

A POTATO FOR THE TEACHER

By Bonny Dahlsrud

I learned that I don't have to give grand gestures of service every time.

A small gesture of love is just as nice.

As an elementary schoolteacher of more than 25 years, I have received a lot of interesting things from my young students. Silly notes, drawn pictures, and imaginative crafts are common gifts. Last year, however, was the first time I had ever received a potato.

"A potato for the teacher," young Emma said proudly when she came to my desk, "because I didn't have an apple." It was a medium-sized potato, scrubbed clean, and beautiful as far as potatoes go. I thanked her and placed it on my desk. I saw Emma's large blue eyes shine with pride whenever she looked at it throughout the day.

After school, when I was working at my desk, I couldn't help but regard the potato with a tender smile. Children see things so simply, and with that common potato, Emma taught me something important. I left it on my desk for over a week

because it served as a reminder to me.

As a visiting teacher and a sister in my ward, I wanted to serve others, but I was always waiting for an "apple" before I took time to help. If I was busy and couldn't make an extra casserole or if I wanted to give a special flower but didn't get to the floral shop, I ignored the still, small voice of the Spirit whispering of someone who needed my service.

"I'll do something this weekend, when I have time," I would convince myself. "Nobody needs me today."

But what if someone really did need me? What if I hadn't ignored the promptings to visit an elderly

neighbor or the young widow who had just lost her husband? Could I have helped or served, even with what I could offer then—a "potato"?

I learned a great lesson from Emma that I am trying hard to put into practice. If I don't have an apple, I give a potato instead, and I do it now. I don't wait to make a casserole or my special lemon cream pie; I buy a box of cookies instead. I don't often get to the florist, but I can drop in for a chat without the flower. A homemade card would be great, but so would a quick phone call. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture of service every time. A small gesture of love is just as nice.

I have the potato at home now, but I don't think I'll ever eat it. It serves as a constant reminder to serve when I'm prompted. I give what I can now instead of waiting until later. A potato for the teacher really was the nicest gift. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

