



Connections

Connected Creative Caring

December
2023

What Happens to People at Christmas Time?

A Reflection by Peter White

For many of us the thoughts of Christmas give rise to a long list of things that need doing in order that Christmas is a success.

- Cards for those far away and local;
- Cooking and baking;
- Friends and guests coming to and staying in the house;
- Cleaning the house and decorating the tree;
- Gifts for all, buying and sending and wrapping;
- Visiting friends, family and neighbours;
- The church concert; and
- Keeping the traditions alive!!!!

My first Christmas, married and living in Northern Ontario, included most of these elements plus lots of snow.

And then it came. My wife, a nurse, having started her job in September was told that she would be on duty for Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years. Thus, our plans changed! Now it meant not being with parents and friends on the actual days of Christmas. Adjustments meant earlier cards and gifts into the Canada Post, travelling home to southern Ontario after Christmas, thus missing the traditional joys of Christmas gift opening, family firesides, and the big old turkey. All was doable but changed the mood from joyful to a stressful "must do by –".

The second shoe fell on Christmas morning. As we were departing to take my wife to work; the phone rang. The doctor on the other end said that my Dad had died.

I made a quick call to my Mom to check on her. I called my boss: "I will be away," and put in calls to two dear friends – go care for Mom and pick me up at the train station in London.

What began then was something that has stayed with me since that day in 1972 – the goodness and kindness of friends, family, and strangers.

Continued on page 3

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Editor's Desk	2
Chair's Desk	2
Unit 6	4
Real Estate Changes	5
Decorating for Christmas	5
Shredding Day	6
Life After Loss	7
Church Gardens Team	7
Ladies Night Out	8
Valley Voices	9
Refugee Support	10
Gifts of Love	12
Unit 7 Christmas	12
Christmas Events/Worship	13
Scrabble Day	14
Advent Water Campaign	14
Alice Perry	15
Monday Memoir Group	16
Moderator's Advent Message	17
Christmas Stories	18-24
Cathy Wilkes, Sally Jo Martin, Susanne Hynes, Judith Dallimore, Carolyn Whiteside, Colleen Isherwood, Donna McCorquodale	
Our Sponsors	25-29
Kate & Trevor's Reflection	30

Of Special Note

Rev. Trevor and Kate's reflection is on the back cover.

Our Advent prayers are for hope, peace, justice, love, kindness, and joy.

Humber Valley
UNITED CHURCH

From the Desk of the Chair of the Board

What a year this has been!!!

I just want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped us out in anyway this year – so many to thank.

- Our ministerial team (Trevor, Kate, Drew, Licia, Claire, Michelle), musicians (Sarah, Jeff, Rod) and all our staff (Kelly, Anita, Janet) for their leadership and dedication to our church.
- The members of the Board, who always seem to have many items to discuss, and the Chairs and members of each of our church committees, teams, and small groups.
- Our custodial team (Hakim, Amalia, Zoran, Dragan, Miyanda) for always being there for us.
- Anne, Jenny, and George for leading our seniors programming with more than 400 participations per month.
- Kelly, Susanne, and Colleen for all their efforts to keep us connected through the weekly “Keeping in Touch” and bimonthly “Connections.”
- Joanne Stenerson who has been providing support to many through “Daily Bread” (at least twice a week for almost four years).
- All those on our Refugee Team, led by Erin and Alexa, and everyone in our congregation and community for your support to the most vulnerable.
- Joan Belford for leading our many fundraisers – we have had a lot of fun and raised some money for the church at the same time.

- Valley Voices has been and is such a blessing, and a joy. Thank you to Kate, Jonah, Jeff, who lead the music and to Kevin with his magic in the AV booth. And Colleen and the committee doing all the background administrative work and the many volunteers who bring the goodies.
- Each and every one of you – you have supported each other. You have called each other. You have shared a laugh and a tear.
- Our elders, led by Brian Goodman and now Brian Thomson, for reaching out. We continue to be a blessed “church family” of people who really care for each other.
- All the new people and families who have joined us – we are so blessed. We hope you will find a church home with us.

To each of you and your families, a Merry Christmas and may 2024 bring hope, joy, peace, and love.

Please continue to support our programs, our church, and our ministries including our online services.

To many of you, hope to see you soon in church, online or on Zoom.

Blessings,

Deb Turnbull



From the Editor's Desk: *Merry Christmas to All*

The Humber Valley United newsletter, *Connections*, reflects our very active and dynamic faith community. It carries reports and photos about the church's activities and features original stories written by our congregation.

For this edition we requested articles about being away from home for Christmas. The first Christmas certainly happened away from home; Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem from their Nazareth home. And then they had to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's terrible command that all male children under two be killed.

Featured on the front cover is Peter White's story about a totally disrupted Christmas filled with sadness. But what

Peter remembers so vividly is the kindness of the people he encountered. Members of the 55+ Memoir Group contributed remembrances about the trees that made their Christmases special.

Rev. Trevor's and Kate's reflection, found on the back cover, assures us that “the light has come into the world and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Christmas is such a special time of year that brings out memories and renews hope because of the gift of the Christ Child.

continued on the next page

What Happens ... Continued from page 1



Peter and his father at Peter's graduation from university in May 1972. His father died at Christmas that year and this is the last photo of the two of them together.

