

It's the thought that counts

The dumbest gift you ever received

The squirrel pelt

It wasn't "It's the thought that counts." It was more like, "What were you thinking?" The dumbest gift I ever received was from a college boyfriend (as in old enough to know better). I was expecting a romantic gift of perfume or flowers. What I got was a squirrel skin that he skinned himself from a squirrel he found "sleeping" in the road. It was wrapped in a shoebox just for me. He showed me how with a rubber band it could easily be made into a squirrel suit for a small stuffed animal. I don't know what I did to inspire such a creepy gift. "Handmade from the heart" does not apply to road kill.

Wendy Growcock | Monroe, Union Power Cooperative



A can of Slim Fast

I pride myself on being a practical person. I love to receive gifts that are funny and make me laugh, or that are practical that I can use. One Christmas morning our family eagerly gathered around the Christmas tree. The atmosphere was one of joy and gleeful shrieks as each ripped the pretty colored paper from the nicely covered boxes.

My daughter got her Barbie Dream House. My son got his electric-powered four-wheeler. My husband got the stereo he wanted. And I got a can of powdered Slim Fast.

A can of powdered Slim Fast. That's right. It wasn't from Santa either, it was from my husband!

"What is this?" I asked my husband.

"Well, you said you wanted to lose weight," was his simple reply.

And so ends the story. That was the dumbest gift I ever got and needless to say, that is one of the many reasons why he's not my husband anymore.

Angie Womack | Sanford, Central EMC



It's a surprise, honey

My new husband was working the second shift (4 p.m. to 12 a.m.) at GE one night when he called long distance to tell me that he had bought a gift for me. Boy, was I excited! It had been several months since my birthday and no other holidays had come around, so I couldn't imagine just what the occasion was. I begged and begged and begged him to tell me what he had, to no avail!

"You can just get it when you wake up in the morning," he said, nonchalantly. Normally I wouldn't even know when he got in. But that particular night I cooked tomorrow's dinner, washed two loads of clothes and folded his uniforms for the week. I was a superwoman that night waiting for his arrival. Finally, I heard the truck door shut. My heart started racing when I heard him dragging something up on the back deck. The back door opened, and there it was: an ironing board!

Sheral Johnson | Supply, Brunswick EMC



Thanks to everyone who sent in stories. You can see more on our Web site. Next month we'll publish your stories about memorable holiday mishaps (deadline was Oct. 15). See more themes and rules for our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series on page 20.

Roller-skate shoes

My grandmother, as nice of a woman as she is, is not the greatest gift giver in the world. She only looks for one thing when she shops—a bargain. According to her, anything on sale makes for a great gift. She once bought a fake Tommy Hilfiger shirt for me on her yearly trip to Mexico. It was great aside from the fact that one sleeve was nearly six inches shorter than the other. But that's okay. She saved some money, and it's the thought that counts.

One of the most ridiculous gifts she has ever given me was for Christmas several years ago. This was when “roller-skate shoes” were the big thing. So naturally I wanted a pair like everyone else, but I probably should've thought it through when I asked my Mimi for them.

We began to open the presents Christmas Day, and I just couldn't wait! I tore the wrapping off, and there they were—almost. There were roller-skate shoes in the box and, in her defense, I probably should've been more specific. Inside, there was a pair of white and pink, size 11 shoes. Maybe I'm being picky, but who could expect an 8-year-old boy to like, let alone fit into, a pair of shoes like that?

“Now I know they're a little big,” she said, obviously missing the color issue at hand. “But look, here is a pair of thick socks I got you so they'll fit better. You should've seen how much they were marked down!”

Of course they were marked down! Look at them! But that's okay. It's the thought that counts, right?

Daniel Grassel | Matthews, Butler High School

“Pregnant shoes”

Around Christmas time in 1975 I was pregnant with our second child. We didn't have much money, and there was this store going out of business called Grant's. Everything was 75 percent off. There wasn't a lot of stuff left to buy, but my husband went there for my Christmas present. I told him I needed a pair of shoes size 8 and a robe for when I went to have the baby. He went shopping, and they even wrapped the gifts for him.

Christmas Eve I opened my presents. The robe was fine, but the shoes were awful! Some young sales girl had sold him a pair of men's sandals size 11. He said they were “pregnant shoes,” especially for expecting mothers.

I couldn't believe my eyes. They were way too big and weighed a ton! I couldn't even pick up my feet in them much less walk. I laughed, and I cried. Needless to say, that was the last time my husband went shopping for me. We've been married 34 years. Now he just gives me the money. Today it still gives us a laugh.

Mary C. Watkins | Aurora, Tideland EMC



The nutcracker

I was 15 years old, and my aunt asked what I would like for Christmas. I loved the “Nutcracker” ballet, and I told her that I would love a nutcracker. Christmas Eve, the family is gathered and opening gifts. I open the one from my aunt and uncle. It was a brand new, shiny metal nutcracker with picks! She couldn't figure why a 15-year-old would want a nutcracker. Fortunately, my mom got me the real deal—a nice, red, wooden nutcracker soldier.

Niki Tucker | Peachland, Pee Dee EMC



Bill Elliot

On my first Valentine's Day as a married woman, I had been waiting patiently all day for my gift, hoping for flowers, a card or something special. By the evening, I had given up hope of getting anything and I was very upset. We had to go to the corner store for something, and I was giving him the silent treatment.

