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The Gift of Love

I love this time of year – the cool, crisp air, decorating for the holidays, and having family gatherings for Thanksgiving and Christmas. I have so many wonderful memories of past holidays, and they will now be joined with new ones. Seeing my three young children's wonderment and anticipation makes the season magical. I wonder how many of these memories will be recalled by my children once they are adults.

This time of year is also financially difficult for many families. Living in the affluent area of East Cobb, it is easy to forget how good we've got it. In fact, Americans, in general, are rich compared to 99% of the world. Sometimes I am asked to assist a family that may be struggling financially, and I help where I can. Recently I received a call at my dental office from a desperate grandmother asking if there was anything I could do to relieve her teenage granddaughter's pain. I was not prepared for the heartbreaking visit that followed. I met a beautiful 16 year-old-girl that had been basically neglected and emotionally abandoned by her parents. After hours of reviewing her x-rays and consulting with specialists, I came to the agonizing realization that I could not save her teeth. I would have to remove all her teeth and make her a denture. As I explained this to her and her grandmother, I was stunned that they were so thankful for the care I was offering and said what a blessing I was giving her.

I am sure you can recall being a teenager and remember the self-confidence and esteem issues that we all struggled with in high school. How much harder would it be to fit in with your peers with rotten, painful teeth and gums? And it is hard to believe in yourself and put value in YOU when it seems that no one else does. Almost

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as shocking as the extensiveness of her dental problems was the fact that she had been going to school and out in public every day, and help never found her until now. I thought of my three lucky children with their fancy electric toothbrushes and special flavored toothpastes, not to mention all the love, admiration, and concern of their parents, and I felt guilty.

One of my favorite movies from this year was The Blind Side. Sandra Bullock's character goes through a realization and transformation as her family makes a disadvantaged boy part of their family. Her affluent lifestyle and possessions suddenly seem much less important and even embarrassing when she discovers the struggles this child has had, and the boy strengthens their family's bond. I am fortunate in so many ways, and being able to meet the dental needs of this young girl is truly a blessing for ME. My hope is that everyone has an opportunity to improve someone's life. What may be a small thing for you to give or offer may truly change the world of another person. At this time of year, and all through the year, the best gift of all is LOVE.