



*My birthday gift wasn't what I expected, but the lesson it taught me was better than any material gift I could have received.*

# RECOGNIZING

By Duane Hoem

**I**n the little town in rural Wisconsin, USA, where I grew up in the days after World War II, money was tight. Bicycles were expensive, but I just knew I would get one for my 12th birthday!

My father had returned from the U.S. Navy at the end of the war and, finding it impossible to get a job, had volunteered to go to Guam as a construction worker on an air base there. My mother worked as a cook in a restaurant,

earning just enough to keep food on the table. Even though I knew that we didn't have much money, I don't remember worrying how my mom would be able to afford my bike.

My birthday wasn't until August, but to make sure my mother knew exactly what bike I wanted, in May I hung a colored picture of a fancy red-and-white Schwinn bicycle in our kitchen. It was the coolest of bikes in those days, with its large whitewall

tires and battery-powered light and horn.

Every few days when my mother was near, I would mention something about the bike. She never said anything but sort of smiled as if she knew something I didn't. That was all the encouragement I needed.

When my birthday finally arrived, I got up early and dashed into the kitchen. My mother wished me a happy 12th birthday and told me there was something for me out in the shed. I raced out, threw open the door, and stood there—stunned.

Oh, there was a bike there, all right. But it wasn't a Schwinn. It wasn't red and white. This one was black. It had no horn and no light. There were no white sidewalls. These were skinny tires. My mother had bought me a used bike for my 12th birthday! I shut the shed door without even taking the bike out, went back into the house, and tore up the picture of the Schwinn. I had enough respect to thank my mother, but I promised myself that the black bike would remain in the shed.

Day after day I wondered how I could get rid of the bike without hurting my mother's feelings. One day I suddenly knew exactly what I was going to do! I would go to Herb

my timidity aside and, with all the confidence I could muster, approached him while he was working in the back room of his store. Before I could even start the speech I had rehearsed in my mind, however, Mr. Stone put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Duane, you are one of the luckiest kids I know." This confused me completely. I had just been given a used bicycle for my birthday. How lucky could I be?

Smiling, Mr. Stone explained, "Early last spring your mom put a bike on layaway for you. Every week she came in and put a dollar or two down, whatever she could afford. I know your mom went without things she needed. Oh, she wanted to buy you a new bike. She said something about a picture you had of a favorite bike, but she just couldn't afford one like that."

Then Mr. Stone asked, "Duane, do you see now why I think you're so lucky? Your mother would do anything in the world for you."

I thanked him and left the store before he could see the tears welling up in my eyes. As I pondered what Mr. Stone had told me, suddenly everything became very clear. It wasn't about the gift—it was about the sacrifice.

# My Mother's Sacrifice

Stone's hardware store, where I knew my mother had purchased the bike, and get Mr. Stone to hire me after school and on Saturdays. My wages would go toward a new bike, probably not a Schwinn but certainly something more presentable than that ugly black thing.

I normally would never have had the nerve to approach a prominent businessman like Mr. Stone. But I was desperate, so I set

From that day on, I rode that bicycle everywhere, even through high school.

That afternoon in the back of the hardware store I started learning one of the most profound lessons on sacrifice that I have experienced in my lifetime, and it has shaped my thinking and behavior ever since. I know today, just as I learned that year, that I was indeed one of the luckiest kids in the world. ■

*The author lives in Nevada, USA.*



## THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

"The degree of our love for the Lord and for our fellowman can be measured by what we are willing to sacrifice for them. Sacrifice is a demonstration of pure love."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Law of Sacrifice," *Ensign*, Oct. 1998, 11.