

# **JACK MADISON**

## **THE SHAPING OF HIS LIFE**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

It is an early summer morning in Southern Illinois, where the sun shines down on a new baseball field. The smell of newly mowed grass follows a gentle breeze. A young boy with blond curly hair and an older man lay motionless in the outfield grass.

“Pa, do you think I will ever be as good a baseball player as you were?”

The older man repositions himself to face his grandson. “If you work hard, listen to your coaches and love the game like I did, Andrew, you sure will be.”

“I hope so! You were the best!”

“Well, fun's over.” Pa says. “We should be heading home so you can change into your uniform for today’s special game. Your grandmother is probably wondering where we are.”

Andrew jumps up and begins running toward the parking lot. “Race you to the truck” Andrew shouts over his shoulder.

Pa follows suit, catches Andrew, but slows to assure Andrew wins the race.

A tarpaulin is covering what appears to be a large statue that sits directly behind the back stop of the ballpark in front of home plate.

Andrew pauses just a moment as he runs past the statue, "I touched the statue for good luck Pa."

The same way thousands of baseball players of all ages would also touch the statue for good luck, year after year.

My name is Jack Madison.

I was born and raised in Fairmont, Illinois, a small farming community of 10,000 residents located in the southern part of the state in the center of huge deposits of oil and coal. I remember as a young boy there was an oil derrick in my grandparent's backyard sitting fenced in the middle of their vegetable garden next to the one car garage where my grandfather kept his always new Ford coupe. I was forever scheming to secretly enter the fenced area and mount the moving end of the derrick and ride it like a rodeo bull rider as it pumped black gold into a holding tank. Fortunately for me, the event remained a fantasy.

You probably have never heard of Fairmont. It is like most small towns in Southern Illinois. Families have lived there for generations enjoying a peaceful life where nothing of any consequence normally happens; however, their small-town life was shattered on March 25, 1947 when an explosion at the Fairmont Coal Mine Company destroyed the town's major employer killing 111 people.

On that fateful day, the explosion ripped through Mine #5 as the night shift stood waiting to enter the mine for another night's work. In those days, mine safety was not paramount to the owners of mines or the workers. The country had survived a depression and the Second World War. Work was precious, especially in a small town. Generations of families worked in the mine. Those soldiers lucky enough to survive the war returned home to their old mining jobs. Throughout the history of Fairmont, Mine #5 sons followed fathers, brothers followed brothers, cousins followed cousins and neighbors followed neighbors down into the mine for a steady paycheck. The work was grueling and dangerous. Everyone accepted the danger, but no one who worked in the mine knew just how dangerous until that horrible day.

Over the years the mine had become exceedingly dry and dusty with heavy deposits of coal dust present along the roadways and on the roof, ribs and timbers inviting disaster. None of today's safety systems were in place in 1947. Coal dust was just something that accumulated throughout the mine over time. It had become part of the landscape.

The incredible explosion came without warning caused by under burdened shot or blown out shot that ignited the coal dust. Only twenty-four men escaped with their lives to tell their horrifying story and to mourn for their lost brothers.

I was ten and vividly remember the wail of the miner's emergency siren reverberating across my small town causing instant dread among all its citizens. The emergency horn only sounded for one reason, mine disaster! People literally stopped their automobiles in the middle of the street, exited and started walking in the direction of the mine as if staring would make the siren go away. Stores emptied as shoppers began moving in the direction of the mine. Everyone who lived in Fairmont either had family or knew someone who worked in #5, but no one expected the horror that would unfold over the next several days.

My father, George, had barely returned from working the day shift at the East Central Railroad facility in Wilton, a small community attached to Fairmont. Like everyone else, my father quickly changed back into his work clothes, jumped into the family car headed for the mine entrance. I begged him to take me and followed him into the car before he could say no. My brother Phil, who was seven, also wanted to tag along, but my father said no having me along was enough to keep up with in such potentially dangerous circumstances.

Dad and I spent hours that night and the next day aiding in any way we could; as one by one friends and families came to the grim reality that someone, they loved, did not make it. Those two days permanently changed this ten-year-old. For months after the explosion I would wake up at night from nightmares of bodies being extracted from the mine.

The explosion in Mine #5 would also change the face of the community forever as the mine closed bringing temporary unemployment until the East Central Railroad opened a new engine repair center located in a massive roundhouse on the same grounds as the railcar manufacturing facility.

Over the next few years life slowly returned to normal with the town growing slightly as new people moved to Fairmont to work at the rail car shops.

Sports at all levels began to shape Fairmont. The local high school was noted statewide for its football, basketball and baseball teams and local teams of all types for all ages were abundant.

My passion was baseball. At a young age I could throw a baseball harder and farther than boys twice my age and catch balls thrown from high school pitchers. I could hit fastballs and curveballs with authority. I would sleep with my favorite Louisville Slugger

bat to protect it from evil spirits whose main goal was to steal hits right out of the hard maple.

I was never thin nor quick, but I was an excellent hitter and receiver with an outstanding arm. Not too many base runners were successful attempting to steal second base. However, I was an extraordinarily slow runner. My father recognized I needed more speed to play at a high level. He believed going to a baseball camp organized by the Fairmont Recreation Department might help with my running ability, so he signed me up.

The baseball camp ran for two weeks in August in 1951 and was led by Fred Jenkins, Assistant Recreation Director and the town's baseball guy.

Throughout Fred's first spring and summer in 1951, I was his constant tag along absorbing his every word and doing my best to imitate his actions. My parents never feared for my safety. They always knew where to find me as well as several other boys my age. Mr. Jenkins (as he became known to all of us) drove an old wood paneled Buick station wagon close to giving up the ghost. It was filled with baseball equipment in the back and kids in the seats. If you were one of the fortunate ones, it was baseball at Morris Field during the day and a Little League game in the evening.

I never knew growing up that there were people in Fairmont who were outspoken about a black man always associating with young white boys. To us, Mr. Jenkins was like the piper. He loved baseball and teaching us the finer points of the game.

The two-week baseball camp improved my baseball skills, but not my running. God made me slow of foot and I do not believe he ever had any interest in changing that fact.

As I grew and continued to improve my other skills, Mr. Jenkins began to ignore my foot speed and began to believe I did have enough talent to become a star player with an opportunity to play professional baseball.

