

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

By Bob White

It was a half-hour before midnight on December 24, 1989. I was a ticket-counter supervisor for a major airline and was looking forward to the end of my shift at Stapleton International Airport in Denver, Colorado. My wife was waiting up for me so we could exchange gifts, as was our tradition on Christmas Eve.

A very frantic and worried gentleman approached me. He asked how he could get home to Cheyenne, Wyoming. He had just arrived from Philadelphia and missed his connecting flight. I pointed him to the ground transportation area. There he could either hire a limousine or rent a car from the various agencies.

He told me that it was extremely important for him to be in Cheyenne for Christmas. I wished him well, and he went on his way. I called my wife to let her know I would be home shortly.

About fifteen minutes later, the same gentleman returned and informed me that all the buses

were full and there were no cars or limousines available. Again he asked if I had any suggestions. The most logical option was to offer him a room in a hotel for the night and get him on the first flight to Cheyenne in the morning. When I suggested this, tears

started running down his cheeks.

He explained that his son was seventeen years old and weighed forty pounds. He had spina bifida and was not expected to live another year. He expected that this would likely be the last

Christmas with his son and the thought that he would not be there to greet him on Christmas morning was unbearable.

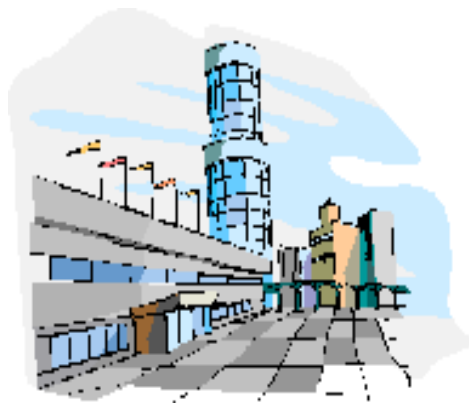
"What's your name, Sir?" I asked.

"Harris, Tom Harris," he replied, his face filled with desperation.

I contacted all of the ground transportation providers and the car rental agencies. Nothing. What was I to do? There was no other choice.

I told Tom to go to the claim area, collect his luggage and wait for me. I called my wife Kathy and told her not to wait up for me. I was driving to Cheyenne, and I would explain everything in the morning. Something had come up that was more important than our exchanging gifts on Christmas Eve.

The drive to Cheyenne was quiet, thoughtful. Tom offered to compensate me for my time and the fuel. I appreciated his gesture, but it wasn't necessary.



We arrived at the airport in Cheyenne around 2:30 A.M. I helped Tom unload his luggage and wished him a Merry Christmas. His wife was meeting him and had not yet arrived.

We shook hands. As I got into my car, I looked back at him. He was the only customer in the airport. I noticed how peaceful and quiet this was compared to the hectic, crowded airport in Denver. Pulling away, I waved good-bye and he waved back. He looked tired and relieved. I wondered how long he would have to wait for his wife to pick him up. She was driving quite a distance.

Kathy was waiting up for me. Before we went to bed, we traded gifts and then our conversation concerned Tom. We imagined his family on Christmas morning as Tom and his wife watched their son open his last Christmas presents. For Kathy and me, there was no question that driving Tom to Cheyenne was the only option. She would have done the same thing.

A couple of days later, I received a Christmas card with a picture of Tom and his family. In it, Tom thanked me for the special gift he had received that holiday season, but I knew the best gift was mine.

Courtesy of:
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