

# Special Oversize Christmas Issue!

## The Stocking

by Mev Notgrass

Ellen and Maureen Fletcher walked down aisle ten of Dollar Tree for the third time. Ellen had already selected her purchase, but Maureen was still trying to make up her mind. Nothing surprising in that. Ellen had always been quick to decide on things, while Maureen took her time, adding up the tax in her head, weighing each dollar spent, and often regretting the purchase after it was made.

"You know, Maureen," Ellen said to her sister lightheartedly, "it really doesn't matter. We're talking about a dollar here. Just pick something!"

"I know," Maureen replied. She picked up a giant felt stocking from the bottom shelf and held it up. It unfolded down to her knees. "How about this?" she asked.

"Great," Ellen said. "It'll be the hit of the party." Maureen turned and headed for the cash register. She stopped at the end of the aisle.

"I don't know," she began.

"Just get it!" Ellen said with a laugh. She couldn't comprehend her sister's inability to make up her mind. Maureen sighed and got in line.

When Maureen put the giant stocking on the counter, the cashier smiled. "You must be hoping for a lot of presents!" he said. Maureen felt her ears turn a little red.

"Actually we're going to a Christmas party where you're supposed to bring a gag gift," she said. "It's one of those things where you can either open a gift that hasn't been opened yet, or take a gift from a person who has already opened one."

"Oh, everybody's going to want this," he said sarcastically. "One dollar and ten cents." Maureen gave him the money. Ellen's ceramic dog piggy bank cost the same thing.

After they got home, Ellen tied a piece of Christmas ribbon around the dog's neck to make it look a little festive. Maureen glued sequins on the white felt band around the top of her giant stocking.

"Does that look tacky enough, Ellen?" Maureen asked.

"I'll say!" Ellen laughed.

Maureen wrapped the stocking in candy cane paper left over from last Christmas. "I'm glad you don't have to put who the gift is from on the package," she said. "I don't really want people to know this is from me." Ellen agreed.

"Is Jack coming to the party?" Ellen asked. Jack was an older man at their church whose wife had been in the nursing home for three years. He had practically adopted Ellen and Maureen and their older brother Philip and was like a grandfather to them.

"He said he was," Maureen answered.

"It's been a while since we went to the nursing home with him," Ellen said as she curled the ribbon on her package. "We could go there with him before the party tomorrow night."

"Sounds good," Maureen said. "Let's do it."

As they drove to the nursing home the following evening, their gifts for the party safely stowed on the back seat, Ellen burst out with a sappy Christmas

song she had heard while they were shopping the day before. Maureen joined in.

"I love to be weird with you," Maureen told her sister at the end of the song.

"I love it, too," Ellen said. Having a sister for a best friend was nice.

After a pause, Maureen asked, "So that thing about paying five dollars to go to this party was a joke, right?"

"I don't know," Ellen replied. "Surely. You don't charge people to come to your house for a church Christmas party."

"I wouldn't think so," Maureen said. "But I have five dollars in my pocket just in case."

Ellen and Maureen turned into the nursing home parking lot and parked by Jack's car. When they closed their doors, they saw Jack look up from his seat in the dining room. His face lit up and he waved to them through the window.

"He's so sweet," Ellen said.

The door alarm made two beeps as they went inside. A man wearing a blue and white striped nightshirt was sitting in a wheelchair by the door. His head was hanging down and he was staring at his feet. A thin stream of drool hung from his mouth to his chest.

"Hello!" Maureen said cheerfully as they went past. She put her hand on his shoulder, but he didn't look up. Ellen and Maureen continued on, down the hallway and to the left.

"I bet there aren't many people who come here every day like Jack does," Ellen said.

"Probably not," Maureen agreed.

When they walked into the dining room, Jack was feeding Ann a bite of the fruit he had brought for her from home.

"Hi, Jack!" Ellen and Maureen said in unison.

"Well, howdy!" Jack replied. Ann was leaning forward with a blank look on her face. "We've got company, Mama," Jack said, rubbing his hand on her shoulder. Ann made a mumbling noise and then opened her mouth for the next bite of fruit. "She hasn't said much this week," Jack said. "Some days she smiles and laughs and talks a little bit, but I don't know if she knows what she's saying. When I pick up my bag and get up, though, she knows I'm fixin' to leave and she starts to make a fuss."

"You're awfully good to her, Jack," Ellen said.

