

Christmas Gift

It was very cold, with traces of snow swirling across the roads and fields. On Christmas morning 1976 we were returning home to Wheaton, Illinois after celebrating at Susie's mom and dad's in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. With the weather threatening and the anticipated after-Christmas traffic woes, we had decided to celebrate early, opening presents on Christmas Eve, in order to make the drive home on Christmas Day. Knowing that the stores would be closed and that most people would still be at home celebrating, we looked forward to an uneventful trip with little traffic to slow us down.

So, packed in our nine-year-old station wagon, Susie and I and our (then) three children were headed north. Just before the Sebree, Kentucky exit, some fifty miles or so from Hopkinsville, on the Edward Pennyrite Parkway, the engine began to sputter a bit. And by the time we slowed to pay the toll, we only made it around the off ramp just past the toll booth and a couple hundred yards down the road toward Sebree before the car died completely. There we sat stranded - not a house or vehicle in sight. I had no real idea what was wrong with the engine and the frigid temperature was rapidly overtaking what warmth was left inside the car. We didn't know the distance to Sebree but even if we could get there, we had no expectation of any business being open on Christmas day.

It was a dilemma for sure, and though Susie and I were both really concerned, we tried to remain calm to keep from upsetting the kids. We decided to pray, and had no more begun, when a fellow in a pickup truck drove up and stopped in front of our station wagon. I got out and met him as he approached. He asked if he could help and I explained what had happened. In no time he slid under the front of the car and yelled that I should try starting the motor. After only a couple turns of the starter, he got back up and said that our problem was a bad fuel pump. He explained that he was a truck driver and a pretty good mechanic as well.

I thanked him, but pointed out the obvious – it was Christmas. To our surprise, he acted as though that was no problem; he insisted that we all squeeze into his pickup truck, and drove us down the road to his mobile home. There his wife greeted us and invited Susie and the kids in while he and I headed for town. I admit to being more than a bit puzzled at that point, but he just drove on making friendly conversation with no apparent concern.

To my utter astonishment, as we approached the downtown there were cars on the street and people milling around the local auto parts store. We walked in like it was a perfectly normal business day with my benefactor passing pleasantries with the locals. Within a matter of minutes, for a cost of about eleven dollars, we walked out with the correct new fuel pump and were on our way.

Back at the car, our unlikely mechanic, with tools from his truck, replaced the broken fuel pump with the new one. The car started right up, and I followed him back to his home to retrieve the family. While we had been attending to the mechanical crisis, his wife had fed and entertained Susie and the kids. We thanked them both profusely and offered to pay what we could for all their help. He absolutely refused, wished us a Merry Christmas and asked only that we be sure to help someone else when the opportunity presented itself. In little more than two hours from the time the car broke down we were back on the road and headed home.

We couldn't help but marvel all the way at how utterly miraculous our experience had been; just another reminder of how the Lord watches over us. And as if to actually put it in writing, after we arrived home and were unpacking, I found the receipt for the fuel pump still in my coat pocket and for the first time noticed the parts store name at the top – "Christian Auto Supply"! The Lord does work in mysterious and wonderful ways.

In retrospect the whole experience seems so unbelievable; was our Good Samaritan an angel? I certainly do not know. But in checking all the available internet/Google information I can find today, there is no indication that there ever was a trailer park where I remember Susie and the kids waiting; nor can I locate any record of there ever having been a business called "Christian Auto Supply" in Sebree, Kentucky.

Merry Christmas