

OUR BEST TRADITION YET

“Dad in charge of Christmas?” The idea shocked us kids, but Mom and Dad had already made the decision. It all started with their unintended Christmas tradition of fretting about the budget. Mom wanted to have a “good” Christmas, creating a special atmosphere in our home to reflect the season. She tried to be frugal, buying discount items in the off-season. But everything added up. Dad insisted that the world shouldn’t dictate to us how much we spend on Christmas. Besides, there were expenses for needed items that had to be considered first.

Finally, Mom suggested, “Maybe you’d like to be in charge of Christmas this year. You buy the presents, and let’s see what kind of Christmas you can come up with for our family.” With a little apprehension, Dad agreed. After pondering a new plan and discussing it with Mom, he announced at family home evening his idea for a “spend-less

Christmas.” Each person in the family would make a \$25 gift for another family member. On Christmas morning, we would take turns sharing our gift and expressing our warmest feelings for the recipient. We would do this one at a time until everyone had presented his or her gift. The idea was to try to make gifts that showed we cared—gifts that expressed love.

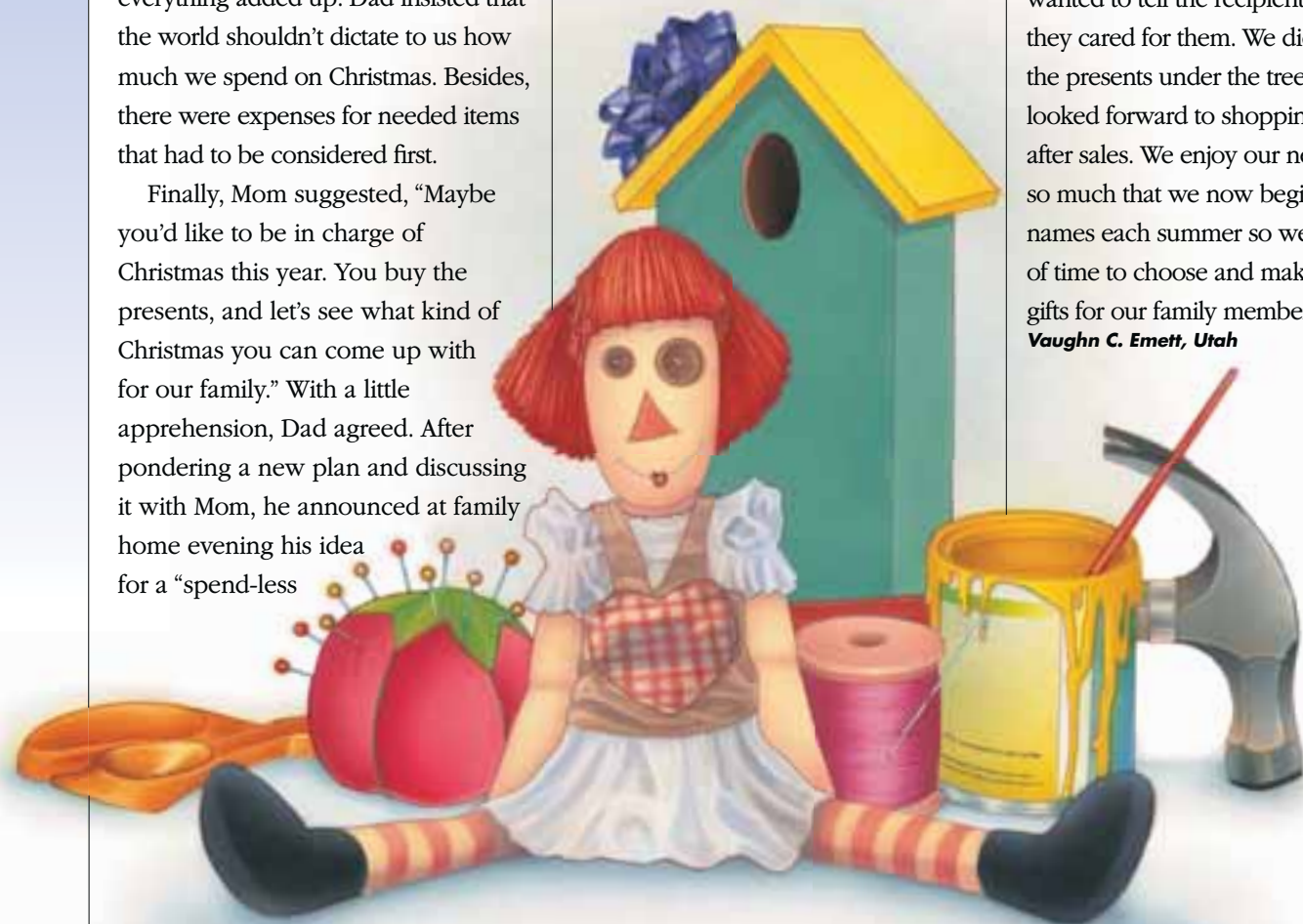
Some of us children were worried about the plan, thinking of all the fun things our friends would have that we wouldn’t. That’s when Dad explained part two of the plan. The rest of the

