

The Gift Certificate

The first gift of Christmas was love.

A parent's love.

Pure as the first snows of Christmas.

Richard Paul Evans, *The Christmas Box*

It came wrapped in a beautiful ribbon, jewel tones of ruby and amber and emerald threads woven into the fabric. The box was beautifully adorned with a tissue paper so delicate that I hesitated to touch it for fear of tearing the translucent skin. A hint of lavender tugged at my nose as I gently examined this beautiful package left for me deep inside my mother's cedar chest. Someone had taken care and pleasure in wrapping this gift for me.

I pulled at the ribbon, releasing the box from its grip; the ribbons fell gently to the side, cascading around the corners of the box. Eagerly I scratched at the paper and then, remembering its beauty, slowed myself down. I unfolded the paper carefully so as not to tear it, preserving every special touch that had been taken as it was wrapped. As I gently peeled back the paper, the treasure held within was revealed. I reached inside and pulled from the wrapping a deep blue velvet box, you know, the type that jeweler's use for something very fine and precious. I held it with reverence, feeling the texture on the palm of my hand, hesitating for a moment, anticipation rising in my chest. What could this be?

As I pulled back the lid, I closed my eyes, not wanting the moment to end, and then opening them, I gazed with disappointment at the contents held within. The box was empty except for a single piece of paper. Tears welled up in my eyes.

I placed the box on the table in front of me and lifted the paper from its velvet nest, examining it more carefully. It was not ordinary paper but an ivory colour and textured. Across the top of the paper, embossed in beautiful gold lettering were the words *Gift Certificate*. This was followed by a message in my mother's familiar hand.

My Darling Daughter;

I have wrapped this gift for you with great care for it is the legacy I leave behind and wish to offer you.

*I give to you the **Gift of Courage** – an invitation to lead your life without fear; an invitation to pursue your dreams and live the life you choose free of the opinions and desires of others. It is an invitation to believe in yourself, never doubting that what you can conceive and believe you can achieve. Lastly it is an invitation to grab the brass ring of life and never let it go.*

*Secondly I give you the **Gift of Love** – of love you will always have from me even though our journey together in this lifetime has come to an end; of love for yourself – perhaps the most important gift of all; of love for others which I encourage you to give often and freely; and of love for life and all that you touch during your time here on earth.*

*Daughter, I also give you the **Gift of Grace** – the joy of living full out, free of the burden of guilt, or blame or shame; an invitation to live your life forgiving yourself of all sins you believe you have committed against others while also releasing the sins you believe others have committed against you. Lastly the Gift of Grace allows you to see and celebrate the abundance in your life and to express gratitude for all of life's magnificence.*

*And finally my darling daughter, I give you the Gift of YOU – of recognizing your own beauty, your great gifts, and, perhaps most importantly, your flame, the spirit that burns deep within you. Show this light to the world – this is the **Gift of Authenticity**.*

Betty, will you do one thing for me? (And this is my last request of you). Live this gift as I ask and as you travel through life, give this gift freely to others; for you see my daughter, it is in the living and the giving that the true meaning of life resides.

Love Mom.

I placed the paper, now my most treasured possession, back in the velvet box, gently closed the lid, and hands resting on the top of the case, remembered my mother and the numerous other gifts she had given to me over a lifetime - patience, encouragement, a listening ear, the warmth of her arms around me, conversations over dinner, her laughter and sly sense of humour, and much more. These I knew were the important gifts, more important than all the material things, the toys and clothes she had also provided. And I also knew that these were the gifts that I wanted to be remembered for, to be my legacy. What do you want yours to be?

Post Script: I wish my mother had actually written me this letter, but she did not. She did however, leave me this gift - a desire to live boldly and courageously, a desire to love everything I touch in life, a desire to live in forgiveness and to see the abundance in my life everyday, and finally, the strongest desire of all, a desire to be myself and to value the gifts I came into this world with. I thank her for this and for all the sacrifices she made for me as a single parent.