

# Christmas Jars Program

## Scene 1

Narrator: Adam and Lauren Maxwell were the definition of frugal. A year before meeting Lauren and three full years before marrying her, Adam had opened a furniture restoration business. He called it Restored, Inc., and so far it provided a steady, though modest, income. Lauren managed the books and marketing; Adam did the restoring. He converted their single-car garage into a functional studio. It was filled with saws, sanders, hand tools, wood stains, brushes and brooms, and on some days the unmistakable smell of freshly cut, untreated wood. For Adam, the aroma was almost intoxicating. Late in the evening of Thanksgiving Day Adam asked,

Adam: "So, shopping tomorrow? It's the first day of the season."

Lauren: "I don't know. The girls invited me, but it's sure no fun without money."

Adam: "So spend a little. Why not?"

Lauren: "Right, spend money we don't have; now that makes sense. How about something different? How about we save a little and put a can, like a soup can or even an empty jar, on the counter. We put our change in it every night. Pocket change."

Adam: "And?"

Lauren: "And we buy presents for one another with the money, whatever we save but not a penny more. It's a limited budget. How much can we possibly save in a few weeks? Call it forced self-restraint."

Adam: "Okay. Let's do it."

Narrator: In the morning, Lauren washed out a near-empty jar of blackberry jelly and placed it on the counter by the phone. On it she painted "The Christmas Jar" in green and red model paint.

## **Scene 2**

Narrator: The days and weeks rolled on, and Christmas arrived before they were ready. They stopped work early on December 24<sup>th</sup> and emptied the jar on the kitchen table. It contained \$27.88.

Lauren: "Sorry, Adam. I thought we'd find a little more. Thirteen dollars and ninety-four cents. Each. That's it. That's not quite what I had in mind. That's not much for Christmas."

Adam: "Sweetheart, it's plenty. It's Christmas. Everything I ever wanted, everything I ever asked for, everything I've ever needed is sitting right here. Look, you wake up tomorrow morning healthy, smiling, and still speaking to me, and I'll have the best Christmas ever."

Narrator: They drove to the nearest mega department store, put on sunglasses that they didn't need, and synchronized their watches. They split up, pockets bulging with change, off on a mission to buy their first-ever Christmas presents as a married couple. They enjoyed every minute of their \$13.94 shopping spree. On Christmas morning they enjoyed every minute of opening their presents to each other some corny gifts, and some thoughtful.

Narrator: The next year, the Christmas Jar appeared back on the counter on Labor Day. It was emptied and counted on Christmas Eve, followed with another trip to the department store. This became their family tradition. The third year they were expecting their first baby, so the Christmas Jar appeared on the kitchen counter at Easter. This year the change spilled over onto the counter. Eventually the Christmas Jar was on the kitchen counter all year long. Adam and Lauren followed the tradition for ten years, and the modest jam jar was replaced with a giant pickle jar. No matter what, all coins went into the jar at the end of every single day.

## **Scene 3**

Narrator: After ten years of the Christmas Jar, the Maxwell family had grown to include Hannah, who was seven years old, and twin two-year-old girls. It was Hannah's turn to bask in the privilege of carrying the jar from the family van into the bank. While Adam and Lauren wrestled the sleepy twins from their car seats and into a double-wide stroller, Hannah's eyes spotted a woman in a gray sweat suit sitting on the curb, crying into one hand and holding a thin slip of white paper in the other.

Hannah: "What's wrong? Are you sad? Would you like our Christmas Jar?"

Adam: "What's up, Hannah?"

Hannah: "Please. Please take our Christmas Jar.?"

Adam: "Hannah?"

Hannah: "I think she needs it, Daddy."

Narrator: Adam weighed the scene. Other customers passed by, entirely uninterested in the drama playing out. He shrugged his shoulders at Lauren. She answered back with a shrug of her own.

Adam: "Merry Christmas, ma'am. Merry Christmas!"

Narrator: Adam took Hannah by the hand and led his family back to their vehicle. Without speaking they loaded back up. He backed the van out and they rode away in silence. The Maxwell's continued on that afternoon to their traditional department store and agreed to a manageable ten-dollars-per-person budget.

Narrator: The next morning the children awoke to the aroma of cookies baking and hot chocolate. Over their once-a-year treat breakfast, Adam and Lauren explained that though they were very proud of Hannah's noble act of charity, they could not afford to replace the Christmas funds. They told the children, "This year will be different." Then they opened the gifts from the grandpas and grandmas, Uncle Steven and Aunt Terri, and the humble gifts they purchased for one another.

