

## Short Story

THE BEST CHRISTMAS  
WE EVER HAD

By Michael Solomon

TWO MONTHS BEFORE CHRISTMAS MOTHER SENT Stanly to the Gas-a-Ho to get a small can of tomato sauce. "Get a small can and don't spend the change." He came back 15 minutes later and slapped 50 cents on the table: "Big cans cost 68 cents and they don't got no small ones." Mother was outraged and Dad said it was best to buy everything from Percy's in Granger or at Albertsons in Kearns. "You can even get a large can at Percy's for 38 cents," Mom agreed. "We're not going back."

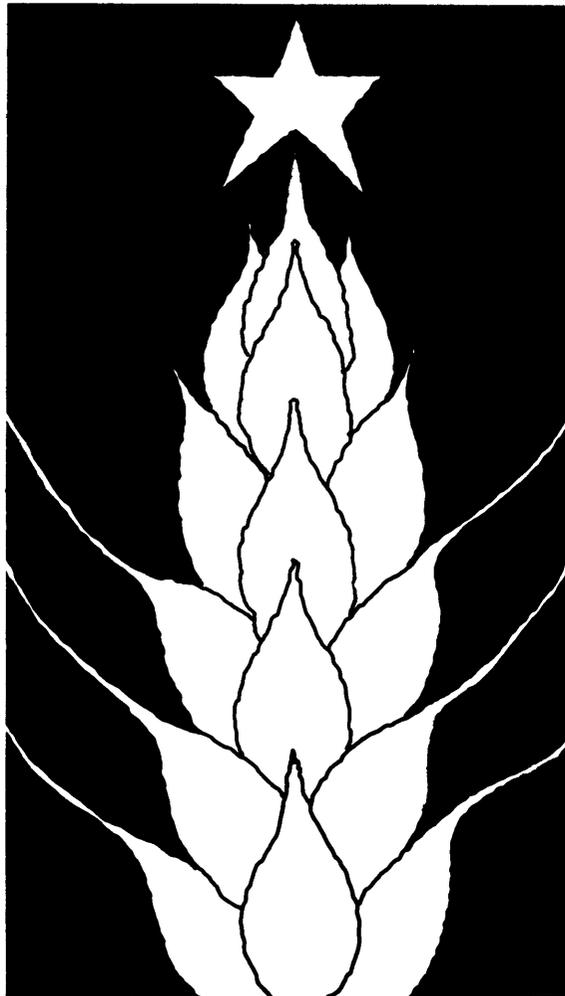
But we all went back from time to time. Mainly because it was open 24 hours a day all year long and they sold a little bit of everything. You know, they sell gas and oil on the outside and then in the little booth they've got cigarettes, combs, bobby pins, beer, pop, cardboard pine trees to deodorize your car, Jello (but not in all flavors), canned stuff like peas, corn, carrots; they've got buttermilk you know, things like pens and papers, some airmail envelopes, even a rack of cheap toys, candy bars, bubble gum, dishwasher detergent (not all brands, just a few), and they always carry the large size so you have to buy more than you need. They've got baseball cards, band-aids, Twinkies, magazines, big sacks of candy, a few hunks of firewood and Bar-b-q charcoals, TV dinners in the little freezer. They charge you too much, but when you need something, at least it's open. They've got batteries, even some oil filters for cars. Mother never went back there herself, but she always sent us to buy her a chocolate bar and pick her up a copy of the Rainbow Ads. Mother liked to read through the Rainbow Ads although she seldom bought anything. At dinner she'd go to Dad,

"You know, we can get a used piano for 200 bucks;" or, "They're selling an air conditioner for 125." But when it came down to it she never wanted to buy nothing.

Mother also liked to read the little news articles in the Rainbow Ads. They were mostly not regular news articles but helpful hints

and gardening tips and true life stories about people's lives. Like I saw once an article about a man that jogged two miles every morning on a wooden leg. In one edition of the Rainbow Ads that came out about a month before Christmas Mother read a story called "How We Put the Christ Back Into Xmas." It told about a couple that did something for the poor. Instead of buying presents for each other they bought presents for poor people. They said they felt the true spirit of Christmas for the first time and that they had the best Christmas they ever had. Mother told Cindy who was in high school about it and she said that she had heard a story in seminary about a family who spent all their Christmas money buying Books of Mormons to put in hotel rooms in Los Angeles. "It was a real spiritual experience for them," Cindy said. Mother said we should have a Family Home Evening and talk it over with the family. She said it would be nice to make a family project out of it. She went right out and told Dad who was working on a car. He said yeah, we could. But when she went to ask Stanly, he said not tonight because he was going to practice basketball at the church. Mother told him tomorrow and he said he couldn't either, but Mother told him to be home at six for a Family Home Evening anyway. She told Dad if tomorrow was alright and he said yeah, we could.