Christmas budget would be divided among us and spent the day after Christmas when many items go on sale. This would help our family’s resources go farther. We could get clothes and other items we needed at a reduced cost.

We all voted to try this new way for one year. If it was a disappointment, we could return to the old way. Then we drew names and started thinking of a personal, handmade gift for that individual.

How did our experiment go? It turned out so well that *everyone* wanted to tell the recipients how much they cared for them. We didn’t miss the presents under the tree and instead looked forward to shopping the day-after sales. We enjoy our new tradition so much that we now begin drawing names each summer so we have plenty of time to choose and make our secret gifts for our family members.

Vaughn C. Emmett, Utah



SERVING WITH STYLE

When my children became adults and left home, I prayed to find volunteer work. A nearby care center for the elderly came to mind, but I fought the impression because I didn't like going there. The thought continued, so I met with the center's recreation leader. We determined that I would return each week for two hours. Doing what? I didn't know yet. But the ideas soon came.

The first week I stood in the middle of a circle of wheelchairs and helped the residents throw a ball back and forth to each other. Though I felt a bit uncomfortable at first, I was determined to do my best. Soon I was actually having fun. The men and women there seemed appreciative of my company. After visiting a few weeks, I began giving the women manicures during my two-hour visits. They were so glad to see me each week and lined up to take turns. I felt so wanted and needed. The experience was wonderful, and I volunteered there for five years.

During this time I became very close to several of the residents. Though it was hard to watch them eventually pass away, I was happy for the long lives they had lived. When my mother died unexpectedly, I felt gratitude, despite my grief, because she had been able to care for herself



"Picture a Stable . . ."

It's Christmastime and you'd like to help your family focus on the Savior's life. But perhaps you don't have time to prepare a special lesson. Actually, it has already been done for you in the Gospel Art Picture Kit (item no. 34730000; U.S. \$30). All you have to do is select the pictures that depict the Savior's birth and life. Invite family members to choose a picture and share what significance the event played

in the Savior's earthly mission. They might also share why a particular picture and story has personal meaning to them. Of course, this simple idea can be expanded to the classroom as well. Pictures from the ward library can be used to structure an activity in which everyone can participate. The teacher doesn't do all the talking; instead he or she leads a discussion and provides transitions as the students share their thoughts about the topics and stories

portrayed. The scriptural references on the backs of the pictures can be used to encourage more in-depth discussions. As members of the Church, we are fortunate to have a rich supply of beautiful artwork to enhance our gospel learning and to help us invite the Spirit into our homes and classrooms.

Barbara Wren Tuttle, California



at home until it was her time to go. I'm blessed with this enhanced understanding and reassurance as I reflect upon my volunteer work caring for my elderly friends.

Peggy Hyer, Utah

FITNESS FOR FAMILIES

DVDs and video and computer games—they're probably on your Christmas wish list. Your children would love to watch and play them, but have you thought to include gifts that encourage exercise fun?

A few years ago my husband and I took stock of our children's Christmas gifts and realized there was nothing that would promote physical activity. So we returned many of the gifts

we had purchased, and we bought instead a simple badminton set and other items for outdoor fun. If your finances allow, you could include bikes, basketball and baseball equipment, or other outdoor games that encourage an active lifestyle. Gifts need not be expensive. Consider giving simple gifts such as a jump rope, sidewalk chalk to make a hopscotch game, a ball, a sled, or a squirt gun for an outside game of chase.

Even with new Christmas toys to boost their enthusiasm, your children will be more likely to play if you join the fun. Challenge them to shoot hoops or play with you, and see how fast they move! Our children crave our attention, and we love spending time with them—and getting a bonus workout too.

Sheri Garver, North Carolina