



# Christmas Spirit

by MARIE WALL

I was at church one Christmas Eve a few years back, a night similar to many I have experienced. The shopping was finished, the house was decorated, and the preparation and waiting were over. After all the hustle and bustle it was an uncanny quiet that felt somewhat unnatural. It was a moment in the service that was silent, you could hear a pin drop. Out of the back of the church a young voice cried out loudly, “Santa, Santa, help me!” This girl is my nephew’s child and knowing she was in distress, the young father, red faced, took her outside and played with her.

Like this little girl, many of us have wanted to cry out for help, especially at Christmas time. Sometimes there is someone to help us, other times we have to help ourselves. Christmas is a season like no other throughout the year, for both bad and good reasons. Literally, it is a season of dark and light. It occurs at the darkest time of the year and colored lights are used in our homes and communities brightening the world around us. I have heard many Christmas memories and the diverse experiences speak to the challenging demands and stressors, as well as its potential for fun and celebration.

“Christmas spirit” is a common phrase that may conjure up images of expectations of things as they are “supposed” to be. For many, these externally imposed expectations lead to disappointment and frustration; imposed by traditions that may no longer be meaningful, or by pressure to extend beyond our means, both financially and energetically – to be all things for all people. It is easy to become swept away in the commercialism. It is important to remember that Christmas is about more than the gift giving and “busyness”. It is an opportunity to be nourished and rejuvenated, to connect with our family and friends, and an opportunity to get away from our regular routine for a short while. There is a great deal of thought about how big business has taken control of the Christmas season and made it their own for profit. I have been wondering about the meaning of Christmas and have questioned whether it is fulfilling the potential it can. Christmas is like many experiences in life – the preparation, the anticipation and

then the celebration and reflection. Without one of these the holiday will go on but its full potential may not be realized.

Both Christmas and life in general requires work; there is effort that goes into it and rewards that can come from it. The preparation is demanding of our time, financial resources and energy. We are challenged to balance each and, where possible, to share the work and effort with family members. Unfortunately, preparing for Christmas may come more naturally to some than others resulting in a few taking on the lion’s share, which often leads to Christmas burnout and resentment. When someone feels drained and distressed the festive season will likely be filled with tension – not a good place to be. If this feels too close to home for you it is time to make a change. It is time to share the responsibilities. Get together with others who need to help you prepare; share what it’s like for you, how it makes you feel to be doing so much, let them know what effects it has on you and what you need in order to be less stressed. Talk about it, plan things out and share the load. It may not feel natural because it would be unfamiliar but distributing the work can feel good and it could start a whole new approach to the preparation.

The anticipation can be seen most easily in the eyes of children, just as the young girl at the back of the church was eager and restless. Her hopes and wishes building in wait of what Santa might deliver. The anticipation is palatable. So what are we waiting for? Is it Santa or is it some other gift? There are several words and concepts that stand out for me when I think of Christmas: joy, love, peace, gifts, lights, family, and reminiscing. Take time to consider what you need in your life at this time and throughout the year. The gifts you are seeking may be material or they may be emotional, such as safety, confidence, peace or anything that you are wanting.

For most in our culture, Christmas is a time of celebration. The festivities are the culmination in observing the traditions that have been created over the years. For some it can be a quiet celebration, or for others it is about gathering with family and friends, which involves visiting and welcoming people into

their homes. I know a lot of people who say it is the only time they get to reconnect with people they don't see throughout the year.

Another important part of Christmas is reflection, remembering the wonderment of it all. To open our hearts and feel gratitude for gifts in our lives; for the quietness or the parties. This is a time that could coincide with the clearing away of the signs of the season or Old Christmas Day. Socrates said "the unreflected life is not worth living" because it does not give us the opportunity to anchor into our lives the experiences that sustain us. It is not Christmas that we will need to remember through the year but the gifts of joy, love, peace, family and friends.

It is also important to remember that everyone in our schools and communities does not celebrate Christmas. We live in a multi-cultural province and for those who do not observe this season it can be different. For those who have had bad experiences at this time of year or have had a loss, it may be a very painful time. There are others who cannot afford the expenses at this time of year; the pressure on them may even be greater. Try to assess what you can do and what is reasonable.

Take the time you need and do what you can to help you feel refreshed for the new year. Just as a young girl cried out for help from the back of the church, we can call out too. Ask for what you need this Christmas from those around you and my best wishes for an enjoyable, healthy and happy season.

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