

“Life Enrichers”

By Rich DeVos – 1989

Announcer:

The following presentation by Rich DeVos was recorded in San Francisco, California, in April of 1989. Here, with a message on life enrichment, is Rich.

Rich DeVos:

Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Thank you.

Well, when I come out in a program like this, I always—to tell you the truth, I come out here to be motivated, and you motivate me. So, I think I'll go home now. [Applause] And I always try to think in terms of: Some of you, a lot of you, maybe, you're struggling with this business. You're trying to put something together, you got kicked around again this week, you got laughed at. People you tried to get in didn't get in. Those who did get in, some of them quit. And you come tonight and say, "Pump me up a little, will ya? Give me a reason. You got any good reasons why I ought to stay in?"

Some of you've done well this week, and we come here to commend you. I just, I roll through in my mind as to, "What can I say or do that might be encouraging?" I look at Dan and Bunny Williams over here, and I remember going to their house, and they were just starting to roll in this business, their first little house in Baton Rouge. And to watch their achievements all through these years is such an exciting thing. Then you always have to deliver that cheap line, "If they can do it, anybody can do it." Well, that's not quite true. I suppose it's true in the sense that anybody could do it, but so few are willing to pay the price.

Sometime when I go out, I feel for you. You've been out there, and people have laughed at you and said, "Don't tell me you got sucked into that deal. Why don't you get smart? What are you wasting your time for? Everybody I know, nobody made any money." This has all been rolling around. And then, like this week, we were invited in to visit with the President with an evangelical group that was visiting the White House. So you sit across from the President of the United States. And I relate to you, struggling with some guy who doesn't know too much, and he's laughing at you. And then I, as a representative of you, sit with the President of the United States and he said, "Well, Rich, how are things going?" You suddenly realize that while some people laugh at you, you are held in such high regard by so many other people who really know what's going on in the world.

We went into the Rose Garden following our meeting with the President, and we saw all of the people we know and top people in the Congress and government and Secretary of State Baker, and he comes up and says, "Rich, how you doing?" These are the kinds of things, that when you get lonely and when you get down sometime, just think about where we really are. Think about how far you have really come, and then be of good courage, and know that you're involved in something that's bigger than whether that person didn't like it or did like it. You're involved in a cause that goes beyond that.

I want to focus our minds tonight around a very simple little theme, but I want to impress on you the urgency of life, and that the time of life moves on as we think about what we're supposed to do. Some of us think we got a lot of time, and that one of these days, we're going to get around to this business, or we're going to do a nice thing. But there's a little story I read the other day, and it's a very simple story. It's a story of a man who was with another man, and they were in his bedroom, and they opened a dresser drawer and he took out a slip. It was his wife's slip. On it was a very high price tag, and he said to the other man, he says, "My wife bought this eight or nine years ago, when we went to New York. And it's a beautiful thing, and she kept saying to me that one of these days, she was going to wear this for a special occasion." And as he took it out of the drawer he said, "You know," he says, "This is that special occasion." And he took it and set it on the bed. Then he took some other things and set them on the bed. He says, "We will take all of these to the mortuary today, because this is that special occasion."

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All of us are sliding through our lives, and always tomorrow, we're going to do something. Tomorrow, you're going to do that nice favor. Tomorrow, you're going to attend to something. Tomorrow, you're going to sponsor somebody. But I just want to impress upon you the urgency of the moment. It's not just a moment on a thing like that. It's the urgency of doing things now that will enrich lives.

Walt Disney used a phrase that I read a while back, and it dealt with what he called three characters or types of people that he has encountered or had encountered in his lifetime. He said, "First of all," he said, "There are what I think of as well poisoners. Now, those are the people who always prick your bloom, who will always dump some poison on you, when you think you've got something good. They always try to spoil your deal. They're the ones who always say to you, "Oh you can't do that. What makes you think you'll ever make it? I know all sorts of people who've failed in the business. That soap is too high priced. I wouldn't use MCI if it was the only telephone system in the world. I hate Coca Cola. I wouldn't drive a car." They just go on and on. Now, those are not bad people. They may have come out of a bad environment. They may be warped. They're oriented in their life to finding fault. They're just loaded with fault. I say they're good people; you might sponsor some of those people sometime. So we don't want to be too critical of them because they might be here tonight.