The list is long:

- The Head Nurse said she would cover for my wife that evening.
- The train station attendant said he would deliver a ticket to me.
- A co-worker, with a working wife and three kids, offered me a loan of \$100 cash as the bank was closed on Christmas day.
- My boss said he would drive me to the train.
- The train conductor showed me to a reserved seat in a corner of the rail car and gave me two Hudson Bay blankets to wrap myself in.
- The porter of the second train came and picked up my bag so I could transfer directly to my seat for the rest of my train journey.
- My special friend provided me with some fortified

coffee and drove me through the snowstorm for 3 hours to the village of Forest.

- There was a second friend who had arrived and was caring for my Mom, who was now very alone, having moved in September to a new village, a new house and a new church.
- Over the next three days, the minister and the head of the UCW plus a whole mass of people introduced themselves as neighbours as they handed us food and drink and open-hearted sympathy, arrived at the door with offers of help and prayers, but mostly kindness.

Mom accepted the invitation of my wife and me to come and stay with us in Cochrane.

At our first church service a week later, the minister gave Mom a book of prayers and his telephone number. He said that a fellow pastor from Forest had called him.

Mom restarted her life, moved to Lindsay, remarried, lost both legs to diabetes, commanded the family from her bed and passed away in peace.

As a small boy, in a small fishing village where my Dad and Mom developed a drug store, I learned early that no matter what the circumstances, it is the people and their innate qualities of kindness and caring that reaches all of our hearts.

I have experienced the Christmas spirit and received the gift of many blessings from family, friends and strangers.

I hope that each of you will be as well blessed.

Peter White

Editor's Desk, continued

For the past few months the Sunday morning service Prayers of the People have been given by volunteers from our congregation. They have all been beautifully written, meaningful and thoughtful. If you would like to lead the congregation in this prayer one Sunday, please contact me at susanne@hyneslegal.ca.

We would like to thank all the people that make *Connections* possible. Colleen and I could not do it without our

amazing contributors, our eagle-eyed proofreaders, Kelly who prints *Connections*, the people who deliver copies, and our sponsors who help defray the costs of production.



We love to hear from you. Please send your comments and suggestions to [Susanne](#) or [Colleen](#).

Susanne Hynes

Comfort Bags for Out of the Cold

On November 7, members of Unit 6 of the United Church Women gathered in the Hearth Room to prepare "Comfort Bags" to be distributed to the "Out of The Cold" participants at All Saints Anglican Church.

They included warm socks, a hat, heavy gloves and some chocolate treats.

This outreach project is something this group has done for many years to support our community. Each bag included a message of Peace, Love, and Hope which we wish for everyone at this time of year.

*Wendy
Oliver*



Unit 6 Christmas Meeting



More than twenty of us gathered in the Hearth Room for our 2023 Christmas Meeting.

We enjoyed each other's company, Christmas music, delicious treats, and warm apple cider.

Continuing with our tradition of helping our community we collected \$405 for the Maybelle Food Bank in cooperation with Islington United Church. They also appreciated the egg cartons we donated. They are needed to sort large flats of eggs into dozen and half dozen amounts according to family needs.

Merry Christmas to All

The real estate industry is changing! What does this mean for you?

Hello Humber Valley Family,

You may not know, there has been a big shift in the industry that has come into effect December 1st, 2023, with the new TRESA (Trust in Real Estate Services Act) regulations being enforced. Real estate professionals have undergone the training required to understand this shift and there is some information that I'd like to share with all of you, as this will affect your future transactions. The changes were largely put in place to strengthen consumer protection, educate home buyers and sellers, and enhance professionalism.

A couple key points to be aware of:

- Property sellers can now disclose information from multiple and competing offers to the buyers, not including the buyer's personal details, but the price and conditions of the offer, creating a more open and transparent bidding process.
- Buyers and sellers, now have the choice of becoming a "Self Represented Party". While you can now represent yourself independently, there are significant risks attached to this right if you do not have the knowledge and expertise to navigate the transaction on your own.

If you'd like more information on what this means and how it will affect your future moves, I'd be happy to share the new RECO (Real Estate Council of Ontario) Guidelines package with you, and answer any questions you may have! Please email me at Philippa.vandervliet@sothebysrealty.ca.

Merry Christmas.

Philippa (Pippa) Van der Vliet

Decorating the Church for Christmas



Thank you Guys!



Shredding Day, November 4, 2023

The HVUC Fundraising Committee would like to thank all who contributed to the success of our fourth annual Shredding Day. Whether you brought a bag or a box for shredding, helped to spread the word of the event to your friends and neighbours, or were one of the hard-working on-site volunteers, we appreciate your contribution to the success of the day. We served 93 individual customers, shredded more than 300 boxes of papers, and made \$3,200 to help support our church. After a generous donation of \$1,000 from one of our parishioners, the total amount added to HVUC coffers was \$4,200.