Summer would eventually arrive, and baseball season would be in full bloom. I was the starting catcher on a Little League team sponsored by the local Morris Lodge. Little League games were broadcast over WNCT, the local AM radio station, for those who could not attend the games in person. In most small towns in the fifties Little League baseball was the most popular kid sport in the town. The NFL and NBA had not yet become the dominating sport they are today. Attendance at Little League games overflowed into the grass surrounding the ball field as we played neighboring towns for supremacy and temporary bragging rights.

I had used my catcher's glove for three hard seasons, and I knew it was on its last leg. Not only was the glove worn from constant use, but my hand had grown as well. It was

time for a new one. Most of my teammates had newer gloves and I was somewhat embarrassed I was still using my old one.

I thought if I played my cards right maybe I could convince my parents a glove would be a perfect gift for my birthday or Christmas.

It was November. Corey Wilson, my best friend whose grandmother also happened to live next door, was sick with pneumonia. Corey's father was the Plant Manager of the local Thomas Manufacturing plant. Corey and his parents lived in a big house on Country Club Lane inside the Fairmont Country Club. Even though Corey was twelve we became acquainted when he would visit his grandmother. Christmas was approaching and I needed money for small gifts for my parents and my brother Phil. I begged Corey to let me deliver The Evening Globe for him while he was sick. Corey had the coveted uptown route. He said yes and agreed to pay me five cents for every paper I delivered. I know today five cents does not sound like a lot, but when you are poor, and it is three weeks until Christmas one dollar and twenty five cents plus any tip I was lucky enough to wrangle was like opening Fort Knox.

Dirty snow was stacked at least three feet high along the curb of East Broadway, the main street running through town. Our last heavy snow occurred over four weeks ago and the warmer weather that followed, had turned the streets into a slushy mess. My rubber boots were several winters old. Over their lifetime, sharp rocks had cut through the soles creating several opportunities for water to dampen my socks. My mother had stuffed plastic bread sacks inside to save my socks and prevent wet feet and winter colds.

I had just delivered the paper to Mr. Jackson's Downtown Barber Shop and turned off East Broadway to South Locust Street. My next stop was Mr. Wilcox's Sporting Goods store. My head was turned down against a dreadfully cold wind when out of the corner of my watery right eye I saw it!

There it was! Sitting in the window with other baseball equipment, not really sitting there, more like the centerpiece at an expensive wedding. I could not believe it! Right before my eyes, there it was, my Christmas present.

It was a 1951 model Del Rose Rawlings catcher's mitt. It was golden in color with dark brown lacing with the name Rawlings stamped in black along the thumb side and Del Rose's signature in the center of the pocket. It was made of "hand tooled leather" and already had a "Deep Well Pocket." All of this for only twelve dollars and fifty cents.

Suddenly the cold wind disappeared, and I stood there mesmerized by the one Christmas gift I wanted more than anything in the world! I had seen a picture of my glove in the Sears Catalog and had left a multitude of hints around the house since baseball season ended and the arrival of the catalog, but my parents gave no indication they had seen it.

I explained to my parents how much better a player I would be with that glove. I also made sure my old hand me down mitt was prominently displayed in strategic locations in the house, where I could retrieve it and point out all the flaws and wear and tear. They seemed oblivious to my plight.

My mother, Edna, smiled each time I mentioned my old catcher's mitt and said, "Well, Christmas is coming, and you never know what Santa will be thinking." My father took a different approach, he said, "Son, you won the league championship last year using that glove. I believe it will make it another year."

I knew the chance of my parents being able to afford twelve dollars and fifty cents for any Christmas present was a long shot. In fact, an impossible long shot, but that did not keep me from dreaming as I stood in the cold outside Mr. Wilcox's Sporting Goods store. I was dreaming of tag outs at home plate and diving catches of popped up bunts as the ball settled into the "Deep Well Pocket" for the last out to win the game.

You see, my family was just the opposite of my friend Corey's family. My father was a car knocker at the East Central Railroad car shops and my mother was unable to work. She stayed at home caring for me and my little brother. Every day was a struggle to survive. My father was wounded in World War II in France, the big one as he always told me. He never fully recovered. His war injury made it impossible for him to do more than one job. Each day he would return home exhausted, needing at a minimum ten hours of recuperation before heading back to the shop that made all types of rail freight cars.

I just had to touch it. Touch my mitt! I gave Mr. Wilcox his paper and asked if it might be possible for me to look at the Del Rose catcher's mitt in the window.

"Of course, you can, Jack," he said. He headed for the display window. "It sure is a beauty, isn't it?"

"It sure is Mr. Wilcox," I replied. "It's just about the best catcher's mitt ever made anywhere on this earth!"

I could not believe it. I gingerly slid my fingers and thumb into the proper slots. Oh my, the feel of the leather and the depth of the catching pocket. With this glove I would never miss a ball. I fantasized of being a big-league catcher, playing in the World Series and catching the ball that ended the series in the Cardinal's favor.

"Well Mr. Madison, what do you think of that glove?" I heard Mr. Wilcox's voice as I was thrust back into reality.

"Mr. Wilcox, it is the best, the very best and I do hope my parents will be able to afford it as my Christmas gift," I said.

“Jack, I sure hope so,” “One look at you and it is obvious - you and that glove are made for each other.”

I hurried next door to the Fairmont Flower Shoppe and delivered my last paper. It was time to head home for supper. (It is funny how in the Midwest, we always called the evening meal supper not dinner.) My mother, father and little brother, Phil, were already sitting at the table when I burst through the back door.

“Mom, dad you should have seen it. It was right there in the window of Mr. Wilcox’s store,” I said. I was so eager to tell them about the glove I blurted everything out at top speed.

“Whoa, boy,” my dad said. “Slow down and tell us what “It” is?”

“And wash your hands before you come to this table, young man!” my mother said.

I felt my hands pass under the water and hoped neither of my parents noticed soap was not involved in the process.

“The Del Rose mitt!” I said. “It’s in Mr. Wilcox’s display window. You know, the one I saw in the Sears catalog and it’s only twelve dollars and fifty cents.”

“That’s nice,” my mother said. Never one to make an early commitment.

“Son, I know you want a new glove for Christmas, but twelve dollars and fifty cents is a lot of money,” dad said. “If we spent that much on you there would be nothing left for your brother. You wouldn’t like that would you?”

My brother had been sitting quietly eyeing the meatloaf mom had prepared, but his head quickly snapped to attention. His main concern was protecting his rights to an at least equal Christmas present.

I spoke before he could respond, “I can help. Corey owes me one dollar and twenty-five cents for delivering the evening paper and I got seventy-five cents in tips today. That is two dollars. I bet I can make at least half of the twelve dollars and fifty cents before Christmas.”

