

# **Favorite Gifts**

A Creative Odyssey  
By Shasta Sovereign  
January 2025



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Dear Reader:

We are in the midst of the winter and have passed our holiday seasons. We have passed the equinox, and the days ever so slowly are inching back to their summer glory. During this time, many of us struggle with patience as we eagerly wait to Spring out.

But this pause, this void is crucial. It gives us time to gather our energy and find a focus point. In order for us to hit the ground running. But with every spring, there needs to be an anchoring point. I find that gratitude serves as a wonderful foundational piece.

What is the best gift you have received? What is the best gift you have given someone else. What does the receiving and giving reveal about yourself?

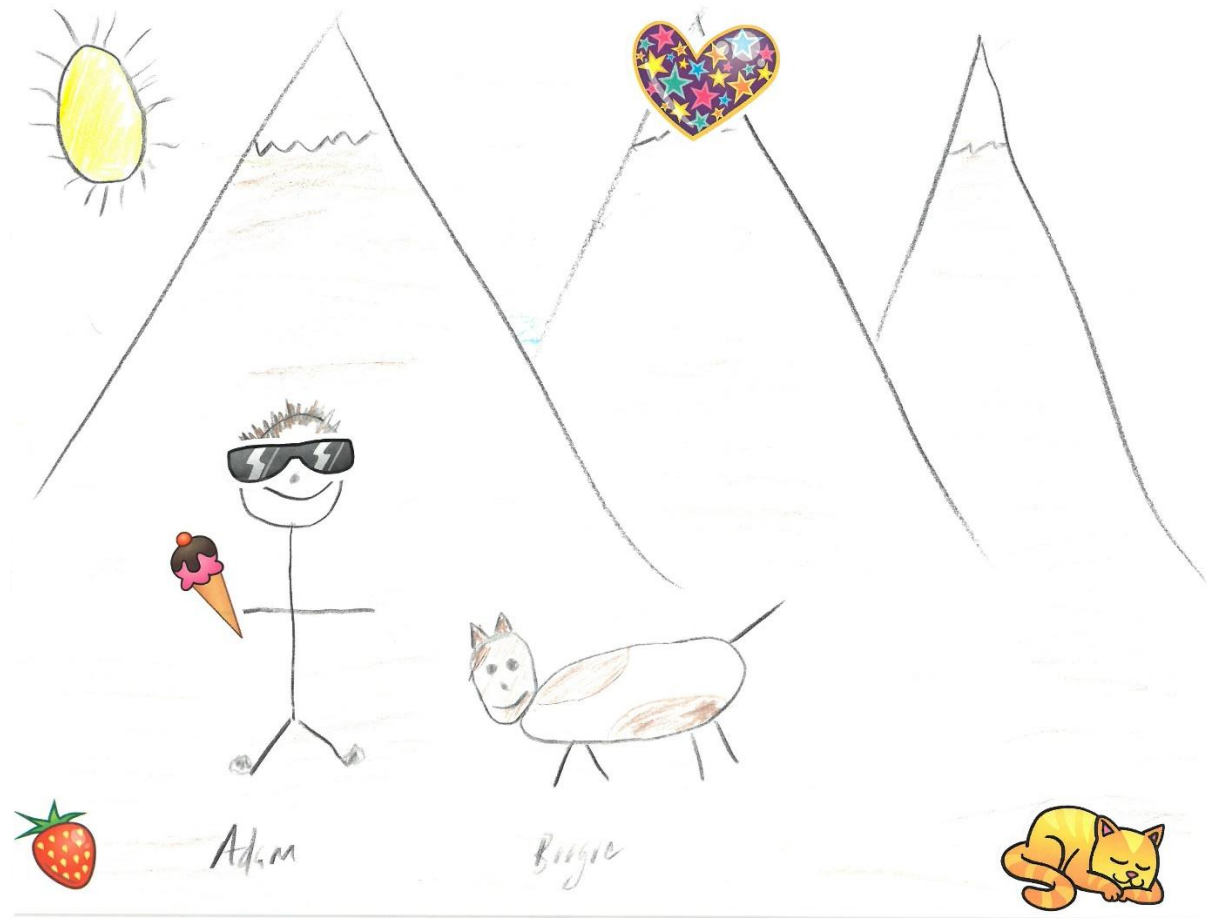
We hope you appreciate the following pages in which our participants have grappled with these questions, and more.

In Inspiration,

Shasta Sovereign

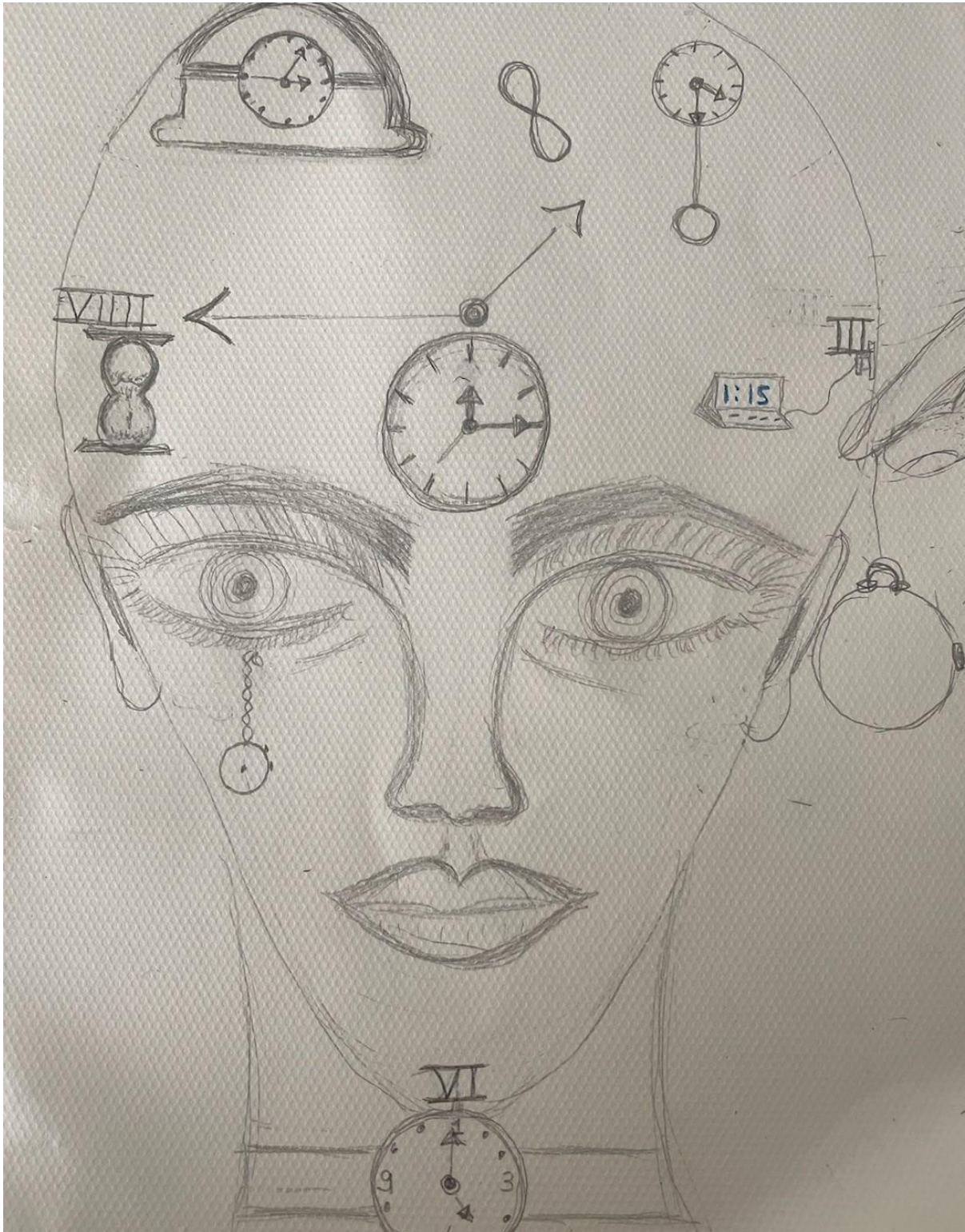


A Day in the Park  
By Adam



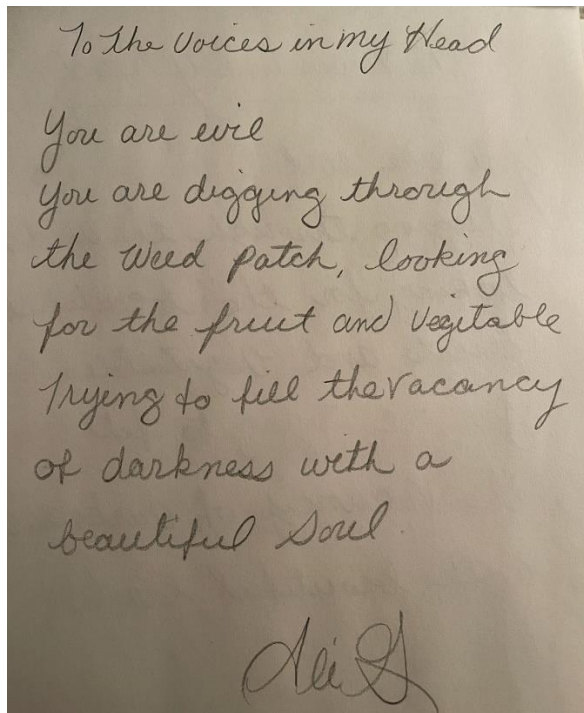


By AliG

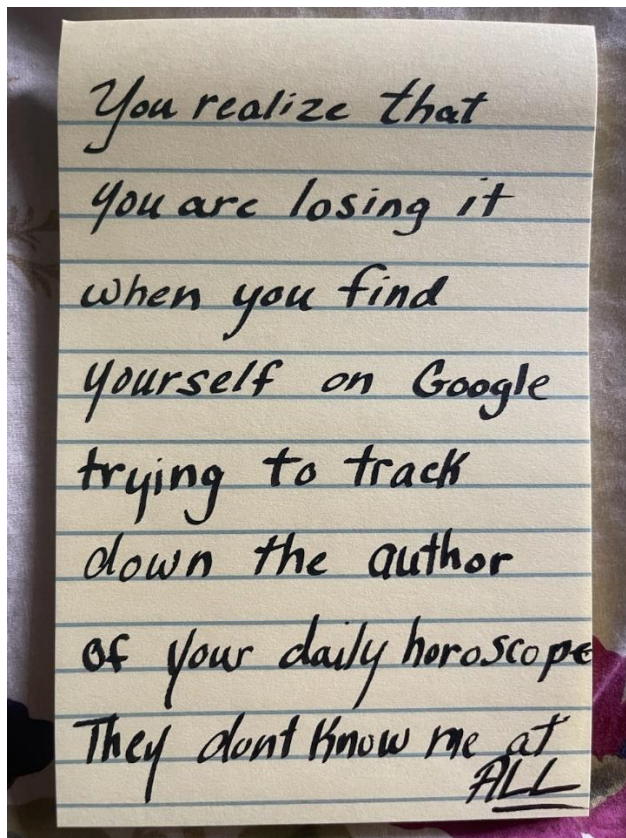




By AliG



By AliG





Isolation in the eye of my storm

By AliG



Erasing all those stars in charcoal shading was time consuming.