We had a few tense moments this year when the shredding company we had used for the last three years withdrew, in mid-August, the written promise they had made in June to provide us with a live-action shredding truck. Instead, they offered a storage vehicle to pick up the documents and take them elsewhere to be destroyed. We didn't think our customers would be happy with that arrangement. We know part of the attraction of our shredding day is that people can see their valued documents being shredded before their eyes.

We then began a mad scramble to find another company to take on the task. It took a lot of phone calls, but we were most fortunate to achieve a contract with Papersavers. We had to change our date and pay more for the service, but every cloud has a silver lining: the early morning rain cleared up, the people at Papersavers were a pleasure to deal with, and the driver who came on November 4th was extremely helpful. He even volunteered to stay an extra 20 minutes to accommodate a customer who came five minutes before closing time with 30 boxes of documents.

Shredding Day has become quite a phenomenon at HVUC. People who come love it. When they drop off their



boxes, they tell us they feel a weight lifted from their shoulders. They are happy to pay, and often top up their payment (e.g. 3 boxes cost \$36, and they give us \$40.) Many suggest we do this twice annually. This year, a few participants asked us if we could add electronic recycling. (Preliminary investigation indicates that might be very complex.)

We are very grateful to all our volunteers:

- Kelly Wells made the posters and the street signs.
- Carolyn Whiteside dealt with the ever-changing dates to get the advertising out.
- Sharon Dowdall and Peter White contributed canopies to protect the cash table.
- Sylvia Cohen made the coffee and brought delicious home-made cereal bars, plus other treats. Lynn Manning contributed a yummy apple cake.
- Angela Balan (Pilarski Real Estate) contributed the street sign holders
- Lynn Manning and Dale Smith assembled the signs and put them on strategic street corners.
- Marnie Bradshaw, Sylvia Cohen, Sally Jo Martin, and Chris Uleryk took shifts on Anglesey Boulevard flagging people in.
- Brian Goodman, Lynn Manning, Andrea Ostvik-Van der Vliet, Murray Smith, and Peter White greeted people, and provided traffic direction, as needed.
- Nuno Araujo, Jonathan Grimm, David Kitchen, Allan Orr, Dale Smith, Brian Thomson, and Mike Watt lifted boxes.
- Ruth Johnson and Janet Ward counted the boxes lifted from each

car.

- Kathy Kitchen did the mental math to tell the drivers what they owed, and took the money to and from the cars.
- Marnie Bradshaw, Charlotte Browning, Sylvia Cohen, Sally Jo Martin, and Judy Smith operated the payment desk and kept tallies of the cash and boxes.
- A special thank you to Gibsons Cleaners and Doug Ward at Cecil Ward, who displayed our flyers. Several customers told us that's where they heard about Shredding Day.

While this list shows their official duties, we want to note that all our volunteers not only did their assigned tasks, but cheerfully helped put up the tents, flattened boxes, and generally filled in wherever needed. Many of the volunteers have been with this project since its inception, and we are very grateful to them. We were also happy to welcome four newcomers to our volunteers this year. As organizers, Gail Cook-Bennett and I feel so privileged to work with such an awesome crew.

By popular demand, it looks as if Shredding Day will be back next year. Start saving your sensitive documents now. I already have about 4 inches of paper in my box.

Joan Belford

Ex-Chair, HVUC Fundraising Committee

Life After Loss

Every spring the Rev. Dr. Deborah Hart, who has been facilitating grief support groups leads a Life After Loss session for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. She takes a faith-based perspective and helps participants move through their grief with greater awareness, hope and health. The course runs for 5 weeks and is based on the materials of grief counsellor Dr. Bill Webster



Recently our Pastoral Care Committee arranged to host a reunion for those who participated in the class over the last three years. We had the opportunity to hear Dr. Bill Webster talk and share about his own personal tragedy that turned into a gift that offers support and comfort to people who have had a loss.

If you have suffered a loss recently and are looking for some ideas of how to cope with a grieving Christmas please take a look at Dr. Bill's website. You may find it helpful.

www.GriefJourney.com

I wish all of you a blessed Christmas.

Kathy Kitchen

Chair, Pastoral Care

Church Gardens Teamwork

The centre garden at HVUC looks wonderful when it's in full bloom but the annual replacement cost of geraniums does take a hit on the budget. So Carolyn White-side has sourced colourful perennials which will grow in that garden next year. Bruce Boyd removed last season's flowers so that Carolyn was able to do the planting back in November.

Carolyn ensures that our planters look good in every season. Ron Crago has taken care of edging the gardens and many other details this season.

We have concerns about the school kids running over the bed that looks empty, so Sally Jo repurposed some garden edging as a temporary deterrent.

We care about our church and the impression it makes for passersby. Thank you to the team that takes care of our gardens.



Ladies' Night Out a Big Hit

Ladies' Night Out 2023 was a resounding success. Everyone had a good time and the buzz in the rooms, and as people left the building, was exhilarating. The sold-out crowd enjoyed the food, fun, vendors, silent auction, bake sale ... and the musical duo (new for us this year) that had us up dancing around to the beat!

We are thrilled to have cleared a profit of \$11,000. The charities and outreach projects we support benefit from this money.