Well, the second kind of person he talked about, he said, and his definition of those people was what he called lawn mowers. Of course, I wouldn't use those words, they're kind of funny, but I'm quoting Disney. He said, "They're nice people, too." He said, "They go back and forth, and they cut the grass. Sometimes they go up and down, to cut it really good. They take care of their little world." But he said, "That's all they do. They go to work every day, they come home. They go to work every day and they come home. They never reach beyond themselves. Wonderful people, and they keep their noses clean and they pay their bills and they're great." And I'm sure some of us are in this room who are very fastidious, and we tend to our knitting.

But he said, "There's a third kind of person that I want to talk about tonight." The third kind of person he called a life enhancer. Now I had a little trouble finding out what enhancer means, so I just say life enricher. And so what I really want to talk to you about is being a life enricher and how that relates to this business.

You get in the Amway business, and I remember when Jay and I got in. Now, I'm 63 years old. I've been in this business 40 years. 1949, Jay and I signed up and bought our sales kit. Now, that's 40 years ago. So my entire, virtually my entire adult life has been involved in this business, and it's the only business I know. Now, when we began with Nutrilite, and bought our first sales kit, and were encouraged by a couple of people named Basil and Lena Fuller. They were our upline; they were two above us. And they were the king and queen of the business in our world at that time. You don't even know them. But they were our mentors, you see. They were the ones who taught us some of the things about this business.

And as we watched the business develop all the years, and as I look back out of that 40 years' experience, I say, "When did the business grow? What did we do that made it happen? And what were the things that occurred when it didn't grow for us?" When you put your mind to it, there are also, while the opportunity is great, there are times when you and I focus our attention on doing the things that make it grow, and then we have all sorts of time we spend doing the things that don't make it grow. They're fun things to do, maybe. They're nice things to do, they're maybe good things to do, but they don't drive the business. And when we were in our periods of growth, what did we do? And I go back from the very earliest days in this business.

Now, we got into this business to make money. Somebody asked me today, "Did you have this wonderful idealism in your mind when you started? Did you want to help the world? Were you so interested in capitalism and free enterprise and all this?" I said, "Quite frankly, we came in to make a

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living. We really wanted some money. I mean, all that other stuff's all right, but we wanted to make some bucks." Now, I'm so old that making a thousand dollars a month was big time. But I'm also young enough to know that for some of you in this room, to make an extra thousand dollars a month would be big time right now, and that's important. You can make more, but until you make that much, you won't make more. And sometimes, we get so busy chasing wild stuff that we forget to do this stuff today that counts.

I'm just dumb enough, or whatever, that I grew up—when I started early in my life, I lived in my grandmother's attic. My father was unemployed for a period of time; they couldn't keep the little home they had bought. So, we had to move back to Grandma's attic. I remember one time when a newspaper kid came to the door trying to sell Liberty Magazines. Now, you don't even remember the name. But when he came to sell Liberty Magazines, he had said it was a dime and he stood at the door crying. He said, "Please buy it. I can't go home until I sell this last one." And my grandfather and my father, I'll never forget it, stood there and said, "I'm sorry, son. We don't have a dime, and we can't buy your last magazine." Now, I'm old enough to know that. So I understand what it means to be in this business to make money. And I don't want to give you a lot of hullabaloo about fancy idealism and all that. There's nothing wrong with your focusing your attention on how to do that.