**Inner Monster**  
By AliG







## A Childhood Memory

By Ali

I have so many wonderful memories from my childhood. In an effort to choose one of them and write it down was easy.

I was born in Ohio, 1969. Haha, okay kind of kidding however, the place and date of my birth actually matter. It will help you relate to my tale. Times were different, I often jokingly start stories about my childhood with “back in the good ole days.” Seriously though, back when I was young, there were no cell phones, no internet, if there was drive thru fast food places, I was not taken to them. A convenience store or a 24 hour gas station with food and bags of snacks did not exist. A bottle of water did not exist for god’s sake. My dad always kept hiking flasks filled with water that he filled from the sinks on hand. I don’t know how I’ve survived this long; unfiltered water is a horrifying thought to me now.

Convenient, unhealthy food was not a thing in our house. My story would be vastly different if told now in comparison to 50 years ago. The reason that I mention these things is because my story is about my family’s road trips. In 1972, my parents moved our family of seven from Ohio to California. My family consisted of my mom and dad, my four siblings and our cat Kitty. Every single summer we would pack up the orange and white VW van and we would hit the road: destination, Ohio. I cannot recall what my siblings or I would do to prepare for these trips. My mom would have been working hard to get the meals and snacks prepared, getting the laundry washed, cleaning the house, packing the suitcases and making sure that we had everything that we might need for our road trip across the United States and our three month stay in Ohio. My dad would have been doing the mechanical maintenance on our van, organizing all of the entertainment that we played (i.e. Yahtzee, memory, cards, bingo, MadLibs, books, etcho-sketch, paper, crayons, penciled, speak and spell, Simon says, clue, monopoly, battleship, four square, crossword and so much more). He would make sure that we had everything for any unexpected event. A box of 30 gallon garbage bags worked great for emergency rain ponchos, he just cut a neck hole and two arm holes in them and they kept us dry, Camping gear, ropes, flares, pillows, blankets, music. So much work must have gone into preparation for our travels and yet I can hardly remember anything but loading up and leaving. We crossed the United States every summer to visit our extended family. There were a few years that we made the trip twice if a grandparent was ill. We were Seven people and a kitty all traveling across the country in a retrofitted VW van. This was before van conversions were a thing. My dad was a “jack of all trades.” we always had a family van and my dad would always remove the backseats of the van, install plywood across the back wheel wells, put a foam mattress on top of the plywood and then shag carpet the entire van. I mean the entire van. The bed was enclosed with shag carpet the walls, the floor. He did a great job, there were no raw edges. my mom would hand sew the curtains and my dad would hang them on rails that he had screwed in or installed on the interior, all windows could be covered.

Every single summer we would drive from Davis, California to Lakeside Ohio, approximately 2500 miles. We did 19 round trips in total. Try and imagine going through the Mojave desert in the middle of summer with no air conditioning. A vehicle containing seven people and a



cat. My mom's idea of air-conditioning was to soak cotton balls in sea breeze astringent which contained alcohol. She would pass a saturated cotton ball to each kid. We would wipe the cool wetness on our faces and our necks. The alcohol in the astringent would cool us down especially with the wind coming through the open windows.

Kitty was on her own, she did lots of panting. We usually made the trip in 3-5 days. My dad always mapped out different routes so that we kids could experience new places and new sites. I've travelled through every state between California and Ohio. The straight through route (which was the fastest) included Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana. The north route included Oregon and or Washington, the other northern states. The south route would take us through Arizona, New Mexico, etc. I mean we hit every state. Indiana was always the state we went through before getting to Ohio. When I say that my dad mapped it out, I am referring to the old fashioned folded paper thingie that gave a person an idea of how to get somewhere or show a person where they were, the state they needed to get to, roads, waterways, mountain ranges. Again, 1972, there were no cell phones, no map apps on your iPad. My mom would unfold the map and give my dad directions. While my mom and dad were navigating and driving, We kids would play games, real games that we played together. We did not have electronic devices, we interacted with each other and we laughed and we also got in fights. The phrase "don't make me pull this car over" is a real saying. My parents often heard "mom, dad, she's touching me." I was very good at annoying my siblings. Repeatedly poking my finger into their arm or leg was a good way of provoking them and getting a reaction. We laughed more than anything though. We smelled terrible. Seriously, seven people and a cat (I have purposefully not mentioned the litter box that was required when traveling with a cat because, gross) all traveling in the middle of the summer in a van with no air conditioning. The Mojave desert was approximately 115-120 degrees. That vehicle did not have a pleasant odor. We were packed very close to each other.

As I mentioned before, my dad had built a bed that was the size of a double bed across the back of the van and encompassed it with orange and yellow shag carpet. The entire van was shagged out. There were no seatbelts. We kids would sit and lay on the bed and floor. We would all sit Indian style on the bed when we were playing games together. When it was time to sleep, my two oldest sisters would get the bed, the next two siblings, my 3rd sister and my brother got the floor. The cubby that was under the bed was for me and Kitty. My mom and dad would pull over when they got tired and sleep anywhere. The desert ground, underneath the stars. If it was raining, they would sleep on the flat area above the ramp under an overpass. It wasn't unusual for my mom to comment about the coyotes howling, the tarantulas that were running all over the desert, or the snakes who wanted to get into any sleeping bag. My mom does not like snakes. We never got hotel rooms or motel rooms. We didn't get fast food. We didn't go to restaurants. My mom would fill a couple coolers with pre-made soups, sauces for noodle, casseroles and she would fix our dinners on a camping stove that my dad would set up.

We usually had sandwiches for lunch. My mom would get the loaf of bread, lunchmeat, cheese, veggies and the condiments and she would individually make each sandwich on her lap and pass them out as they were done. The best food part of our trips to Ohio was that my



mom would buy those packs of the mini boxes of cereal. Which had 10 to 12 different cereals in mini boxes, real cereal like fruit loops and lucky charms, the good stuff. Back then those little mini boxes had perforated lines and we would make a cut down the center and two perpendicular cuts basically cutting a capital letter I. There was a wax paper liner on the inside which we also cut through and then we would pull the flaps back thus making a portable bowl with the cereal in it. The milk got poured into the wax paper lined box. It was the only time that we were ever given cereal that wasn't healthy or wasn't granola. Our road trip snack was GORP. Anyone who doesn't know what GORP is, It is basically trail mix, a mixture of nuts, dried fruit and if we were lucky carob chips. Carob chips are a poor substitution for chocolate chips.

During our travels, there would be a time in the middle, usually day two that my dad would find a park with a hose faucet a spigot (back in those days the handle was left on the spigot). My dad would have each of us kids lean over so that he could wash our hair. We were bathing in public. No comment on that subject however, I'm writing this story at the request of my psychiatrist soooo.

There are so many details of our family adventures, it would require me to write a book or nineteen books to go into the details. Excitement, danger, fear, happiness, love, accidentally leaving a sister at a rest stop. I mean seriously, there were five kids. Driving away with at least four was a win win. The distance between exits was long, she was understandably scared. That event was the beginning of the count off, I was "five". Kitty couldn't talk, she was six. We only left her behind once, we were in Moab, Utah. We went back and found her under a bush. We all survived. My Kitty died in 1985, cats don't live as long as people. My daddy died this year. I think about my dad so much. He made our travels so special. He would tell us stories, point sites out to us, he showed us so much. I had a really good childhood I have so great memories.



I'm Fine  
By Ali





What do you see?

By Ali



What did you see first? A semi-profile of a dragon, his eye, horn, nostril or... The back view of a woman, her left arm over something, highlight between her shoulder blades and the center of her butt?



## Lovely Scars

By AliG



I see all my scars as my individual beauty. No one has the same scars, I am unique and special. My undiagnosed skin condition of 20 years has left me with scars over my entire body and emotional scars on the inside. I used to be ashamed and I tried to hide them. Now I let people see me, it's just me. My ex used to call me horrible names like Scar Face. He was cruel. I choose to see myself as beautiful rather than ugly. Positive over the negative.



## A Moment In Time

By Angel Lady

When asked to write about "a favorite childhood memory", my first thought was about the time when I was the winner of a big Spelling Bee that took place at our school, when I was somewhere around 10 years old. I was the final person up on the stage and had managed to make it to the Grand Finale. Would I strike out on this next word, or could I spell it correctly? The word was "antidisestablishmentarianism".

I did not like standing on stage in front of an audience anyway, but, somehow I could magically concentrate enough to follow a kind of logic of how the word broke into pieces and I surprised myself, as well as everyone else in the room, when I spelled it correctly. Wow, what a feeling! The shock and awe of everyone in the room, myself included.

Of course, I had no idea what it meant. And even now, as an adult, I needed to Google it to find out what it means. Which I will not go into here.

What I find interesting, is that another memory came to my mind of "a favorite childhood memory" that I felt was even more meaningful to me. And isn't it kinda funny how when you ask yourself such questions, how the subconscious mind will come up with things that you would not have expected? And for some reason, this other seemingly random memory has more meaning to me....

It goes back to when I think I was a few years younger than the Spelling Bee. I was probably about 7 years old. The only thing special about this particular day was that I was laying on my back in the lush, thick, green grass, looking straight up into the electric blue sky with white, cotton ball, billowy clouds quickly blowing by, so many of them, all moving so quickly. In that moment, just a fleeting moment in time, I became mesmerized by the sensation it created in me. I felt as if I was aware of how fast this Planet Earth was moving as I lay upon it. I didn't realize the clouds were moving quickly because of the wind currents, it appeared as if the Earth itself was moving so fast and I was reeling from that sensation, and it was as if the clouds were stationary and were my reference point as to how fast I was moving. It created a sense of dizziness, my traveling so fast, riding on this fast-moving Planet Earth.

But I could let go into a sense of security, laying in the velvety thick cushion of the green grass under me, letting myself be cradled safely, while hurtling through space, clouds dramatically whizzing by so rapidly. In that moment, I felt such a sense of wonder, and I felt a kind of oneness with Planet Earth, the incredibly intense blue sky, the white clouds, the birds flying up above me, and I was in awe of their ability to fly, and in that moment, I wished that I could fly as the birds do.

This is a moment, a moment in time, preserved as if watching a movie about my life, and honing in on that one moment. That moment was more "important" in my memory even more than winning the Spelling Bee.