"Well, I try to be," Jack replied. "I feel like it's what I'm supposed to do. Look over there," he said, pointing to the counter at the other end of the room. "See that pan? I brought the girls a German chocolate cake."

"Ooo, that sounds good," Maureen said. Jack often made cakes and pies for the people who worked at the nursing home. Sometimes he took part of the dessert to them and kept the rest at home. He would tell Ellen and Maureen and Philip that he didn't know who he was going to get to eat it, which meant he wanted them to come over. He was lonely.

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**Let us  
consider  
how to  
stimulate  
one another  
to love  
and good  
deeds.**

Hebrews 10:24

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# The Stocking

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When Ann was finished with her dinner, Ellen, Maureen, and Jack left to go to the party. The Carters' house was one of the nicest homes in town. The décor was magazine-quality. The food laid out for the party was exquisite. Mrs. Carter had ordered little cakes from a bakery in California and had them shipped in. It was the first party Maureen remembered going to where caviar was an option.

After the meal, it was time to open the gifts that had been brought.

Maureen and Ellen were about forty to fifty years younger than almost all of the other guests. Everyone gathered in the living room and drew numbers to find out the order for opening the gifts. Maureen was number 19. She wondered what sort of gag gifts the sweet little old ladies had come up with. She watched horrified as Number 1, Number 2, Number 3, and Number 4 each opened a nice, high-quality gift that must have cost at least fifteen dollars and likely more. Number 5 took the gift that Number 3 had opened, and the game continued. People were unwrapping fancy Christmas decorations, a snowflake blanket, a nice box of chocolates, and on and on. Maureen and Ellen exchanged pained expressions. Maureen thought back to the announcement at church about the party. They were each supposed to bring a gift to play "Dirty Santa," the game had been explained. Maureen realized that she and Ellen had just assumed that the gifts were supposed to be gag gifts. So far, there were no other cheap, tacky, or gaudy items to be seen. Maureen was doubly thankful that there were no tags on the gifts. She wondered if anyone remembered that the gift she brought in was wrapped in candy cane paper.

Number 12, an older lady whose husband was an elder in the church, opened Ellen's ceramic dog piggy bank with the Christmas ribbon tied around his neck. None of the succeeding players took it away from her. Number 16 picked up the box wrapped in candy cane paper.

"I like this paper!" Number 16 commented. She was a widow who lived near the church building and always walked to the services. Inside, Maureen was squirming, but she tried hard not to look conspicuous. When Number 16 pulled out the stocking and it unfolded into her lap, the gaudy sequins reflecting the lights of the Christmas tree, Maureen wished she could melt into her chair like a snowflake. One man commented, "You'll be set for the next four Christmases if Santa fills that up!"

Mrs. Polly, a vivacious lady who was at least seventy years old, called out from across the room, "Oh, I love that! Who brought it?" Maureen sat still and stared at Mrs. Carter's paperweight collection. It's okay if I don't speak up, she told herself, because the gifts are supposed to be kept a secret.

To Maureen's surprise, Number 17 stood up and instead of picking a gift from the few that remained, walked over to Number 16 and said, "I want this stocking!" People laughed and Number 18 took his turn. While Number 18 opened his gift, Mrs. Polly said, "I'd really like to know who brought that stocking! There's a man I visit at the nursing home who would just love to have one hanging on his door. Who brought it?" Maureen didn't know what to do. Now she felt selfish not speaking up, like she was

robbing a man in the nursing home of some Christmas cheer. "Who brought the stocking?" Mrs. Polly asked again. Maureen sheepishly held up her hand. "You did, Maureen?" Maureen nodded. "Where did you get it?"

Maureen was not about to announce to a room full of people that she had done her shopping at Dollar Tree. She thought for a minute and said, "I can tell you later."

The game went on. Maureen ended up with a travel mug that could be plugged into a cigarette lighter in the car. Ellen had a new snowflake blanket. Maureen was hoping that Mrs. Polly would forget to ask her again about where she got the stocking, but as people were gathering their things to leave, she walked across the room and said, "Where'd you get that stocking?"

"Dollar Tree," Maureen said rather quietly.

"Where?"

"Dollar Tree," Maureen repeated slightly louder.

"I'm going to have to get one of those for Fred."