But when I look back at what made the business go when we did it certain ways, then we entered into a period of doing what I call, and this thing we're working on here, a little bit of life enrichment. And you see, that's what Disney had put his fingers on. Sometimes, those are the products of many years of experience, and then you move into that. But unfortunately, when you get older, and you focus on those things, you sometimes have got to be reminded that you really started to make money. So I don't want to confuse you with that. I understand that motive. I believe in that motive. And you've got your children here. You've got a lot of kids, and you're trying to make those things happen.

So, let me just see if we can't define this matter of life enrichment for you a minute, because I believe it has always been the cornerstone cause behind this business. And when we focused our minds on life enrichment, this business grew. We were supporting the cause of free enterprise, but not for the sake of free enterprise, but because of what it could do to change the lives of people. And in this little interview I was doing today, and we were reviewing free enterprise, the person said, "Did you always go for free enterprise, and was that what was behind this always?" I said, "Well, not really. It's just that we understood early, when we even formed it and called it Amway, that millions of people want freedom, and want to have their own business and get ahead in life, and that's what it really embodied." When we focused our minds about that, and how we could help other people achieve their freedom, their goals, their independence, then all the other things just seemed to come into focus.

And when we got busy trying to figure out whether the bonus schedule was just right or whether the price was too high or whether my sponsor was too good or whether the other sponsor was better or whether this piece of junk this guy was trying to get me to go into was better than the piece of stuff I was selling over here, then I died. And all through the years we've been in this business, we've had a thousand distractions, and every day you put up with it, and every time we put our mind on the fundamentals of the business, we grew.

So, what is a life enricher? And what is success in the business? I wrote down a few little things that I put down. What is a life enricher? What is success? Success should not be a goal. Success should be a process. Success is measured as the years go by and Dan and Bunny or Basil and Lena and all the other pros in this room can tell you, they, what they think most about, are the people that they introduced to this business who have gone on and are doing great things or enjoying some measure of personal achievement. Oh, they enjoy the money and the things that money buys. I don't mean that. But when

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they really nail it down, they think about lives touched. And I know that we grew, and we touched lives and put our minds around whose lives we could enrich. That is it, the basis of what I call cause behind the Amway business. It's the driving force of the business. We are the greatest organization in the world the reaches down and touches people and changes lives—in a business sense or an economic sense, of any organization in the world.

I don't really have to talk to you about life enrichment. You already are all of these things. I just want to focus your mind at it, so when you work at this business, you'll know what you're doing and know where to spend your energy. And your energy works when you get to the cause of touching people and helping them.

Now, Ralph Waldo Emerson talked about success. He had a poem. He said, "How do you measure success?" He says, "To laugh often and much." Sometimes when I go around, I see sour faces. Usually when I go around the business, it's coming, "Oh, it's great. Thanks for this. You're wonderful. I'm so happy. Thank you for letting me in this business." I say, "Wait a minute. I didn't let you in this business. I didn't even tell you about the business. Your sponsor told you about the business. That's the person who impacted your life, because they reached out and enriched you by sharing what they had." That sponsor, or somebody above that, a Diamond, an Emerald or your Direct, then worked for you.

They come up to me and say, "I want to thank you for my business." Not my business, your business. I didn't make any phone calls. I didn't come in your house and put a meeting on for you. I didn't do anything for you. You are what you are because of what you have become. And that's the goal of this business. What he said, "Laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of critics and endure the betrayal of false friends." Pretty heavy. "To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others. To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a redeemed social condition, or a job well done. To know even one other life has breathed because you lived. This is to have succeeded."

So, what he's saying to us, this famous poet, is that it is in our level of enrichment of others. It's a matter of the heart. We think of the business as being a matter of dollars and cents, but this is a business of the heart, of a loving, caring people. The biggest pins in this business are the ones who had the biggest hearts, who shared their love and concern with other people, despite the disappointments and discouragement. Now, we have a lady that works in our house, and she's worked in our house for many years, and grew up with all of the kids, and as Doug mentioned to you, he recently got married. So about that time, it was busy, and ours is a busy household, because we're traveling and we do lots of things, and the kids are coming and going and we're blessed that they're around. That's what you do when you have a business where your kids can be involved, they're around you.

