

LIFESTYLE



# UNEXPECTED GIFTS

Priceless treasures from a loving God

by Andrea Foster

Christmas is a time for giving and receiving. I have been given many gifts throughout my life. Some have been used and enjoyed for a season, others returned or exchanged. But of all the gifts I've received, I treasure the gifts God gives through people. They are from my heavenly Father and come wrapped in the most unexpected ways.

We were at an annual Christmas party with friends—eight adults and fourteen children between the ages of 12 and six! A roast beef dinner was followed by copious amounts of coffee and desserts. The kids played happily and, although the house was buzzing with activity, the atmosphere was calm and inviting. Even with our twin girls there, I was at ease and enjoying myself, which was not always the case. In past years we had left the twins with my mom. It gave us a needed break. My husband, Kirk, and

company tuberous sclerosis. These spasms are possibly the subtlest looking yet severest type of seizure a baby can have. They must be stopped as soon as possible. We learned of a new drug called vigabatrin, which was being used in Canada with great success in the treatment of infantile spasms, and specifically in those who have tuberous sclerosis. We were both encouraged and fearful at the same time.

But after a week on vigabatrin, the infantile spasms returned and we were back to Sick-Kids Hospital to look at our next option—ACTH steroid injections given every second day for three months. The side effects are horrifying. The girls' immune systems would be wiped out, and they would become very agitated and gain weight. Developmental progress would halt during treatment. I was scared but believed God could heal them. I

As we approached the driveway of a home not far from ours, I noticed a baby on the lap of a lady sitting at the edge of the garage. I commented on how cute her baby was. Another woman joined the conversation and said he was actually her son. I told her he reminded me of my chubby twins and that they looked to be around the same age. She explained that her son had recently been on a medication which had caused him to gain weight and that was the reason he was so big. Feeling comfortable, I asked which medication he had been on.

“ACTH steroids for treating something called infantile spasms,” the mother replied.

I was stunned and excited. I knew this was a moment ordained by God. Our conversation carried on, and the similarities of our stories formed an instant bond between us. I asked her who her neurologist was and she replied, “Dr. Yim.” She described how wonderful he was, how well the treatment had gone, and said that her son's infantile spasms had stopped almost immediately. I was encouraged and less anxious about our upcoming appointment the next week. What an unexpected gift of reassurance to find at a garage sale table.

As we sat across from the neurologist at Sick-

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I are very much a team when it comes to dealing with the girls' outbursts and seizures as they can often involve crying, kicking and scratching. It is one of the challenges that comes with having children with special needs.

At one point during the evening, the hockey game was on and most of the men, along with some of the children, were watching their favourite team. I felt tense as Annie and Audrey, drawn to the TV, laughed and danced in front of the screen. As I began to get up from my seat in order to remove them, our friend, Richard, looked over at me and calmly said, “Andrea, it's just a hockey game.” I sat back down. I felt a lump rise in my throat and tears fill my eyes. I had just been given a most beautiful gift. Much more than tolerance or even acceptance, this was the unexpected gift of embrace.

I received another unexpected gift not long after our eight-month-old baby girls began having the inevitable infantile spasms that ac-

asked if we could continue the vigabatrin for another week. The neurologist agreed, and we went home to send out requests to family and friends for prayer.

Over the next week, we prayed and waited expectantly for a miracle. By the end of the week, I was feeling confused and wondering what to do. A friend suggested I ask for a second opinion. I knew we were blessed to be at a world-renowned hospital where our girls were being cared for by some of the brightest medical minds on the planet. Still, I could not shake the feeling that *this* was not the right treatment for our children. I felt overwhelmed.

Summer had arrived and so had garage sale season. The thought of hitting the streets with a little cash to spend on someone else's junk seemed just the escape I needed. I could spend some time with my eldest daughter, Lily, and get my mind off the decisions we were facing with the twins.

Kids, I was nervous at the thought of suggesting a second opinion. But I had immediate peace as our neurologist agreed and suggested we see Dr. Yim! What an unexpected gift of confirmation.

I hold these unexpected gifts close to my heart. I can't put a price tag on them. I will never return or exchange them. They have caused my faith to grow and helped my character to change. Jesus gave His disciples this promise: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). I am thankful for the promises of God and for His patience and creativity. He continuously gives gifts to me through people—whether they know it or not.

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