



Z O R O

MUSICIAN AND
MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Zoro the Drummer is an internationally known rock star and Christian ambassador. One of the world's most renowned and respected drummers, he has toured and recorded with Lenny Kravitz, Bobby Brown, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, The New Edition, Jody Watley, Sean Lennon, Lisa Marie Presley, and many others. The voice of a generation, Zoro speaks at churches, schools, conferences, youth groups, and corporate events all over the world. Zoro is passionate about impacting the lives of children and is a spokesperson for Compassion International, a Christian child advocacy ministry (www.zorothedrummer.com).

There were seven kids in my family, and we were all raised by a single mother. She was from Mexico City originally, and we didn't have any extended family here in the United States — no grandparents, uncles, or aunts.

MY FAVORITE CHRISTMAS

My mother, Maria, had some significant health issues, including debilitating arthritis, which made it impossible for her to hold down a job. Consequently, we were a welfare family living off food stamps and barely getting by. And because of that, Christmas was a real struggle for my mother. Yet she did her best to make it special.



(Zoro, Bobby and Lisa)

Music was always playing in our house, and at Christmastime we had the old standards on the turntable: Nat King Cole, Elvis, Johnny Mathis, and Perry Como to name a few. Every Christmas we also listened to Perry Como's narration of the classic holiday poem, *The Night Before Christmas*. It was something we looked forward to every year.

As a family, we gathered around the television every season to watch those timeless Christmas movies. One of my favorites was the 1970 musical *Scrooge*, starring Albert Finney and Sir Alec Guinness. Then there was *Miracle on 34th Street*, *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Frosty the Snowman*, and the "claymation" films *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer* and *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* with Burl Ives and Fred Astaire.

Like most kids, my brothers and sisters and I spent a lot of time dreaming about what we wanted for Christmas. Every year we took turns looking through the Montgomery Wards and Sears Wishbook catalogs dreaming of things we could never have. I remember my brother, Bobby, and I sitting side by side with the catalog on our laps pretending that we were getting everything on our side of the page for Christmas. It was a fun way of dreaming and imagining.

Because we were so economically challenged, my mother had to be creative to make ends meet and still give us a merry Christmas. One way she accomplished that was by signing up for community programs. For example, the Jaycees, a nonprofit youth development organization, had



MY FAVORITE CHRISTMAS

a program that provided poor children with \$10 so they could buy presents for their families.

Mom also visited the local fire department and took advantage of their Toys for Tots drive. Every Christmas Eve they came through with a basket of toys for us. One year they brought Lincoln Logs and that was the biggest thrill ever. When I got them on Christmas morning I set them up a thousand different ways.

Now when I think about my favorite Christmas memory, one in particular really jumps out. As a kid I loved to bang on things – coffee cans or whatever I could get my hands on. But for years I had wanted a real drum set. Every time I looked in the Sears Wishbook and came across the page with the drums on it, that's all I could focus on. But obviously, I knew there was no way that was going to happen.

But one Christmas morning when I looked under the tree, there was an enormous box with my name on it. I remember ripping that box open and finding a whole drum set in it. I can still picture exactly what it

looked like – it had a picture of Mickey Mouse on the bass drum. My reaction was one of pure and total elation. The only way I can describe it is that I was overflowing with joy. You know the feeling; when you have your heart set on something and you finally get it, the feeling is pretty awesome. Believe it or not, I think my mom had more joy than I did just watching me open it up, because it had taken everything she had to be able to get it for me.

I banged happily on that drum set all Christmas Day and night until it broke. The skins were made of paper, so I ripped right through them. But even though it was destroyed, it set a fire in me. I believe that particular Christmas changed my destiny. Fortunately, my mom lived long enough to see what happened with that one little seed she planted.

Now I have children of my own. And since they were toddlers I've taught them what the word compassion means. One Christmas I took them to Toys "R" Us and told them to pick out what they wanted the most for Christmas. Of course, they both picked out the biggest, coolest thing they could find.



MY FAVORITE CHRISTMAS

Then I said, "I'm not going to give those toys to you... we're going to take them to the fire department and put them in the big Toys for Tots bin and bless somebody else." I explained that there were people in our community who didn't have money to buy presents, so we were going to give those children our presents and make them the happiest kids in the world.

Then I said, "When I was a little boy, I was one of those children. If it weren't for the fire department I wouldn't have had something big and special." I was the kid on Christmas Day who got something great because of the generosity of strangers.

When I took my kids to the fire department that day, the firefighters were really enamored with them. Little kids didn't usually come in and donate the gifts themselves. As a reward, my kids were given a private tour of the fire station and got to sit on the fire engine and even put the headphones on. It was like a bonus I hadn't counted on from teaching them how to give. They were blessed because they gave from their hearts and God showed them His favor. It was a great lesson.

We do that every year now – it has become our special family tradition. Because of that experience, my kids have become real givers. Last year I went on a mission trip to Ghana. When I returned and showed my kids the photos from my trip, my little boy said something that just blew me away. One of the little African boys in the pictures was missing a finger, and my five-year-old son asked me how much a finger cost. He wanted to buy a new one for that little African boy for Christmas! Tears poured down my cheeks because I knew my son understood what compassion was really all about. And that's the true meaning of Christmas.