I said to her, I said, "Well, now that they're finally all married, I thought there was going to be a little peace and quiet around here." And Maddy said to me, "Mr. DeVos," she said, "You don't understand." She says, "When they're young, they're on your lap, but when you're older, they're on your heart." That's the essence of the Amway business, of having other people on our hearts.

Now, success—I've written a few things—is not things. It's the enrichment of the lives of others. When things become the objects of our affection—don't let me tell you that I'm not in favor of things. I like cars, boats, trains and bathrooms. And one of the reasons we keep busy is we sail together. So, I believe in the economic performance. But do you know how the economic performance comes? It comes when you put people on your heart. When they're in your heart, then the things come behind it. But when things become your primary object, then people become commodities to be used. Think about that. They are people to be used, and that is not what you're seeking.

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Number two, playing becomes subordinate to winning. You begin to say, "I'm going to win at any cost. I'll say anything, I'll do anything to get that guy in." And then you lose the joy of playing this Amway game, of focusing your minds on enriching the lives of others.

Number three, absolute rules, and I'm speaking of rules of ethics and principles. I'm speaking of rules such as, I wouldn't have you in my group because you're sponsored by another. I just wouldn't touch you. I don't care if he's a lousy sponsor or not. I'm not going to get in the way of that process. You go to that sponsor. If your sponsor isn't helping you, go to his sponsor. If he isn't helping you, go to your Direct. There's somebody in that line that'll take care of you. But I'm not going to mess with you, because I believe in the ethical standards of this organization, and they are built on this love and respect for others. So we don't moderate our rules, we stand on them.

And the last point I would make is that when success is things, then individuals end up worshiping themselves. Those are danger signs for us to think about. My father-in-law is 94 years old just recently. In the early days of this business, Helen and I were married, we didn't have a lot of money, we were struggling. I would talk a lot about vacations, and I wanted a better car, and we needed another bathroom in the house and we were going to do this and that. And I never forget it, we had gone to a trip to Florida. I had taken them down there. They'd never been to Florida, from Michigan. And I said, "Well, we'll take you down there." When I got ready to take them down there, I didn't have any money to take them down there. I borrowed it. I never forget it, I went to the bank and borrowed \$400 so I could take them to Florida.

And on the way home, we got to talking, and I was thinking money, and all this, as you do. And then he began to talk about his life of dedication to others. And he said, "Don't ever let those things get in your way." He never was financially a giant. He was a schoolteacher, a school principal, a superintendent of schools. He worked in our church. All of the elders that I know in the church always talk about Mr. Van Wesep. He was always there as one of these tremendously strong, dedicated individuals. The kind of people that you give your heart for, but he understood human values. And when you and I follow those, then our business goes better.

Well, how are you going to be one of these? Well, if you're going to be one of these, you got to have what I call an attitude of gratitude. You got to get your own house in order. You got to be a person who understands these things, first of all, accepts the challenge of them, and then prepare you for that. So, you can't be a moaner and groaner. If you have been, you just got to cease that. I remember my mother said to me, just a year or two ago, my father's been dead, I think 25 years, as Dan said, and she said, "One day, after your dad died, I made a decision. I decided I was not going to be a moaner and groaner anymore." And I said to her, "Mother, I never thought of you as being a moaner and groaner. I never thought of you as being negative." She said, "I really was, but I'm not going to be."

That's a decision, and some of you and some of us have to make those decisions regularly. She said, "I decided that if I was a moaner and groaner, you wouldn't come to see me anymore." She's probably right. She says, "Because you've become very positive. You talk positive and you say, 'Don't hang around with negative people.'" So she said, "I figured I was on the list." Well, I don't hang around with moaners and groaners. They're not worth being around. I find ways to avoid them. If they want to be a bellyacher, that's okay. But I can't be an influence if I got to live with that. So, the first thing you and I have to focus our minds on, is having attitudes of gratitude. Once we get our attitude right, the rest works pretty good.