Thanks to everyone who supported *Ladies' Night Out 2023* from the ticket seller, silent auction co-ordinators, bake sale ladies, decorating and set-up team, kitchen prep staff and more ... and especially all the ticket buyers who came out to support the evening.

And, who could forget our distinguished crew of *Men-in-Suits* who enhanced the party by serving wine, food, coffee, tea, and then headed to the dance floor to get the ladies up and swaying to the musical beats.

Special thanks to those who generously donated food for the evening. Delmanor, Prince Edward provided wonderful Nicoise salads for everyone. Parkland on Eglinton West provided chocolate cupcakes for dessert. Dinner rolls came from Cobs Bread at Humbertown.

Several of our local businesses supported us through sponsorship ads in our event booklet. We appreciate their support and urge you to support them when you can.

Beaulieu Vision Care	Lifeline
Casual Affairs	Sense of Hearing Etobicoke/Toronto
Dineen Construction	Tartistry
Farquhar Advantage	Thornbrook Home Care
Ken Shaw Lexus	Turner & Porter
Kingsway Village Custom Homes	
Life Force Physiotherapy	

Linda Grass

Photos from top to bottom:
 Diane and Mike on the dance floor.
 Sharon, Colleen and Sandra.
 Donna, Susanne, Carolyn and Ruth.
 Linda Grass with ladies from Delmanor Retirement Home showing the delicious main course they donated.
 Yummy cupcakes came from Parkland on Eglinton.



The Joy of Singing

Valley Voices has had a busy fall, starting in early October with our trip to Kipling Acres Long-Term Care Home. We performed our Vintage Vinyl repertoire at four different retirement homes in October and November, including Delmanor, Parkland and Cawthra Gardens.

In December we switched to our Christmas songs and carols. We participated in the Light the Season Tree Lighting at the church on December 3rd. Over the last couple of years this has become a widely- anticipated fun, family friendly event.

Decked out in our brightest Christmas sweaters and sporting tiny Santa hats, Valley Voices sang popular favourites such as *Frosty the Snowman*, with Nancy Roper repeating last year's performance. This year, Josie Mullins replaced Kevin Curnock as Rudolph (the Red Nose Reindeer). And Santa was on hand, looking suspiciously like our own Drew Brown!



Sue Hansen celebrated her 88th Birthday. She, her daughter and her granddaughter all sing with Valley Voices

We are now into our Christmas performances at the Retirement Homes. The Christmas Singalong at Kipling Acres Nursing Home included a few requests from the audience, including *I don't want a lot for Christmas* by Mariah Carey, and an audience member who sang *Silent Night* in German.

That evening, Valley Voices went caroling in the neighbourhood, with a large group walking to nearby destinations and a small group travelling by car to homes that were further away. It was so much fun, and the response was amazing! We all gathered at the Church afterward for hot chocolate and baked goodies.



We have two more dates at Retirement Homes, and one at Daytimers on Dec. 18.

On December 10, Valley Voices filled in at the Church Service because Drew had COVID. We will also be performing at two services on Sunday, December 24 — one at 10:30 a.m. and one at 10:00 p.m. The morning Church Service will be a Carol Sing led by our choir. The Christmas Candlelight Service in the evening might even include some Carols in different languages. Our choir has members who can sing *Silent Night* in English, German, Norwegian and Italian!

Our choir is always open to new members. No auditions required. We have lots of fun under the leadership of Kate Brown and our two musicians, Jeff Kahl and Jonah Schwartz. Come out and share the Joy of Singing. Please contact me for more details.

Colleen Isherwood

Colleen.isherwood26@gmail.com

Refugee Family from Ethiopia

Our refugee support group and congregation have enjoyed getting to know the Becele family from Ethiopia. They have become part of our church family and have helped us to deepen our faith.

The family now is ready for the winter with proper clothes, work permits, CV's and temporary residency brown papers. On November 21st, Erin Billowits and Brian Goodman moved them into their eldest daughter's place in Brighton with beds, mattresses and bedding for each of them. They are getting monthly payments from the government for a year.

We will continue to work with them to help to get their mom and Hana's husband to Canada and continue to support them finding work. We feel so happy that the family is settled and back together.



Baby Shower for Afghanistan Refugees

Erin hosted a shower for Sameera, Haroon and Hania as their new baby is expected any time now.

We are so excited for them as they welcome a new family member.



Continuing Support for the Food and Clothing Bank at St. Luke's United Church (Sherbourne and Carlton)

HVUC is continuing to support the food and clothing bank at St. Luke's United Church. This food and clothing bank supports the homeless and refugees in downtown Toronto.

Families and Groups being Supported

We supported an Arab family living in Israel who came to Canada as refugees to help them move into their new accommodations in an apartment in Vaughan. We are now beginning to support a new mother and her baby from Kenya and her friend as well as two pregnant women. More details to come in the future.



Refugee Family Support

Kenyan Canadian Newcomers Fair

Thank you to everyone who donated clothes and food and thanks to all the other churches who supported this initiative with us: Royal York Road United, St. Giles Presbyterian, Kenyan Newcomers Church in North York, and many of our renters. Special thanks to the two Brians, Foster Brown, and Kathy and David Kitchen, and Miyanda. Congratulations to Hadassa for her leadership and all her work. More than one hundred and sixty newcomers attended the event.



