

THE GIFT OF MILKING COWS

Pearl S. Buck, in the book *Christmas Day in the Morning*, tells about a young man's first experience of giving a gift from the heart.

Rob was 15 years old that Christmas, a strapping young man who was a great help on his family's farm. Farm work started early in the morning, with Rob and his father out in the barn milking the cows every day at 5 a.m. Rob liked working alongside his father, although he wasn't too fond of getting up so early.

One morning, he overheard his parents talking outside his bedroom. His father was hesitant to wake up Rob for the morning's chores. He wanted his son to get some sleep. He wished aloud that he could do all the milking himself, so as not to work Rob so much.

As Rob lay there listening to his parents' conversation, he was struck with the realization that his father loved him. His parents had always expressed their love in simple, everyday ways, but they weren't prone to verbalize their feelings. This conversation, however, was confirmation enough for Rob. His father loved him.

Suddenly, Rob wanted more than anything to show his father that he loved him, too.

Christmas was only a few days away, so Rob had a little time to think. He couldn't afford to buy his parents a fancy present. But he did have an idea of something that would make his father happy. Rob would go out early and milk the cows all by himself before his father even woke up.



So that Christmas morning, Rob awoke before 4 a.m. He slipped out to the barn and milked all the cows, then made it back to bed before his father could suspect anything. Rob's heart had been so full of love and joy that it hadn't even felt like work to him.

Soon, his father came into his room and awakened him for the morning milking. Then he went on ahead while Rob got ready. In a few minutes, Rob's father returned. He was alternately laughing and

crying, so touched by his son's gift that he didn't know what to say. As he wrapped his arms around his son, Rob's father promised that he would remember this gift every Christmas for as long as he lived.

Now, 50 years after that day, Rob still wakes up on Christmas morning to reflect on the gift that made his father so happy – a gift that had come straight from his heart.

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It was a gift of thoughtfulness that had not cost Rob a penny, but it was priceless to his father.

This story prompts the obvious question for each of us: Is there someone this Christmas you need to reach out to? Maybe it's someone in your own family – as was the case with Rob – or someone in your church or at work? This is a wonderful time for a new beginning.

Of course, in what we are called to do in Life Care, every day affords us the opportunity to listen, to react, and to respond with love and kindness – whether it be to residents, their families or associates – and make long-lasting, priceless memories for them and for us.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love
(1 Corinthians 13:13 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter