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## **The Christmas Envelope**

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*Do you have certain people on your Christmas list that make it unusually difficult to find the perfect gift? When I was growing up in Chicago my parents always had difficulty buy presents for each other. I was never an issue. My Dad was the manager of the Toy Department at Marshall Fields on State Street. When I was very young, I received toys that other children only dream about. Have you ever gone to Fields at Christmas time to see the decorations, eat under the tree and view the giant electric train set? Picture "last years" train set up in my basement.*

*My Mom's choices for my Dad were shirts, ties or the new gizmo for the work shop. He always seemed happy with her choices, but it was never the elation I had as I opened my presents. My Dad often presented my Mom the standard Mom Stuff. My Mom always smiled and looked pleased. Well not completely true, the year of the new sewing machine was a little tense around the Christmas tree. Having learned from that experience, I never made the mistake of the "sewing machine" gift. I only wish I would have grasped that this rule also applied to vacuum cleaners.*

*The year I turned nine, everything changed. My stack of presents was less than usual, but I really didn't care. I had my Ernie Banks jersey with number 14 on the back. My Mom and Dad simply exchanged envelopes. The content created the most joy I had ever seen on my parent's face. They had decided to forgo the standard presents and find a better use for the money. They each had selected a charity to donate in the name of the other. I don't remember exactly what my Dad received but I do remember my Mom's gift. My Dad had taken some of my Christmas "stuff" and added to it for gifts to children who might not have received anything for Christmas. He had spent the previous evening delivering the toys, mittens and other winter gear. He presented my Mom a list of the Children and the Gifts they received.*

*Each year the exchange of Christmas Envelopes continued. The creativity and generosity continued to increase over the years. I remember years when a particular family was the recipient of one of the Gifts. Another time our church's youth group was involved in spreading the joy by helping with the delivery. It was never a question of who could spend the most, the goal was to do the most possible to spread the Christmas message while staying within the budget. As I got older, I was always enlisted to help. I was sworn to secrecy until Christmas morning, but the experience of helping my parents with their Christmas exchange profoundly influenced my own thinking.*

*Currently, I have used my parent's Christmas spirit to help the Santa Claus Girls help the children of Grand Rapids. I have kept our Christmas tradition alive by contributing in your name to the Santa Claus Girl's rather than sending you a typical Christmas trinket. If you would like to help, you can still make contributions.*

*The best part of any worthwhile tradition is the opportunity to pass it to the next generation. Two homes in the Dallas, TX area will have white envelopes in a place honor under the Christmas tree containing a Christmas Gift for a sibling.*

Merry Christmas

Harry Gribnitz

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