

## CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

### Different Perspectives at Different Times ...

by Vic Berecz

My wife and I have reached the stage of life where we don't give each other Christmas gifts ... other than to say "Hey, I'm still here and I love you." But, due to terrible planning on the part of my late in-laws, I have to buy a birthday gift for her at Christmas. [I can't "forget" birthdays. People born during the Christmas season are very emphatic about receiving birthday gifts ... besides she bought me two nice sets of underwear for my last birthday.]

This morning I finally figured out how to do Christmas-season gift shopping very easily. Go to the mall at 9AM on the Monday before Christmas ... park right in front of the entrance, move easily through empty corridors and stores, and checkout with no lines. That's the extent of my Christmas shopping this year, except for the stuff I helped order from catalogs or the Internet for the kids and grandkids. I try to take it easy. Life's good!

Here's a family story about Christmas gifts told by my aunt. My grandmother (her mother), then a widowed and under-educated immigrant, worked for many years as a hotel maid -- in the lowest category of that job, a bathroom cleaner. In the 1930s, she was employed by the *Sherry Netherland* a prominent Manhattan residential hotel favored by artistic types. Each Christmas, for several years, she and the rest of the staff were invited into the apartment of Mary Pickford who greeted and thanked each of them for their service personally, served tea, and on departure presented each employee with an envelope containing a substantial cash gift. Likewise, all the employees were invited to the apartment of Al Jolson, who also greeted and thanked each personally. As his gift to the staff, he sat at the piano and played and sang several tunes for them. She always asked: Guess which of these big stars was held in higher regard by the staff? This week I read an article titled *Tips for Tipping* and right up-front the author said, "The golden rule seems to be that cash is king." I guess times don't change.

Children love gifts, and Christmas for them is a great giving and receiving experience. Though they may receive many clothes, at least one toy is needed to make it a real Christmas, and usually there are a lot more than that. As we age gifts take on different meanings. All too often, cash does become king.

For many today the Christmas "bonus" represents a significant part of their annual income. Wall Street people, as we all know, expect those bonuses to be in seven digits. Where I worked we got a turkey. Later a coupon to buy a turkey. Later, a check for \$30 to buy a turkey, or whatever else we chose. After someone complained that the \$30 was reported to the IRS as taxable income, we got nothing. You know what? Losing that "bonus" didn't bother us much. So it goes ... different perspectives, different expectations.

Maybe I've gotten old enough to understand what Christmas is really all about ... the symbolic coming into our world and our lives of a God of Love. Hold that thought a moment as you recollect the best gifts you've received over a lifetime ... as a child, a teen, an adult, and even as a codger if you've lived as long as I have. Isn't it the truth? When it comes to gifts ...

... **"the greatest of these is Love".**

© Copyright 2009 by Victor G. Berecz, Jr. All Rights Reserved.