And I can't help but ask myself why? What was special about that moment in time, compared to the other memory of winning the Spelling Bee? And I sit here typing on my computer's keyboard, just now....it comes to me....It was not about achieving anything in the eyes of other people...It was not about the dopamine rush of one's own sense of accomplishing something, or of feeling recognized, of feeling special because of something I had done....no....it was simply being aware of myself Being Fully Present, In The Moment.

A Moment In Time when I was free from the programming to be achieving something, of pleasing others, or proving myself to others or even just to myself. FREE. Free To Just Be.

That is definitely one of my more favorite childhood memories. And I would like to thank Dr. Samran for creating a structure for me to go through this journey inside myself, this process of writing, as I sit at the keyboard of my computer, look back at sentences, reflecting on if I am capturing what it is I am searching to come in touch with, inside myself, putting it across in words. Thank you for this venue of self-exploration, and this venue for sharing.

And in this moment, I feel aware of the presence of that 7-year old girl, and her sense of wonder, that she is still inside of me. The one who is still even Now, so Pure, so Sweet, so Wise, so Free from all of the programming. She just wants me to Identify with her, and to Remember that She Is Still Here, right Now, behind those eyes I see in the mirror, in the eyes of the older lady I have externally become now.

I see you Girl! I Feel You! I embrace you NOW with Love! Your Purity and Wisdom is Beautiful Girl, I Get You! A Tear Is Shed. What a Moment. Oh God, Let Me Remember THIS Moment. Let me remember this awareness of my "Inner Child". Some of us have heard about, read about, "Healing Our Inner Child". I thought that was about finding that wounded inner child and having our inner adult then embracing that child with compassion and understanding. I have done that, with Healers, and using guiding healing meditations on my own, for that purpose.

This was different. This was Acknowledging the Beauty, Purity, Wisdom and Completeness of the Inner Child, that part of me who was so in tune with the Pulse of Life in the most positive ways, despite the lack of security I felt from all the shuffling around that went on back and forth in my childhood. I don't think it had quite dawned on me, that part of my Healing of My Inner Child, was to give her the Acknowledgement of just how Incredibly Plugged In she was and IS even now! Wow, thank you for this creative writing project.

I am seeing more and more how writing can be used to see Goodness, Wholeness and Completeness deep inside myself, just by being asked to focus in on a theme or answering a thought-provoking question. Writing does not just have to be only to vent or rehash or ruminate on unpleasant memories, even if that may be the human mind's automatic reaction. Which was mine too, but, I said to myself "That's not the assignment, I remember Dr. Samran specifically saying "What is a FAVORITE memory from your childhood?". So, I asked that question to myself. And glad for it. I'm so grateful. Thank you Dr. Samran for your intuitive, caring guidance to help us to learn to use POSITIVE creative outlets, such as writing,





and art, to find Healing and Self Discovery through this wonderful format of Shasta Sovereign. Much gratitude.



Here is a photo of myself as a child, which captures that Moment In Time when I felt so much Beauty and Wonder as described in my story.



## I just can't pick one favorite, but if I must....

By Ayodhya

I have been contemplating this subject matter all month. Recognizing, recalling, and selecting a favorite gift received depends on mindset and in each moment that can change and does and what I consider my favorite gift does as well.

When I imagine a life without the things I take for granted such as a physical body with full working senses and faculties, then my very existence in a human body with the ability to think and reason and feel and move through life becomes the greatest gift.

When I see all of the horrid things that are done to animals by a species who believes itself to be the most dominant one on our planet, then my upbringing as a vegetarian with the most honor offered to the cow who has everything taken from her by humans, as well as my innate desire to comfort and protect all living beings, become the greatest gift.

When I think of how I had my biological family taken from me at such a tender age and see how other orphans can have horrible and tragic things happen to them out in the world, then being taken in by the temple and the Hare Krsna movement, raised in their schools and eventually given a set of parents who actually wanted to keep me as theirs to the extent that they have, becomes the best gift.

And along those lines, when I think of the stringent upbringing I had, where anything that was not Krsna-centered was considered Maya and a danger to my soul's well-being and how heavy this was to carry as a child who innately wanted to have comfort and laughter and free use of my imagination, then the uniqueness of my adopted mother who was a really good devotee but also a fun loving sweet human being who let me goof off sometimes, even in a Maya way, then I think of the comic book she sent me in the mail a couple years back and thus it Little Nemo in Slumberland, probably an antique or collectible by now, becomes my most treasured gift received.

Chanting japa; the entire mantra consisting of:

Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare  
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare

on a string of wood beads containing 108 of such, from the youngest age, was tedious. In Dallas Gurukula, at the age of 6 or so, we got to do it in a more sing-song fashion and we could walk as a group around the temple in the dark and sing japa. I don't recall the exact amount of time that we had to chant but for the adults or anyone (even a child) who had been initiated in front of the sacrificial fire (first initiation), it was at least 2 hours of chanting japa each day. That is usually how long it took to chant the promised 16 rounds, the entire mantra (16 words) on the 108 beads.



Here is a photo of japa beads.

My dearly departed boyfriend Gopal's on the left and mine on the right.

They are kept in a bag worn around the neck.

The right hand holds the beads and moves along each bead.

Pointer finger always out away from the beads.



It may not seem a big deal as I write about it until I recall that in Seattle Gurukula where we had a particularly cruel woman running the show and enforcing strange, cruel and unusual punishments on us children.

For some reason I cannot recall I was given the punishment of chanting 32 rounds a day when I was about 8 years old. The time that I had to do this was during the playtimes when all my ashram mates would be allowed to be walked down to the park out in the normal human world and be allowed to play. And even if they were organized and directed Krsna-centered or themed games such as tag or whatever (we would have to say a name of Krsna or His expansion or associates to get unstuffed), it was "fun" time.

I got to do this chanting in the greenhouse that contained the temple's Tulasi (sacred basil, to put it simply) plants. She was a worshipped plant and in Seattle some of us got to take care of our own. That I did love. I had named mine Rasa Parayana. The fact that I got to do it (serve my punishment) in Tulasi's house, in the top floor of the temple house versus in one of the



dark basements or closets in which I normally had to do punishments, is a big deal now that I'm writing about it.

I could never admit it back then because I would have been considered a demon and I don't even want to know what the punishment would have been for that, but chanting was one of my least favorite parts of my childhood days, being a devotee of Krsna. It was boring. It didn't come naturally as an activity that inspired me or made me feel closer to Krsna. And I remember one of the tapes they played of Srila Prabhupada, the one who brought the ancient Vedic traditions and religion from India in 1965, where he said that chanting is not an artificial imposition on the mind. I have to disagree from where I am at in my spiritual evolution.

And on that note, during japa time which was from 5 to 7 am, each temple played a tape of Srila Prabhupada (Abhay Charan Bhaktivedanta Svami) chanting japa, over the temple's loudspeaker system. I know it is on YouTube now and I don't get a good feeling when I try to listen to it. It triggers feelings and sensations I don't want to feel and even a sense of doom. I think that can be attributed to so much but one incident in particular stands out.

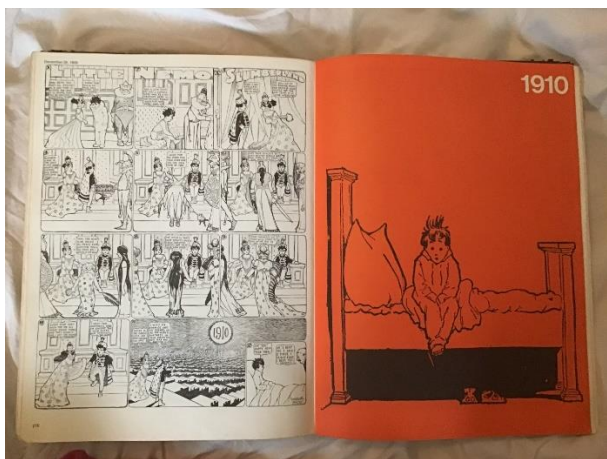
In upstate New York, on our farm, I was first initiated at age 13. So I was chanting 16 rounds a day as promised by me. I also had a lot of temple and altar service to do as I took 2nd initiation (brahmana) 4 months after I got first initiation, on top of being an academic student (so, school work). So while the congregation of devotees were all eating breakfast prasadam in the prasadam hall outside the temple room I was in the temple room cleaning the floor, on this particular day.

All of a sudden I heard a whole bunch of chanting, loud and frantic. This was unusual during prasadam time so I opened the temple room door. I was told by someone that my friend Ragalekha's mom was nursing her new baby boy when blood started coming out of his mouth. Then he stopped breathing. One of the woman adults (Krsna Kumari) had taken the baby and began CPR. She ended up doing CPR on the baby as the vehicle drove them along the country roads, 45 minutes away, all the way to the hospital. The baby ended up being fine and is now a healthy, lovely man.

But it left a negative impression on me.

Of course it didn't help that a couple days after that during Srimad Bhagavatam class (another hour long part of the daily morning program), one of the community leaders (later exposed as a child molestor) said something about a baby being conceived in sin and thus almost dying. It was so bizarre because that is not even Vedic lingo. I imagine everyone was in a state of gratitude and relief that the baby boy had survived. So ugly.

But I digress. My adopted mom let me read some of the aforementioned comic book (Little Nemo in Slumberland) with her during japa time sometimes. So we would be reading it and then if a strict devotee or authority (like my adopted dad, her husband) came by we would simply resume chanting. But the forbidden-ness of such Maya activity coupled with the absolute hilarity of the comic book's content had us laughing so hard. This was pure joy.



Now, having that book in my possession is a cherished treasure.

To be added to so many gifts I have received in my life are my 6 children who I would have to say are my greatest and favorite gifts as they have given my life purpose the last 32 years. Two of them are still minors and at home along with an adult son of mine, and three grown children are gifts to the world. I still have in my possession the numerous gifts they made for me while attending public school (probably the only real thing I liked about public school).



And now as parents themselves (2 of them so far) and loving beings that make me want to be the best human I can, they are the gifts that keep on giving.

The encouragement and incentives I get from the mental health caregiver whose site I am writing all of this to share on, is another favorite gift.



Thank you for this opportunity to share.



**Nourished through love, A Gift of a Lifetime**

By A Shepherd has landed

I think most people would say their time.  
That's what I thought of at first  
But I'm going to have to say  
My coffee protein shake mix with vitamins.  
How could you not give it?!  
You're giving a good day.  
The feeling of excitement, joyfulness  
Satisfaction and contentment,  
And last, but not least,  
Love.  
A nourished body is  
A nourished mind, heart and soul.  
A full belly, a nourished body  
In return  
Which nourishes your soul  
And explodes your energy.  
All in all  
You're giving a good day  
And if they choose,  
A good life!