African Dinner Hosted by Kate



Erin F., Miyanda, Hadassa, and Nancy R.



Hadassa sang a solo, *Broken Road*, with Valley Voices.

Donations wanted

We continue to collect donations of food and clothing for the many refugee initiatives we are supporting. Please continue to bring items to the church in bags or boxes (all types of clothes, coats, shoes, boots, etc. for all sizes, for all seasons) and the team will make sure they are delivered to those in need.

Items needed by the new mom include: size 2 and 3 diapers, zip in sleeping bag for a car seat, breast pads, 3-6 month old sleepers, grocery cards for No Frills, Food Basics, and Walmart.

Thank you to HVUC for all your support and donations.

The refugee support group will continue to work with Rev. Alexa Gilmour to identify a new family or group or individuals for us to support.

Deb Turnbull

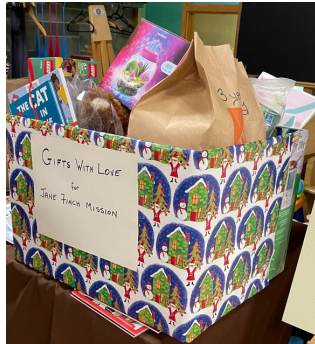
Gifts of Love

Jane Finch Mission - Gifts of Love

Continuing our practice of collecting toys for the children served by the Jane Finch Mission, the congregation quickly signed up for the 22 children on our list. Financial contributions will also be sent to assist the work of this neighbourhood charity.

On Sunday, December 10, the children brought the toys into the sanctuary in a wagon.

Sally Jo Martin



Unit 7

Unit 7 women have had a busy Humber Valley autumn with service to our church and wider community and at our meetings. We have resumed meeting in person but always add a Zoom segment for those who can't attend.

Unit 7's annual Christmas party was filled with delicious food and drink, games led by Carolyn Booth, carol singing and some charity too. It was a time to welcome some new

members, and to reconnect with old friends, one of whom we hadn't seen for about five years due to illness. We even had members Zooming in from places as far away as Florida, Winnipeg and The Kipling-Rathburn area (smile!) And we brought fun and practical items to fill stockings for Youth Without Shelter. Thanks to Susanne Hynes and Carolyn Booth for organizing everything and to Susanne for hosting in her beautiful home.

Colleen Isherwood



Rev. Trevor Brisbin has been preaching a series entitled
The Arc of Advent on the Sundays in the season of Advent: at 10:30 am.

Join us in Sunday services in the Sanctuary at Humber Valley United or watch the services
anytime on YouTube. If you missed some of these, [you can still see them here](#).

Third of Advent—December 17

Sunday Worship 10:30 am, teaching series *The Arc of Advent*.

Gift of Hope Gathering 7:00 pm

Christmas can be a difficult time for those who have experienced loss and grief. In this gathering we acknowledge the difficulty of the season and seek glimpses of light in what often feels very dark. Fellowship and refreshments at 7:00pm with the service following at 7:30pm.

Daytimers Christmas—Monday, December 18

Turkey meal and entertainment 11:30 am

Fourth of Advent — December 24

Sunday Worship 10:30 am . Final teaching in the series *The Arc of Advent*. Carol singing.

Family Christmas in the Valley

5:00 pm A time of worship and learning to engage the whole family. Skits, singing, and glow sticks makes this a Christmas Eve favourite.

Candlelight Christmas

10:00 pm As the city settles into the sacred night of Christmas, we gather to welcome the Christ by candlelight.



Scrabble Day in Honour of Beryl

The last time Beryl Finlay was at church was for Bids 'n' Bites in the spring of 2023. Even though she was already very ill, she played scrabble with three friends and they had a great time. Beryl died not long after, on June 3.

Beryl loved playing Scrabble, so in her memory, and to raise some money for the Dorothy Ley Hospice, Jill Kershaw and Andrea Van der Vliet organized a Scrabble Day at Humber Valley United Church.

On November 22 twenty players, (five tables) gathered in the Hearth Room to play Scrabble. We raised \$290 and as great luck had it, an anonymous donor connected with Dorothy Ley, was matching funds donated in November so our money was double to \$580.

We hope to do this again next year, likely in the spring.

Andrea and Jill



Beryl with two friends at an HVUC event. She supported the church and was active in many activities.



Playing scrabble in the Hearth Room on November 22.



Advent Water Projects

For many years, Advent at Humber Valley has meant the promotion of safe water projects both locally and in Africa.

We have the opportunity to help fund the building of wells in Africa with GAIN, Global Aid International.

Closer to home we support Water First, an Ontario charity providing water treatment internships for indigenous youth in their communities.

