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Christmas Memories Best Gift of All

Heading into the Christmas season these days is like diving head first into the spin cycle of a washing machine.

Just the other day, I was watching the news and saw hundreds of shoppers barreling through the doors of a discount store in a mad dash to grab that coveted computer game or electronic gadget. Just the sight of the hurried shoppers caused my blood pressure to go up. Christmas is supposed to be a time of peace, so why do people get so stressed and in a hurry?

Whenever the holidays become a bit overwhelming, my mind drifts back to a more simple time when shopping wasn't a competition and gifts were rarely electronic in nature.

My first Christmas memory was when I was three. I was helping my dad, my brother, Roger and my sister, Margaret decorate the tree. I remember picking up a red glass ornament thinking it looked like a shiny red apple. I didn't bite into it, but a picture exists to prove I held it up to my mouth.

The days before Christmas seemed to take forever and the three of us would try to appease our curiosity by snooping around the house for unwrapped presents. We soon found out our parents hid the elusive treasures in a place too high for us to reach.

One of my favorite things to do during the Advent season was to gather all the candles in the house and place them on newspaper in the middle of the living room floor. We would then light the candles, turn out all the lights except for the ones on the tree and sing Christmas carols.

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On Christmas Eve, our family would attend services at our church. I always loved celebrating the birth of Jesus through messages and the music presented in the service. My favorite part came at the end when we would all light our candles from the Christ candle. As the flame was passed from candle to candle, the words “May the light of Christ fill your life” were uttered. Then we would hold up our candles and sing “Silent Night.”

Sometimes after the service, dad would drive us around to look at Christmas lights. Once we were home, mom would fix cinnamon toast and hot chocolate. Margaret and I would always beg mom to let us open just one present before we went to bed and mom usually gave in.

Before we turned in for the night, Margaret and I would set out a plate of cookies and a glass of milk for Santa on the piano. By morning, the plate was empty and the milk gone. We always suspected dad was the one to consume Santa’s snack, but we could never get him to admit it.

Margaret and I always had trouble getting to sleep Christmas Eve and we were the first ones to get up Christmas morning. One year, we got up at 5:00 and dad made us go back to bed until 6:00.

As soon as the two of us were awake, we’d hop out of bed and stand at Roger’s bedroom door. “You go wake him up,” I’d say. “No, *you* go wake him up,” Margaret would argue. After several exchanges, Roger would mumble, “I’m awake.”

The three of us would tiptoe downstairs. Margaret and I would stand quietly at mom and dad’s bedroom door while Roger riffled through the packages under the tree.

The same exchange that took place at my brother's door, repeated itself at my parents door.

“You go wake them up.”

“No, *you* go wake them up.”

Afraid of being the responsible party for waking up mom and dad, Margaret and I would join Roger in the living room and start rattling packages in hopes mom and dad would wake up on their own.

Once mom and dad made their appearance in the living room, the three of us tore into the packages mom so carefully and lovingly wrapped the night before. “I got such a kick out of watching you kids unwrapping your gifts,” she said.

After the presents were opened, mom treated us to a Christmas breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, toast and juice. As good as it was, Roger, Margaret and I couldn't wait to get breakfast out of the way so we could enjoy our new gifts.

Christmas Day generally ended with a visit to my aunt and uncle's house. My aunt would always have a table full of delectable goodies. All the cousins would get together to watch TV or play a game while the adults engaged themselves in conversation.

As our family has grown over the years, many of our Christmas traditions have disappeared. However, when the Christmas rush gets to be too much, I can take this faded box of cherished memories off the shelf, dust it off and open it to experience once again the wondrous joy of Christmas long ago. No batteries necessary. No assembly required.