A Christmas Gift

By Charles Noland

We were the only people in the restaurant. I set Ethan in a high chair and everyone was quietly eating and talking now. Suddenly Ethan squealed with glee and said, "hi there." He pounded his little hands on the high chair tray, his eyes were wide with excitement, his mouth was bared in a toothless grin. He wiggled and giggled with joy.

I looked around and saw the source of his joy. It was a man with a tattered rag of a coat; dirty, greasy and worn. His pants were baggy with the zipper at half-mast and his toes poked out of would-be shoes. His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed.

His whiskers were too long to be called a beard and his nose was so varicose it looked like a road map. We were too far from him to smell him, but was sure he smelled.

His hands waved and flapped on loose wrist, "Hi there, baby; hi there big boy I see you buster," the old man said to Ethan. My husband and I exchanged looks, "what do we do?" Ethan continued to laugh and answer, "hi, there."

Everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the old man. The old guesser was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby.

Our meal came and the old man began shouting across the room, do you know patty cake? Do you know peek a boo? Hey, look, he knows peek a boo.

Nobody thought the old man was cute, He was obviously drunk. My husband and I were embarrassed. We ate in silence; all except for Ethan, who was running through his repertoire for the admiring skid-row bum, who in turn, recipated with his comments.

We finally got through the meal and headed for the door. My husband went to pay the check and told me to meet him in the parking lot. The old man sat poised between me and the door. "Lord, just let me out of here before he speaks to me I prayed. As I drew closer to the old man, I turned my back trying to side-step him and avoid any air he might be breathing, as I did, Ethan leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby "pick me up" position. Before I could stop him, Ethan propelled from my arms to the old man's. Suddenly a very old smelly man and a very young baby consummated their love relationship. Ethan in the act of total trust, love and submission laid his head on the old mans shoulder.

The man's eyes closed and I could see tears hover beneath his lashes. His aged hands full of grime, pain and hard labor, gently, so gently, cradled my baby's bottom and stroked his back.

No the two things ever loved so deeply for a short time. I stood awe struck. The old man rocked and cradled Ethan in his arms for a moment, then his eyes opened and set squarely on mine, he said in a firm commanding voice. "You take care of this baby."

Some how I managed, "I will," from a throat that contained a stone. He pried Ethan from his chest - unwilling, longingly, as though we was in pain. I received my baby and the man said, "God bless you ma'ma you've given me my Christmas gift."

I said nothing more than a muttered thanks, with Ethan in my arms, I ran to the car. My husband was wondering why I was crying and holding Ethan so tightly, and why I was saying, "my God, my God, forgive me."

I had just witnessed Christ's love shown through the innocence of my tiny child who saw no sin, who made no judgement, a child who saw a soul; and a mother who saw a suit of clothes. I was a Christian who was blind, holding a child who was not. I felt it was God asking - "are you willing to share your son for a moment?" when he shared for his eternity.

The ragged old man, unwillingly, had reminded me, "to enter the kingdom of God, we must become as little children."

For they gave so much more to my dear loved ones that care,
But their families have only a memory of which to share.
So ask most soldiers who's their hero and they will say,
My family and those true Americans who support us every day.

America's Biggest Questions
By William Jerry Ayers

Where is the friendly people of the world?
We see...only shadows.
Where is the hearts of other nation leaders?
We see...only stones.
Where is love and friendship among some nations?
We see...only hatred.
Where is world wide peace?
We see...Nothing.

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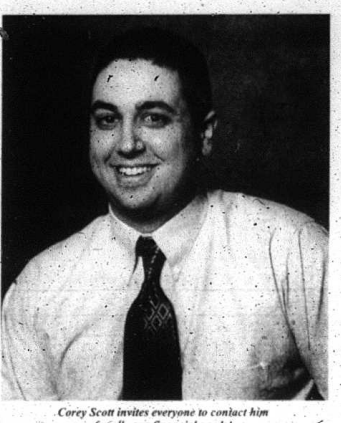

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Poet's Corner

Value of Time
By Charles Noland

To realize the value of ten years:
Ask a newly divorced couple.
To realize the value of four years:
Ask two, now single, high school sweethearts.
To realize the value of one year:
Ask a student who has failed a final exam.
To realize the value of nine months:
Ask the mother who gave birth to a still born.
To realize the value of one month:
Ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.
To realize the value of one week:
Ask an editor of weekly newspaper.
To realize the value of one hour:
Ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.
To realize the value of one minute:
Ask a person who has missed a train, bus or plane.
To realize the value of one second:
Ask a person who has survived an accident.
To realize the value of a millisecond:
Ask the person who has won a silver medal in the Olympics.
Time waits for no one. Treasure every moment you have.
You never know when it will be your last.

So make your self right with God.
You will treasure it even more when you can share it with some, some one special.

A Simple Hug
By Charles Noland

There's something in a simple hug
That always warms the heart,
Whenever friends or loved ones have to part.
A hug is a way to share joy
And sad times we go through,
Or just a way for friends to say
They like you 'cause your you.
Hugs are meant for anyone
For whom we really care.
From your grandma to your neighbor,
Or a cuddly teddy bear.
A hug is an amazing thing.
It's just the perfect way
To show the love we're feeling
But can't find the words to say.
It's funny how a little hug
Makes everyone feel good;
In every place and language,
It's always understood.
And hugs don't need new equipment.
Special batteries or parts.
Just open your arms
And open up your hearts,
"And give some one a little hug today,"
Just to let them know you care.

A Soldier's Hero
By William Jerry Ayers

Ask any American soldier who his hero is and might say,
My mom, my wife, my family, for when I left they had to stay.
You see they smiled and were brave when we had to part,
Yes they were proud of me, but they had a broken heart.
So when you give medals, please give one to my dad,
For to have taken my place, he would have been glad.
My wife's a hero and the baby I've never gotten to see,
Born after I had gone, but that's the way it had to be.
Mom's the biggest hero of all, when I left she tried not to cry,
Yet when I looked back one last time, I saw the tears in her eye.

Ask any American soldier who his hero is and he might say
My mom, my dad, my family, for when I left they had to stay.
When you speak of bravery speak not of me, but of my family,
For to an American soldier they are the real heroes you see.
Please give those medals to my buddies that had to die,

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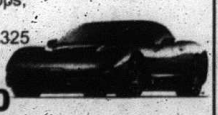

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