“Twelve dollars and fifty cents,” dad said. “That means with the two dollars you already have you would have to earn four dollars and twenty-five cents in less than a month to have the six dollars and twenty-five cents. That is a lot of money in a short time.”

“I can do it!” I said, with conviction in my voice. “I know I can.”

“Son, we know how hard you will try,” my mother said. “You will work extremely hard to earn the four dollars.”

I interrupted her, "And twenty-five cents."

"Yes, son and twenty-five cents, but you know how hard your father works and at Christmas time your father and I must spend wisely to make sure your brother and you each have at least one present under the tree."

"Mom, it's only four dollars and twenty-five cents. I will work harder and make more. I really need that glove. How will I make it to the big leagues with my old one?"

"In the first place, your old glove is just fine," my dad said. "You used it all last season, didn't you?"

"Yeah, but my gosh, everybody else on the team had a newer glove."

"Son, what your dad is trying to say is even if you do make the four dollars and twenty-five cents, we may not be able to buy you the glove."

"You said may," I said, with a faint hope in my voice. "Then I will earn four dollars and twenty-five cents before Christmas. I just know you and dad will find a way."

I looked at my little brother who had remained silent while we were talking. He had a resigned look on his face that said he was going to get the short end of this deal.

"Don't worry Phil, we will both get the best Christmas presents!" I said. "May I be excused?"

"Yes, you may," my mother said. "If you have any homework, please go to your room and finish it before you listen to any of your radio shows."

"Yes, ma'am"

Beginning the next day and every day until right before Christmas, I do not believe I had ever worked as hard in my life as I did the next three weeks. I shoveled snow for any neighbor that would say yes, I ran errands for old Mrs. Miller next door because she didn't walk so good, Mr. Sanderson, at the grocery store, let me deliver groceries and I begged Corey to let me do some of his paper route. Corey agreed but told me I had to give my tips to him. He said he had to buy Christmas presents too.

Every day I made sure to walk past Mr. Wilcox's store to make sure my glove was still there, right in the window where I first saw it. I asked Mr. Wilcox to take it out of the window so no one would see it and buy it. He just laughed.

By December 23, I had earned four dollars and fifty cents. Twenty-five cents above my goal. I had six dollars and fifty cents. I had done it!

I decided supper was the best time to not only tell my parents about my six dollars and fifty cents, but to show them as well. I waited until supper was over. I did not want to miss my mother's fried chicken. In later years, no matter where I travelled, I ordered fried chicken, but no one ever made it better. The thought even today makes me hungry!

"Mom, dad I have something to show you," I said. I emptied my cigar box holding six dollars and fifty cents dollars right in the middle of the kitchen table. "What you see before you are six dollars and fifty cents!"

My parents looked at the money, at me and at each other before my father spoke. He said, "Son that's terrific. Your mother and I knew you could do it."

"Does that mean I can have my glove for Christmas? I know it is still in the window at Mr. Wilcox's. I checked today to make sure."

"Son, do you remember our conversation three weeks ago and your mother and I telling you about needing to buy Christmas presents for more than just you?"

"Yeah, I remember," I said. I really did not try to hide my beginning disappointment.

"It's yes, I remember," my mother corrected me.

"But you said may"

"Yes, we did, but some extra bills have come up and your father did not work as much overtime as we thought. We don't have an extra six dollars to buy you the glove."

That evening the disappointment I experienced was difficult to understand and accept. They had said "may." How could they have said "may" knowing there was no "may."

I ran from the table, down the hall, up the stairs and into the room I shared with my brother, Phil, slamming the door behind me. How could they do this to me after I worked so hard? I mean could they not understand how badly I needed my glove! Now how would I ever make the big leagues using that old piece of junk they called a catcher's mitt.

It did not take long for my father to knock on the door, "Son, I would like to talk to you."

"Go away," I said sobbing. "I don't want to talk to anybody who ruined Christmas!"

"I think it would be best if you did open the door and we talked before your mother comes up the stairs."

My father was a gentle man who worked hard for everything he had. He graduated from high school and worked several jobs around Fairmont. The story I liked the best was him riding in a car, with several other guys, to Detroit. The guys would drive new

Oldsmobile's back to the local dealership. I never tired of my father telling me and my brother the stories from each trip. Detroit seemed like a faraway exotic place at the time and each trip was an adventure.

He finally landed a job working for the East Central Railroad as a laborer in the rail car manufacturing part of the company. By 1951 he had worked his way up to car knocker. A car knocker is the railroad slang term for a car inspector. In the shop, my dad was part of a larger team that performed a final inspection on each car before it was released for shipment to a customer.

Over time, with hard work and a likable personality, dad was promoted to Materials Supervisor. He was responsible for the movement of all Material used in building the various types of rail cars. By then I was playing baseball for the Fairmont High School baseball team.

My mother, on the other hand, was a different personality. She was raised in a family of two brothers and two sisters. Her father also worked for the railroad, as a brakeman, in the large freight car yard. His job was to set the brake on the first car to facilitate the coupler latch to the next car. When he was at work, that is.

He was a big drinker and very abusive to his wife and children. It was not uncommon for him to receive his pay from the pay master on payday afternoon and return home the next morning hung over in a bad mood with most of his pay unaccounted for.

My mother and her sisters learned quickly to disappear until their father had slept it off and was in a better mood. Many times, her mother would be bruised from beatings he administered before he passed out somewhere in the house.

My grandmother worked as a washerwoman for several of the prominent people in town to provide enough money to pay the bills and keep all her children clothed. Even that was difficult when my grandfather came home drunk and saw the washing scattered in the kitchen area. He would curse those who had clothes in the stacks. He berated my mother for working for rich people and a beating would follow.

Tragically, both of my grandparents died unexpectedly. He died from an accident in the rail yard when he fell under a moving rail car. It was decided he had been drunk at the time. My grandmother died less than a year later from a massive heart attack. I always had a special place in my heart for her, even though I never met her.

My mother was seven years younger than my father when they met. I do not believe she loved him at first but saw him as someone to take her away from the poverty in her life. I cannot say I blame my dad for marrying her. I could tell she was beautiful by looking at pictures of her in her youth.

Over time I believe she did begin to love him. They were married for 50 years before she died in 2000 and he in 2001.

“But dad,” I said. “You know what Mr. Jenkins said about me and baseball. He believes I can make it to the majors. How can I do that with an old glove?”