Mrs. Polly was the kind of person who wouldn't be shocked at anything, so it really wasn't a big deal for her to know where the stocking came from. Maureen couldn't help but wonder, though, if the ladies beside her overheard.

As they got ready to leave, Mr. Carter was standing by the door collecting money from the guests who hadn't paid yet. Maureen glanced at Ellen as she reached into her pocket.

"I guess it wasn't a joke," Ellen whispered.

Jack got to Mr. Carter before Ellen and Maureen did. He pulled out his wallet and handed Mr. Carter a five dollar bill. "That's for me," he said. Then he took out a ten dollar bill. "And this is for the two girls I picked up off the street and brought with me." Ellen and Maureen laughed and said thank-you. They thanked the Carters for the lovely party and followed Jack outside.

"Thank you, Jack," Ellen said again as they walked down the brick steps toward the driveway.

"That was really nice of you," Maureen added.

"Well, ya'll are kind enough to be nice to an old man like me. Least I can do is buy you some caviar." They all laughed, said good night, and walked on. Jack went to his car and drove to a house that was full of memories, but empty of the laughter and companionship that used to be there.

"Well, I've never had to pay to go to a party at someone's house before," Maureen said as they drove home. "Of course, we didn't actually have to pay ourselves, but still." After a pause she added, "Jack's so sweet."

"He must be really lonely," Ellen said. "Imagine leaving an empty house and going to that nursing home every day and then going back to empty house."

Maureen thought about the smile Jack gave them through the dining room window when they got to the nursing home. She thought about the German chocolate cake he made for the people who worked there. She thought about how Ann made a fuss every day when he got up to leave, even though she couldn't really talk to him when he was there. Suddenly life was about so much more than a giant stocking and which store it came from.



# We Have Seen His Glory

*a study of the book of John, part 12*

1. Read John 18:1-14. Why do you think the chief priests and Pharisees thought it necessary to send armed soldiers with Judas?

2. Read John 18:15-18 and 25-27. Why do you think Peter behaved so differently in the situations when he cut off the man's ear and when he denied that he knew Jesus?

3. Read John 18:19-24. What do you think some of the high priest's questions to Jesus about His disciples and His teaching might have been?

4. Read John 18:28-40. Describe how Jesus fulfilled His purpose of coming into the world to be a King and to testify to the truth (verse 37).

5. Read John 19:1-16. Why do you think Pilate wanted to release Jesus? Why do you think he finally gave in to the chief priests and officers?

6. Read John 19:17-30. Make a list of every person and every object that was part of the narrative of this section. Next to each one, describe his, her or its role in the story.

7. Read John 19:31-37. Do you believe that these events really happened? Why?

8. Read John 19:38-42. Describe how God arranged for Joseph and Nicodemus to be a part of these events. What can we learn from the part they played?

9. What are your thoughts right after reading chapters 18 and 19 of the book of John?



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Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

John 19:41-42

# Letters from Rachel Starr Thomson

## Now We Are Free

written December 22, 2002

It is 8:04 p.m., three days before Christmas. I am writing now because something very important has just happened. My grandmother is free. Before the clock struck eight tonight, her heart stopped beating. She has gone away from us.

It was not so long ago that she told me what she most looked forward to. "Do you know what the best thing about heaven is going to be?" she asked me. "It's not that I'll be with my loved ones again... though that will be wonderful. It's not the streets of gold or the angels or anything else like that... it's Him. It will be so wonderful to see Him. To be with Him. To talk with Him. Can you imagine it?"

Yes, Grandma, I can imagine it... but I know that my imagination does not begin to describe what you are feeling now. Since you were seventeen you have lived in His service. His truth has lit your way. His love has filled your heart and flowed over to touch my life, and the lives of so many. So many. And now you see Him.

I don't know what the obituary will say. "Lois Thomson died at the age of seventy-three, in the city of Windsor, Ontario, where she spent the last forty some years of her life. She leaves behind a mother, a sister, a husband, eight children, seven children-in-law, and forty-seven grandchildren. She will be sorely missed."

True enough, but it doesn't begin to say what must be said. It doesn't say what the angels are saying, but their words have an echo in my own heart. Lois Thomson went to the place of her heart's desire today.

She has long seen through a glass, darkly, but now she sees clearly. She was sown in corruption; she is raised incorruptible. Praise Him. She was sown in dishonour; she is raised in glory. Give praise to the Lord of Life. She was sown in weakness; she is raised in power. Praise Him, for His mercy endureth forever. Her mortality is swallowed up in life! Death is swallowed up in victory! O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? God has at last become her all in all. She has gone into the holy of holies, and she need never come back into the dirt and darkness of this world again. Truly, she is free.

