**Christmas Memories**

In my little world, Christmas means Hallmark movies, baking, cleaning the house for company, presents, decorating, Christmas trees, candy canes, lights, and nativity sets. I usually start prepping for Christmas in September and the first tree goes up towards the end of the month. Of course, the Fall decorations get thrown in there during October and November!

Commercials start advertising in August about planning for Christmas and stores start displaying ornaments and decorations in September. Let’s face it, Christmas is a big deal no matter your age or occupation.

Christmas through the eyes of a child is an amazing thing! Their eyes glow with the wonder of the lights, the cookies and the presents. If they could tell you what was in their heart, I think they would express it is the joy of having Mom and Dad off work and just spending time together as a family.

All of these things produce memories. I remember when I was a little girl that I loved playing with my Barbie dolls. I loved dressing them up and fixing their hair. As a result, that is what I wanted for Christmas—more Barbie dolls and clothes for them. That particular year, my Mother stayed up late every night after my sister and I went to bed and made clothes for our Barbie dolls. Christmas morning, the back of the couch was lined with what seemed like a 100 different outfits! It was heaven! I will never forget that Christmas.

Fast forward a few years to my own family and I remember the family gift that year was a game of twister. I can remember Chandler jumping and down on the sidelines laughing and screaming with laughter, while Tim, Stetson and I were trying to compete for the winner of the game. Brittany was in charge of spinning the wheel and telling everyone where to put their feet and hands. Of course, Stetson won the game because he was so wirery that he could bend in all kinds of contortions! I remember laughing so hard that my stomach hurt.

As it is with all of life’s memories, there are sad memories at Christmas time too. A few years ago, my father-in-law was in the last stages of cancer and we knew it would be our last Christmas together. It was precious, yet sad. God’s comfort was with us and lots of reminiscing and laughing together.

In pondering all of my Christmas memories this year, I remembered that we had a family tradition of making presents for Jesus and putting them under the tree. We would open them and let everyone see what we had chosen to give Jesus. On one particular year, Stetson did not want to share what he had given Jesus. He said it was private. As the year progressed, we all forgot about him not sharing, but he remembered. The reason was because he had promised Jesus that he would read the Bible through in a year. He didn’t want to tell us in case he couldn’t fulfill his gift to Jesus. I remember him walking into the kitchen one day and telling me what he had given to Jesus. He was also proud to tell me that he had been able to fulfill that gift to Jesus and had completed reading the Bible through.

That Christmas memory spoke to my heart this week. Even though Christmas means all the things I have mentioned, the most important memory is Jesus. I hear every year that “Jesus is the Reason for the Season.” However, today I finally captured the real meaning behind that phrase. When Christmas memories change and nothing is the same—Jesus is still the same today, yesterday and forever. When loved ones can’t be with us and the table is set for two instead of ten, Jesus is still there. When you are sick and can’t decorate the tree, Jesus is still there. When there are no presents under the tree, Jesus is still there.

The day Jesus was born:

* Faith was born
* Hope was ignited
* Peace was abundant

Jesus has always been my reason for living. I cannot remember a day without Him in my life. He is my source of faith, hope and peace. I have faith that He is in control. I have hope in a life full of His blessings. I have deep abiding peace that cannot be described.

Jesus truly is the reason for the season. When everything has changed—Jesus has not.

May your Christmas season be full of faith, hope and peace—because Jesus is still there even though everything has changed.

~Karen Harper, Executive Assistant

Great Lakes Ministries