Narrator: After they finished opening the packages, Adam asked Lauren to share one thing she loved about Hannah and each of the twins. She did, and then added a tender note about her well-meaning husband. Adam returned the gesture, telling Hannah how proud he was of her bravery and sensitivity to others, and praising Lauren for maintaining such beauty--inside and out. Hannah caught the vision and wanted her own turn. She gushed genuine "I love you's" to everyone and thanked her dad for not being mad about giving away Christmas. Then the family spent some time playing games together. They shared stories and jokes until the spirit of the day was unlike any the Maxwell's had experienced since they began living as a family of two.

Narrator: Late that night as they drove home from a visit to the grandparents, Adam and Lauren debated a new tradition. A new jar reappeared on the twenty-sixth and slowly filled with daily pocket change. By Memorial Day it was half full. By December it was loaded airtight.

Narrator: On Christmas Eve they secretly gave the jar to one of Hannah's teachers who'd been laid off that summer in a budget consolidation and was struggling with her checkbook and self-confidence. The next year's jar went to a wealthy furniture client who hardly needed the money but who they privately surmised might appreciate his own lesson in giving. They noticed the countenance of the longtime client brighten in the coming visits. They suspected he had given the jar right back away to someone in more financial need.

#### **Scene 4**

One night at a romantic restaurant, while the girls spent the evening being spoiled at Grandma's, Lauren leaned across the table and asked,

Lauren: "Hon, how often do you think about the Christmas Jar?"

Adam: "Every time I empty my pockets. Every single time. It's been a blessing, to be certain. A blessing for the woman at the bank, for Hannah's teacher, and all the others we've helped.

Lauren: "Sure, but it's also a blessing for Hannah, and for the rest of us. The jar isn't about money. You've heard the saying "It's the thought that counts?"

Adam: "Of course."

Lauren: "It couldn't be more true than in this case. The money has never been enough to save anyone, but every day we notice that jingling in our pockets and purses, and that saves us. I guess it's a daily remembrance of sacrifice. Not a day passes when we don't think of."

Adam and Lauren in unison: "The Christmas Jar."

#### **Scene 5**

Narrator: After 36 years of Christmas Jars, Adam Maxwell passed away on December 18<sup>th</sup>. He died of a heart attack while working on his latest antique furniture restoration project at his home studio. He was fifty-eight. His funeral was held at noon on December 24<sup>th</sup>.

Narrator: That evening as the family gathered at the Maxwell home, the doorbell rang. Adam's brother, Steven, answered the door, and returned with a jar of change. It was a woman and her son who handed him the jar and said, "Thank you, and God bless." Hannah and her mother sat in the living room looking through family albums. Three loud knocks interrupted them. Hannah answered the door, and returned with another jar, decorated with bright paints and white ribbon.

Hannah: "They said they're first-timers. They found a jar at their door after church last year. They don't even live around here."

Lauren: "You're kidding. Did you get their name?"

Hannah: "Now you're kidding, Mother. Of course not. They wouldn't say. They just wanted us to know they

were thinking of us, that Christmas was different this year than any other, and to thank you.”

Narrator: Just as Hannah took her seat amid the photo albums, another knock at the door sounded. One of the twins entered the living room, this time carrying not one but two Christmas Jars. One was a small jam jar, still with its lid, the initials “CJ” written on top in marker. The other was a quart-sized plastic jar that smelled of peanut butter.

Lauren: “I don’t know what to say.”

Hannah: “One is from an older couple that got their own jar a few years ago when their last child moved out of the house. They thought you could use it. The other is from a family of eight, believe it or not. Their father was laid off two years back, and a jar appeared on their step Christmas morning. It had almost a thousand dollars in cash. They apologized for not doing as well but wanted you to know they were thinking of you. Look how loved you are, Mother.”

Lauren: “And so too your father.”

Narrator: Another knock once again turned their heads from one another to the front door.

Hannah: “Mother, you’d better come see this.”

Narrator: Scattered between the first step and as far as a block away were dozens of people carrying jars, all converging on the porch, all wearing tremendous smiles as wide as any Maxwell had ever seen. A makeshift line formed, and as if in a funeral reception line the strangers worked up the five steps to Lauren to hand over their Christmas Jars. Some shared their own conversion stories, others offered a warm “Merry Christmas”, and still others said nothing at all. Jars arrived for almost an hour. Very little was said, for most were still numb, inside and out, from the remarkable generosity, mostly from people they’d never met in all their years at 316 Oakley Hill Road.