Now, Yogi Berra talks about attitude. He said that, in getting ahead in life and being successful, he said, attitude is 90%. And he said work was the other half. That's a pretty good thing. Now, to help you have an attitude of gratitude, then think back where you were 10, 20, 30 years ago. Think just back to what

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you were like before you got in the Amway business. Think about the crowd you hung around with, and how you felt about life, and how you felt about yourself and how you've changed today. That alone should give you an attitude of gratitude. When people like you will come any distance on a Friday night to hear somebody talk about what we're talking about, you have got to have an attitude of gratitude. You wouldn't be here. But here you are, because you're involved in this, you're caught up in it, and you're trying to bring other people into this wonderful feeling. So have an attitude of gratitude.

As I said to you, I lived in an attic. I've lived on the other side, and I look back often to where we once were, and how much God has blessed us and the things we've been allowed to enjoy. The second thing I'd ask you to do is decide to be happy now. I talk to people, "Oh, when I get that new car." Or, "When I get that new house." There's always something you're waiting for that you think, "And when I make Diamond, then I'm going to be happy." Well, I know a few unhappy Diamonds, because now they're unhappy because they're not Double Diamonds. Yesterday in Seattle, somebody came up to me and says, "I'm going to see you at Peter Island, and then you'll really respect me." I said, "I respect you now. I don't respect you based on what pin you wear. I don't really care. You got on whatever pin you want to have on. But my respect for you is based on you as a human being, not what pin you wear, or not whether you arrive at another level."

Then I read another good line. I'm not sure I agree with the whole line, but a little bit of it. The line said that, "All unhappiness is caused by comparison." That's a pretty heavy statement. But I guess I do say to you that if you're going to have people who want to be around you, and if you want to enrich the lives of others, then you've got to make a decision to be happy despite it. Because if you don't, people won't want to be with you. And if you're going to be the inspirer that I expect you to be, then you're going to overcome that.

Now, there's another poem. I don't know where I got this one, but it goes like this. It said, "Lord, I ain't what I ought to be. With my potential, I ought to be more loving and more open. Lord, I ain't what I want to be. I want to be more sensitive, more patient, and more tolerant. Lord, I ain't what I'm going to be. And thank you, Lord. I ain't what I used to be." Isn't that nice?

Now, I can start giving you stories, and that's what I really intend to do, about people I've known in this business. I get lots of wonderful letters, and I was tempted to drag out all the letters where people say, "You changed my life." "You did this." And I got one or two of those. But it doesn't compare with the people I know who have been real life enrichers. And then I look at myself, and I think of some of the times when I haven't been. I've failed. And I've enriched or been enriched by the people who were in my group, people I knew who inspired me, who were there to help us when we were down.

We have one of the gals who's been in our business almost 40 years. A wonderful lady. She's a little older than I am, today, but how can you be less than that when you've been around all these years. She is a wonderful lady. I used to get impatient with her when she'd be late for a meeting or late for a function or late to catch the bus, because we used to all ride the bus when we went to Chicago, that's about 180 miles from Grand Rapids, and we'd all charter a bus for their annual convention that the Fullers put on, that I mentioned, who are here tonight. And it was a marvelous, inspiring show. It was the annual, kind of what you'd think of as a family get together. We'd go and we'd ride the bus and we'd leave at four in the morning, because we could save money by going together, and because we didn't have to have any hotel rooms that way. We went to functions for years in this business, to save the bucks it took to rent a hotel room. And that's when hotel rooms were cheap. Just to get by and be with it.