My grandmother was a remarkable woman. Her life touched more people than can be counted. She wasn't perfect. Of course not. She was human just like you and me. And she was beginning to tire of life. Oh, she still had a lot to live for, but it wasn't easy anymore. She was often tired and discouraged. I am crying as I write this, but I am grieving for myself, not for her. How can I? She has answered the call of her beloved.

"The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.

"My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land." (Song of Solomon 2:10-12 KJV)

This world was not cruel to my grandmother. She had many people to love her, and the light of God shone in her life. But a deeper longing was within her still, and she did not fear death because of it. She knew there was more to come for her.

C.S. Lewis once wrote these words: "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

Why should I mourn for this one whom I love? She is leaping and skipping upon the mountains. She has found the desire of her heart. She has discovered the meaning of the words, "It is finished."

Some might say that it's a terrible thing to lose a loved one just before Christmas, but I am glad it happened now. It brings the miracle of Christmas all the closer. Some two thousand years ago, a man was born who gave hope substance and made faith worth having. The Son of God took a human name, lived a human life, and died a human death. Why?

So that my grandma could be free today. And so that I could cry and still write these words. He rose from the dead so that we could, too. Without Jesus, all hope is vain and all joy is empty. But because He lived, died, and lives again, every one of us can look death in the face and say, "I do not fear you. Nor can you truly take anything away from me. Everything I have is hidden in Him who does not die."

My grandmother has gone to be with him, which means that she is not so very far away from me. He is as close as a prayer, as close as the air that hangs around me. That is why love transcends death, because we can't ever be really separated. He has seen to that.

This Christmas, my grandmother's thoughts and words and eyes are full of Him, only Him. I pray that all of those who read these words would also fill their souls with Him, with His nearness and His love. As Grandma lay dying this past week, a prayer continually filled my heart: "Father, glorify Thy name." He has.

I love you, Grandma. Thank you for teaching me this one last lesson.

My dear friend Janet says that for Christians, there is no such thing as good-bye, only see you later. So.

I'll see you later.

Rachel Starr Thomson is the oldest of twelve children, a homeschool graduate, and the author of several books including the fantasy *Worlds Unseen* and its sequel *Burning Light*, *Tales of the Heartily Homeschooled*, *Letters to a Samuel Generation*, and *Heart to Heart: Meeting With God in the Lord's Prayer*. She is a believer in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and hope of the world, and she loves to write about His goodness and grace. Rachel loves long walks, good books, and the fellowship of God's people. She is an incurable tea-drinker and a counter-culture revolutionary who thinks life would be far, far better if we all chucked our television sets out the window. Visit [www.rachelstarrthomson.com](http://www.rachelstarrthomson.com)

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# 50 Cents Short

by Mrs. M.A.L. Lane, 1913

edited by Amy Puetz

It was the day before Christmas in the year 189--. Snow was falling heavily in the streets of Boston, but the crowd of shoppers seemed undiminished. As the storm increased, groups gathered at the corners and in sheltering doorways to wait for belated cars; but the holiday cheer was in the air, and there was no grumbling. Mothers dragging tired children through the slush of the streets; pretty girls hurrying home for the holidays; here and there a harassed-looking man with perhaps a single package which he had taken a whole morning to select--all had the same spirit of tolerant good-humor.

"School Street! School Street!" called the conductor of an electric car. A group of young people at the farther end of the car started to their feet. One of them, a young man wearing a heavy fur-trimmed coat, addressed the conductor angrily.

"I said, 'Music Hall,' didn't I?" he demanded. "Now we've got to walk back in the snow because of your stupidity!"

"Oh, never mind, Frank!" one of the girls interposed. "We ought to have been looking out ourselves! Six of us, and we went by without a thought! It is all Mrs. Tirrell's fault! She shouldn't have been so entertaining!"

The young matron dimpled and blushed. "That's charming of you, Maidie," she said, gathering up her silk skirts as she prepared to step down into the pond before her. "The compliment makes up for the blame, but how it snows!"

"It doesn't matter. We all have gaiters on," returned Maidie Williams, undisturbed.

"Fares, please!" said the conductor unresponsively.