“Son, it’s a long time until spring,” he said. “As hard as you worked to earn eleven dollars, don’t you believe you can work just as hard and earn the rest by spring? You have a birthday in early April. Maybe by then your mother and I can help you with any money you don’t have at that time.”

I sat there on the side of my bed trying to think how I was going to answer that one. My father was right. I knew I could work hard over the winter and earn six dollars. There was plenty of time until spring.

“But what if Mr. Wilcox sells my glove? What do I do then?” I asked. I felt the first pangs of panic.

“There is still the Sears Catalogue,” my father said. “We can order it from there and you can have it early in the season.”

“Early in the season?” I said. Now there was panic in my voice. “How will I have time to break it in. You know how long that takes.”

Breaking a new glove was a long drawn out process full of mystical procedures like pouring oil into the pocket and kneading it into the leather, followed by pounding the pocket with a baseball for hours, then a water soak for at least two days followed by a baking process and finally the last oiling of every part of the glove. Then and only then, would the glove be ready to use in practice. Never in a game, until after several practices.

“I know, son. How about this? Maybe I can go Mr. Wilcox and get him to agree to take your six dollars and fifty cents and hold the glove for you until you have earned the full twelve dollars and fifty cents?”

“Would you? I mean, would he? You really think he might?” My hopes were soaring with each utterance.

“Oh, I think he will. He is an old friend and he knows how much you want that particular glove,” he said. “If you ask him properly, he might even find some work for you around his store.”

“Do you really think so, Dad?”

“Yes, I bet so.”

“What’s going on in here?” It was my mother standing outside the door, “What are you two up to? Knowing you two probably no good!” She said, laughing at the situation.

“Mom,” I almost shouted. “Dad is going to ask Mr. Wilcox if he will hold my glove for me, if I give him my six dollars and twenty-five cents now and promise to pay him the other six dollars and twenty-five cents by spring. I know I can make the six dollars and twenty-five cents by spring. Isn’t that just the greatest thing?”

My mother gave my father a stern look. She said, “George, do you really think Mr. Wilcox will hold that glove for such a long time, it being Christmas?”

“I think so, honey. After all, I have known him for a long time, and I was captain of his sponsored softball team for several years.”

“Dad, when can we go see him? How about right now?”

“Slow down there, son. It’s late and his store is closed by now. We can go see him after I get home tomorrow night.”

“But that’s Christmas Eve. What if he is not open?”

“Oh, something tells me he will be open,” my father said. He was smiling to himself. “I believe Mr. Wilcox will try to earn every dime he can before Christmas.”

“Okay, buster it is time for homework and then to bed. Once you finish you will be free from homework until after the holidays,” mother said. “Tomorrow will get here soon enough.”

I rushed through my homework. Why do teachers give you homework for the last day of school before Christmas break? Sometimes I think they really did not want to be there either, so homework was their way of punishing us for making them be at school.

No radio for me that night. I kissed my mother and father good night. My little brother was already asleep, so I tiptoed over and kissed him good night. Mother's orders!

I tried to go to sleep. Oh, how I tried, but I could not when tomorrow my father and I would go to Mr. Wilcox’s store and ask Mr. Wilcox if I gave him my six dollars and fifty cents would he hold the glove for me until I had earned the full price of the glove. I just knew Mr. Wilcox would say yes, after all he was the one that said the Del Rose and I fit together.

Christmas Eve day, I paced throughout the house watching the clock that seemed to never move. I fretted that four o’clock would never get here. What if Mr. Wilcox did close early? I prayed my best and most sincere prayer asking God to keep shoppers coming into Mr. Wilcox’s store until my dad and I could get there. It never entertained my mind

that someone else might buy my glove. My mother finally could not stand it any longer and banished me outside to play in the snow with my little brother. Now playing with my little brother was bad enough, but it was not smart to make my mom mad. There would be consequences to be paid if I did.

I was standing at the front door when my father arrived home from work with my coat, gloves, galoshes on and hat in hand. My father did not appear to be surprised at me being ready to leave at once.

“Hold on a minute, son,” my father said. He chuckled to himself. “I need to take shower and change clothes.”

“But Dad, Mr. Wilcox will be closed by the time you have done all of that, and I will not get my glove,” I replied.

“The boy’s right George,” my mother broke in. “Mr. Wilcox may decide to close early if business is slow. It is Christmas Eve.”

“You may be right, Edna. He might just do that. Okay, son. Don’t want to miss him, do we?”

“We have to hurry, Dad,” I said. “I don’t know what I will do if we get there and he is closed!”

We left the house at five minutes to four that afternoon. It was a ten-minute drive to downtown. I planned another five minutes to find a parking place and an added five minutes to walk to Mr. Wilcox’s store. That would mean we would arrive exactly at four fifteen. Plenty of time if Mr. Wilcox closed at his regular time of five o’clock.

We turned the corner on to East Locust Street. I ran ahead of my father, way too anxious to walk as slow he was walking. I slid to a stop in front of the store window looking for the baseball display I had checked every day. My glove would be right in the middle of the display, like a sparkling diamond. There was the display just like always, but why had a bat become the center of the display?

Where was my glove? I frantically searched every inch of the display, but my glove was nowhere in sight. Maybe Mr. Wilcox had moved it somewhere else in the window. Yes, that was it. He moved the glove to a better location. I refocused my eyes on the rest of the window and slowly began to panic. My glove was no longer in the window.

This cannot be, I thought. It must be here somewhere. Maybe Mr. Wilcox, in anticipation of my parents coming in the store this evening, had put it somewhere safe until they arrived. Then another thought hit me, like an ice-cold water balloon tossed directly in my face. What if someone bought the glove. My glove! No, that could not be possible! That

was my glove. I worked hard to make over one half of the money and knew I could quickly earn the rest. Nobody would do that to me. Buy my glove right out from under me!

“Dad, my glove is gone,” I yelled. “It’s not in the display or even anywhere in the window! It’s gone!”

“Now, don’t be too hasty, son,” my father replied. “Maybe Mr. Wilcox removed it from the window to show someone and hasn’t put it back yet.”

“Of course, that’s it,” I said. I fainted confidence trying to convince myself my father was right. “He has it inside the store.”

I hurried ahead of my father and entered the store with my eyes frantically scanning everything in sight, trying to find my glove.

“Hello Frank, Merry Christmas,” my father said. Mr. Wilcox was climbing down from a ladder retrieving a box holding genuine Wilson NCAA footballs.

