

This year there would
be one less present for
Jared under the tree.

GIVING CHRISTMAS AWAY

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOEL D. SPRINGER



Stack your presents in front of you," Mom said, pulling the gifts from under the tree.

"Yes!" Matt shouted. "We're opening them early!"

Jared knew exactly which presents were his. In about 30 seconds they were stacked in front of him.

"Each of you should have seven presents," Mom said as she placed a large box in front of the tree. Then she explained that this year their family was "giving some Christmas away."

"We're giving away our presents?" Kate asked in disbelief.

"Just one," Mom replied. "Put one of your gifts in this box for the family shelter."

There was silence.

"Can we open the gift first?" asked Matt.

Mom shook her head.

"How will the people know what the presents are?" Jared look confused.

Mom smiled. "We'll tell them to give it to a boy your age. The whole idea is to be generous."

Jared sighed. He picked up a small box. A watch? He shook a long, thin package. Something rattled inside. A new tent? "This is too hard!" he complained. "I don't know which one to give."

"Would it really be any easier if you knew what was inside?" Mom asked. "You're making a sacrifice—that's what Christmas is really about."



Jared's mind raced through his wish list: waterproof watch, basketball shoes, tennis racket, computer game, music CDs, tent, and a reversible jacket.

Finally he closed his eyes and stuck out his finger. It landed on a medium-sized box with a huge green bow.

Jared's parents had placed other things in the box for the shelter: quilts, gloves, hats, socks, soap, shampoo, and toothpaste.

"Ready?" his dad asked. "Let's go."

The shelter had been converted from an old school. Red bricks crumbled on the walls, and paint peeled down the door. Inside, a Christmas tree was surrounded by folding chairs. Children sat in a circle listening to a story. A few women rocked babies.

"We brought some things for Christmas," Mom told the woman who came forward.

"Oh, bless your hearts!" she said as she got out papers for them to sign. "Follow me; we'll care for these gifts."

Jared, Kate, and Matt looked around the storage room and saw stacks of canned soup, peaches, beans, and tomatoes. On the lowest shelf were piles of used

clothes and shoes, sorted by sizes.

When Jared held out his wrapped box, the woman asked, "What is this?"

"I don't know," Jared shrugged.

"You're supposed to give it to a boy his age," Matt piped in. "He's 13."

The woman looked at the gift tag. "Are you Jared?"

He nodded.


"And I'm Matt. Here's mine. It's for a boy 7 years old in the first grade, just like me."

The woman's eyes filled with tears. "These are your presents, aren't they?"

Suddenly a warm feeling washed over Jared. "Not anymore," he said with a smile. "Now they're somebody else's."

The woman brushed a tear away as she took Kate's gift and wrote "17-year-old girl" on the tag.

At the front door she thanked them. "I promise these gifts will make someone's holiday much brighter.

They already did, Jared thought as he climbed into the van. 



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