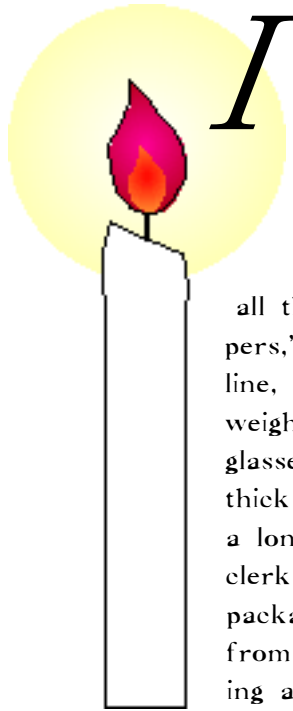


# The Greatest Gift of All

★...a holiday fable © SCOTT "Q" MARCUS, THINspirationaL Speaker™



I am one of the underclass of the holiday season, those people who wait to the last minute to shop for Christmas; so there I am on Christmas Eve in a long line at Kay Bee Toys, with all the other "last minute shoppers," The man at the front of line, an elderly, bearded, overweight gentleman with wire rim glasses resting on a pug nose, and thick black heavy boots, is having a long conversation with the clerk. People overloaded with packages are restlessly shifting from one leg to the other, glancing at their watches, and staring

at the ceiling while the long-winded discussion went back and forth.

The sales person repeated, "You can't pay for that many toys using pennies."

"That's all I've got," the old man repeats, realizing he's losing the battle. "I do deliveries once a year. The children thank me by leaving things for me. I can't pay you in milk, cookies, or crayon drawings but they also leave me fistfuls of pennies. That's all the money I own."

The clerk shrugged. "I'm sorry Sir, you'll have to go elsewhere." With that, he turns to the next person in line - me - motioning for me to put my purchases on the counter.

The round old-timer stares at the clerk, a sad expression spoiling his pudgy face. Then, he looks at me. I look back at him, his eyes losing their sparkle, even while I watch. I pull out my credit card, handed it to the clerk and tell him to charge both of our purchases to my credit card. It is a blessing to give and this is definitely the time of year for blessings.

The heavy man shakes my hand profusely, "I'm so grateful. There are so many children depending on me and I didn't know what to do.

Tonight's my busy night but I'm going to make sure you get something great." He crosses his arms, rubs his chin, deep in thought. Suddenly, a light crosses his face, snaps his fingers, and lets out a deep robust belly laugh, his middle shaking like jelly. "Oh, ho ho, I know the greatest gift! It'll be waiting for you tomorrow."

And before I could say another thing, he again laughed his full, rich, belly-quaking laugh, took his packages and hurried from the mall. I never caught his name - but I think I knew.

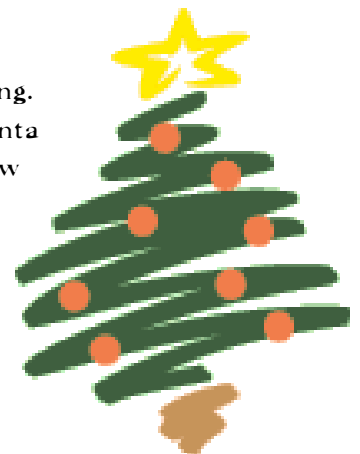
On Christmas morning, I raced downstairs, tumbling over my big fluffy, overworn slippers. I didn't know what to expect but I was sure it would be big. There were so many things I needed; mostly expensive. Usually



electric - with lots of lights and high tech switches. This was going to be a great Christmas! I surveyed the living room. Tree. Couch. Coffee table. No super fantabulous gift to be seen.


"Outside! That's it!" A new, super fancy, really expensive, car! Wow! This is going to be better than I thought! I threw open the door, greeted not by the sight of a deluxe automobile in my driveway but by my same old Pontiac.

The obvious was dawning. The old man wasn't Santa - how could he be? How silly of me to even believe. He was just an eccentric old man who cashed in his penny jar. With my head and spirit low, I headed to the kitchen



to drown my sadness in some coffee, feeling stupid and betrayed.

Next to the coffee maker was a wrapped box. I picked it up. It felt empty. "This - this is my 'greatest gift of all?'" What a let down. No whistles. No bells. No 300 horsepower engine. All that lived inside was a parchment and a ribbon. My heart lifted again, "Maybe it's a gift certificate." I started to imagine the type of certificate Santa could give. Sure would beat the heck out of pepperoni sticks at Hickory Farm. With nervous hands, I read the paper:



*Take now this greatest gift. As of today, you will accept yourself for who you are and honor all you do. You will not forget that you are of the same stuff as the stars and the cosmos and that the Spirit of the Universe flows through you at all times. You are meant to be here. Your life is full even when it seems not. You are all the good you believe yourself to be. Enjoy today and appreciate all life.*

*P.S. Thank you for your help.*

I couldn't read who signed it.

I reread it a few times and then decided it was a joke. A clever, well meaning man with and a nice sentiment. But all his ornaments weren't hanging from the right tree.

I tossed the certificate to the side and dejectedly picked up my mug with warm coffee, cradling it between my hands and noticing the warmth against my skin on this cold Christmas morning. "What a simple pleasure," I thought as I sipped the dark, hot liquid. I always described my coffee as hot, brown, bitter water but this really tasted great! Felt wonderful going down too. A nice warmth in my belly. Which - I noticed - is looking quite thin these days. My weight *is* under control. I smiled again, mentally congratulating myself for the work I do to maintain my body, my health, and my mind. I'm fortunate that it's so good. And, you know, even in sweatpants, I look pretty sexy. No wonder I get along with

women in my Weight Watchers meetings: I'm a role model of health, honesty, friendliness and sensitivity - and not bad looking to boot. Quite the catch.

I started to strut around the living room "feeling my oats," and thinking of these "fortunate" women friends of mine - which led to me to think of all my other friends, and then my family, and then everyone else I like and who enjoy my company and look up to me and share with me and help me. Boy, I've got so many! It brought a tear of joy to my eyes and a warm glow to my chest. I'm lucky I can feel things so deeply. So many are dead to their emotions, missing out on the richness of life. Not me! Another blessing.

My strutting took me to other rooms, just taking a few moments to appreciate my home. I took a minute to recognize all the delightful things I have. Fun car. Big TV. Nice computer. Warm house. Belongings many others can't afford. "I'm doing OK financially too," I mused.

I earn everything based on my skills and abilities. I live in an area I love. And I even help to make it better. I have my health. My family. My friends. My outlook. My faith. I lack nothing; "I have it all"

I plopped into a chair, realizing the power of that thought. "I have it all." This morning when I got up all I could think of were the possessions I didn't have. And now, with merely a change in my thoughts, I have everything. And I appreciate it so much. For quite some time, I sat in silence with a smile emanating from deep within my soul.

And every few moments, I sent a prayer and thank you to a unusual, nameless, heavy man I met in a long line at a mall.

He hadn't left me a thing but had indeed given me the greatest gift of all.

