door. To our surprise, there stood the same group of youth singing Christmas carols for our investigators.

I was impressed that they would think not only to visit people they knew from the branch, but also to visit the people the missionaries were teaching. I thought it was a wonderful way for the youth to get involved in missionary work.

Our investigators were impressed for a very different reason, however. After the youth left, they told us how amazed they were that a group of teenagers would give up their Sunday evening to bring others some Christmas cheer. They commented on how many youth today seem selfish and would not do such a thing but that the youth in our Church were different. They wanted their children to be like these young men and women.

Soon after Christmas this wonderful family decided to be baptized, and I know one of the influences on their decision to join the Church was the members' testimonies and examples. They could also see the light in the members' faces. I know they saw it that night when those youth gave of their time to spread the spirit of Christmas. **NE**

THE UNKNOWN GIFT

BY MISTY VANLUE



A few years ago, I had a very good friend at school. She was two grades above me, so we didn't have any classes together. We always talked with each other during breaks between classes because it was the only time we saw each other. She had some rough times at home and would often come to me upset. I tried to be helpful and give her advice, but I never thought I did any good because she was always sad again the next day.

Then, the day before Christmas break, it was my turn to be sad. I had been so busy with school that I had forgotten the fast approaching holiday break. My friend asked what was wrong, and I told her I hadn't done anything for anyone. And now it was too late to even get Christmas presents or make cards. She just laughed. At first I thought she was making fun of me. Then she told me that throughout the year, I had been helping her. She said that before she met me, it was hard to handle her parents' divorce. But her life had been brighter since knowing me. She had even written me a poem about the ways I had helped her and given

her strength.

She handed me her final copy.

Just then, the bell rang and we had to go back to our classes. When I reached the classroom, I quietly read the poem. It was so kind and heartfelt that it almost made me cry.

After Christmas break, I looked all over for my friend but couldn't find her. I found out she had moved away during the break. I was so sad that day because I couldn't thank her for showing me how I had made a difference in someone else's life.

It's been nine years since I received that poem. I can still remember its final lines:

*And when others have fallen
to the storm,
She is the one that is still
standing tall,
Not ready to give up or fall.*

Many Christmas gifts are only physical things, and sometimes lack a lot of meaning. Of all the gifts I have received over the years, that tiny piece of paper sets the standard. It was one of the best of all. It was a gift from the heart. **NE**