But I was kidding her one morning about being late, and she was, "Well," she says, "I have this son who's handicapped." And she had a son who was born with some great mental problem, and I forget the exact

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medical term of it. But she said, "You know, he got up at two o'clock and he'd made a mess in his bed, and I had to clean him, and I cleaned up the bed and then I had to wash all the bedding, and then by the time I got to bed, it was another hour. And then he did it again, so I'm sorry I'm a little late."

And then I suddenly realized, I was out of step. And from that point on, I began to try to be in tune with the problems. That one hit me, because I was being impatient and I watched this woman, who was a life enricher herself, who took care of this kid till he was 25 years old. Her husband died a few years later, and she carried on all alone. The other day, I talked to her, and she's still in the Amway business. And she says, "My business still allows me to do things I want to do, and I love the people who come over and pick up products." She's been going at this for 40 years.

A lot of you in this room know a fellow by the name of Walter Bass. Now, Walter is a dear friend. He signed up with us way in the 40 year ago cycle, too. And this was a guy who never could do enough for people in this business, always had a sense of value. Never got confused between who he was. He was in this business, sponsored probably the two strongest legs in the whole organization. He sponsored Bernice Hansen, and so you know where that goes. That goes to Marsh and Williams and Yeager and Britt and all that. It all comes off from that, out of Walter Bass, and we sponsored Walter. Walter Bass most of the years in this business had two legs. Now, you know what that means. He never saw an Emerald bonus on all that downline business. Until about four years ago he finally decided he was going to go back work and make it happen. I think he was about 80 when that happened. Some guys learn a little late.

Well, Walter got his third leg. And it didn't amount to a lot of money, maybe \$80,000 a year, but it was a nice little kicker for him. It was an 80th birthday present sort of thing. But I talked to Walter Monday of this week, and in fact we were chatting about it and he was celebrating his 84th birthday. Walter Bass is a life enricher.

I mentioned to you Bernice Hansen. Her daughter Marianne is traveling with us this week and working within the company in the cosmetics area. I remember going, when Marianne, who is traveling with us as a beauty consultant, was sleeping upstairs when we had a meeting in their living room. There were all six people there. And that was the beginning of that entire organization, and all that's erupted out of that. But Bernice Hansen and Fred Hansen, her husband at that time, started and plugged along. Fred Hansen was a life enricher.

Fred Hansen focused his mind on helping people all the time. He never got distracted. He'd wear funny shorts and he'd get in an elevator and he says, "Well, you wonder why I called this meeting," even with strangers, and he'd start talking. Those were in the day when they didn't say, "Don't tell me you got in that?" Then they used to say, "What is that?" Anyway, Fred was a life enricher in every sense of the word.

And Bernice, after Fred passed away, I think they were about Diamonds, took that business on and made a Crown Distributorship out of it. But Bernice focused her mind, always, on touching people. In Grand Rapids the other night, Jay and I were given an award. I think it was for age, survival. Junior Achievement there opened up a thing they call a Hall of Fame. And it will be placed permanently, it's being placed permanently, in the airport, Kent County International Airport of Grand Rapids, and they will add other members to it, but we are part of the original group. And we had a nice party for that. But who's on the phone? Bernice Hansen. "I just want to call to congratulate you. I think it's so great." I was enriched because Bernice Hansen took a moment to do that.

I've been enriched by Angelo and Claudia Nardone and their work on Easter Seals, unbelievable results. I believe they raised, in their group, about \$240,000. That's tremendous achievement. That's a symbol of this organization and an act of caring.

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And I've been enriched lately by Robert Swan, and you may need to catch up with the word, but that's "Icewalk." And he is freezing his tootsies off out there tonight, and maybe his something else. He talks about doing basic bodily functions in those temperatures. He talks about, if you heat a little water and you throw it into the air up there, it freezes before it gets out of the pan. It freezes in the air before it ever hits the ground. He's living out there tonight, with a few others, trying to get to the North Pole, because of the environmental concerns, because of standing for something. Life enrichers, they're all over.