If you wish to contribute to either or both of these charities, please mark your donation to indicate which you want your money to support:

GAIN - wells in Africa

Water First - employment training of indigenous youth in Ontario

Humber Valley
UNITED CHURCH

Outreach & Action
Now Accepting Donations for

WATER FIRST
Indigenous Training - Ontario

Water for Life
GAIN Wells in AFRICA
Global Aid Network

Use envelopes provided in the lobby or send an e-transfer specifying your choice of charity to:
finance@hvuc.ca

Alice Perry

Alice Victoria Perry (nee Mayo)
February 17, 1930 - November 16, 2023



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Alice on November 16, 2023, at Etobicoke General Hospital at the age of 93 years.

She was the beloved wife of the late Robert Murray Perry. The loving mother of Catharine (Peter) and Deborah (Rejean). Dear grandmother of Victoria

(Andrew) and Matthew. Cherished great grandmother of Jaimes, Liam, Cayden, Declan, Lucas and Peyton.

Alice was born in Longueuil, Quebec on February 17, 1930. She met her late husband, Murray, while working at Sun Life Insurance. They married on July 14th, 1951 at Garden-ville United Church in Longueuil. They had two daughters, Catharine and Deborah.

Alice loved her family and enjoyed being part of her community. She played basketball in high school and also at her first job at Sun Life. As a young adult she learned to play bridge and enjoyed this card game throughout her life. She was still playing this game in her early nineties at Parkland on Eglinton. Alice loved to bowl. In her middle years she joined a bowling league. She enjoyed the game as much as the camaraderie of her team mates. Later she joined the Boulevard Club where she played lawn bowling. She loved to watch sports on TV. Her favourite teams were the Blue Jays, the Raptors and the Montreal Canadians. Alice loved to chat about these games; talking about the Montreal Canadians with Torontonians did not always go over well but she loved the banter. In 1969, Alice traveled to Scotland with Murray and her children for a vacation and to meet family. She memorized pictures and relatives names and it was like she knew everyone the moment she walked off the plane. When Alice moved to To-

ronto in 1979 she found her passion. She joined Daughters of the Nile. This organization raises funds for crippled children and burn victims as well as supporting the Shriner's Hospital in Montreal. Alice became Queen of Toronto Temple # 69 in 2000. She represented her temple in Palm Springs that year. She was an active member into her early nineties. Murray was a Mason and a Shriner and he and Alice traveled all over the United States and Canada with these organizations and Daughters of the Nile. Alice was a member of Humber Valley United Church. There she joined the UCW and was part of Unit 9. She also took a trip to Israel in 1997, with the minister at the time, Rev. Don Gibson. One of the group members, Gray Cavanagh, wrote a book on their experiences and she really cherished these memories. Alice sold her house in 2020 and moved to Parkland on Eglinton. She made this move during COVID and initially she found herself adjusting to a new life style. She began to make new friends and eventually enjoyed getting involved in this community and having her meals with different people. She loved to chat and she could always remember everyone's name. Alice will truly be missed by family and all the friends she made over the years.

Online condolences may be made through www.turnerporter.ca. In lieu of flowers please make a donation to Daughters of the Nile, The Heart and Stroke Foundation, Humber Valley United Church or a favourite charity.

Source: [Turner and Porter](#)

Visitation was held at Turner and Porter, Butler Chapel, 4933 Dundas St. W., Toronto, on December 5th and the Service was at Humber Valley United Church, on December 6th at 2:00 pm. Interment was at Glen Oaks Funeral Home and Cemetery, on December 7th.

Alice was a member of United Church Women, Unit 9.

Our deepest sympathies to Catharine and Peter Clemens and their family.

Monday Memoir Group

We remember, revisit, rediscover, and share our lives.

In the process the Monday Memoir Group has become a coherent group of people. Many of us knew each other when we started meeting, now we have become friends.

Almost four years ago, when we were all in the grips of the COVID pandemic, Anne Pietropaolo started a Zoom memoir group led by Carolyn Peters for a short time.

The first thing Carolyn taught us was that memoir writing works best when you deal with chewable chunks: smaller bits in your life that you bring back to life. Memoir writing isn't biography; it isn't a retelling of the factual events in your life in chronological order. Memoir writing involves exploring a particular topic and describing what it has meant to your life. It should be descriptive and it should evoke the emotions the topic brought to you. You will be able to share what the event taught you; how it has affected the rest of your life. Whether you are writing memoir to be published, to share with your family, or just to please yourself, the writing needs to draw the reader in.

Memoir writing during COVID was a very fine way to use the extra time being shut in gave us.

We have written about *A Room*, *A First Job*, *A Wedding*, *A Changed Opinion*, and many other topics. The topic for our first December meeting was *The Christmas Tree*. The process of writing involves thinking about the topic and results in bringing back memories that often were deeply buried. For us in the group this has been a wonderful trip down memory lane. Two of our memoirs have been published, *The Lady Who Saved the Sandbanks* by Donna

McCorquodale in *County* magazine and *Bottled Sunshine* by Susanne Hynes in the *Globe and Mail*.

For a while we met weekly; now we meet twice a month. Carolyn could no longer lead because of health issues so Donna McCorquodale (with the help of Joan Belford) stepped in to lead. During our meetings we take turns reading our memoirs and commenting on what we hear. Sharing the stories helps us enrich our own writing and it certainly has made us closer to each other. Donna has already designed a topic schedule for the next few months.

