It is a wonderful time of the year for many people. It is, however, not so wonderful for others. I know not everyone celebrates Christmas but, nevertheless, I wanted to share a tear jerking story that I came across. My hope is that - no matter your current circumstances – you can find things to be grateful for and ... you can find something to give.

[This story was written by Nancy Gavin and originally published in the December 14, 1982 issue of Woman's Day magazine]

‘For the man who hated Christmas’

“It’s just a small, white envelope stuck among the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past ten years or so.

It all began because my husband Mike hated Christmas--oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it--overspending... the frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and powder for Grandma---the gifts given in desperation because you couldn’t think of anything else.

Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, ties and so forth. I reached for something special just for Mike. The inspiration came in an unusual way.

Our son Kevin, who was 12 that year, was wrestling at the junior level for the school he attended; and shortly before Christmas, there was a non-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church. These youngsters, dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together, presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes. As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear, a kind of light helmet designed to protect a wrestler’s ears.

It was a luxury the ragtag team obviously could not afford. Well, we ended up walloping them. We took every weight class. And as each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that couldn’t acknowledge defeat.
Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly, “I wish just one of them could have won,” he said. “They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them.” Mike loved kids - all kids - and he knew them, having coached little league football, baseball and lacrosse. That’s when the idea for his present came. That afternoon, I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church.

On Christmas Eve, I placed the envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me. His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years. For each Christmas, I followed the tradition—one year sending a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, another year a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground the week before Christmas, and on and on.

The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents.

As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure. The story doesn’t end there ... you see, we lost Mike last year due to dreaded cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was still so wrapped in grief that I barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree, and in the morning, it was joined by three more.

Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition has grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren standing to take down the envelope.

Mike’s spirit, like the Christmas spirit will always be with us.”

You always have something to give ...

If you are anything like me ... you now have tears in your eyes! What a beautiful story ... but even more inspiring is its message. There are people right now much worse off than you and I. Now is the time to, not only, be grateful for what you have, but even more ... find something to give. It doesn’t have to cost money and it doesn’t have to take time ... give a smile, give love, give a hand or give the word of encouragement. You have plenty to give, so give in abundance – imagine the lives you could change.

Make the festive season in 2013 a memorable one ... not because of the food you ate or the presents you received. Make it memorable because of what you were able to give, who you were able to help and the lives you were able to impact.

Have a wonderful holiday season.

December 22, 2013