Frank Armstrong thrust his gloved hand deep into his pocket with angry vehemence. "There's your money," he said, "and be quick about the change, will you? We've lost time enough!"

The man counted out the change with stiff, red fingers, closed his lips firmly as if to keep back an obvious rejoinder, rang up the six fares with careful accuracy, and gave the signal to go ahead. The car went on into the drifting storm.

Armstrong laughed shortly as he rapidly counted the bits of silver lying in his open palm. He turned instinctively, but two or three cars were already between him and the one he was looking for.

"The fellow must be an imbecile," he said, rejoining the group on the crossing. "He's given me back a dollar and twenty cents, and I handed him a dollar bill."

"Oh, can't you stop him?" cried Maidie Williams, with a backward step into the wet street.

The Harvard junior, who was carrying her umbrella, protested, "What's the use, Miss Williams? He'll make it up before he gets to Scollay Square, you may be sure. Those chaps don't lose anything. Why, the other day, I gave one a quarter and he went off as cool as you please. 'Where's my change?' said I. 'You gave me a nickel,' said he. And there wasn't anybody to swear that I didn't except myself, and I didn't count."

"But that doesn't make any difference," insisted the girl warmly. "Because one conductor was dishonest, we needn't be. I beg your pardon, Frank, but it does seem to me just stealing."

"Oh, come along!" said her cousin, with an easy laugh. "I guess the West End Corporation won't go without their dinners tomorrow. Here, Maidie, here's the ill-gotten fifty cents. I think you ought to treat us all after the concert; still, I won't urge you. I wash my hands of all responsibility. But I do wish you hadn't such an unpleasant conscience."

Maidie flushed under the sting of his cousinly rudeness, but she went on quietly with the rest. It was evident that any attempt to overtake the car was out of the question.

"Did you notice his number, Frank?" she asked, suddenly.

"No, I never thought of it" said Frank, stopping short. "However, I probably shouldn't make any complaint if I had. I shall forget all about it tomorrow. I find it's never safe to let the sun go down on my wrath. It's very likely not to be there the next day."

"I wasn't thinking of making a complaint," said Maidie; but the two young men were enjoying the small joke too much to notice what she said.

The great doorway of Music Hall was just ahead. In a moment the party were within its friendly shelter, stamping off the snow. The girls were adjusting veils and hats with skillful feminine touches; the pretty chaperone was beaming approval upon them, and the young men were taking off their wet overcoats, when Maidie turned again in sudden desperation.

"Mr. Harris," she said, rather faintly, for she did not like to make herself disagreeable, "do you suppose that car comes right back from Scollay Square?"

"What car?" asked Walter Harris, blankly. "Oh, the one we came in? Yes, I suppose it does. They're running all the time, anyway. Why, you are not sick, are you, Miss Williams?"

There was genuine concern in his tone. This girl, with her sweet, vibrant voice, her clear gray eyes, seemed very charming to him. She wasn't beautiful, perhaps, but she was the kind of girl he liked. There was a steady earnestness in the gray eyes that made him think of his mother.

"No," said Maidie, slowly. "I'm all right, thank you. But I wish I could find that man again. I know sometimes they have to make it up if their accounts are wrong, and I couldn't--we couldn't feel very comfortable."

Frank Armstrong interrupted her. "Maidie," he said, with the studied calmness with which one speaks to an unreasonable child, "you are perfectly absurd. Here it is within five minutes of the time for the concert to begin. It is impossible to tell when that car is coming back. You are making us all very uncomfortable. Mrs. Tirrell, won't you please tell her not to spoil our afternoon?"

"I think he's right, Maidie," said Mrs. Tirrell. "It's very nice of you to feel so sorry for the poor man, but he really was very careless. It was all his own fault. And just think how far he made us walk! My feet are quite damp. We ought to go in directly or we shall all take cold, and I'm sure you wouldn't like that, my dear."

She led the way as she spoke, the two girls and young Armstrong following. Maidie hesitated. It was so easy to go in, to forget everything in the light and warmth and excitement.

"No," said she, very firmly, and as much to herself as to the young man who stood waiting for her. "I must go back and try to make it right. I'm so sorry, Mr. Harris, but if you will tell them."

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# 50 Cents Short continued from page 5

"Why, I'm going with you, of course," said the young fellow, impulsively. "If I'd only looked once at the man I'd go alone, but I shouldn't know him from Adam."