### **How a bad day saved my life**

By Baby Girl

Back in October of 2023  
A simple day changed my life.  
I was a severely, severely bad alcohol and druggie  
And I got in my car and I went for a ride  
Picked up a friend.  
And that turned tragic.  
I was in a severely bad car accident,  
Hurt my passenger and myself.  
And from then on, my whole life has changed.  
God stepped in to save my Life  
And I have been clean and sober since October 1st of 2023.  
From then on, my life has been  
One miracle after the next.  
It's been up and down, up and down  
But I can finally see where I want to be.  
I got a new job, I am still clean and sober  
And I can finally open up my heart  
And have real true friends.  
God has non-stop let me know  
He has got my back and he walks with me everyday.  
Who would have thought,  
To find out  
That a really bad day  
Saved my life.

### **The Gift of Love**

By Baby Girl

When I think about  
My favorite gift  
That I got,  
I got many, many gifts  
That were awesome and amazing.  
But the one that stands out more  
Is the gift of love and friendship  
That I got from God  
And from many many people.  
I have never,  
In my 41 years,  
Had a Christmas with such love  
And grace and respect.  
And just makes me want  
To try to be a better person





## Tech

By Beth Rotan

I am going to try to start my new year off by trying to make less of a technological footprint in the world. I have already been trying to do this for the last couple of years. I stopped using my ATM card and I don't have one with my bank anymore. I use cash whenever I purchase anything except online. If I need something, I have a prepaid card that I just add cash to in order to minimize my so called footprint in technology. I have been a victim of identity theft and had to put a freeze on my credit. I didn't have social media for 2 years and I just recently started a new Facebook account only to stay in contact with my family since I have been away from them. I have a house phone and a desktop computer I use instead of my cell phone and I make sure I have a phone I can take my battery out of. Like Edward Snowden said no go juice it can't function so I take it out when I am not using it. It may sound a little extreme but it's what I have to do to stay safe on the web. I'm most likely going to have to change my name and social security number if it's something I can accomplish. Anyways I hope this gives some insight on what my plan is.



## Cat Xmas

By BJB



When you have cats and a kitten during the holidays and you need to get creative. An indoor “tree” because can’t have an indoor tree with our cats right now. A kind of “sculpture.”



## Favorite Gift Received

By Brit

As I ponder over gifts received, so many come to mind  
There is no favorite one particularly as all were precious in their time  
Maybe it was my Bible at age 1 or first Missal at age 5  
Or maybe the personal hand towel embroidered and specifically all mine  
As years passed the gifts evolved, from Raggedy Ann to books and charms  
However, none were closest than the hugs received from family, and friends awaiting arms.

Gifts are cherished, revered, and reflect memories of meaning at that time  
From past to present, young and old, a record player, a ring, and a clock with awakening  
chime

Vouchers, gift cards, money, allowing an excitement to spend and personally select

The independence as a teenager to choose and then perfect

The item always wanted, that pocket money could not afford....

The white go-go boots, flared pants, a record, and jewelry from Montgomery Ward

My rosary and Mother Mary grotto picture are irreplaceable and gifts beyond measure

Safely stored, neatly kept, as should be any priceless treasure

My gifts that never fade, never are returned, never wrapped, yet always light ...

Are the love, hope, and peace I receive when I close my eyes and keep all memories **BRIGHT**



By Daryl

My favorite gift ever received  
Was a brand new mountain bike  
That I was wanting.  
And so my grandparents  
Bought it for me



## The Best Gift I Ever Gave

By Desiree Lee

The best gift I ever gave is a difficult topic. How does one quantify what “best” means? The most expensive? The one with the most personal connection? The one most helpful to the recipient?

After losing my daughter to the foster care system for over seven months, the best gift I can give her is to rectify the issues that the situation arose from. She is back home conditionally now, and even more progress is being made.

The other best gift I can give her is my time. I have serious health problems. I don’t know how much longer I have, but I’m marking time in years instead of decades. I want to be present more for her so that her memories of me are good ones.

I know this is about the best gift I ever gave, but I feel remiss if I didn’t include the best gift I ever received. This year it is getting my daughter back home where she belongs.

Outside of my family, I have started giving bags of food to the homeless. Living in Dorris, I do most of my shopping in Klamath Falls, OR. I see more and more homeless people in populous areas, holding signs asking for food. When my daughter was in foster care, my visitation was in Yreka. Across the street from the CPS building is a tent city on the hillside. It breaks my heart to see people in such dire straits. In the past I’d buy a meal at a restaurant for a person. While that is helpful, it’s one meal.

Instead I’ve been making bags of shelf stable foods, including bread, peanut butter, fresh fruit, crackers, and whatever other things I can find on sale at the time. I put some plastic cutlery and napkins in the bag as well. If I have the extra money at the time, I will buy packages of baby wipes to add to the bag. This way the recipient isn’t near a facility where they can wash their hands, at least this allows them to clean their hands before eating. I have given these out in the hope that it provides more than one meal.

I have done this of my own volition, though I won’t lie. If I can find some crowdfunding for it, that would help me make more of these donations happen. Perhaps I should record myself giving these bags out like the YouTubers I see doing homeless outreach.

So, I leave it up to you. Which of these do you think is the best gift I ever gave? Which situation do you think qualifies as best?

**The best gift I ever gave someone**

By DLS 35

Life.  
Breath.  
A heartbeat  
for my babies  
thumping softly  
and with strength,  
definition,  
purpose.  
A gift from God  
A gift for me  
to give  
to humanity.  
Holy light  
The best gift  
I ever gave  
4 children.

**The Burgundy Volvo**

DLS 35

The Burgundy Volvo.  
A gift for me. One of my best gifts at the forefront of my good memories.  
I had 2 small children. Babies. No car. I had to rely on my husband to drive me anywhere.  
To buy groceries, clothes.  
The things a woman would want and need for herself  
and family.  
Standing in the kitchen  
gazing out the window  
to the street one day  
a Burgundy Volvo sedan  
slowly pulls up  
and parks.  
Shiny. Bright deep burgundy. New. Beautiful.  
I had no idea  
it was a gift for me.  
From my husband.  
He traded in his BMW and took the bus to work now  
So that I  
could have a car. So that I no longer had to struggle with babies and little to no  
transportation.  
A great gift and a great memory.

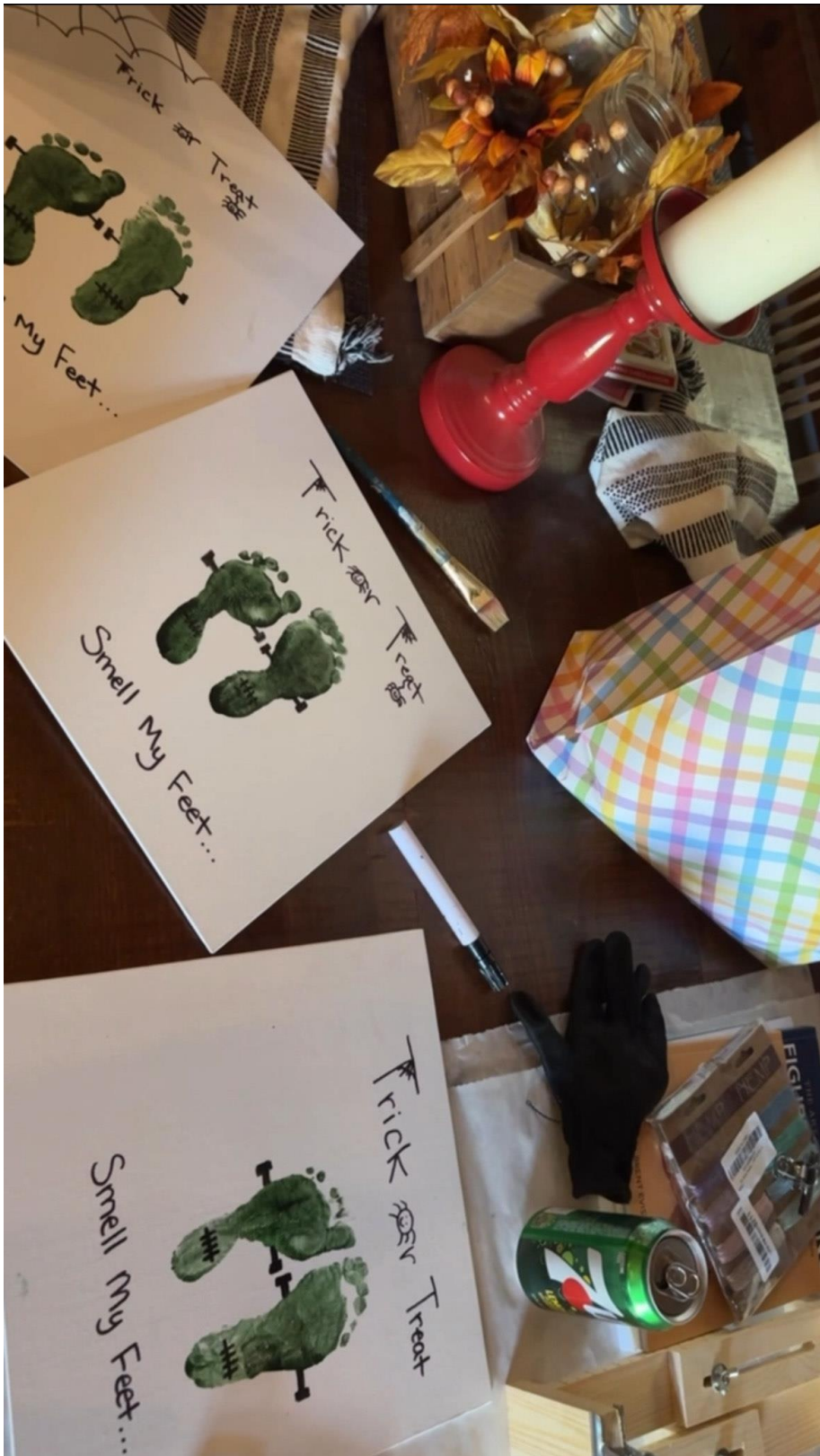
**Grateful**

By Drew

I had good holidays.  
Got games  
And sent a card to grandparents.  
Got a card from grandparents  
Worth \$20  
And I got \$40 from my mom.  
Went to the movies with my mom.  
Seen Mufasa.  
Got new clothes.  
My dad gave me \$20  
And ate tacos.  
I got a new pad to write in,  
Made by grandparents.  
The games names are  
Supermario party, Jumanji, Supermario 3D world.  
Fun.  
Get to be a cat,  
Bowser's fury.  
Got a blanket.  
The dog baby girl is in heat  
So Charly is all crazy.  
My Macy got something in her eye.  
I had to get some wood on the parch.  
We had to lock up our mail.  
Boy Duck, he gets mean to the chicken  
Just the one chicken.