Then this room is filled with them. I've mentioned a few of the names of people who've enriched my life, and the list is endless. I would ask you to do me a favor. I'm trying to build up a little file of people who have been life enrichers that you know. Maybe you're one. Tell me your story. But if you've enriched the life of somebody, or somebody's enriched your life, put it on a piece of paper someday for me. Just send it to my office. I think this organization is, I know this organization is filled with millions of stories of people who've been life enrichers. And there are people who are in this room today only because somebody else enriched their life by sharing with them, by loving for them, by being there when somebody was sick, by bringing in a hot meal, by taking care of somebody else's kids, by just holding your hand at the time of a death, enriching experiences that are the heart and soul of this business.

And when we do that well, we will grow. And when we stop doing that, we will stop and decline, because we will have failed to do what we have been called to do in this business. We are an organization that has discovered some great secrets, and it's all wrapped up in this.

And I want to close with a simple story. I'm going to read it to you. I guess it reads a little better than I can tell it, and there's a few little nuances about it that probably get said better that way.

Teddy Stallard, the story goes, certainly qualified as one of the least: Disinterested in school; musty, wrinkled clothes; hair never combed. One of those kids in school with a deadpan face; expressionless, sort of a glassy, unfocused stare. When Miss Thompson spoke to Teddy, he always answered in monosyllables. Unattractive, unmotivated and distant, sounds like some of the people I've tried to recruit. He was just plain hard to like.

Even though his teacher said she loved all in her class the same, down inside she wasn't being completely truthful. Whenever she marked Teddy's papers, she got a certain perverse pleasure out of putting Xs next to the wrong answers. And when she put the Fs at the top of the papers, she always did it with a flair. She should have known better; she had Teddy's records and she knew more about him than she wanted to admit. The records read, first grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but poor home situation. Second grade: Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home. Third grade, Teddy is a good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died last year. Fourth grade, Teddy is very slow, but well behaved. His father shows no interest.

Well, it was Christmastime, and Christmas came, and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's class brought her Christmas presents. They piled their presents on her desk and crowded around to watch her open them. Among the presents there was one from Teddy Stallard. She was surprised that he had brought her a gift, but he had.

Teddy's gift was wrapped in brown paper and was held together with Scotch tape. On the paper were written the simple words, "For Miss Thompson from Teddy." When she opened Teddy's present, out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. The boys and girls began to giggle and smirk over Teddy's gift. But Miss Thompson at least had enough sense to silence them by immediately putting on the bracelet and putting some of the perfume on her wrist. Holding her wrist up for the other children to smell, she said "Doesn't it smell lovely?" And the children, taking their cues from the teacher, readily agreed with "oohs" and "aahs."

“Life Enrichers”

By Rich DeVos – 1989

At the end of the day, when school was over and the other children had left, Teddy lingered behind. He slowly came over to her desk and said softly, "Miss Thompson? Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother, and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked my presents." When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her.

The next day when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a new teacher. Miss Thompson had become a different person. She was no longer just a teacher; she had become an agent of God. She was now a person committed to loving her children and doing things for them that would live on after her. She helped all the children, but especially the slow ones and especially Teddy Stallard. By the end of that school year, Teddy showed dramatic improvement. He had caught up with most of the students and was even ahead of some.

She didn't hear from Teddy for a long time. Then one day, she received a note that read, "Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Four years later, another note came. "Dear Miss Thompson, They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stallard."

And four years later, "Dear Miss Thompson, As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now. Dad died last year. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Well, Miss Thompson went to that wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat. She deserved to sit there. She had done something for Teddy that he could never forget.

And I'm in the presence this evening of Miss Thompsons—all of you. You are doing things for people that they will never forget. And as we rededicate ourselves to that cause, we will impact this nation and this world and make this a better place, while helping you achieve some of your other goals, as well. Thank you, life enrichers. Good luck.

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