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The gift that keeps on giving

By Marie LeBlanc on December 30, 2014

Posted in Local Heroes, Our Neighbourhoods, Stories of Giving

A bus driver and a man named John Hayward; two men with big hearts who put smiles on peoples' faces by giving back to the community during this holiday season.

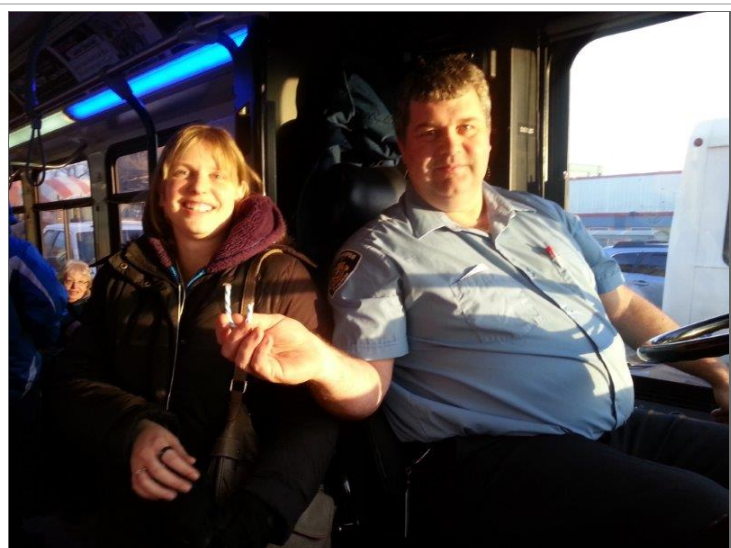
With the hustle and bustle of Christmas, these two individuals take the time to slow down, appreciate others and give thanks without expecting anything in return.

Jumping on the bus the other day on Portage Avenue, the anonymous bus driver offered me a candy cane. I said, "Thank you Santa!"

Unsure if this was the Santa Bus, I asked the lady beside me, "Is this the Santa Bus?" She replied, "Yes it is." Still, my intuition was telling me this was not the Santa Bus.

I approached the bus driver asking, "Is this the Santa Bus?"

In a kind, upbeat voice and with a bright smile, he said, "No it is not," and he asked if I received a candy cane.



Winnipeg bus driver greets passengers with a candy cane and a smile.

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PHOTO OF THE DAY



On the bandwagon: a sign of the times at a local donut shop. No word yet on official bagels or perogies. PHOTO by Greg Petzold

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RIVER CITY 360

Greeting each person with a smile, offering them a candy cane as they boarded the bus, he created quite a stir. His grin was infectious as it put smiles on many peoples' faces.

Some of the comments received as he presented a candy cane to each passenger included, "Awesome!" "Thank you." "Wow this is great!"

It was truly an inspiration to see the bus driver with so much joy and love as he genuinely gave from his heart. He was beaming and so was everyone on his bus. People were smiling from ear to ear. The bus was floating with smiling faces; a glow that could have been seen halfway across the city.

He even let me take a picture for a quick second as he was handing out the candy canes.

Remember the words from that song, "Good, good, good, good vibrations?" Well that's just what was happening on this bus.

It's also a feeling evident elsewhere in our community. Take as another example, John Hayward, a man who does some amazing things for his fellow human beings at Christmas time.

Hayward, who is a cheerful individual filled with many talents and unique heartfelt ways of giving to his family and to the community at this time of year, gave me a sneak peek into his world of giving.

Working in the healthcare profession, he is able to help people all year round. However, at Christmas, he likes to do something extra special to put a smile on peoples' faces and to thank others.

"Giving for me is actually very selfish because I gain so much joy and so much happiness from that, when I do it," says Hayward. "I get a lot out of it and get a big kick out of it."



John Hayward says he receives enormous joy from the act of giving to others.

When someone he has helped says thank you with a smile on their face, whether it be through giving of his time or in other ways, Hayward says he receives so much joy.

