

*Jimmy's Gift*  
12/20/2020

# *From The Principal's Pen*



It is a simple plastic ball the size of a small apple, round and wrapped with a plastic decorative image. It has a single wire attached at the top, and it has yellowed a bit over the years with age. More than twenty years ago, during my second Christmas in the classroom, I asked each of our students to bring an ornament for our Classroom Christmas Tree. The tree stayed up for the entire month of December, and on the last day, before we went home for Christmas break, the students would take their ornaments back home with them.

That Christmas was especially memorable for me. My son was born in November and was only a few weeks old as we approached his first Christmas. There was a different level of excitement in the air. I was teaching second grade at the time. The last day before Christmas break was an early dismissal, and most classes returned to their room after lunch for a Christmas party. During the party, there were cupcakes and individually wrapped gifts for each of my students. Several students had also brought gifts for me, and the students asked that I open them before the end of the day. You could sense their excitement as I opened each of their gifts. I am sure there were coffee mugs and gift certificates. I can't remember each one. As I finished up with what I thought was the last gift, Jimmy came up and handed me a hastily wrapped gift. He had taken some of the discarded wrapping paper and a box from the Christmas party and used it to wrap his gift for me. You could tell he was proud to be able to give me something. I remember him telling me that he was so happy that I was his teacher.

I knew Jimmy's family from the community. His parents were separated, and his mother worked hard to provide for herself and her only son. They didn't have much, but Jimmy was clean every day when he came to school, and she tried to make sure he did his homework and had what he needed for the day. Jimmy's dad wasn't in the picture, but his mom loved him and did her best to provide for him.

When I opened the small box, I found the white ornament that he had brought to place on our classroom tree. He said he wanted me to have it to remember him. And remember him, I do.

Each year, just after Thanksgiving, we put up our family Christmas tree. In the ornament box, there are dozens of typical ornaments that we pick between to place on the tree. We have accumulated more ornaments than one tree can hold. There are also about six unique ornaments that we use each year. Most are valuable to our family for a variety of reasons, and they have their own boxes. They spend their lives from late December through Thanksgiving wrapped carefully in tissue paper and stored in their own box for safekeeping. Some are expensive ceramic and glass-blown ornaments that we select and use each year. Jimmy's ornament also has its own box and is treated like the valuable ornament that it is. When my son was in second grade, we told him the story as a reminder that this season is about having an attitude of giving. It's the only ornament that must go on the tree each and every year. It's a reminder that giving matters. It is also my reminder that while we hope to have a lasting impact on our students' lives, they will have just as much of an effect on us.

*Please know that I changed the name and circumstances in the story slightly to protect the student's identity. However, if he read the story and remembered the event, it is similar enough for him to realize it's about him. I would also want him to know how much the simple gift meant to me!*