

A Christmas gift for Lisa

By MICHAEL LIVINGSTONE
After a long week, I was looking forward to getting home to my family. I'm a corporate management officer, an executive babysitter. I streamline the administrative executive staff of my company, a never-ending job. Most of my time is spent travelling from one city to another, keeping these renegades from bankrupting us. The travel itself isn't so bad, but the jet lag is really something, and I was certainly glad to be coming home. I didn't see my family very often, my job being what it was, and I missed them terribly.

It was two days before Christmas and I was transporting a very valuable cargo. In the inside pocket of my suit I was carrying a small jewelry box, containing a slim watch for my daughter, Lisa. It was a very popular watch this Christmas season, and I had spent many hours searching for it. It wasn't particularly expensive, nor encrusted in diamonds or gold, and bereft of a trendy (in New York, they say) armadillo strap. It was a gunmetal gray Timex, with black hands and a waterproof casing. Nothing flashy. Dependable and elegant in its simplicity. But it was the watch Lisa really wanted.

I depend on my sense of perception to help me in my work. You would be astounded at the stories I am told, by people anxious to keep their jobs, superfluous though they may be. I have been lied to, promised enormous bribes, and threatened with violence. After years of reading people's faces, listening to their voices, and gauging their reactions, I was a master of interpreting the unspoken thought.

Therefore, when Lisa announced in the fall that she needed a new watch, I was listening. Of course, Lisa just didn't come right out and say she needed a new watch. It took me a week to gradually coax the details from her. Teenagers, more so than any other demographic, are fastidious when it comes to their personal appearance, and Lisa was no different. It couldn't be just any watch, she informed me, she had certain style policies to adhere to. I understood, having been young once, too.

I began my search in late September, not believing in Santa Claus any more. These days, Santa gets a lot of help from parents. I didn't consider Christmas so much the celebration of a miracle, as a holiday to be tolerated.

It was, however, a respite from the tedium of work, and that is exactly how I treated it. I was dismayed when I couldn't find the watch in Simpson's, Eaton's and Birks, usually reliable, failed me. I went everywhere, but there wasn't one of those watches to be had in southern Ontario. This realization hit me a week before Christmas.

The week before, I had mentioned my problem to a colleague, and she told me of her similar predicament when obtaining a Nintendo video game. Her solution was simple: go south. Sure enough, when I landed in Arizona the next day on business and searched the duty-free shop, there it was. In the display case, second from the left. The clerk hurried over, no doubt noticing the thrill of discovery on my face. When I flew home, I was secure in the knowledge that, with Christmas



in two days, I was saved.

I landed in Toronto and caught a cab back to my office. As I got in the cab, I transferred the watch to my trenchcoat pocket, so I could easily reassure myself it was still there. Since I had purchased that watch south of the border, I checked it every few minutes, to make absolutely sure I still had it in my possession.

When the cabbie let me off in front of the building, I tipped him generously. I was feeling fine, greeting Tommy the security guard warmly as I headed for the elevators. Several floors up, I checked my pocket, once more, to make sure the watch was still

in my pocket.

It wasn't. I didn't panic. I calmly set down my suitcase on the floor of the elevator and took off my trenchcoat, carefully searching the pockets. In the right pocket, I found it. A thin tear in the slippery fabric. It was less than five centimetres wide, but that was enough. I knew then what had happened. As I was stepping out of the cab, the box had fallen out of my pocket and on to the floor of the cab. I always rode in the back seat, and by now, some lucky patron was collecting an unexpected bonus. Lisa's watch. I knew then the game was over.

There was no way I could ever get another Timex before Christmas. I went home, defeated, cursing my ill luck.

Lisa was not a greedy child, and she didn't make unreasonable demands, but I could tell that watch meant something to her. It was a tangible symbol of her personality, all grace and polite good manners. She would laugh it off, I was sure, but I knew it would hurt. Her dad couldn't even present her with a simple watch.

Christmas morning arrived. I did not want to open the presents, a ritual I usually enjoyed immensely. My wife and I opened Lisa's presents, and then she opened our gifts for her. Maria had bought her a bright yellow ski jacket, which she tried on immediately, despite the heat from the fire. A perfect fit. She then proceeded to open my gift, a porcelain brooch the saleslady at Eaton's assured me would please her. I dreaded her look of dismay when she saw it wasn't the watch wrapped in that pretty paper.

She opened the box and her face lit up. She jumped up and threw her arms around me, telling me it was exactly what she wanted, and how did I know?

She pulled away, strapping the Timex on her wrist, holding it up to the light to have a good look at it.

I was speechless. Where did the watch come from? I had given her a porcelain brooch. The little package was identical, down to the paper and ribbon. I picked up the card on the box. In my messy handwriting, it read, "To Lisa, with much love, Santa." Lisa told me that the card didn't fool her. She knew it was me, not Santa, all along. I just nodded, smiling, preserving the illusion for future memories.

Well, for someone who didn't believe in Santa Claus, I was certainly converted. I guess Christmas is a time of miracles, after all.



Christmas carols for seniors

Carolers from Joseph Gibbons Public School in Georgetown entertained residents at the Bennett Centre Monday, singing a wide variety of Christmas classics including Jingle Bells. The carol group is

comprised of students from Grades one to five. The group has already performed for the Georgetown Golden Circle Club and the Bells and Bows Club also of Georgetown. (Herald photo)

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