“Merry Christmas, George and to you too, Jack. Cannot keep these footballs in stock. Real popular this Christmas season,” he said. He carried the box to the counter next to the cash register, “What can I do for you this evening?”

“Jack has been admiring a Del Rose catcher’s mitt you had in the front window. He has been negotiating with his mother and me to split the cost of the glove and make it his Christmas present. Honestly, right now we don’t have the money to pay the difference.” My father said. “I thought you might be willing to hold the glove until spring if we gave you the six dollars and fifty cents Jack has saved, until he has earned the balance?”

Mr. Wilcox had a serious face, he replied, “George, you know there is nothing I would like better than to hold that glove, but someone bought it just this morning.”

I had to hold onto the counter. I thought I was going to faint, faint dead onto the floor. This cannot be happening to me! My glove cannot be sold! Who would do such a thing?

“Dad,” I wailed, “Do something! That is my glove. It must be here.” I began running throughout the store looking on every shelf, sorting through all the baseball equipment and was about to move on to the other sports equipment, when my father’s voice brought me back to reality.

“Stop it, son!” he said. His voice was extremely stern. “The glove is not here. Someone bought it. Mr. Wilcox would not lie about something like that, would you Mr. Wilcox?”

“I’m afraid I am telling you the unhappy truth, Jack. Someone came in early this morning and bought it, said it was going to be a Christmas present.” Mr. Wilcox said.

“Who would do a thing like that?” I asked Mr. Wilcox. “Who was it?”

“I don’t think who it was is important at this point,” He replied. “The glove has been sold, that’s all there is to it.”

I stood there trying to open my mouth and form words, but nothing worked. Christmas came crashing down around me. Christmas, huh, what good is Christmas without my glove.

“Thanks for your time, Frank,” my father said. “I think Jack and I will be running along now.”

Mr. Wilcox walked up to me and put his hand on my stooped shoulder, “I am terribly sorry Jack. I had no idea that glove would sell before you came to buy it. I would look to see if I could order it, but the wholesaler told me this was the last production for that particular model.”

I know Mr. Wilcox was trying to soothe my pain, but his telling me there would never be another one made only made me begin to bawl. I was crying so hard I could barely see the door leading out of the store.

Mr. Wilcox said, “Jack, I know your parents will have a real good Christmas present under the tree tomorrow morning; you just wait and see.”

“Thanks again and Merry Christmas, Frank,” my father said. He waved goodbye as we exited the store into a very cold December wind. I remember, I did not feel the wind on the way to Mr. Wilcox’s store. Something must have changed.

The ride home was the most depressing thing that I had ever experienced. I cried, I said bad things about the person who bought my glove and I cried some more. How could God do this to me after my prayer earlier in the day? How could he be so cruel!

“Son now stop acting like a baby and act like a man,” my dad said. “It is only a ball glove. There are more important things in life than a catcher’s mitt.”

I wiped my nose with the sleeve of my coat and did my best to stop crying. “You don’t understand, Dad. I have watched that glove for weeks and worked hard to earn the money to at least pay half and now it is gone! My glove gone to some other kid that probably won’t know how to break it in or how to use it. It is just not fair! How can God ruin my Christmas just like that?”

My dad looked at me with a pained expression, “Now son, blaming God for what happened in Mr. Wilcox’s store is not going to make things any better plus I don’t like you speaking about God in that tone of voice. God has been good to you, your mother, brother and me, and you know it.”

“I know dad, but of all my Christmas presents, that glove would have been the most special. You do not know the feeling I had the first time I put it on my hand. It made me feel we were made for each other. Even Mr. Wilcox said so.”

My dad said, “Maybe after Christmas you can earn the rest of the twelve dollars and fifty cents and we can order it out of the Sears Catalogue.” I knew his words were an attempt to console me and ease my pain.

“But that’s not the same. I will never have it in time for baseball season. By then every kid on my team will have a new glove and they will laugh at me and my old catcher’s mitt.”

“Come now, son not every other player on your team will have a new mitt and you know it,” dad said. “Besides your old glove is completely broken in and you restrung it late last season.”

“I don’t care!” I said. “I wanted that glove. Now, because you and mom would not buy it for me and made me earn half the money, it was gone when we got to the store. It is all your fault. I bet if Phil wanted a new glove, you would have bought it for him!”

“That’s enough from you, young man,” my father said. “The glove is gone, and that is nobody’s fault. Your mother and I do all we can to make sure you and your brother have the things you need. A new glove is not one of them. No more on this subject from you, especially in front of your mother, when we get home, understand?”

We drove the rest of the way home in silence. I buried myself as far down in the seat as I could and sulked. How could this be happening to me! At Christmas!

My father worked exceedingly hard to support his family. Things like television did not appear in our house until I was almost a teenager. That was a luxury we could ill afford. New clothes were for special occasions. Most of normal daily clothes were bought from secondhand shops. We were always clean, and my mother insisted our manners were above reproach. We attended church every Sunday and thanked God for all our blessings.

At Christmas time, my parents believed the tree should be a live tree cut from a friend’s farm and placed in front of the picture window in the living room, one week before Christmas. My father was cautious about a dry tree causing a house fire. My mother oversaw decorating the tree and handed out assignments to my brother and me. My father’s job was to place the tinsel on the tree when the decorating was complete. My dad loved to indiscriminately throw it in the general direction of the tree with hopes it would find its own best position.

My father’s childhood Lionel Christmas Train was the next to last decoration. The circular track was installed on the floor at the base of the tree just on the outside of the

Christmas tree skirt featuring scenes of Santa and his elves in Santa's workshop. Phil and I assembled the track, placed the engine and cars on the track, arranged the train station and crossing makers, inserted the water and smoke pellets in the engine and hooked up the transformer. My dad's job was to electrify the train and make the first run.

Presents were normally placed under the tree on Christmas Eve after Phil and I were asleep. Several years ago, we both had come to realize Santa was really our mom and dad, but on Christmas Eve we were still as excited as when we were small children.

In our house, a Christmas present meant something homemade and one purchased present from mom and dad. A couple of presents from my grandparents and always one from my Aunt Mary in Peoria, in upstate Illinois. Of course, I always saved my allowance money throughout the year to buy both my parents and my brother something. Phil did the same, but most of his money was supplied by our parents.

Looking back today, I realize things were not so bad. My brother and I had a good home with parents who loved us, grandparents who treated us like all grandparents treat their grandchildren and a warm and safe environment to grow up in.