Trick or Treat, smell my feet!  
By Eloise



Art project with my baby girl



**Favorite Gift**

By Ember Lee

So the question is, what is the best gift I've ever given?  
I wasn't sure of the answer,  
So I reached out and asked a few important people in my life  
The first was my mother-in-law.  
I just genuinely mentioned that my entry this month was about the best gift I've ever given.  
Without a pause,  
She answered back and said  
You gave me my grandbabies and you gave me a daughter.  
I didn't think that qualified for an answer  
So I asked my husband what's the best gift I've given you?  
And he told me a close answer.  
He said you gave me 3 beautiful children.  
And you also gave me a chance to marry my best friend (me).  
Then finally, I ask my children what the best gift I had given them.  
I expected it to be an object.  
But they told me the best gift I had given them was loving them,  
Never leaving their side and always understanding.  
So, to sum it up, the best gift I have given is what most people dream of:  
Grand babies, a daughter in law, a wife, and a loving mother.  
All the things I would have never expected to be someone's best gift.  
So remember, sometimes, the best gift can just be  
Loving someone, understanding them, being by their side.

**Will it end?**

By Ember Lee

Through her eyes, she sees darkness  
Through her eyes, she feels empty.  
The woman she used to be, gone.  
She is beat down and broken  
A shadow  
In her own body and mind.  
She can't seem to find the light  
To brighten her day.  
Some thing has triggered  
Her mind, soul and body.  
That is dangerous  
And it consumes her.  
No one will understand her  
Ever again.  
No one sees how much  
She is hurting



And how much she wants to help  
But can;t express the pain  
She feels everyday.  
The pain she sees in her dreams.  
Because then, it becomes real  
It all becomes true.  
She is slowly losing  
The first man she loved-  
Her father.  
The man that helped her  
With her own thoughts,  
And protected her from her own darkness.  
How the voice is  
Just blank.  
The darkness is winning.  
She is trying to fight  
Question is:  
Will she win?  
Or will the darkness?

Please understand, please.



## A gift for our daughters

By Estelle

I circled in a catalog, then one morning received my most meaningful childhood toy that I would play with every day. My sister's doll would walk along mine, immersed in any story we'd create. They now sleep in a keepsake box in the home of our mother. Hopefully we will one day gift them to our future daughters.



Doll

Received as  
gift in 2008



## Coincidence

By Formerarcher

We are supposed to write about a gift we received that we are thankful for. I know this probably sounds cliché, but I am thankful for my second chance at life.

Yes, I screwed up, yes I got three DUIs and relapsed in May of 2021. And I lost everything I had worked so hard to gain. My boyfriend killed himself and my kids stopped talking to me. My mother stole everything from my house. But my life was far more crazy and I had things happen to me that are unexplainable. No one can, or would, help me. I lost my faith in God for quite some time, and I lost myself.

I am slowly getting better, but my questions are still unanswered. Why? Why did these things happen to me? Why was it ok to happen to me and no private investigator or police, no one in my family, none of my friends would help me or believe me? They all left me, they just told me these things weren't happening to me. But they were. No one cared, but how can we call this America, if in fact I think I must be an owner piece of property, freedom? What is that? I feel like the only way "they" leave me alone is if I completely ignore them as if they don't exist. Why is that the answer and why is that fair? Why don't I matter? I feel like my parents sold me, or something like that happened. They say that slavery was abolished, but I don't believe that. How can my phone, my bank accounts, my emails and any other accounts I have be hacked? When I say hacked, I mean I could go buy a new phone right now, and regardless if I make a new account and never use an old one, it doesn't matter. "They" will be in my shit. I spent two years of my life gathering evidence and it still doesn't matter. When I have tried to report identity theft to the FBI, my phone call is ALWAYS forwarded to suicide prevention hotline. I try and I try, and nothing works. I am followed everywhere I go. There is always a drone, or whatever it is. in the sky following me. I have never been treated for mental illness, even though now after all of this, I have PTSD bad. I flip out on people in public, and I don't give a shit who they are. Somehow though, I will get arrested. Everytime I get close to figuring out what is going on, and "they" (Illuminati? Free Mason's?, not sure?) will always take my evidence.

Except, I am a hell of a lot smarter than any of them know. I have flash drives, and SD cards with everything on them since day 1. And they are somewhere safe, so when I need them or when someone someday believes me, I will be able to expose the sick bastards for exactly what they are. I have found, in my research, that they do this to people like myself, a felon, someone who is considered not a credible source, or illegal immigrants. People who have no one to go to in order to ask for help. I started to do dumb shit to get myself into trouble. I was arrested for felon in possession of body armor. I had a bullet proof vest pad that belonged to my ex boyfriend who had killed himself. When he killed himself, that's when this shit started happening to me. I honestly didn't know that it was illegal to possess, but apparently it's a bad ass having a gun. I had no idea that having a piece of kevlar was illegal. So, defending yourself after being a felon is also a right you have lost, or I myself have. So I decided to not let them win. I have been clean and sober, and it is not happening like it was. I mean, people would actually tell me that they were following me. How do you get help when the ones that are supposed to help you are involved in hurting you??



I spoke with a CHP officer about some of this and he told me to look into the story of Edward Snowden. Naturally I did, and it talks about how he is a whistleblower, a former CIA agent who told about the government and how they spy on people through their phones. Then I listened to the song "They not like us", by Kendrick Lamar and the song "Drop the world" by Lil Wayne and Eminem, and "Ghost in the making" by Floater. I believe the singer from Floater was one of them at one point, because he sings about them and what they do. "They" never say anything to me. Very rarely. I mean I can flip out on them in public, just like they want me to do, and they never say anything. I told a woman at Walmart that she was a piece of shit and I said I don't know how you sleep at night. She looked furious, but not one single word came out of her mouth. I used to be scared of them until after many encounters with them I realized they can't physically touch me. They try to push you over the edge to harm yourself. I will NEVER hurt myself and they know it. One woman told me, "you just won't die will you"? Don't you find that odd? How about being on the phone with the bank and a check disappeared in front of the banker's face. She said that has never happened to her. Or how their computer crashed almost every time I call a bank, or EDD or disability, or anything important. It's all a mystery and now I am sharing it with you. I could go on for hours about this and tell you story after story of all the things that happen to me. And how can it be that there is no help for me?

So I am left to try to clear my mind of it, but I will never forget.

**EARTHBOUND NO MORE**

By Flying Ace

My seventh birthday gift was a  
Box wrapped in brown paper bags  
Tied with kite string  
At my place at the table

I ripped the bags off, tore into the box  
Inside a pair of strap-on roller skates  
Two shiny wheels in the front, two in the back,  
a key to adjust the skate's length and width  
to perfectly fit my shoes  
Before mom or dad could help  
I screwed the skates tightly  
To my earthbound feet

Rolled up the concrete sidewalk  
Arms flailing for balance  
Falling every other step  
Bloody skinned knees, gravelled palms,  
Getting up and falling again  
And again and again, skating

Up Seminary Hill, the winding road  
Steep even for me on my bicycle  
But not steep enough to stop me

Skating and skating and skating  
Up to the very top  
Overlooking the valley, the town,  
My house. Plunging headlong  
Down the hill down the steep hill  
Laughing, screaming, flying

Falling hard  
Body slamming into concrete  
Spirit soaring into space  
Soul landing in God's outstretched arms

Earthbound no more

**Poetry Collection**

By Golden Sapphire

## Part 1

Wishing I wasn't suffocating  
Wishing I wasn't drowning  
Going deeper and deeper  
Wishing I could toss  
The crown  
Into the deepest part of the ocean.  
Wanting to jump in the water  
To wash away my sorrow  
Not swim after my crown  
Wanting to let it go  
Wishing God would give  
Straight answers instead of riddles.  
Wishing his voice wouldn't  
be inside my head  
When someone asks if I hear God's words.  
I have to deny it  
Because everyone wants power  
Everyone wants greed  
Everyone thinks I have all the answers  
From the bible.  
But I never read the bible.  
I barely went to church  
Because I believe in God  
I believe in goddess  
I believe in Jesus as my soulmate.  
Everyone thinks I can heal them  
But I'm not the Savior.  
Never claim to be him.  
What I hate about myself  
Is heaven's crown.  
Because I'm always being hunted down  
I spent most of my life  
In hiding.  
Never once said who I am  
Until I broke down  
Until my mind broke down  
Into pieces.  
But no one understand what  
It means to wear the crown/  
What it means to be used for power.  
But what no one knows  
Is that heaven crown isn't worth money



It's actually worthless  
To those who want to seek money and power.  
Because direct link is still direct link  
Wanting to find a dark place to hide  
Away from corrupted souls  
Not wanting the world to look towards  
Me for answers that I cannot say  
Not wanting to rewrite Jesus' past  
Because only I know his true past.  
Not wanting history to repeat  
With my death  
When those with corrupted souls  
Won't hesitate to take my life away...

## Part 2

Gift I want  
Doesn't come wrapped  
Doesn't go under a tree.  
Wishing I could trust  
Someone  
With me as prophet.  
That wish  
Would never come true  
Because everyone would rather  
Betray that trust.  
So I close off,  
Shut down,  
Just need to focus  
On healing.  
But can't heal.  
The voices want me  
To end my life.  
So maybe  
I should listen to them.  
Because no one seems to care  
If I end it.  
Everyone says  
It's my choice too.  
So maybe  
If I step off the edges  
I take that leap  
Just to end it all,  
God would open the  
Gates and welcome me home  
With open arms.





The voices are winning the battle  
While I'm losing the battle.  
Maybe I should just end  
The pain  
I feel deep inside my heart.  
I just want the voices to stop  
Whispering, yelling, screaming  
Inside my head.  
The gift I want  
Doesn't come wrapped,  
Doesn't go under the tree.  
But to actually trust someone  
With me as prophet  
Is hard.  
The gift I want  
Is someone to love me  
For me  
Broken pieces and all...



**Best Christmas Present**

By Grace

I am going to tell you  
How my best Xmas Present was as a child.  
I am such a mother's and father's girl.  
My parents  
Theresa and Jack  
Were always my favorite Xmas present  
Every year.  
I thank my parents everyday  
For being there for me  
And they were my best present.  
Every year.



## Parenting

By Greeneyed Mystery

Growing up most of us dream of becoming parents  
We talk about names and attributes we want them to have  
We speak about the gender we want and in which order  
We fantasize about their little fingers and toes and we love the way a new baby smells.  
But no one really understands the trials and tribulations  
The blood, sweat and tears you put into raising a child  
No one talks about the back talk and arguments  
The repeating yourself over and over  
The feelings of scared and worried for your child's future  
The feelings of defeat and failure as a parent  
Being a parent and raising children is not for the weak  
Being a parent and raising children will be the most trying but rewarding thing you will ever  
do in your life.  
I love my children and my reward will be someday soon watching my children have a life of  
their own  
Having the reward of watching them raise children of their own  
Parenting is hard but the end game is well worth it.