He thinks, as a man, he is probably "unique and rare," because he enjoys buying presents for people, as he knows what they like; and how he enjoys watching their face light up when they open up their presents. He puts a lot of thought into what he does, particular to each person or part of the community that he is giving to.



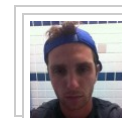
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He doesn't give expensive presents, and comes up with many fun ways to appreciate his family. He gets up early in the morning with a smile on his face to do something creative and new each day.

Through trial and no error, as it all tastes good in the end, with cookie cutter in hand, he whips up a batch of cookies spelling each name of his children and presents it to them when they wake up. He gets a "hoot" out of watching their faces as they are presented with what he has come up with next.

Full of surprises, Hayward embraces the idea of "paying it forward" on Christmas Eve Day and "gets a kick out of that."

When in line, he pays for the person behind him and says, "What I would like to hear is that the process keeps on going down the line where the next person pays and the next person pays for the next person," and see how long this keeps on going. As he exits, the person behind him gives him a wave in thanks.

Leading by example, as something new this year, Hayward contacted his local fire hall to see if it was okay to bring a big box of coffee to some local firefighters on Christmas Eve Day.

It dawned on him that the local fire hall is open on Christmas Eve Day and he wanted to show his appreciation for what these men and women do all year, realizing they are taking time out of their Christmas away from their families to help others.

"Watching people get happy is something I love to do," says Hayward. He says he thanks the letter carrier, the person who delivers the newspaper, the police department and so many other people and organizations in the community.

They are all special, he says, and to do little things to say thanks for all they do is very important, such as giving them a card. He enjoys it when someone thanks him and he loves giving thanks in return.

Active in his church, Hayward helps prepare and deliver Christmas Cheer Board hampers, and he provides rides for elderly who need a ride to church and to many other community activities.

Ironically, Hayward recently had the privilege of playing John the Baptist in the local church play where his character and Santa got into a heated debate.

John the Baptist wanted people to repent and purify their minds. He also wanted Santa Claus to get serious. Meanwhile, the rolly polly jolly Santa Claus was asking John the Baptist to calm down.

Santa's message was to spend time with family, give each other presents and enjoy each others company.

"This was a good message," says Hayward, "however it gets ripped apart and lost in all the business and commercialism of Christmas."

John the Baptist's message was to repent, purify your hearts and minds and prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ; which was a fine message as well.

In the middle, according to Hayward, "Jesus would have said, 'love each other, enjoy each other; that's why I came, to offer you peace and contentment, to offer these two prime commandments, love your neighbour as yourself, and love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your might.' This is a very important message. It's a very important part of the Christmas message."

Hayward and the bus driver are two amazing examples of giving without expectation. They both enjoy seeing the smiles on others faces and make it fun for all.

Thank you to the bus driver, to John Hayward and to all who help others during this holiday season. This is the time for giving and I thank you for all you do to help make this world a better place. You truly give from the heart, bringing the world to new heights.

Through their examples, maybe others would like to do something similar, by loving one another and being at peace this joyous season.

If you know someone who is alone, take time to visit or call them. Maybe you can help those in need by volunteering or by listening to their story; you never know what you will find out. Open your heart and feel the joy it brings to you. It is not about the presents; it is about our presence.

From my heart to yours I wish you peace, love, joy, laughter, love and light. Have a great holiday.

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About Marie LeBlanc

Marie is an artist, poet, photographer, with a background in alternative health and Bachelor of Arts in Human Geography and Sociology (Advanced Major). She advocates and has been active in many committees to create awareness for people with various disabilities. She was awarded the Mental Health Volunteer Hero of the year in 2012 and has helped coordinate mental health walks. Marie believes creative expression through art and entertainment is healing for your body, mind and soul. She is extremely inventive, creative and resourceful. Other Interests include the environment, culture and just about anything due to her curious nature. She enjoys and has learned a lot through her experience writing and taking pictures for the community news commons.

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