

The SECRET Santa

By Jane McBride

(Based on a true story)

"When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17).

Christmas used to be the best time of the year. Tasha's grandma would take her shopping for a new dress. And Dad read "The Night before Christmas" to her every Christmas Eve.

But two years ago, Grandma had died. And then the next year, Dad died, and Tasha and Mom moved to a smaller house. Now there was no fireplace to hang stockings, and reading Dad's Christmas poem was too sad.



One night about two weeks before Christmas, the doorbell rang. When Tasha opened the door, there was a mug full of candy canes with a little note signed, "Secret Santa." Tasha's face lit up. She *loved* candy canes!

"Who do you think it's from?" she asked, peeling open one of the wrappers.

"I don't know," said Mom. She smiled and pulled out a candy cane. "But what a nice surprise!"

The next night, their Secret Santa left hot cocoa mix. The night after that it was a box of cute soaps. Every night, Tasha was excited to see what showed up next. And every night she got more and more curious. Who was dropping off the gifts?

Tonight there was a plate of cookies with reindeer faces. They had chocolate-chip eyes and antlers made from melted caramel. "They're so cute," Tasha said. "I wish we knew who was bringing these so we could say thank you."

Mom got out some milk to go with their cookies. "It seems like whoever's doing it wants to stay anonymous."

"What's a . . . anonymous?" Tasha asked.

"It means they don't want other people to know who they are. Maybe the best thing we can do to thank them is to pass their kindness on to other people."

Tasha was quiet as she ate her cookie. What kind things could *she* do? She didn't have money to buy cute little gifts. And even if she did, Mom didn't have time to take her to the store.

Tasha sighed. "I *want* to do something nice, but I don't know what to do. And I don't have a lot of money."

"Being kind doesn't take money," Mom said. "All it takes is thinking about others. Smiling at a friend who looks sad, sitting at lunch with someone who's alone, saying 'thank you'—those are nice *and* free."

Tasha nodded slowly. She could do that.

On Monday morning at school, her teacher was wearing a new sweater.



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"Mrs. Hennessy," Tasha said, "that's a really pretty red sweater."

Mrs. Hennessy looked happy. "Thank you!"

For the rest of the day, Mrs. Hennessy seemed to be smiling a lot.

That afternoon after school, Tasha volunteered to walk her neighbor's dog.

"Thank you, Tasha," Mrs. Oliver said. "My hip was hurting so much that I wondered how I was going to take Penny for her walk. You're an answer to prayer."

"You're welcome," Tasha said. She was glad she'd come to help.

After dinner she helped Mom fold laundry and clean the kitchen. Tomorrow she was going to surprise Mom and vacuum!

That night their Secret Santa struck again, this time leaving a bag of chocolate candies.

"Mom," Tasha said, "can I take some of these to school to share? I think that would make my class really happy."

Mom took a chocolate and handed the bag to Tasha. "Of course!"

Tasha grinned. She would always miss Dad and Grandma, but she was glad she had discovered this Christmas secret: helping others made her happy! ●

The author lives in Colorado, USA.



Once my friend was sad, and I went and helped her. She had a big smile.

Gavin W., age 9, Idaho, USA