



A Christmas gift for Daddy B

We wanted to give him something he couldn't give away

My father, whom we all called Daddy B, spent the first 61 years of his life accumulating things.

He moved to Vero Beach, Florida, in early 1919 and entered the citrus fruit business. A frugal man, he never went into debt. To my knowledge, he never owed a mortgage all his life.

As a result, by the time he was 61 he had accumulated a lot of things—real estate, citrus groves, businesses, houses, and all the things you put in houses. Although he would not have been classified as wealthy, he never wanted.

At age 61 he had a personal encounter with Christ. For the next 26 years, until he died in 1979 at the age of 87, he spent his life getting rid of the things he had accumulated.

He became the most "giving" man I have ever known.

My mother, who had her encounter with Christ about the same time, was the same way.

In fact, before my father died he appointed my older brother to oversee my mother's finances after he was gone. "If someone doesn't watch her," he chuckled, "she'll give away everything she has."

It was true.

My father, in particular, seemed bent on divesting himself of everything he didn't actually need prior to his homegoing. The only things he held on to were the things he wanted my mother to have after he left—things he felt necessary to her happiness.

Aside from that, he gave away everything else, including the old homestead of more than 40 acres which went to the Florida Baptist Convention as their retirement center. He gave a few personal things to his children, and ear-marked everything that did not go to my mother in his will for mission causes.

By the Christmas before he died he and mother had pretty well stripped themselves and their little house of all non-essentials. Daddy wanted to go to heaven the same way he came into this world—with empty hands. His treasure was, in fact, where his heart was.

The week before Christmas Jackie and I called our children together. We had a problem. What could we give Mother B and Daddy B for Christmas?

Two years before I had given them a full

set of all my books—hardbound collectors' copies. They had read them, and then given them away.

"No need for books to sit here on my shelf when they could be out helping someone else," my daddy reasoned.

The year before I had given them an oil painting I had brought with me from the Philippines. It was a beautiful harvester scene in a mahogany frame.

It never even made it to my parents' wall. They looked at it, said it was pretty, and gave it away to someone who didn't have an oil painting.

Now our family was faced with a problem. What could we give my parents that they wouldn't give away?

Jackie suggested I drive down to Vero Beach—40 miles south of our home along the east coast of Florida—on a reconnoitering mission. Maybe I could discover

underwear and a few pair of socks—including some big white fuzzies to keep his feet warm. On his little night stand were his hairbrush, his glasses, a pocket watch and a small radio. He owned no shoes, needing only an old pair of slippers for his wheelchair.

His long, narrow, single-bladed mother-of-pearl pocket knife, the one he used to slice grapefruit in the groves to test for sweetness, had been given to my brother.

Even his house had been sold to one of the children. As his outlook became more heavenly, his need for things diminished.

"What do you need?" I asked.

"I have everything I need," he smiled.

"And," he added with a wink, "Everything I want."

He knew why I was there.

On the way out I looked around the house. My dad was right. Anything I gave

Isn't that what happened that first Christmas—on that holiest of nights? God gave us something holy—something we can't give away.

Jesus can be shared but once received, He never leaves us or forsakes us. He is with us forever.

What a grand gift?

something they needed, something they wanted, which we could give them.

Something they wouldn't give away.

My father was in bed the morning I arrived. His muscles had deteriorated badly, and although his mind was clear and sharp, he could no longer walk—or even sit up by himself. His arms worked fine, but the muscles in his back and the lower part of his body were weak and rubbery. Twice a day a friend came by to lift him into his wheelchair so he could sit at his desk and work on his ledgers.

I sat down on the side of the bed and we talked for a while. Then I asked him, point blank, what he owned.

He grinned, waved his arm around the room, and said: "You can see it all from where you are sitting."

He owned two pair of soft khaki trousers, three shirts, one black bow tie, some

them would be superfluous—and sooner or later, would be given away.

I returned home and reported to the family.

"Then let's give them something money can't buy," my daughter Robin said.

"Yeah," one of the younger children chimed in, "Let's give them us. They can't give us away."

It was a grand idea. We spent the afternoon planning it.

Christmas Eve day we all got in the car to drive down the coast to Vero Beach. Jackie and I and the five children—three of whom were students at Oral Roberts University, two still in high school.

We arrived mid-afternoon wearing our best "church clothes." (I had rejected the idea of our teen-age son, Tim, that we tie big Christmas bows around our necks so the grandparents would know we were

giving ourselves as Christmas presents.)

My mother met us at the door and after the usual hugs and kisses, we all trooped back to Daddy B's bedroom. He was lying on his back, his head slightly elevated with a pillow, dressed as usual in his khaki pants, long-sleeved khaki shirt and white fuzzy socks.

When he saw us come in with our church clothes he grinned and reached over on the night stand for his little black, clip-on bow tie.

"A gentleman should be properly dressed at all times," he said as he clipped the tie in place. At 87 years of age he remained, as always, proper.

We all gathered around his bed. My mother, almost 80 years old and dressed in a blue cotton dress with white pinafore, stood at the foot looking on. I announced we had brought our Christmas present—one they could not give away.

"We've come to give you ourselves," daughter Bonnie said.

Sandy had her autoharp. She strummed a chord and we began to sing. We sang all the old Christmas carols. Mother B joined in with her faltering alto, Daddy added his bass.

Then we told them we wanted to sing some of the scripture choruses we sang at our church. They quickly learned them with us, and joined in.

Then Mother B started a song. The kids grew silent as she sang from her Kentucky childhood.

There's a church in the valley by the wildwood,

No lovelier place in the dale.

No spot is so dear to my childhood,

As the little brown church in the vale.

Daddy B, Jackie and I joined her on the chorus—our children having grown up in a generation that missed that old gospel song.

O come, come, come, come, come to the church in the wildwood . . .

There were tears in my father's eyes when we left. "I didn't tell you all the truth the other day," he said. "I said I had all I wanted, but I didn't. I wanted this. Like Mary, I shall keep it, ponder it in my heart, and never give it away."

On the way back up the coast, heading for the Christmas Eve service at our own church, our oldest son Bruce concluded the matter.

"I feel real clean," he said. "Like something holy has passed through me to Mother B and Daddy B."

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What a grand gift! ↵