Regularly meeting on Zoom makes it easy for us all; no travel time involved. But we have now held five in-person meetings. Celebrations, really. Carolyn Whiteside has hosted us for two Christmas lunches in her beautiful home. The photo below was taken on Monday, December 12, 2023. The food, the setting, and the fellowship were all splendid. Last summer we met at Ellen Moorhouse's historic home east of High Park. Her house is filled with antiques and amazing memorabilia and led to great conversations.

Our regular readers are aware, I am sure, that *Connections* features a lot of stories; original writing mostly by members of the congregation. Several times I have reached out to the Monday Memoirs Group for contributions on the particular theme for that edition. Memoir folk have never let us down. The stories you find in this edition about Christmas Trees were all contributed by this group.

Susanne Hynes



Hello, I'm the Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, Moderator of The United Church of Canada. As we enter into Advent and a time of expectant waiting for the Christmas miracle, I pray you are able to celebrate this time and experience once again the story of our faith. It is a story of hope, bravery, and a willingness to have faith in God. It is also a story of generosity and of humans caring for each other.



You can also join the growing community of over 1,700 subscribers, lovingly known as revolutionaries, who have found meaningful ways to engage people of all ages through [Advent Unwrapped](#).

Search "Advent Unwrapped" on the United Church's website and social media channels for a collection of resources and tools to help us prepare for Christ's arrival and to celebrate the season. This year, we will have new music videos, prayer resources, craft ideas, and recipes to help us unwrap the reason for the season together.

At this time of year, it is especially important to show generosity to each other. For that reason, I'm asking you to consider a gift to our [Mission and Service](#). Your gifts allow our church to respond to those in need in Canada and around the world. Your gifts bring hope, compassion, and caring through tangible actions such as feeding those who hunger, helping refugees, and seeking justice for those most marginalized.

Whatever you are able to do, I thank you. Your prayers, your gifts, and your actions are all important. God bless you this Advent season.

Source: [United Church of Canada](#)

Advent Prayers with the Church in the Holy Land

This Advent, we are being called to pause from festivities to pray with the church in the Holy Land who are seeking relief from the atrocities of war. Weekly, light a candle for the Holy Land, say a prayer, and consider other [ways you may act](#) for a just peace in Israel and Palestine.



Week 1: Hope

What will become of the dream of hope and healing?
In Bethlehem, where there is great sadness and pain?
With the victims of this war and those in dire need who seek relief?

Week 2: Peace

What will become of the dream of peace and justice?
In Bethlehem, can peace be reborn?
With those who are living in or fleeing from war?

Week 3: Joy

What will become of the dream of love and kindness?
In Bethlehem, where there is fear for those in dire need?
With those who are seeking but cannot find humanitarian aid?

Week 4: Love

What will become of the dream of joy and laughter?
In Bethlehem, where young people are crying out in anguish?
With those who are heavily burdened with grief and despair?

We wonder and wait for Christ's hope on this journey. Although there are no simple answers or easy paths. May we find the courage to keep on advancing towards God's dream of justice, peace, and a love that lasts.

Source: [United Church of Canada](#)

Christmas Away from Home

We have always enjoyed a Canadian Christmas — 59 of them together in Ontario — and one, in our tenth year of being snowbirds, in Florida. Those 59 Christmases have not all been white nor have they been icy cold. But there was always a fire going and most would agree that even green Christmases are generally cold. Here at home it's a time of mulled wine, hot chocolate, Christmas cake and shortbread.

I could not envision feeling Christmas-y in sunny, warm high 70's(F) weather. But in 2014 our family made the pilgrimage down to our town in central Florida with our 10 month old first grandson, Howie, to spend a warm Christmas with us. It was totally different weather but the rituals and the feeling were familiar.

Where family gather together to celebrate Jesus' birthday it is celebratory!

This is not the Florida of white beaches, lush hibiscus and blue green rolling surf. No, our part of Florida is dotted with gator-filled freshwater lakes which have tiny towns like ours strung along them like beads on a rosary. And the landscape is hilly with orange groves on the flat parts and cattle pasture everywhere else. There are a few lush golf courses scattered around the county appropriately named Lake County.



The 4:00 pm nativity play at our small Presbyterian Community Church (membership 40) features live animals including a llama, a miniature pony, a few goats, a friendly golden retriever, lots of hay bales, and a working manger borrowed for the event. The biggest problem is rustling up a baby since this is, after all, a seniors' area.

The angels were grandchildren brought into town from the big city of the area — Orlando — and they dazzled in white gauzy gowns festooned like all angels everywhere

with glittery tinsel halos, nervous giggles and big smiles.

That year we sang Christmas Carols a cappella in golf shirts, and sat on the chairs brought out from the church hall to watch and listen to the Christmas story. A few of the crowd swished fans, it was 79 degrees F with no breeze, and the post performance beverage was ice cold lemonade. Shortbread cookies wilt here, so the popular ones were made of crumbled cookies mixed into balls with nuts and honey or had names like buckeyes and those came out of the fridge at the last minute. No one here worries much about peanut allergies. Gluten is a staple along with grits. I take Nanaimo bars, home made, because the Costco an hour away does not carry them. They are considered exotic.