Maidie laughed. "Oh, I don't want to lose the whole concert, Mr. Harris, and Frank has all the tickets. You must go after them and try to make my peace. I'll come just as soon as I can. Don't wait for me, please. If you'll come and look for me here after the first number, and not let them scold me too much." She ended with an imploring little catch in her breath that was almost a sob.

"They shan't say a word, Miss Williams!" cried Walter Harris, with honest admiration in his eyes. But she was gone already, and conscious that further delay was only making matters worse, he went on into the hall.

Meanwhile, the car swung heavily along the wet rails on its way to the turning-point. It was nearly empty now. An old gentleman and his nurse were the only occupants. Jim Stevens, the conductor, had stepped inside the car. "Too bad I forgot those young people wanted to get off at Music Hall," he was thinking to himself. "I don't see how I came to do it. That chap looked as if he wanted to complain of me, and I don't know as I blame him. I'd have said I was sorry if he hadn't been so sharp with his tongue. I hope he won't complain just now. 'Twould be a pretty bad tune for me to get into trouble, with Mary and the baby both sick. I'm too sleepy to be good for much, that's a fact. Sitting up three nights running takes hold of a fellow somehow when he's at work all day. The rent's paid, that's one thing, if it hasn't left me but half a dollar to my name. Hullo!" He was struck by a sudden distinct recollection of the coins he had returned. "Why, I gave him fifty cents too much!"

He glanced up at the dial which indicated the fares and began to count the change in his pocket. He knew exactly how much money he had had at the beginning of the trip. He counted carefully. Then he plunged his hand into the heavy canvas pocket of his coat. Perhaps he had half a dollar there. No, it was empty!

He faced the fact reluctantly. Fifty cents short, ten fares! Gone into the pocket of the young gentleman with the fur collar! The conductor's hand shook as he put the money back in his pocket. It meant--what did it mean? He drew a long breath.

Christmas Eve! A dark dreary little room upstairs in a noisy tenement house. A pale, thin woman on a shabby lounge vainly trying to quiet a fretful child. The child is thin and pale, too, with a hard, racking cough. There is a small fire in the stove, a very small fire; coal is so high. The medicine stands on the shelf. "Medicine won't do much good," the doctor had said; "he needs beef and cream."

Jim's heart sank at the thought. He could almost hear the baby asking: "Isn't Papa coming soon? Isn't he, Mamma?"

"Poor little kid!" Jim said, softly, under his breath. "And I shan't have a thing to take home to him; nor Mary's violets, either. It'll be the first Christmas that ever happened. I suppose that chap would think it was ridiculous for me to be buying violets. He wouldn't understand what the flowers mean to Mary. Perhaps he didn't notice I gave him too much. That kind don't know how much they have. They just pull it out as if it was newspaper."

The conductor went out into the snow to help the nurse, who was assisting the old gentleman to the ground. Then the car swung on again. Jim turned up the collar of his coat about his ears and stamped his feet. There was the florist's shop where he had meant to buy the violets, and the toy-shop was just around the corner.

A thought flashed across his tired brain. "Plenty of men would do it; they do it every day. Nobody ever would be the poorer for it. This car will be crowded going home. I needn't ring in every fare; nobody could tell. But Mary! She wouldn't touch those violets if she knew. And she'd know. I'd have to tell her. I couldn't keep it from her, she's that quick."

He jumped off to adjust the trolley with a curious sense of unreality. It couldn't be that he was really going home this Christmas Eve with empty hands. Well, they must all suffer together for his carelessness. It was his own fault, but it was hard. And he was so tired!

To his amazement he found his eyes were blurred as he watched the people crowding into the car. Was he going to cry like a baby--he, a great burly man of thirty years?

"It's no use," he thought. "I couldn't do it. The first time I gave Mary violets was the night she said she'd marry me. I told her then I'd do my best to make her proud of me. I guess she wouldn't be very proud of a man who could cheat. She'd rather starve than have a ribbon she couldn't pay for."

He rang up a dozen fares with a steady hand. The temptation was over. Six more strokes--then nine without a falter. He even imagined the bell rang more distinctly than usual, even encouragingly.

The car stopped. Jim flung the door open with a triumphant sweep of his arm. He felt ready to face the world. But the baby--his arm dropped. It was hard.

