

# Christmas Treasures

Some versions of the classic carol, "Deck the Halls," contain the line, "While I tell of Christmas treasure." The "treasures" contained in this special edition were submitted to the *Catholic Courier* in response to requests for original Christmas stories, memoirs and poetry. We were flooded with submissions, making for pleasant reading, but sometimes difficult choices. The pieces included in this issue are representative of the quality, poignancy and humor of the many worthy submissions we received. We hope you enjoy these Christmas Treasures as much as we did.

## The perfect gift

I remember the first year I was allowed to do my own Christmas shopping. With our mothers hovering an aisle or so away, my friend, Kristen, and I made each of our own choices. I wanted every gift to be absolutely perfect. However, just as now, my preference often exceeded my budget. Many of the things I wanted to buy would have to wait for another year, and a bigger Christmas Club.

Kristen and I with our mothers in tow had reached Dowd-Leo's Men's Shop in downtown Auburn. I had been there many times with my father, and was known to several of the salesmen. I thought that I would buy my father a gorgeous tie. My father enjoyed dressing well, and loved beautiful ties. I was very disappointed to discover that though a tie was small, the price tag was not. Refusing to leave without the perfect gift, I went through the entire store. Just as I was certain that I wouldn't be able to give my Dad something really special, I found it.

There on the display of what I now know to be novelty gifts, was a pair of bright, Kelly green stretchy nylon socks, with white reindeer in flight on the side. Mr. Carroll, the salesman who always waited on my father, did all that he could to dissuade me from this purchase. He tried to tell me that my father didn't really own anything which would be just right to wear with these socks. He offered black socks, which I scorned. He offered me perfectly plain white handkerchiefs as an alternative, explaining that they were always correct. I couldn't be swayed. I asked the one person whose opinion I could really trust, and Kristen assured me that this was indeed the perfect gift. So I paid for them, and grandly asked Mr. Carroll to gift-wrap them for me.

I didn't tell anyone else about my perfect gift. I wanted them to be a total surprise to my sister and my mother as well as my father. I knew in my heart that no one else could have found a better present ... And I had done it myself!

It was the custom in our family for the children to give our parents their gifts on Christmas Eve. Christmas morning was reserved for Santa Claus, and everyone knew that he didn't bring presents to adults. I could hardly contain my self when it came to gift time. I felt like a balloon that had been untied and allowed to zoom around the room. I was so excited!

My father always stretched our patience to the limit when he opened gifts. He would look over the wrapping paper, comment on the bow, read the card aloud, and most maddeningly of all, use the penknife he wore at the end of his pocket watch to carefully slit the tape. It was a great production. That night I didn't even mind, because I knew that when he opened it he would find my wonderful gift.

At last the box was open, and my dad carefully lifted the tissue paper. The expression on his face was remarkable. I thought that he was just too overcome for words.



Linda Jeanne Rivers

Now I realize that he was struggling to find something to say. He finally put the box down, looked me squarely in the eye and said, "Mary, this is really something."

"Hurrah," I thought, but I just smiled to myself because I knew that I had indeed found something very special for my dad.

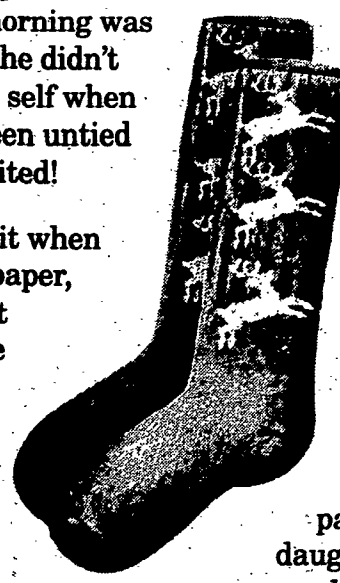
It was my father's practice to use or wear what ever he received as a gift as soon as possible. That was the true test of a successful gift. The fit and color were perfect. It didn't need to be exchanged. I knew that if my socks were truly the perfect gift, my father would wear them right away.

We went to Mass as a family on Christmas morning. I didn't see how my father was dressed before we went out to get in the car. It was very snowy and everyone had to wear boots to church, even my father. As we went into church, one of the ushers asked my father if he could fill in for someone and take up the collection. My father said of course, and no one, including me, thought any more about it.

My dad disappeared to the back of the church to divest himself of outerwear at collection time. And then, he came proudly down the aisle, in his best suit, complete with vest, the elegant shirt and tie from my mother, and the bright Kelly green stretchy nylon socks with the white reindeer in flight on the side.

It is many years since that Christmas, and my dad is no longer here to celebrate with us, and exasperate us with his pokey gift opening. I have often thought of that Christmas and him, and the 'most perfect gift.' At the time I thought the perfect gift was the one I gave to him. I know now that it was the gift he gave to me. That wonderful love that would cause a man as proper and dignified as my dad to wear the most awful pair of socks ever created; the perfect gift of love of a dad for his daughter. I never saw my father wear those socks again. He didn't need to. He had worn them when it counted most.

- Mary E. Caffrey, Auburn



### Childhood

Inside myself  
A secret book  
Opens to Christmas Days I know  
Windows my eyes looked out upon  
To see the season's first flakes of snow



Trees all decked out in their glow  
Toys and clothes beneath the tree  
Stockings filled for you and me.  
Oh, the joy on Christmas Days  
To go downstairs and have a look;  
And never, never see an Elf.

- Eloise Peacock Seidler, Auburn

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol. 110 No. 13, December 24, 1998  
Published weekly except the first Thursday in January.  
Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.  
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.