The Greatest Gift

*By Marilynn Reeves*

In 1945, when I was three, the family moved from Denver to Salida. Dad had leased a store space in the heart of downtown and we stayed in an apartment across from the hospital for a few months while he was   
fixing it up.

He built counters and paneled all the walls in knotty pine. Then he partitioned of the back section of the store to create a living space for the family. My older sister Janet and I shared a bed at the foot of the stairs that went up to the balcony which held my parents’ bedroom and Dad’s office.

Behind the living room was a full-sized kitchen. Next to it was a rickety old elevator, hand operated with ropes and pulleys. To the side of the elevator was a door to the staircase leading down to the full basement where the merchandise was stored. The basement was lined with old brick and filled with unfinished wooden shelves. It was really spooky down there. Dad didn’t seem to mind it, but I almost never went down there unless he was with me. Even spookier was the door where he hung his hat and overalls. At night those clothes looked like the boogeyman! I was afraid to cross the elevator by myself in order to use the small bathroom on the other side. I had to wake Janet to come with me.

We continued to live in that apartment in back of the store until I was eight years old. Which, as it turned out, was a very good year.

One day Mom dragged out an old trunk filled with baby clothes. She didn’t say a word, just smiled. “Mom,” I said, “why are you pulling out all those baby clothes?” She said, “Well, when Janet was a baby she wore them. Then when you were a baby, you did. And now …”

Suddenly a lightbulb went off in my head. “You mean we’re going to have another baby?” She said yes, in a few months, we would have a new addition to our family. I was so surprised and overjoyed I couldn’t wait to get to school the next day to tell all my friends. Jumping up and down I shouted, “We’re going to have a baby!”

On the eleventh day of October, 1950, we had just moved in to the big two-story house up the street when suddenly Dad whisked Mom off to the hospital. I knew next to nothing about the birds and bees, but I knew it had something to do with the baby.

A couple of days later, Mother returned home, looking a bit weary but exceedingly happy. She said, “Go look in the bedroom. There’s someone in there you might like to meet.” And there, lying in the center of their white chenille bedspread was this tiny little bundle. It wiggled. That was my first introduction to my little sister Rosemary, who became the light of my life. It was a gift that lasted a lifetime. To this day, my sister Rosie continues to be my best friend.