## Am I going crazy?

By Greeneyed mystery

No matter what we do, this boy does not listen. Lying about everything, and now he's stealing! What is going on? I yell at him and it does nothing. We ground him and it does nothing. When we correct him, he stares straight through you. He is mean to his sister and makes her cry. He doesn't respect me and he barely respects his father. He's not doing good in school. He'll fall asleep, and when his teacher tries to wake him up, he's rude and aggressive. He's hanging out with not so good kids, which makes me so angry. I feel like I'm always on edge, I'm always in fight mode dealing with this kid. The past 6 months I've been working on my mental health, trying to control my depression and anxiety. I've been learning what triggers my PTSD and if I can control that too. I am struggling, I am depressed and have to push myself out of bed just to pee. I shower once a week, if that. I stopped brushing my hair and I stopped taking care of myself. If I do get out of bed, my anxiety is so bad I'm on alert all the time. I'm snappy and easily triggered, freak out, then hide in my room. I don't go pick my daughter up from school because I'm worried of the stares and whispers. Worried my son's actions have made everyone look at us like we're bad parents. And my PTSD cannot handle that. My PTSD has caused me to not sleep much even though I'm exhausted, because when I do sleep I'm having nightmares and waking up gasping for air, grabbing at my throat. During the day, I'm too tired to do anything. I am miserable in this prison of a brain and I wish it would all go away. Sometimes I have thoughts of leaving my family because my mental health can't handle my son. But then I fall into a depressive emotional state and just cry because I feel like I should be stronger than that. How can a child make me leave my husband and my daughter when they need me? I cry all the time. Anything happy sad, good, or bad, I



cry. For no reason I'll cry. I feel like I'm going crazy. Like my brain is uncontrollably making these assumptions and feelings on its own. I have no control. It's a constant battle, I fight myself all the time. I've been dissociated, and lose hours or minutes at a time, being in my head. Thoughts of me not being loved, not being enough, being hated, are on constant repeat. I struggle with if I can't get my son to respect me, how can I expect anyone else to respect me. I hate this. I hate feeling alone, I hate feeling trapped like I can't escape this sink drain of a downward spiral. I hate feeling like I'm drowning fighting to come up for air. I just want to be normal. I just want to be happy. And I just want my son to be a good kid.



### My Gift to Jerry Tamen

By Gus

I made a small box with some gifts in it and it is wrapped up with shiny colorful paper. It is a nice gift for Jerry Tamen. I think he will really appreciate this nice gift from me. I will mail it to Jerry Tamen and he will get a gift from me in the mail. Jerry Tamen is somewhere in the world- somewhere interesting!



### My Favorite Gift

By Gus

My favorite gift for Christmas  
was the swords.  
They are razor sharp swords  
that look really deadly!  
I think they could cut you  
very easily.  
They are no joke.  
The swords can be used for combat!!



By Gwen





**Favorite Gift**

By Helen

My favorite childhood memory  
Is when I was 10 years old  
And took a train ride on Amtrack  
To go to Los Angeles  
To see my dad.  
We never got to spend much time  
With him growing up,  
So to me,  
That was special.  
And I will never forget it



**Billy the Frog**  
By James

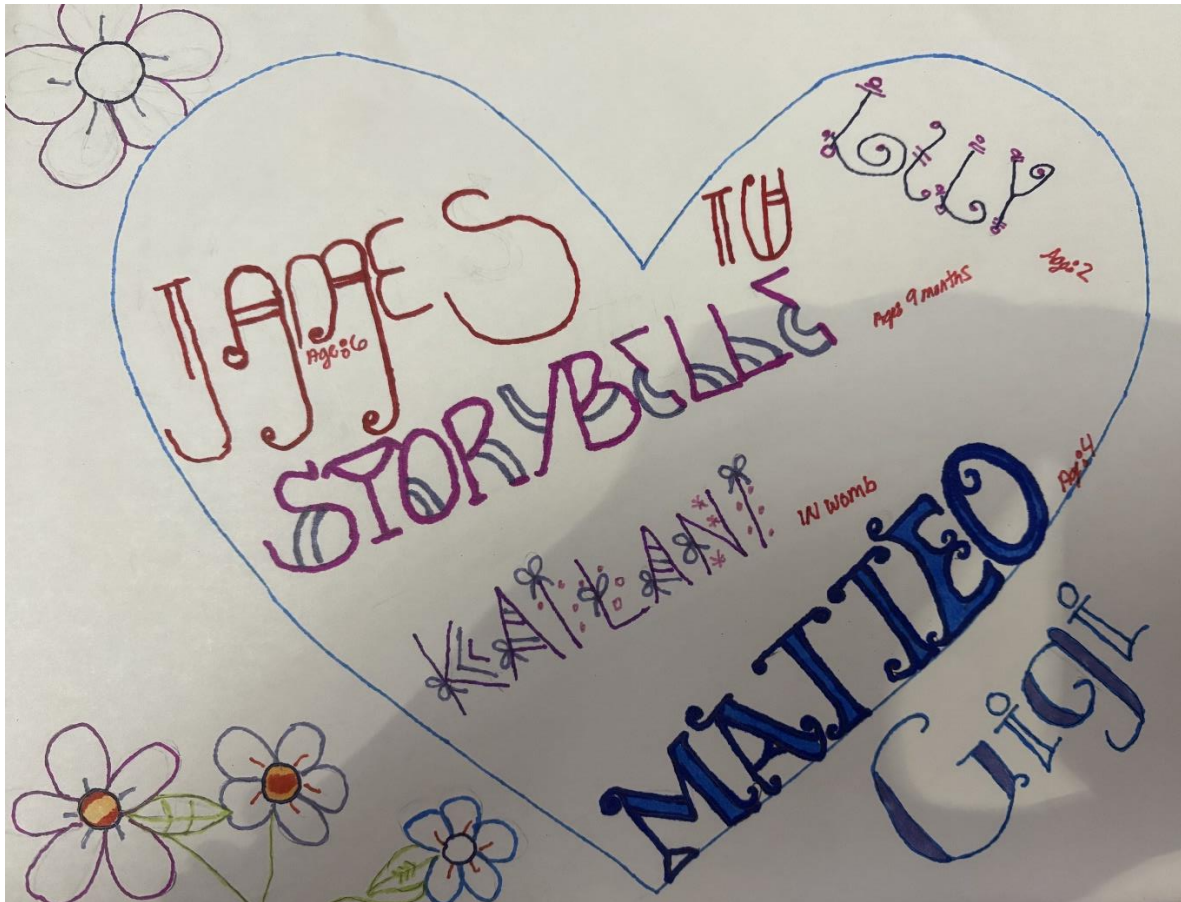






### My most special gifts

By Jasmine Carter



My favorite ever gift is and always will be my grandbabies. These are their names and ages. Their laughter and smiles, even the tears. This is what this grandma lives for. They are what's precious in this life



## My Heart Dog, Wally

By Kelly

He thought he was human, that's for sure. Always wanted to drink out of a human cup and the water faucet. He never used the doggy door either... only the human door. When I took him on Airplane flights with me, he had a different walk at the Airport. Very cute.

He was also a lot like me. We knew each other very well, like we could read each other's minds. He was also stubborn at times, like me.

He was also a great swimmer. Swam like an Otter. Dr. Sampson, at Mount Shasta Hospital called him Superman because he had above average muscle. He was an Athlete. He lived his stick and playing fetch. He also loved the snow and loved driving with me in the car. I called him my Co-Pilot.





## **Favorite Gift**

By Kinoko

For many years now, I have given people I love pieces of polished amber to mark special occasions. On cold, gray days - especially when it's snowing or raining - the warm, golden glow of amber can feel like a purpose-made antidote for the winter blues. Every piece I give is unique, with shiny spangles, mossy flecks, and minuscule bubbles of water and air. The beauty of the amber runs deep, for within lies nothing less than frozen space and time from bygone eras, bridging the long gap between what once was and the present. I get the amber from a good Polish friend who loves wild mushrooms. I trade him porcini, morels, and many other kinds, and he returns the favor by letting me pick several gems from his vast collection. In this way, even acquiring the amber feels like an exchange of gifts. I do have a hard time picking favorites, but for me at least, the amber is always special as a gift that keeps on giving.



**Carpal Tunnel**  
By Lilly



When I crochet, I swear I get carpal tunnel. One was a gift for my mom and other was a gift for my partner.

**Alive**

By Lisa

2025 and shockingly I'm alive.

High school guidance counselors. "Where do you see yourself in 5 years?"

It's a meme now "I don't know what I'm doing now let alone 5 years from now" and everyone gets a good laugh.

Fifteen year old me is not laughing. She's sitting in front of the counselor trying to figure out what they could mean. She starts to panic because she doesn't have an answer and feels she is supposed to. I'm sure that most people had an answer.

I ended up dropping out of high school. I couldn't answer the question.

I couldn't see myself living to be 18 let alone 21. These were milestones that I was to look forward to. I had no idea how to live, what I was supposed to do. I'm not sure I know now.

I've survived to 55.



**Early Bird**  
By Loki



The early bird is running late. Captured in Eureka, CA. at 200mm



**Haikus**

By Luna Lumbre

#1

Falling yet again-  
Will I lose myself this time?  
or will I find love?

#2

New moon and new year  
Opportunity to choose  
a new path forward

#3

Capricorn New Moon  
I rededicate myself  
to healing and growth



### **Favorite Gift Given**

By Marilyn

My favorite gift I have ever given is a Big Plushy Recliner that I got for my late husband. He was 6'4" and it was his favorite place to be. Of course he thought that I paid too much for it. And I told him that I wanted him to be so comfortable that he would never want to leave home. He absolutely enjoyed his big monster chair. It's still here in the living room and nobody ever wants to set in it because it's too big. That's my story I hope everyone enjoys it.



### **Favorite Gift Received**

By Marilyn

My Favorite Gift

Was an Easy Bake Oven.

It came with little cake pans

And little boxes of cake and cookie dough mixes.

It had a light bulb in it

To cook the cake and cookies.

I was baking up goodies for all my brothers and sisters.

I must have been about 9 years old.

And to this day I remember

How delicious 😊 everything I baked in my oven tasted.





## Sailing

By Markus

For me,  
Sailing has never happened before.  
I have always wanted to go on a cool sailing yacht for a vacation.  
I am, however, not a fan of deep water  
Where you can't see the bottom  
And which has fish bigger than a boat.  
I do watch a few shows about sailing.  
I have been to the docks  
Where the ship *Black Pearl* for the Pirates of the Caribbean movies was docked.  
She is a beautiful ship for sure.  
I wanted to do the tour but couldn't at the time.