“What's wrong with you?” he asked.

“Nothing,” I said, because he should've known.

“Oh, I know. You're mad because I didn't get you anything,” he said.

So we stopped at the store, and he goes inside. A few minutes later he comes back out and hands me a rolled-up piece of paper. “What's this?” I ask as I unroll it.

“It's your Valentine's Day gift,” he says, smiling.

And it's a poster of Bill Elliot.

“Uh, how much was this?” I ask, already knowing the answer.

“Oh, it was free,” he says. “They gave it to me.”

Lisa Griffin | Morganton, Rutherford EMC

The sandalwood elephant

A co-worker, originally from China, brought me a wedding gift several weeks before the 1978 date. Inside the box was a carved elephant of sandalwood. I was enchanted by this exotic gift.

Months later, a fellow employee and I (we had both married around the same time) were comparing newlywed notes. He asked what I had received from “Nancy,” our mutual co-worker. When I described the gift he grinned and said, “I got the other two.” Apparently it was a set of three elephants that linked together. Mine was the larger “leader.”

We both had a good laugh at our frugal friend. And then we laughed even more when he offered to give me the rest of the set (which I declined).

Patricia M. Poland | Monroe, Union Power Cooperative

From the strange aunt

On the first Christmas my husband and I spent together, we were visiting his grandmother for Christmas dinner, and I was eagerly awaiting the arrival of his strange aunt who I had heard so much about. Upon meeting this kind lady, I was surprised everyone had said such harsh things about her. She seemed very nice to me. She had even gotten me a gift. How thoughtful of her to make me feel like part of the family.

After dinner, everyone returned to the sitting room to open gifts. Imagine the looks on everyone's faces as we realized she had gotten us all fly swatters.

Becky Rogers | Wallace, Four County EMC

Flowers and nuts

I was a bookkeeper at Reynolds Mill, our family's business, near Robbins. We dealt with the farmers who were wonderful people. These farmers brought their grain and corn to the mill to have it ground into flour and meal. Sometimes the wives would ride with their husbands to the mill. It was always a delight to see them.

There was a small lady I especially enjoyed. She always wore a pretty straw hat. One day she came in the office with a pretty bunch of flowers she had cut from her yard. The stems were in a wet, white cloth. She had a brown bag in the other hand. She told me, "When I got in the pickup, my husband asked me, 'What are you going to do with the flowers?' I told him I was taking them to Geneva. His answer was, 'I did not know she was dead. When did she die?' I told him, she is not dead. I am giving her flowers while she is living." Now what was in the brown bag? She had been to the woods and picked up a bag of hickory nuts for me. She said, "I hope you like them."

I have received some nice gifts wrapped in pretty paper with big shiny bows, but nothing has touched me like that handful of flowers and the brown bag with the hickory nuts. It surely was the thought that counted.

Geneva Reynolds Auman | Seagrove, Randolph EMC

The white elephant

Once upon a time, I was a teenager way back in Depression days. At Christmas the teacher decided that we draw names. That way everybody would get a present. Don't remember whose name I got, but I'll never forget who got mine and what he gave me. This is hilarious. It was an ashtray with a white elephant on one side. Now when you don't smoke and you hadn't even gone out behind the buildings to try smoking, it surely gets the title of the dumbest gift I ever received. At first it hurt my feelings, but it soon turned into a laughing matter. After many years I put it in the Salvation Army stuff.

Hazel B. Kimrey | Denton, EnergyUnited

For ages 18 and under

On August 15, 2005, for my 18th birthday, my mama's best friend decided that since I was now 18 and just graduating high school, that I should be able to handle a puzzle.

Unlike normal puzzles consisting of 500 to 1,000 pieces my puzzle contains two big pieces. Not only that, but after giving me the gift she informed me that the answer key was included in case I needed any help. I think I'll be able to handle it on my own.

Jamy Lyn Russ | Elizabethtown, Four County EMC

Still grateful after all these years

Could it be the set of four beige linen napkins that my wife's best friend gave us for Christmas one year? We are a family of five.

Or the time my brother gave me underwear for Christmas? They were in his size, and he weighed 100 pounds more than I did.

Maybe it was the wedding gift my mother gave us almost 30 years ago: the ornate, multicolored, paisley-patterned bottom sheet for our bed with matching pillow cases but no top sheet. We still have them and have moved them to 10 homes in four states. What will ever match them?

How about the time our sister-in-law gave us three towels and three washcloths for a gift? None of the six were the same color or pattern. What was she thinking?

But, then, it would be hard to top the bottle of after-shave lotion I got for a gift some time back. I've worn a full beard for years and years. Oh, I know... 🙄

Paul Kaminer | Red Springs, Lumbee River EMC

Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures about these themes. If yours is chosen for publication, we'll send you \$50. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

January 2006

How I Improved My Health

One thing you did that made you a lot healthier.

Deadline: Nov. 15

February 2006 We Made History

Who in your family made a mark in North Carolina history? Send a photo, if you have one.

Deadline: Dec. 15

March 2006 Why I'm a Gardener

The real reason you tend a garden.

Deadline: Jan. 15

April 2006 A Perfect Site for a Picnic

Send us your pictures and stories about the best picnic place in North Carolina.

Deadline: Feb. 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. One entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published. We retain reprint rights.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can't pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don't agree to this.)
9. Send to: Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616
Or by e-mail: finer@carolinacountry.com
Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com