He turned to help the young girl who was waiting at the step. Through the whirling snow he saw her eager face, with a quick recognition lighting the steady eyes, and wondered dimly, as he stood with his hand on the signal-strap, where he could have seen her before. He knew immediately.

"There was a mistake," she said, with a shy tremor in her voice. "You gave us too much change and here it is." She held out to Jim the piece of silver which had given him such an unhappy quarter of an hour.

He took it like one dazed. Would the young lady think he was crazy to care so much about so small a coin? He must say something. "Thank you, miss," he stammered as well as he could. "You see, I thought it was gone--and there's the baby--and it's Christmas Eve--and my wife's sick--and you can't understand."

It certainly was not remarkable that she couldn't. "But I do," she said, simply. "I was afraid of that. And I thought perhaps there was a baby, so I brought my Christmas present for her," and something else dropped into Jim's cold hand.

"What you waiting for?" shouted the motorman from the front platform. The girl had disappeared in the snow.

Jim rang the bell to go ahead, and gazed again at the two shining half dollars in his hand.

"I didn't have a chance to tell her," he explained to his wife late in the evening, as he sat in a tiny rocking chair several sizes too small for him, "that the baby wasn't a her at all, though if I thought he'd grow up into such a lovely one as she is, I don't know but I almost wish he was."

"Poor Jim!" said Mary, with a little laugh as she put up her hand to stroke his rough cheek. "I guess you're tired."

"And I should say," he added, stretching out his long legs toward the few red sparks in the bottom of the grate, "I should say she had tears in her eyes, too, but I was that near crying myself I couldn't be sure."

The little room was sweet with the odor of English violets. Asleep in the bed lay the boy, a toy horse clasped close to his breast.

"Bless her heart!" said Mary, softly.

"Well, Miss Williams," said Walter Harris, as he sprang to meet a snow-covered figure coming swiftly along the sidewalk. "I can see that you found him. You've lost the first number, but they won't scold you--not this time."

The girl turned a radiant face upon him. "Thank you," she said, shaking the snowy crystals from her skirt. "I don't care now if they do. I should have lost more than that if I had stayed."

Amy Puetz is the author of *Uncover Exciting History: Revealing America's Christian Heritage in Short, Easy-to-Read Nuggets and Countdown to Christmas: Memory Making Stories and Activities for Every Day from December 1st to the 25th*. As a columnist for Home School Enrichment Magazine she shares stories about historical events from a Christian worldview. She especially loves to dig for little-known stories that show God's providential hand. Visit her web site at [www.AmyPuetz.com](http://www.AmyPuetz.com). Join her mailing list and receive a free e-book!



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# Christmas Blessings

It's time again for Christmas Blessings! Let's get together and give! This is our fifth and final annual project to give help to people in need. We hope you'll choose to participate this year.

## Here's the history of Christmas Blessings:

**Christmas Blessings 2005:** We collected and donated bibs, blankets, and clothes for babies to victims of Hurricane Katrina in cooperation with the Friendship Baptist Church in Grand Bay, Alabama.

**Christmas Blessings 2006:** We collected and donated pens, pencils, and colored pencils to the Healing Hands International humanitarian aid organization based in Nashville, Tennessee.

**Christmas Blessings 2007:** We collected Christmas gifts for at-risk inner-city children served by Cottage Cove Urban Ministries in Nashville, Tennessee.

**Christmas Blessings 2008,** We collected school supplies for impoverished orphans cared for by the Maria Atkinson Orphanage in Mexico, partnering with New Life Church of God in Arizona.

## Christmas Blessings 2009

House of Hope is a home for orphaned and abandoned girls in Tabarre, Haiti. Since 1976, this ministry has been working to "train children in a loving Christian environment, providing for their physical, spiritual, and emotional needs, and preparing them for their future in Haiti." This year, we have the opportunity to partner with them in helping to provide for the needs of the girls of House of Hope.