Christmas during my childhood was not like the Christmases my children have enjoyed. Right or wrong I made a promise never to disappoint my children with my actions.

Christmas in 1951 was not that way for me, in my mind. To put it plainly in today's language, "It sucked!"

I did my best not to show my true emotion when dad and I entered the house early that evening, but my disappointment got the best of me. Within minutes I was replaying the same conversation my dad heard in the car. I cried and shouted at my father and mother as I ran upstairs saying this was the worst Christmas of my life. I slammed the bedroom door and fell on my bed crying as hard as I had cried all day. I pounded the bed over and over saying, "How can this be happening to me! I hate Christmas!"

My mother waited a few minutes until she no longer heard my ranting before she made the trip up the stairs to our bedroom.

"Open this door young man and do it now!" she said. I could tell I was in big trouble.

"No, I won't. Go away and leave me alone!" I replied.

"I'm not going to ask again. Open this door before I have to call your father."

I quickly came to my senses. I did not want my father and his belt in our room. He was not afraid to use it when circumstances called for it. To this day I can vividly remember the feeling of the belt on my butt!

I opened the door and quickly retreated to the safety of my bed, burying my face in my pillow. Mom may have been in the room, but I did not have to talk to her.

“Jack, your attitude when you and your father came home was uncalled for,” she said. “I know how disappointed you are that the glove was sold, but it is not mine, your father’s or God’s fault. These things happen. We do not always get everything we want in life. We need to understand how to act each time something like this happens. It is Christmas, the best time of the year. I will not allow you to act this way and spoil it for your brother.”

The last sentence hit deep. I began to cry. I rolled over, looked at my mom and said, “I don’t care about my brother and his Christmas. I care about mine. All I wanted was my glove and now Christmas is spoiled. I will never like Christmas again.”

“I am truly sorry you are so selfish, Jack,” my mother said. There was a sadness in her voice. “I thought your father and I raised you better than that. It is very disappointing.”

“Not as disappointed as I am.”

My mother was beginning to lose her temper with me and the situation, but maintained control long enough to say, “I think you should stay in your room and think about what you just said and the way you have acted today. Maybe after a little time to think you will feel differently.”

She continued, “Your father and I don’t want you downstairs until you are ready to apologize for your actions.” She closed the door and left.

Apologize! Apologize. Why should I apologize? I am the one who is going to have a lousy Christmas because my parents would not buy the only Christmas present, I ever wanted. I promised myself I would stay in my room until Christmas was over. That would teach them a thing or two.

It was not long before the odor of our traditional fried chicken supper waffled into the room and I began to realize I had not eaten lunch. The Cream O’Wheat breakfast was no longer sticking to my ribs. I was hungry.

I said to myself, “I don’t care if I am hungry. I will not give in. I am staying here until Christmas is over. They will be sorry!”

The chicken really did smell good and I decided sitting in our room starving was not the answer. Maybe I will go downstairs, get some chicken, ignore everyone and escape back into the bedroom. Yeah, I rationalized, that will work. After all, a guy must eat. I promised myself I would not weaken and talk to any of them. After all, hadn’t my mom and dad ruined my Christmas.

I opened the door making my way down the stairs and into the kitchen. Mom, dad and Phil were already at the table. I could tell the blessing had been said, because Phil was reaching for the platter of chicken. I noticed my place was not set at the table. Another insult!

Do not say a word, I repeated to myself. I retrieved a plate from the cupboard and positioned myself right next to my brother, so I was next in line for the platter.

“If you want some of the chicken, I suggest you sit in your seat and apologize to your father and me, young man,” my mother said.

I desperately wanted to throw the plate in the kitchen sink and run out of the room back upstairs, but the chicken smelled so good and I was so hungry. Maybe I could mumble some sort of halfhearted apology, eat supper, and continue my vigil in the solitude of my room.

“I’m sorry,” I mumbled in as low a voice as I thought would pass, as I took my usual seat at the table.

“Apology accepted,” my mother said. “Now sit up straight and smile.”

Boy, she had good ears to hear that apology, but at least I was going to be eating some fried chicken. My dad said nothing directly to me, but gave me a look of disappointment, that even at ten, cut through me like a knife. I hated to disappoint my father anytime, but this was different. If they had not been so stubborn and bought my Del Rose mitt earlier than Christmas Eve, using my hard-earned money, all this heart ache could have been avoided. After all, hadn’t I worked extremely hard to earn my share of the money?

Thankfully, nothing more was said during supper. I just knew I would have said something ugly and be sent to my room again. Yes, I know that was my plan, but somehow being with my mom and dad and my little brother on Christmas Eve, eating mom's incredibly prepared fried chicken began to take its toll on my resolve to punish everyone for their actions.

“Boys, it is your job this evening to clean the table and wash the dishes,” my mother said. “Please put the leftovers on the counter next to the kitchen sink. I will wrap them and put them in the refrigerator after they have cooled. Your dad and I have a few things to do before we begin our Christmas Eve celebration.”

Phil and I knew that comment meant mom was going to remove the angel from its box and dad was going to the garage to retrieve the ladder. This year it was Phil’s turn to place the angel on top of the Christmas tree. Placing the angel was the last decoration and the official beginning of Christmas, in the Madison household. Afterwards, my mom

forced my dad, Phil and me to sing Christmas carols she had selected and loaded onto the record player.

My mother favored all the traditional carols like Silent Night, Hark the Herald Angels, Oh Come, All Ye Faithful. My dad did like those carols, but he always wanted to add more contemporary songs by Perry Como or Frank Sinatra or Rosemary Clooney to the list. Mom would acquiesce occasionally making my dad smile and sing his heart out, drowning out the rest of us.

My disappointment and resolve to spread that disappointment returned little by little the longer it took to complete the task of cleaning the kitchen and washing the dishes. By the time we were finished, I had talked myself right back into my mood prior to smelling the chicken and supper.

Phil dried the last plate and carefully placed it in the cabinet where all the other plates sat waiting. I turned with my head down and resolute, headed for the stairs and the sanctity of my room. It was back on! I would make them pay!

I plunged ahead reaching the landing and quickly began my ascent up the stairs. I wanted my mom or dad to see me, to call out to me, so I could ignore them and keep climbing. Phil broke the silence. He said, "Jack, where are you going? We have to place the angel and sing carols."

Perfect! Could not be any better. Now they had to recognize I was not going to be a part of their "dumb ole" celebration. I mean, how could I? Christmas was ruined forever!

