

THE MIRACLE OF THE CHRISTMAS BASKET

By Lorraine Payette

Most people are familiar with the Christmas basket. Every December, different businesses and charitable organizations get together and collect food, small gifts, and items to give to the “less fortunate” in society and sometimes a basket can mean a miracle.

It was December of 1985. It was snowy, and Christmas was near. A single mother of a 3-year-old boy was enjoying a welcome sleep in on a Saturday morning, when he woke her up.

“Mummy, scratch my back, it’s so itchy,” he said, and then added “Please?”

She rolled over to see a brightly lit sky out the window and a determined face placed firmly between it and her. Sighing, she sat up and checked his back first before scratching it for him.

Lifting his shirt, she found a grainy, garnet coloured, sand like rash that she had never seen before. He was hot to the touch, and she knew this was serious.

“Honey, we’re going to have to go to the hospital,” she said.

This was a challenge. They lived about 18 km from the city, and she didn’t drive. There was a bus on Saturdays, but it would be tough going if she missed it. Neighbours were unavailable, and returning home would be difficult.

They had to get in, so she got him ready and put on her pack. Then off they went. On arriving at the hospital, his temperature was quite high and the rash had started spreading toward his face and down his arms. They were let in right away, and the diagnosis was scarlet fever.

The treatment would not be the modern “Antibiotics and he’ll be fine,” which was just starting to be used, but was an old fashioned “get him home – your family doctor says 30 days quarantine!” Medicine was provided immediately at the hospital, and they were given a ride home by ambulance.

While the boy enjoyed the unusual ride, the mother was terrified. She had been unemployed for quite a while, and they survived through the financial kindness of family members living hundreds of miles away. Quarantine meant 30 days of nobody in or out. Things could be left in the mailbox at the street or out in the yard, but no one was able to leave the house and interact with other people period. This meant she could not do banking, shop or do any of the needed chores outside. With no one to help and dwindling supplies in her home, she had no idea of how they could possibly get through.

They hadn’t been home much more than an hour when the phone rang. She asked her son to please try to be quiet as she answered it, and he toned down the siren noises as he rolled his toy emergency vehicles around on the floor.

“Excuse me, ma’am?” the voice said. “I’m the manager of the Dominion Store on Barrack Street in Kingston. We were wondering if you could use a Christmas basket this year.” Ordinarily she would have said, “No, thank

you,” believing there were others who were far less fortunate than she. This year however, she had to reconsider.

Within an hour, the pick-up truck had pulled up by her door. She called out to the driver, explaining that the black and yellow signs in the windows meant she couldn’t go out and he couldn’t come in. He smiled, waved, and started unloading boxes onto the snow.

So many boxes! She couldn’t believe it. She yelled “thank you” out the window, and she and her son waved as the truck drove away.

Inside was everything they needed to get through, not just the Christmas holiday, but the entire 30 days. There was food and beverages, some toys, mitts and a touque for her son and warm gloves for her. They had even provided cleaning supplies, paper towels and toilet tissue.

Years later, she still thinks back on that basket – it was a Christmas miracle. Her son got better, and they were able to return to their lives after the quarantine was over. The supplies were enough, at exactly the right time. She remains eternally grateful to the people who never knew her, never knew her circumstances, but were willing to reach out and help during this critical time in their lives.

The next time you think about the Christmas baskets and whether or not they can make a difference in someone’s life, please consider this story. You never know when you might be participating in someone else’s miracle. **LH**

