

MICHIGAN CHRISTMAS

By Bob Young

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Last month as Thanksgiving rolled around, I wrote about our Thanksgiving experiences in Michigan. The emotions we felt at being a long way from home and unable to spend time with our extended family during the holidays intensified as Christmas approached. We were again aware that we would not spend any holiday time with extended family. Again, we decided that we had the opportunity to establish our own family holiday traditions.

If you were to ask our sons about Michigan Christmases past, they would probably mention Mom's early morning coffee cake, opening gifts after a delightful breakfast, and Dad cooking steaks outside on the grill for Christmas dinner every year (regardless of how cold or difficult the weather). They might mention that we heated primarily with wood which gave a special atmosphere and aroma to Christmas morning. They would probably mention the year they were roused from bed early on Christmas morning when Santa Claus showed up on his snowmobile!

We also decided that Christmas was about sharing and that it was a time to spend with friends. Every December, we invited all of the widows of the congregation to our home for a "sit-down" meal. The boys served, and that was when we had our Christmas turkey and dressing. Christmas became a time to connect with our spiritual family. It was also a time to connect with others who were far from home.

One year when Christmas fell on Sunday, the family "agreed" to delay our gift opening until afternoon (with some dismay on the part of our sons). That morning, a new couple was at church—they had just moved to our community so he could attend law school. Our boys asked if we could invite Dennis and Donna to our house for lunch. We did and they accepted. Dennis helped cook the steaks. As the meal concluded and it came time to open the gifts, our sons called us into our bedroom and wanted to know if they could change the names on certain gifts so that there would be something under the tree for Dennis and Donna. The spirit of Christmas was alive and well that day—we celebrated giving, not receiving!

We lived in Michigan for almost 12 years—we were there for our 15th Wedding Anniversary. The boys and I had secretly purchased a new wedding ring for Jan—a surprise because the wedding anniversary was now four months past. We had secured the ring box deep in the Christmas tree, virtually invisible unless one knew where it was. Jan played "Santa Claus" (gift distributor). She gave out all of the presents, or so she thought. The boys insisted that there was one more. She looked, and looked, and looked—and finally, there it was! Whose is it? It was for "Santa Claus". Delightful memories—celebrating giving more than receiving!

Those are days long ago, but they still help make us what we are. May God help us at this holiday season to remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive—words Paul attributes to our Lord!