"Jack, where are you going?" my dad asked.

"To my room. I don't want to have anything to do with your Christmas!" I kept climbing but slowed my ascent not sure what would happen next.

"Jack Richard Madison, you stop right where you are, turn around and come down those stairs immediately," my dad said. His voice was loud and commanding. "I will not allow you and your totally unacceptable attitude to spoil Christmas for your mother and brother."

Jack Richard Madison meant I was in the biggest of trouble. Decision time! If I continued up the stairs, I knew there would be a price to pay. If I turned and joined them, I was not being true to my promise to myself. Think, I said to myself. I have got it! I will go down there, .and I will sing the stupid carols, but I will not enjoy it and I will not talk to any of them. Maybe I will sing off key. That will really get to my mother, who always brags to her friends about my wonderful singing voice.

Phil placed the angel on the top of the Christmas tree while my dad held the ladder and my mom smiled. I looked the other way. My little protest.

Mon started the record player and announced the first carol we were to sing. When the music started, I sang normally. About halfway through Silent Night I let my voice go and began to sing entirely off key.

“Jack, what is wrong with you? What has happened to your wonderful voice? Are you Okay?”

“I’m fine, mom,” I said.

“Then let’s begin again,” mom said, placing the next record on the phonograph.

The sound of God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen filled the room. Mom gave the signal to begin singing. I began screeching the first words. Mom stopped, “Now I know what you are up to Jack Madison and I will not stand for you acting this way and spoiling everyone’s evening. Either sing on key or go to your room.” Go to my room. Yes, I had won. I had shown them. I turned and started walking toward the stairs when my dad’s voice stopped me in my tracks. “Oh no, you don’t, Jack. You are not going to spoil this Christmas Eve. If you cannot sing on key, you just come back here and sit under the tree until we have finished singing the carols. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, father.” What was I supposed to do? I knew better than to continue up the stairs. I made my way back into the living room and flopped under the Christmas tree. I may have to sit here, but I certainly did not have to show any enjoyment.

Mom, dad and Phil continued with the carol singing completely ignoring me. I continued to sit under the tree and pout.

They finished with a rousing chorus of Jingle Bells, and mom went into the kitchen to heat the hot chocolate and slice a piece of her homemade fruit cake for each of us. When she returned carrying the tray of goodies, I asked if I could go to my room.

“Son, you don’t want any hot chocolate or fruit cake?” mom asked.

“No mam, I just want to go to my room,” I said. I used the saddest voice I could muster.

Mom looked at dad and an unspoken communication flowed between them, “If that is how you feel. You may certainly go to your room.”

It took all my newly found resolve to pass that tray of hot chocolate and fruit cake. I quickly climbed the stairs to my room. “I hate Christmas,” I said. I spoke to myself in defiance as I was climbing the stairs.

The rest of the evening passed glumly. No one came to our room to tuck me in or say good night. That is okay, I kept saying to myself. It hurts them more than me.

I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I remember was Phil shaking me awake, “Wake up Jack, wake up Jack. It is Christmas morning. We have got to get downstairs to see what is under the tree. Hurry up, come on.”

For a fleeting moment I was excited. It was Christmas morning. Then I thought about my Del Rose catcher’s mitt and all the excitement drained from me.

Phil threw my covers back and began to pull me from the bed. “Stop it you freak! I’m getting up,” I shouted.

“But it’s not fast enough and you know we have to go downstairs at the same time. Come on Jack, hurry,” Phil said.

I know what I did to my brother was mean and I was sorry later. I slowly pulled my covers back, put my feet on the floor and stretched for a good couple of minutes driving my brother into a frenzy. “For goodness sakes, Jack can’t you hurry. Cooooommmme Onnnnnnn! Here put these on,” Phil said. He shoved the same clothes I wore the day before that were sitting on an old hope chest that was positioned at the foot of my bed.

“Damn it, Jack,” Phil said. There was desperation in his voice as I continued my snail’s pace dressing. Then realizing what he has just blurted out loud, he hung his head and said “Sorry.” One thing we both knew was our mother would not allow any cursing in our house and anywhere within range of her hearing. There were many times when she would attack complete strangers and admonish them for saying less.

“Phil, what did you just say? Did you say damn? If you did, I am going to tell mother.”

“I said damn, and it is all your fault. If you would just hurry up, I would not have said that. It is your fault for everything, Jack. I bet I get a crummy Christmas present because of you and you’re whining about that old catcher’s mitt you wanted.”

“Okay, okay I’m coming, and I won’t tell mother what you said.”

Phil raced down the stairs two at a time like someone making a desperate attempt to escape a fire. I, on the other hand, took my good old time. After all, my Christmas died in Mr. Wilcox’s sporting goods store on Christmas Eve.

I could hear Phil scream with delight, as I reached the landing.

“Oh wow, a genuine pair of Roy Rogers cowboy boots!” Phil shouted. “Just what I wanted and socks to go with them. Jack, look what I got. Wow! And look there is more under the tree!”

“Yeah, real neat,” I said.

“Well come on Jack there are presents under the tree for you too,” my mother said. She motioned me to join them.

What I really wanted to do was retreat upstairs and into my room but knew that was not an option. So unsmiling, with my head down, I sat down under the tree. Just because I was sitting there did not mean I was going to be all happy and smiling about some old dumb Christmas present.

“Here Jack, open this one first,” my dad said. He handed me a large box decorated with Santa Claus wrapping paper, “Your mother and I hope you will like it.”

I took the present with no emotion and slowly began to unwrap it.

“Want me to help?” Phil said. He knew he could not open his next present until I had opened mine.

“No, I don’t need anybody’s help.” I was annoyed that I was doing this in the first place. Whatever was in the box I did not want, I said to myself. Nothing could replace my Del Rose catcher’s mitt.

Wrapping paper gone, I recognized what was inside had to be some type of footwear and it was. Inside was a new pair of black rubber galoshes.

“Now Jack, you will not have to put bread wrappers in your boots like you have to do with your old ones,” mother said. She was quite happy with my Christmas present.

“They’re swell,” I said. I put the galoshes back in the box and closed the lid. A lousy pair of rubber boots. Wait until all my friends hear about this, I thought.

“Try them on. See if they fit,” my dad said.

“Does he have to?” Phil said. It was obvious he was ready to move on to the other presents under the tree. He did not appreciate my taking up so much time.

“George, Jack can try them on later,” my mother said. “Let Phil open his next present.”