## Disneyland and SeaWorld

By Markus

I will start this journey by going to my grandparent's house in Los Angeles. We would usually go there every summer break from school. This year was a treat. I'm not sure how old I was but I remember mom saying that I was finally tall and old enough for something.

We went out early in the morning and no one would tell me where we were going. We finally arrived at this place with a huge parking lot. Then I saw the sign. I was so excited to just see the place. We rode as many rides as we could fit in for that day. My favorite ride was probably the haunted house. You also have to remember it was a long time ago and since then I've been there lots more times until I got older and couldn't afford to go.

The next day we had gotten taken to a train station for Amtrak. We took the train to San Diego to go to our next destination. That was also my first train ride. Really neat experience. I'm not sure how we got from the train station to sea world but we got there.

Sea World was very neat too. We went and checked out all the stuff we could while fitting in the special events. We went and saw the most exciting one, watching Shamoo. My parents went and sat in the back while I was up in the front getting a closer look and better experience. After a certain point I realized why they sat back there. I was totally soaked head to toe and had to walk around the rest of the day drying off.

In all I would have to say that was one of the most exciting moments when I was a child. I am sure there were more similar events but they don't quite top that.



## **Favorite Christmas Gift**

By Miss Kim

My favorite memory was when my sister and I received our first iPod from my parents for Christmas! I remember the feeling of this novel music device being held for the first time and being a middle schooler with so much excitement. Some of the original devices from Apple still remain my favorites despite the growth in technology. The simplicity of CD players were still present, but a new generation of devices were introduced that Christmas. Since then, it's amazing how much the iPod has changed into phones. Christmas has always been my favorite holiday. Not just for gift giving, but the prelude of the holiday season brings so much joy and traditions that it is hard to imagine waiting the whole year to celebrate. As we continue to anticipate new memories of Christmas and joyful celebrations of Jesus, my heart is full of gratitude for my family.



By Patches





## Best Christmas Present

By RockStar

This is a short story  
About my best Christmas Present ever.  
It was an egg  
And inside was an African Grey Parrot.  
When she hatched,  
I felt like a proud mother.  
I named her Ariba.  
I loved her so much.  
She helped to get me  
Sober from Alcohol.  
I put her through it all with me.  
Even my divorce.  
The judge said we had to  
Share visiting rights.  
It sounds crazy but it's true!  
Then she fell in love  
With my boyfriend.  
Ariba saved my life!





### Broken Button Art

By Ruth

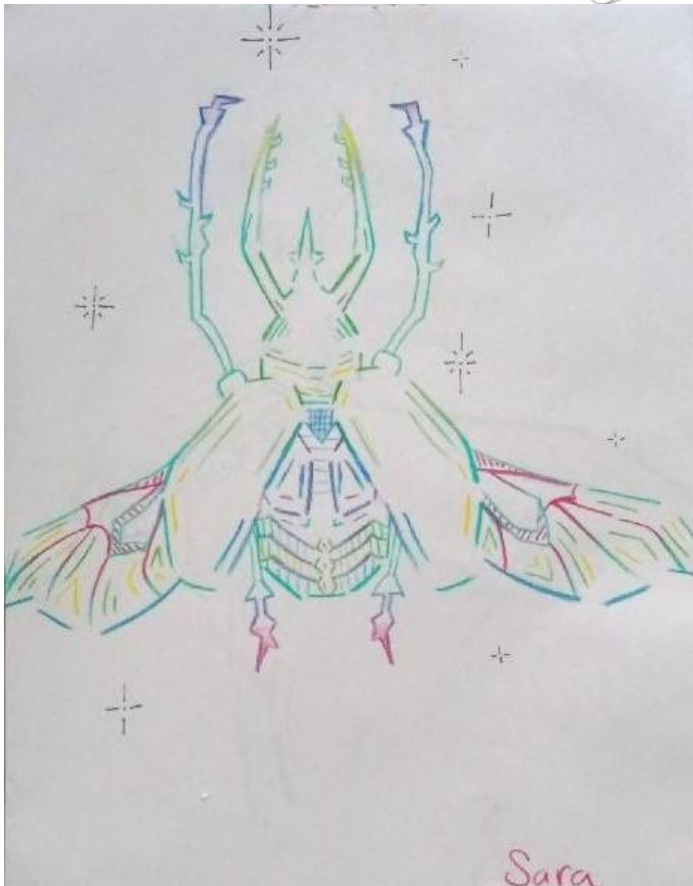


These are Christmas presents for my youngest children. The sun is for my son because his nickname is "sunshine." And the flower is for my daughter because her name is Lilly.



Line Art  
By SaraRose





**Gift Gifted**

By Sharon

I really don't know if I have given a favorite gift to someone. No one has ever come up and said this changed my life kind of gift. Except this last month. I do know that during the holidays I try to find families or a friend or person in need. This last Christmas, I had a girlfriend who had not told of she was having trouble keeping food in her house. Her financial situation had taken a drastic turn and she was struggling. People tend to be very prideful and she isn't one to complain, but she was stressed horribly for food. She couldn't go to a pantry, she didn't have gas for her car. When all this came to light, I believe she was at a very low place of starvation. I quickly cleaned out my pantry and restocked hers. Went to the store for whatever I didn't have. Gave her some gas and a small gift card to get whatever else she needed. I usually donate a ham or turkey with extra stuff for dinners during the holidays. I'm finding nowadays that it doesn't take much for someone to be homeless and in need of food. I ask her once a week now if she is good on stuff and keep her head above water. No one should ever be worried about food, but this world seems to have a problem with this issue. Keep an eye on neighbors and friends, even your family members. People are prideful and sometimes wait too long to ask for help, if they ever do. Try and be the good in the world by giving small gestures to those less fortunate than yourself. That's my greatest gift I have ever given to someone else.

**Gift Received**

By Sharon

As Christmas approaches and giving this topic a lot of thought, I have realized that it's not a gift as in a present I have received that hasn't meant the most or even the most meaningful or memorable for me. It actually was a trip that my daughter took me on. It was Christmas 2015, we went to New York City. I flew from Sacramento to San Diego. Spent the night and the next morning we flew to New York. I was so excited and scared to be honest. We were going for a week. The week of Christmas and leaving right before New Year's Eve. It was very busy, loud and lots of people when we got off the plane. My daughter had arranged for an Uber waiting for us. We took a long ride to Manhattan through tunnels and cities. I was so glad I wasn't driving. She had gotten us a hotel right by Central Park. It was a magical week. People ask what we saw. I say just ask if we went there. We went to waterfalls. The natural history museum. The metropolitan, the Statue of Liberty. The library. We walked, got Ubers to Wall Street, Central Park, the Christmas lights of Macy's, the Rockefeller Center tree, the skating rink, Empire State Building, Time square which was getting ready for New Year's Eve. The ball was in place. We went World One Trade Center, which was very somber but beautiful. The reflection pools are absolutely stunning but reminds you why you're looking at them. The top of the rock. This is the short list, I was in amazement. The lights, the trees, the music the sounds and lights. Everything was big and beautiful. There isn't a lot of personal space in the city. Literally we crammed in so much stuff in a week. We did a tour bus through the city. Walking through the park. The weather was actually nice. It didn't snow, it rained a little. As much as we wanted a white Christmas in New York, we were both kind of grateful it didn't snow because we wouldn't have been able to see as much as we did. There is so much more we saw. I took over a thousand photos. All have a story I could tell. We headed home





the day before New Year's Eve and it was crazy busy. Lots of people. The people I met were all amazing and from Australia. Everything we did was very memorable and so magical. Literally I could move there for a month and still not see everything in the city. I could go on and on. It was the most memorable thing I've ever done and with her. The next year we did a trip to Seattle, the year after Las Vegas; they were all amazing too. We haven't been in a few years now. I have Celiac disease, so eating can be challenging for me and for others. I will always treasure this trip. I thank my daughter for that time to travel and see wonderful places. Magical thing: take one trip with your child. It doesn't matter where.

Love you Katie,



## Elizabeth's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday

By Spilly the Always Reinventive Gypsy

My Beautiful Favorite Neighbor Elizabeth had her Birthday on the 29th. I so wanted to make it as special as I could for her. Her son abandoned her and will not let her grandson know her out of spite and greed. Mainly because she will not go in a nursing home so he can sell her home and take her money. But she's safe now with a wonderful care taker and a beautiful power of attorney/friend. I spend as much time as I can with her, we call each other "Our Buddies." She cried and cried when she saw the painting, and kept saying "I'm not sure if I'm worth all this kindness."

So I made her a Queen 👑 for her birthday by making her favorite cake, Carrot Cake and painted her portrait.

Also for Thanksgiving I found out her and her caretaker were going to be alone for the holidays and he did not know how to cook for it. So I cooked Thanksgiving dinner and spent time with her. She was so excited.



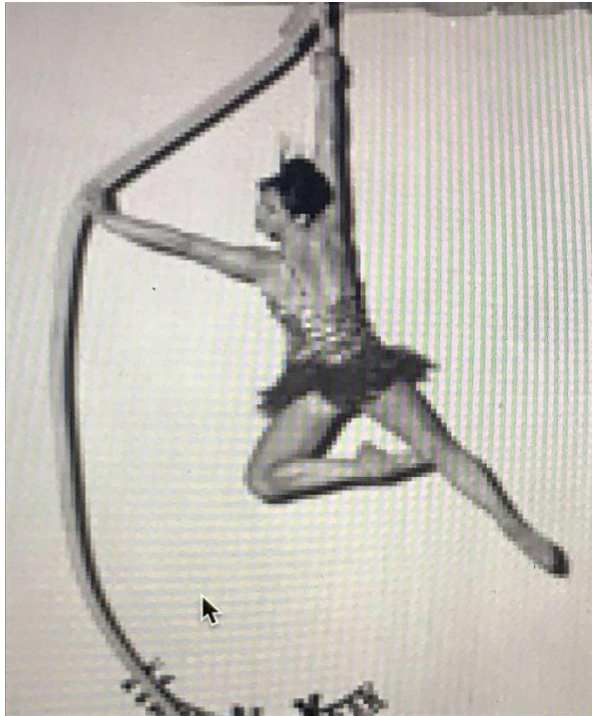


## **Gloria Esposito's Dance School; the Best Place on Earth**

By Spilly the Always Reinventive Gypsy

The best childhood memory for me was going to dance at Miss Gloria's Dance School. She was my hero, my mentor, and later, my true friend in life. We young girls used to have so much fun going to dance school, we couldn't wait for school to let out so we could get there and be there with Gloria. Of course, Renee, Tess and I were the goofballs and the Gabby ones of the ones lol.