Later, before the Family Home Evening, Mother was thinking and she said the Holy Ghost hit her and she remembered that we still didn't have our two years supply of Food Storage. So, when we started the Family Home Evening, after the prayer, she told us



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about not buying each other presents this Christmas but that we should buy each other Food Storage stuff. Cindy said it would be a real spiritual experience and suggested that we wrap everything up anyway. She said she had heard in seminary that other families had done it too. Stanly didn't like it. He said that he had wanted a new pair of basketball shoes for a long time, but Mother said what about earthquakes, hard times and bombs, and said we really needed Food Storage. Cindy asked what Jesus would say. He left to practice basketball even before Mother could make brownies for the refreshment part of Family Home Evening. When Dad came in late, because he had to finish one thing on a car, Mother told him and he said he didn't care if that's what we wanted. Mother said it would be the best Christmas we ever had.

Mother wasted no time telling them in Church. She bore her testimony every Fast Sunday and us Deacons called her one of the Regulars. She told them how proud she was of us and she started to cry about the Food Storage stuff which made everybody uncomfortable because she didn't say anything for a long time. Then, she said, finally, that she was real proud that her family was following the prophet and she bore her testimony about Dad being a good man in supporting us in these things. Dad never hardly came to Church because on the weekends he was always working on something, mainly cars. He had four, some times five cars in the front and back yard. He'd get them real cheap and work on them when he got home from Kennecott, trying to get them to run. Even though he never went to Church they all knew his name was Ralph because Mother always told them that he could do things. And he did them when he could. He always went out to the Welfare Tomato Fields and when they needed something fixed they would just say, "Hey Ralph, can you look at the washer?" or "Hey Ralph, can you look at this lawnmower?" The priests said Dad was a good guy because he helped them fix their cars.

After awhile Stanly started to buy his Food Storage presents too and wrapping them up like the rest of us. Once he said that he hoped we got him a two year supply of Gatorade and everybody laughed. Stanly was trying for the Jr. High basketball team and that's why he wanted those expensive shoes for Christmas. I said that I hoped that we had a two year supply of Dorito Chips because I like them better than Fritos and Mother laughed. She said we were really getting into the true Christmas spirit.

Well, we did everything we were supposed to do and on Christmas Eve we put them all under the tree. With everything wrapped up it looked just like a real Christmas. I said it was too bad that all those huge presents weren't for real but Mother said they were real and I said OK but I meant they weren't real real. When Dad came in Mother said that because it was Christmas Eve we should have a Christmas Eve Family Home Evening so we all sat by the tree and sang two songs. Mother made Dad read from the Bible the story about Jesus and the Manger. Then she went and got a book she had that was called Christmas Ideas and she read a story about a little match girl that sold matches. Then she told Cindy to read a poem in the book. After we made root

beer floats out of Coke and watched TV.

The next morning I got up and saw Stanly out there looking around. When Mother got up she said it was Christmas and that we should sit around and open presents. Stanly was still looking around. "Those big ones over there are for you, Stan," Mother told him. "Those, I know, they're just wheat," Stanly told her. Dad got up and sat on the green shag floor next to the TV. He was joking and saying we forgot to leave a cookie out for Santa, but none of us believed in Santa Claus anymore anyway. We were too old and we knew he, Dad, just ate them anyway when we'd leave them out. Might as well just give him the cookie before we went to bed. I told him that but he said it wasn't the same. Then, Mother told us to open more presents, but Cindy told her that we had opened enough of them that they were all the same and Mother asked why we wasted all the time and paper wrapping them if we weren't even going to open them all. Cindy said she wanted to go back to bed, but Mother told her it was Christmas and that we should do something at least for awhile like a family. We sat there for awhile and nobody said nothing. Mother told us that us kids didn't know how lucky we are. "We got wheat, powdered milk, cans of noodle soup, some peanut butter, salt, honey . . ." Mother told us. I told her that Stanly didn't get his Gatorade, but nobody laughed. Dad said he was going to move the Food Storage stuff down to the basement, but Mother told him to just sit down because we were going to have a special Christmas and sing some more songs or do something as a family. Stanly said that he wanted to go practice basketball, but she told him to sit down too. She got out that book she had of Christmas ideas and said that it said how to do a Christmas dance from Germany. Cindy told Stanly to come on and do it with her for Mother, but he didn't want to. She tried to pull him up to do it and he accidentally kicked a hole into a bag of flour when she was trying to pull him up to do it and the white flour went all into the green shag carpet. Mother said not to worry, that she would get it later and that if we didn't want to dance we should do something else. She said to say a Christmas morning prayer and Dad said it. Then we just sat there for awhile until Mother told us that we should be happy that we were together. Then Dad said that we should have put up stockings and Stanly asked him what for. Then, Stanly said he needed those basketball shoes and Cindy told him he would probably get them for his birthday. Then, nobody wanted to sing. Nobody said nothing. Then, Mother said she was proud of us and that the Prophet was proud of us too. She said it would later be the best Christmas we ever had. Then, nobody said anything so Mother got up to go get the vacuum cleaner to clean up the flour. Then, Dad got up to leave. We thought he was going out to work on a car but he must have gone to the Gas-a-Ho because when he got back his arms were full of things from there like combs, bags of candies, a flashlight for someone, a big bag of Dorito Chips, some magazines, an ice cream roll, even a sixpack of Dr. Pepper and a box of fancy bobbypins. At first he didn't know what to do with them. Then, he set them on the floor under the tree next to the powdered milk. I think the Dr. Pepper and Sports Illustrated was for Stanly, but it was too late because he had already left to practice basketball.