Here's what to do:

Purchase an item or items from this list:

- travel-size shampoo
- travel-size lotion
- toothpaste (large and travel-size)
- toothbrushes (for children and adults)
- washcloths
- hair accessories

Mail to:

☉⊙✕ network  
370 S. Lowe Ave, Suite A  
PMB 211  
Cookeville TN 38501

**IMPORTANT:** Please do not purchase items that are decorated with specific cartoon, TV, or movie characters.

- Keep in mind that these are for children; fun and colorful is good!
  - Everything must be brand-new and good quality.
  - Please leave items in original packaging.
  - Please do not send used, cheap, easily broken, or low-quality items.
  - You can send one item or as many as you wish.
  - All donations (large and small) will be appreciated! It's great to involve your family, friends, church, Sunday school class, and homeschool group.
  - Ship your gift to the ☉⊙✕ network by US Postal Service, Fed Ex, or UPS, and the ☉⊙✕ network will send them to the Amer-Haitian Bon Zami organization that oversees the House of Hope.
  - Please ship your gifts by **December 10, 2009. (Deadline extended)**
- Any questions? Please ask! [bethany@notgrass.com](mailto:bethany@notgrass.com)

We hope you will take this opportunity to give Christmas Blessings!

There's still time!

# A Message from My Heart

Interviews with women of God by Annalisa Perry

## A Talk with Mev

Mev is the assistant editor of the amie newsletter. She is 26, and lives and works with her family in Tennessee.

### What do you do on your mission trips to Belize?

I have been involved with a Christian school in Belize for about a year and a half and have made three trips down there. On my longest trip (three and a half weeks) my mom went with me and we did music classes with the children at the school. We taught them songs which they performed at a concert for their families and the community near the end of our time there. The songs and accompanying narration told the story of the Bible from Creation through Acts. I have gotten to know several Christians in Belize and look forward to continuing to build my relationships with them. Their tendency to take life at a slow and relaxed pace is different to what I am used to, but I try to go with the flow when I'm there. I am thankful that God has opened this door for me.

### Tell about a time when you saw God's work in your life. What is one of the hardest lessons you learned?

Last summer I had a frightfully close call as I lost my strength while swimming in deep water in a river and was rescued by some friends. That experience shook me pretty hard. I realized how all my worries and frustrations paled in comparison to the simple fact that I was alive. God has given me the beautiful and precious gift of life. It is my duty to use this life for Him. I don't know when it might end--it might be on a warm summer day in a river or it might be in a hospital when I'm 90 years old--but each moment I have needs to be for Him. Sadly, that's a lesson God has to remind me of over and over. Sadly, learning a lesson once is often much easier than remembering it and letting it impact my life for the long haul.

### Tell about someone in your life who has impacted you and how.

I know a couple whose marriage shines like a beacon. They have been married 25 or 30 years, but they are still so in love and aren't ashamed to let people see it! It's beautiful to see how they respect and honor each other. If God ever blesses me with a husband, I want people to see in my marriage what I see in theirs.

### What do you enjoy doing?

Walking with my dog beside the river, playing cards with my sister, staying in touch with friends, rambling in the woods, eating German chocolate, seeing my mom have a laughter attack, creating art, praying with my dad at night, acting, feeling that God is near.

### How can we put Christ foremost in our life?

By realizing that He asks nothing more from us than what He was willing to give Himself.

### When I am feeling impatient with someone, what are some things I need to remember?

The times when the roles have been reversed. I cannot count the times I have been frustrated with someone about something and then I turn around and do the very same thing or something similar myself. That's humbling.

### Tell about some times you've spent with elderly people. How was that rewarding to you?

Several years ago a friend and I used to visit the nursing home together every week. We each took a monkey puppet with long floppy arms and legs and went from room to room trying to give the patients something to smile about. One of the dearest ladies we got to know there was from New York and she had a strong New Yorker accent that I loved to hear. I remember one day when we walked into her room and said with such joy, "My friends are here!"

### What do you have to say about the founder and director of the amie network?

Bethany has poured a great deal of heart and time into writing the amie newsletters and managing the network for many years. She cares deeply about the girls who have been a part of amie. Bethany is beautiful inside and out, she is good with words and very perceptive, she knows how to love and give and be someone to look up to. She is the greatest sister and friend God could have given me. I am blessed to have lived with her my whole life, and I sure am going to miss her when she gets married in December and moves to Texas! I'm happy for her, though, and thankful for who she is and what God is doing in her life.

Annalisa is the eldest of eight children. She enjoys reading books, writing stories, talking to people, and spending quality time with her family. Annalisa and her family were missionaries in Germany for five years and now live in Arkansas. She enjoys homeschooling because it gives her independence and unique opportunities. She is in 11th grade. You can write Annalisa at [annalisaperry@yahoo.com](mailto:annalisaperry@yahoo.com)

