



## **A Gift from the Heart**

**Vince Parrish, L.C.S.W.**

“Christmas,” Thomas Tusser wrote in 1557, “comes but once a year.” But lest we forget, Wal-Mart begins annually reminding us shortly after Labor Day!

As I write this column two weeks before Halloween, retailer’s shelves everywhere already groan with holiday merchandise. “Buy it, wrap it, receive it, return it” could well be a holiday anthem for many at this time of year.

Some years ago on a bitterly cold, snowy mid-December evening in Cambridge, MA, I witnessed a young woman as she stooped to her knees before an icy doorway, which served as “home” for two elderly, bedraggled men. I watched in amazement as she pulled an old guitar from its battered case and lovingly proceeded to serenade them with beautiful holiday carols. I could hardly believe what I was seeing nor could the bleary-eyed gentlemen, who chuckled when she unsuccessfully tried to coax them to sing along with her. Their faces beamed with joy and surprise even after she packed up her instrument and ambled away.

It’s no coincidence, I suppose, that long before malls and credit cards, Christmas and Hanukkah were observed during the longest nights of the winter solstice. Believers deemed it important to commemorate and celebrate their faith, often by lighting candles and fires for illumination, warmth, and as a defense against the season’s gloom and darkness. My Cambridge “doorway experience” reminded me of the power of a personalized, inexpensive surprise gift given freely from the heart to someone who has no prospect of repayment. Such gifts bring warmth and light to both the giver and the receiver, and help dispel cold and despair.

Year round, we at the Physicians Health Program are privileged to serve Tennessee’s physicians and their families. We are grateful to the generous benefactors who make this worthy mission possible. To them and to you – whatever your faith or beliefs – we extend our thanks and best wishes for a holiday season filled with surprise, light and peace.

*To make a tax deductible contribution to the Physician’s Health Program, contact TMF Administrator Michael Todd at (615) 467-6411, or write to the Tennessee Medical Foundation, 216 Centerview Drive, Suite 304, Brentwood, TN 37027.*

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