Later on, when I got older (about 13), this beautiful graceful caring lady believed in me when everyone else gave up on me. My mom had Multiple Sclerosis and took it out on me daily. On this account, she told me she would no longer pay for my dance, because if she couldn't dance, why should she pay for me? This killed me. I loved dance. It was my outlet from the home stress, and it was a happy place. So, I had to go to Gloria and tell her I was quitting dance. Bawling my eyes out, crying and telling her why. And she surprised me by going to my house and talking to my mom. She told her that she was going to cover my dance if I was going to be her assistant teacher for the younger kids for as long as possible. As long as my mom could help, at least with the costumes for the performance at the end of the year. Even though Gloria and her mom made most of them, my mom just needed to cover a little bit of the cost. I ended up covering that with my babysitting money, so my mom didn't pay for anything. Gloria told my mom that she felt that I had potential, and that she wasn't going to give up on me. My mom just sat there and listened. I was surprised, but this was my hero. This was my mentor, and this was my friend later on. I loved this lady with all my heart. She never gave up on me.

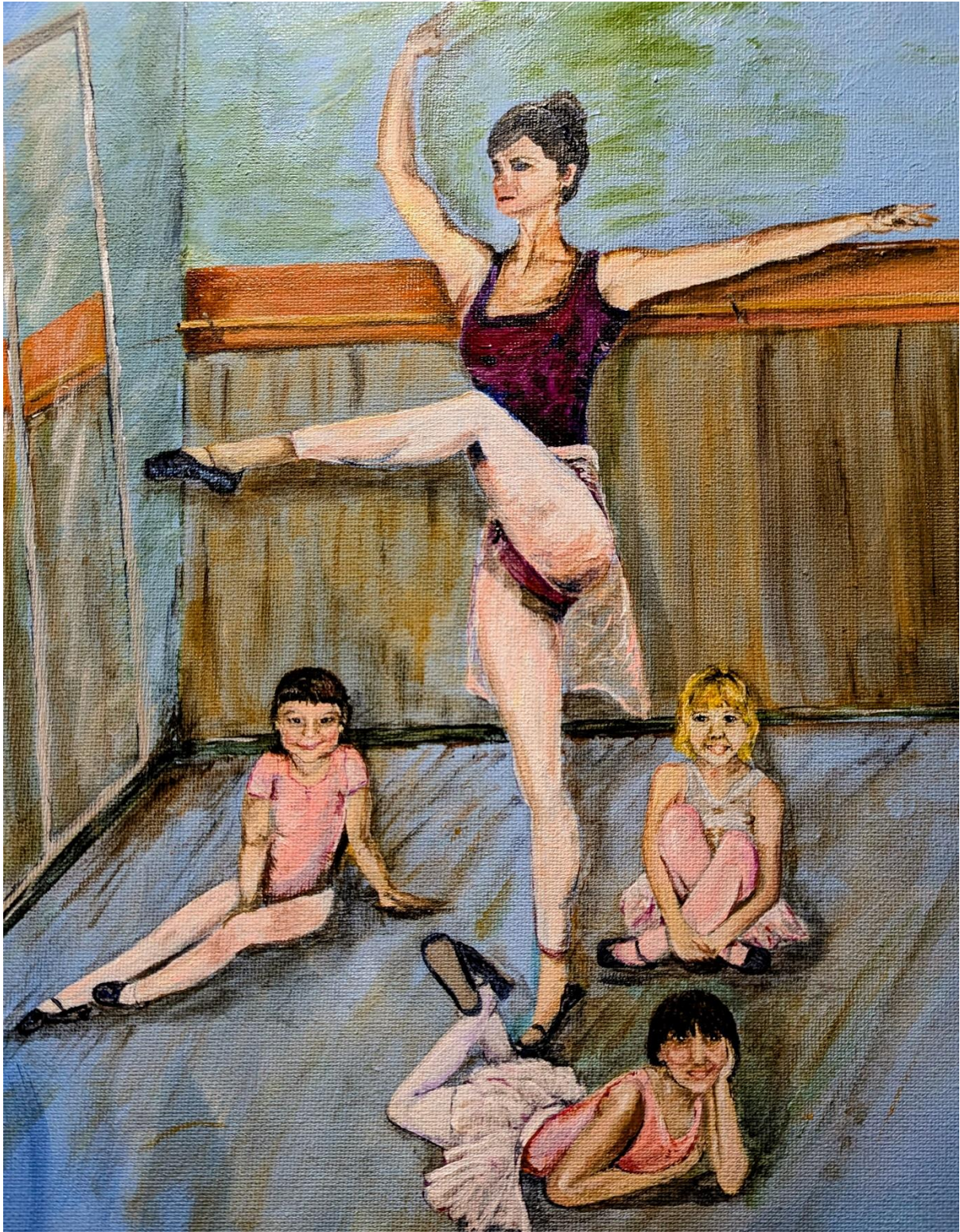


### *Gloria's Life at a Glance*

Gloria J. Bischoff, age 80 of Huber Heights, passed away Sunday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 at Grandview Hospital. She was born in Dayton, Ohio on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1937, the daughter of John Marion and Thelma A. Esposito. Gloria grew up alongside her three brothers George, Charles, and David Esposito. After high school, she moved to New York City in hopes of joining the New York Ballet. Instead, she was recruited by the Ringling Brother's Barnum & Bailey Circus, where she worked for over 5 years. She performed as an aerial rope acrobat, as well as in numerous other acts. It was here on the circus where she met her life-long husband, Horst. It wasn't until after they started their family with their son, Roland, that they finally left the circus. Back in Dayton, she started her own dancing school, Gloria Esposito School of Dance, which she owned and operated for over 40 years.

To her students, she was much more than just a dance instructor; she inspired them with her sweet, uplifting ways, teaching them lessons that would guide them through life. Her obsession with dance didn't end here; she continued to teach lessons through recent years at numerous schools and her local YMCA in Huber Heights. Gloria pliéed and pas de bourrée through life, spreading her infectious smile and positive outlook to everyone around her. If you were to ask anyone who knew Gloria, they would tell you her kindness and generosity was undeniable, always putting others before herself. For these bountiful, benevolent, beautiful ways, she will be dearly missed by her friends, family, and anyone who was blessed enough to be graced with her presence. To all that loved her, we will never truly lose her, for all that we love becomes a part of who we are forever.







### Christmas Gifts

By Spilly the Always Reinventive Gypsy

My Christmas Home Baked Goodies I made for My neighbors and favorite Pharmacist





## Phantom Falls Loop

By Tasha

<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/us/california/phantom-falls-loop?sh=qzccqi>

We hiked a total of 7.2 miles exploring the area with close friends who knew the best spots. We climbed down ropes that led to the bottom of the falls, which was not for the weak hearted. Between the muddy slick trail down and going back up that rope which was barely on an old tree. It was definitely a trail for someone with more experience. Less experience should stick to the Lookout spot. During the springtime, the trails are covered in wild flowers.









## My First Miracle

By Timshil

She was all I wanted that year. I just knew Santa would bring her for me. I'd been so good knowing that was the price to pay for what you want.

I'd seen her in the decorated window of Macys when my family went to see the Christmas splendor in the city.

I was instantly in love. I could feel it in my heart like I'd never felt before. We were meant to be together forever. "Mom! Daddy! Look at her! Isn't she the most beautiful doll you've ever seen!?"

I waited for them to agree. After a bit my Dad said flatly, "No not really. Her face is kind of weird." Weird!!?? How could he say that about her? She smiled at me with her rosy cheeks and stunning blue eyes. I fell more in love.

He took my hand and began to walk away! My Mom had already walked away without even acknowledging my question but threw an answer over her shoulder, "Ask Santa." How could they not care?

Later when we saw Santa and I'd crawled into his lap I told him all about her and about how good I'd been and how I'd never wanted anything so much in all my 8 years. He smiled, patted my head and said, "I'll see what I can do. Merry Christmas!" And it was over just like that!

I slumped down into my seat on the way home, looked out the window and silently the tears rolled down my cheeks. That was the first time I prayed. I wasn't sure I fully believed or trusted Santa but I believed in God for sure.

The next few weeks were agony. She was all I could think about.

My father was Jewish, my mom Christian which caused confusion at times but for the most part we practiced both holidays, Hanukkah and Christmas. As kids it was awesome! My Jewish grandparents always bought me clothes from their store. They were always way too big and they pretended not to notice so I did too.

That year for some reason we were celebrating Hanukkah until after Christmas. Something about a great uncle in hospital.

When Christmas morning finally came around I raced out to the tree to greet my new baby! As my eyes raced around the tree and space around it, I saw no boxes big enough for her to fit! I started making piles of gifts for people just knowing Santa pulled a fast one and hid her deep in the pile.



My family came out and joined to start the gift opening ritual. One per person around in a circle. Took forever but we loved it!

Hours later my heart was tired of the roller coaster of hoping and losing hope as she didn't appear. When all the piles were open and I realized she truly wasn't here, tears started and I silently slumped back to my room to choke them back. I said nothing about it, neither did my parents.

3 weeks later we went to Hanukkah. No hope there. Nobody there would've known what I wanted. I tried to forget about it and have fun with my cousins.

Then came presents time. I opened my clothes and acted thrilled. I opened a few other small gifts, then crawled up into my granddad's lap. He was my favorite person in the world then and his lap was comforting.

About an hour later my grandmother came in with a big blue box with stars of David sprinkled about on it. She held it up and asked my Grand Dad, "Hey Sam what's this? I found it in your painting studio."

He said smiling, "Oh that! I assumed it was yours!"

She looked all over it and then in almost a whisper she said, "It has Beth's name on it!"

I jumped up and ran to her with my hands out in disbelief! It couldn't be mine. I never told them what I wanted!

"Well what are you waiting for? Open it up!"

I tore at it wildly afraid to even hope it was her!

My first miracle stared up at me with her blue eyes and rosy cheeks! Grand Dad got on his knees and whispered, "I just had a feeling you'd like her!" My favorite person in the world wrapped me in his arms and we had an appropriately long hug!

I never found out how he knew but she was mine to cherish forever. She's worn out now and cheeks aren't rosy any longer, but I pull her out every Hanukkah and send him much love for making magic in my life.



**Favorite Gift Received**

By VDUBLST

Corey's home!

The holidays were my favorite time of year.

Of course, for all the obvious reasons....

Christmas tree lights, the music of the season, the mounds of snow,

Baking with my Mom while adoring the aprons my Nana had worn.

My favorite gift wasn't one received.

It was the gift of my brother coming home for the holidays.

It was the feeling I had of pure excitement,

The anticipation of waiting for his car to show up.

Even as an adult,

This was always the highlight of the holidays for me.

Corey's home!



**For My Husband**  
By Whole Hearted

My favorite gifts  
Sacred secrets of my soul  
I share all with you



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