“All right honey. Go ahead Phil. Look at what else is under the tree.”

We continued to open presents with oohs and aahs and thank you as each present was opened. My presents included a handmade wool scarf from mom and dad, a new flannel shirt from my grandparents and a stocking cap the same color as my scarf from my Aunt Mary. Of course, Phil and I received the normal underwear and socks from Santa. I could never figure out why my mother thought it was funny for Santa to always bring Phil and I underwear and socks.

As the morning wore, on my resolve began to give way. I decided I would be just a little happy. Not completely happy, mind you. It was still a crummy Christmas and I still wanted my parents to know it.

My grandparents arrived precisely at noon, like they did for every Christmas I can remember. Mother oversaw cooking the turkey, while my grandmother made the yams, Waldorf salad, the string beans, corn and homemade rolls. My mother also always made the cranberry sauce. For dessert grandmother made an apple pie for my dad and a pumpkin pie, as well.

Supper was over and the kitchen was back in order. We all gathered in the living room to relax and eventually sing Christmas carols when there was a knock at the front door.

“I wonder who that could be on Christmas afternoon,” my mother said.

“Well, we will never know unless you answer the door,” my dad said. He was laughing.

Phil and I were engaged in a hot game of Monopoly, a family Christmas gift from Santa and paid no attention to the knock.

“Merry Christmas, Mrs. Madison. I hope I am not intruding?” the voice said.

“No, no, not at all Mr. Jenkins and Merry Christmas to you, as well. Please come in and join us. We were just about to sing some Christmas carols. Do you sing, Mr. Jenkins?”

“I’m afraid not ma’am. Not much of a singer.”

“Well, no matter. Please come in”

I could not believe my ears. Was it really Mr. Jenkins coming into our house on Christmas day? Why would he be coming here, I wondered?

I pulled myself into a standing position and walked towards the door, to join my mother.

“Hi, Mr. Jenkins,” I said, “Merry Christmas”

“Merry Christmas, Jack!” Mr. Jenkins said. He mussed my hair. “It is you I actually came to see.”

“Me? You came to see me?”

By this time, we were in the living room and my mother had introduced Mr. Jenkins to my grandparents and my dad had shook Mr. Jenkins’s hand. My brother waved and greeted Mr. Jenkins with a, Merry Christmas.

“Mr. and Mrs. Madison, as you know, I think a lot of your son, Jack. I believe he has the ability to become a first-rate baseball player. I think I am a pretty good judge of things like that, after playing professional ball and all, myself.”

“With your permission, I have a small gift for Jack that might help him continue to improve his skills and reach his full potential,” Mr. Jenkins said. “May I?”

“Of course. I know Jack will be thrilled with anything you have brought for him. Right Jack?”

It was at that moment, I recognized Mr. Jenkins was holding a rather large package almost behind his back.

“You bet I will.”

“Well then, Jack this is for you,” Mr. Jenkins said. He handed me the package. It was an unevenly shaped package wrapped in red and green Christmas paper, with a big white bow. “Go ahead, open it.”

Whatever it was it felt between soft and hard, as I began to tear open the paper. One tear and I was speechless. I could hardly open the rest of the paper as tears began to gush down my cheeks.

It could not be, but it was!

Inside the paper was my mitt - my Del Rose catcher’s mitt! Is it real? Am I dreaming, is it really Christmas in my house?

“Well I’ll be,” my father said.

“Dad, mom, everyone, look, it is my mitt,” I shouted. “It is really my mitt! Oh boy, can I really be an all-star now and look dad, it is the real one just like the one in Mr. Wilcox’s window and the Sears catalogue!”

“Mr. Jenkins, thank you, thank you, but how did you know I wanted this glove?” I said. I gave him the best bear hug I could muster.

“Well Jack, I watched you struggle at times during the season with your old glove and figured a new one might improve your game. Like I told your dad, you have the raw talent to become something in baseball and I thought a new glove, plus hard work from you might do the trick.”

“Mr. Jenkins, I don’t know how we can ever thank you for what you have done for Jack. You are a very generous person,” my mother said.

“Like I said ma ‘am, Jack has talent and I want to be sure he has every opportunity to develop it.”

“Mr. Jenkins, may I ask where you purchased the glove?” my dad asked.

“Well sir, I bought the glove first thing Christmas eve after Mr. Crandell gave me my Christmas bonus. I was afraid Mr. Wilcox might have sold it, because he had taken it down from the display in his window and placed it on the counter.”

We all began laughing. I laughed through more tears, my mother laughed also wiping away tears and my dad had to turn his back and blow his nose into his handkerchief.

Mr. Jenkins was not sure what to do as he stood in the middle of the room looking at all of us, so he began to laugh too.

“I know you probably think we have all lost our minds, but you see Jack and I tried to buy that exact same glove on Christmas Eve. Mr. Wilcox said the glove had been sold. Jack had worked hard to earn one half of the money to buy the glove. You beat us to it. What a wonderful surprise.”

I finally let go of Mr. Jenkins and began pounding the pocket of the glove completely lost in all the fantastic plays I would make next season when my father’s voice filtered through.

“Jack, stop pounding that glove.”

“Yes sir”

“Mr. Jenkins,” my mother said. “I believe we have some pie left and more than enough turkey for a sandwich.”

“No thank you, Mrs. Morrison. I really do have to be going. It is getting late.”

“Are you sure?” my dad said.

“Yeah. Mr. Jenkins please stay for at least a piece of pie,” I said.

“Well, maybe just one small piece and then I really must go.”

In honor of Mr. Jenkins, we all ate a second piece of pie and my grandparents regaled Mr. Jenkins with stories of my father and his athletic ability, as a youngster. I believe Mr. Jenkins enjoyed the stories, but excused himself after eating his pie, saying he enjoyed meeting everyone.

My mother and father thanked Mr. Jenkins, once again as he was leaving, “Mr. Jenkins,” my mother said. “You must come back soon and have supper with us, then we can properly thank you for what you have done for Jack.”

“Ma’am, I certainly would appreciate that,” Mr. Jenkins replied. He was smiling. “I am not much of a cook and don’t really have time to eat out often.”

“Well, I will make sure George invites you soon for a good home cooked meal,” my mom replied.

“Thank you, ma’am, I look forward to it.”

After he was gone, my mother looked at me and said, “Now aren’t you sorry the way you acted over the past two days. How you almost spoiled Christmas for your brother and your father and me?”

“Oh yes!” I exclaimed. “This is the best Christmas I have ever had!”