

## Inspiring Story: On the Last Day of School before Christmas

### Inspiring Christmas Story

It seems that there was a lady named Jean Thompson and when she stood in front of her fifth-grade class on the very first day of school in the fall, she told the children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her pupils and said that she loved them all the same, that she would treat them all alike. And that was impossible because there in front of her, slumped in his seat on the third row, was a boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed he didn't play well with the other children, that his clothes were unkempt and that he constantly needed a bath. Add to it the fact Teddy was unpleasant. As the school year went by it got to the point that she would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold 'X's and then marking the 'F' at the top of the paper biggest of all.

Because Teddy was a sullen little boy, nobody else seemed to enjoy him, either. Now at the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's records and because of things, put Teddy's off until the absolute last. But, when she opened his file, she was in for a surprise.

His first-grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright, inquisitive child with a ready laugh. He does work neatly and has good manners...he is a joy to be around."

His second-grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student and is well-liked by his classmates -- but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle."

His third-grade teacher wrote, "Teddy continues to work hard, but his mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

Teddy's fourth-grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometime sleeps in class. He is tardy and could become a problem."

By now Mrs. Thompson realized the problem, but Christmas was coming fast. It was all she could do, with the school play and all, until the day before the holidays began and she was suddenly forced to focus on Teddy Stoddard on that last day before the vacation would begin. Her children brought her presents, all in gay ribbon and bright paper, except for Teddy's, which was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper of a scissored grocery bag.

Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents and some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet, with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one-quarter full of cologne. She stifled the laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and she dabbed some of the perfume behind the other wrist.

At the end of the day, as the other children joyously raced from the room, Teddy Stoddard stayed behind, just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my mom used to." As soon as Teddy left, Mrs. Thompson knelt at her desk and there, after the last day of school before Christmas, she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading and writing and speaking. Instead, she began to teach children. And Jean Thompson paid particular attention to one they all called "Teddy".

As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded and, on days that there would be an important test, Mrs. Thompson would remember that cologne. By the end of the year he had become one of the smartest children in the class and...well, he had also become the "pet" of the teacher who had once vowed to love all of her children exactly the same.

A year later she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that of all the teachers he'd had in elementary school, she was his favorite.

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. And then he wrote that as he finished high school, third in his class, she was still his favorite teacher of all time.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, that he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson she was still his favorite teacher.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still his favorite teacher, but that now his name was a little longer. And the letter was signed, "Theodore F. Stoddard, M.D."

The story doesn't end there. You see, there was yet another letter that Spring. Teddy said that...well, that he'd met this girl and was to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering...well, if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the pew usually reserved for the mother of the groom.

Most people overlook a child's heart when it is buried under pain. Take the time to give a wounded child your love and he will learn to love the world. Love is very powerful. Use it's power wisely and someone will be the better for it.

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

By Tony Campolo

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