

Things In Motion ...

THE GIFT

THE SECOND GRADE classroom was filled with the wonderful scent of cedar when names were drawn for the exchange of gifts. The school janitor, a black man who seemed very old to us, had made a stand for the tree that he had brought in from the woods behind Georgetown School, along with other trees for all elementary grades. It was a school tradition that each class make all the decorations for its tree and students delighted in creating unusual ornaments and long paper chains when the constraints of a great depression severely limited the amount of cash that farm families had available.

I drew Margaret Cole's name. She was a very quiet girl, probably subdued to some extent by her hand-me-down clothes and the shoes with holes, although her clothes and shoes were similar to those of more than one of her classmates, including me. The commonality of thrift among families of that day drew no special notice; we were all poor to some degree and none of us knew it.

On Saturday before the school closed for Christmas vacation, my mother cruised both dime stores in Eufaula, looking for a suitable gift for Margaret. I was with her, but offered little help—boys didn't know what to get for girls! Finally my mother picked up a box and asked me if I thought Margaret would like it. It was a sewing kit with two very small dolls and a number of dresses already cut out, with a thimble, needle, and scissors

that could be used to sew and trim the dolls' dresses. With a boy's nonchalance I guessed that Margaret would like it OK.

On the following Friday, every class had its Christmas party and everyone exchanged gifts. There always seemed to be a giant Santa Claus who went from room to room passing out candy, chewing gum, and loud Ho-Ho-Hos! Our entire class always recognized Santa, but we loved it anyway.

My gift from a classmate was a large bag of marbles—always a treasure. When Margaret opened her gift from me I watched to verify for my Mom that the gift was liked. I felt good when Margaret's eyes lit up and a giant smile crinkled her face. She held the box as if it were precious crystal, reading the description of its contents and concentrating on each wonderful part of the kit. She came over to my desk and said, "Thank you, thank you, thank you" about a dozen times until I was on the verge of embarrassment. Her delight was so absolute that I was caught up in it and my grin became a duplicate of her own. In my heart at that moment was a tremendous love for my Mom's wisdom in selecting such a treasured gift for Margaret. I have wondered in the years that followed, if Margaret remembered that time when the giver was equally as blessed as the receiver.



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