



## *Music to my Ears*

*I* sat silently in the backseat as we drove home from an evening church program. And my heart flooded with happiness as the three of us hummed to familiar Christmas carols drifting from the car radio.

With my nose pressed against the side glass, I gawked at the department-store displays. As we passed houses with lighted Christmas trees in the windows, I imagined the gifts piled under them. Holiday cheer was everywhere.

My happiness lasted only until we came to the gravel road leading to our home. My father turned onto the dark country lane where the house sat two hundred yards back. No welcoming lights greeted us; no Christmas tree glowed in the window. Gloom seeped into my nine-year-old heart.

I couldn't help but wish for trees and presents like other children. But the year was 1939, and I was taught to be grateful for the clothes on my back and the shoes on my feet, to be thankful for a home — no matter how humble — and for simple food to fill my growling belly. More than once, I'd heard my folks say, "Christmas trees are a waste of money."

I guessed gifts must be, too.

Although my parents had climbed out of the car and gone into the house, I lingered outside and sank down on the porch steps — dreading to lose the holiday

joy I'd felt in town, wishing for Christmas at my house. When the late-night chill finally cut through my thin dress and sweater, I shuddered and wrapped my arms around myself in a hug. Even the hot tears streaking down my cheeks couldn't warm me.

And then I heard it. Music. And singing.

I listened and looked up at the stars crowding the sky, shining more brightly than I'd ever seen them. The singing surrounded me, uplifting me. After a time, I headed inside to listen to the radio where it was warm.

But the living room was dark and still. How odd.

I walked back out and listened again to the singing. Where was it coming from? Maybe the neighbor's radio? I padded down the long road, glorious music accompanying me all the way. But the neighbor's car was gone, and their house was quiet. Even their Christmas tree stood dark.

The glorious music, however, was as loud as ever, following me and echoing around me. Could it be coming from the other neighbor's house? Even at this distance, I could plainly see no one was there. Still, I covered the three hundred yards separating their house and ours.

But there was nothing and no one.

Yet to my ears the singing rang clear and pure. To my eyes the night stars shone with such radiance that I wasn't afraid to walk home alone. Once I reached my house, I sat again on the porch steps and pondered this miracle. And it was a miracle. For I knew in my young heart and soul I was being serenaded by heaven.

I was no longer cold and sad. Now I felt warm and happy, inside and out. As I gazed upward into eternity, I knew I had received a joyous Christmas gift after all — a gift straight from God.

The gift of love.

The shining star.

And an everlasting Christmas.

Margaret Middleton