On Christmas Day, David and our son played golf in the morning while the turkey was cooking. We have a 5 foot tree pre-decorated with designer ornaments and lights which we won at a fundraiser around 2006. It can fit into a guest room closet if bent ever so slightly and I drag it out each year since decorating is de-rigueur here. With no cold to contend with the decor on lawns, homes and streets would have you believe that power is free from Black Friday to New Years Day. It's spectacular.

So our traditional Turkey dinner was enjoyed with a fan rotating overhead, burning the candles down into odd messy shapes that spilled over into the tablecloth. Brussels sprouts don't taste as good as they do in our colder clime. Apparently, they are tastiest when touched by a light frost. I bought a can of fried onions which are usually sprinkled on a green bean casserole which is in every recipe for winter dinners here. I did not make this casserole but we did sprinkle the fried crispy onions atop our mashed potatoes and gravy. It was a one off experiment.

We always sang Happy Birthday to Jesus when our kids were young so we did so since we had the next generation at the table. I had made an English plum pudding and we lit the brandy in true Dickens style before pouring on the rum sauce. It isn't quite as appealing in the warmth but everyone pretended it was because well, that was our Christmas dessert prepared for years by my mom.

Since that year we have returned home to celebrate in the Canadian winter. Honestly it doesn't matter what the weather is like. Christmas is a time for gathering with loved ones, retelling the story of our Saviour's birth and

Christmas Away from Home

following the family rituals of food and fellowship.

This year will be my first without my beloved and I am already feeling weepy. But we will tell the stories, remember our missing loved ones and I will enjoy being together around my son's family's candle lit table in Toronto. There will be no fan whirring overhead...

Cathy Wilkes

A Special Christmas *Stille Nacht* in Austria 1972

Silent Night is a beautiful Christmas carol with a simple melody and lyrics that help to visualize the night that Christ was born. At Humber Valley the Christmas Eve service traditionally ends with the overhead lights being dimmed, while candles are lit from person to person standing around the sanctuary as the song is quietly sung. It is a meditative experience that leaves us ready to head home and prepare for the excitement of gift sharing and a traditional turkey meal with family.

But I have another memory of that carol, candle lighting and the meaning of family.

In 1972 my husband Bill organized a ski trip to Austria for the Christmas school break.

A group of people signed up and we eagerly prepared for departure on December 21st from Toronto.

The weatherman had other plans. Heavy snow and ice prevented our flight on the 21st and again on the 22nd. Finally on December 23 we headed out to the airport and were relieved to be allowed on a plane leaving for Europe with stopovers in Montreal, Amsterdam and Zurich. Arriving in Austria on December 24th, we discovered that the driver who had been arranged to take us to the ski village, Mayerhoffen, had decided to wait no longer and had left to be with his family for Christmas Eve.

What to do now? A local driver agreed to take us part way to our destination and ar-

ranged for another driver to take us the final distance.

So after more than 24 hours of travel we weary travelers found ourselves driving along the mountain road into the Mayerhoffen Valley. Snow was softly falling, the moon was shining brightly and we saw a line of candle carrying villagers walking to the cemetery while the church bells rang out the tune of *Stille Nacht - Silent Night*. The Austrian tradition is to honour the dead with candles, music and quiet contemplation. Years later I can still picture the scene and how deeply we felt the impact of music and candles.

It is a memory never to be forgotten.

So now when we celebrate Christmas Eve at Humber Valley with the quiet singing of *Silent Night*, holding candles and sharing the support of friends and family, I remember the experience when *Stille Nacht* brought a quiet appreciation of tradition in another time and place.

This story was written on November 23rd 2020, in Toronto during a new COVID lockdown. Travel was limited, stores were closed for Christmas shopping, family dinners likely did not happen and Christmas Eve at Humber Valley was to be shared on Zoom. I planned to light candles and sing *Silent Night* to myself, perhaps with a CD playing in the background. Memories transcend even the hardest times.

Sally Jo Martin



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The Christmas Tree

Santa has to Start Somewhere

Santa comes to my home on Christmas Eve. This is an eastern European custom. In my childhood home the Christmas tree was put up and decorated on Christmas Eve. It was a real balsam fir and it filled the living room with a gorgeous smell. Our trees were very fresh, probably cut a few days earlier. For a few years we had real candles, but my Dad felt that was too dangerous so he ordered two strings of candle-shaped lights from Germany.

For a couple of years my Dad and I were tasked with getting the Christmas tree on the weekend before Christmas. In those days in Newfoundland you could just drive along the highroad and stop anywhere to cut down a tree. We would spot trees during the summer and say, "remember that one." But, of course we never could find that perfect tree again as we drove the back roads on our tree expedition.

It always snowed a lot in the week or two before Christmas so even when you spotted the tree you wanted, it was hard to get to it. Your boots sank deep into the freshly fallen snow which hid dips, ditches, and boulders. Guaranteed your feet got wet and froze. Probably you did a face plant. The little trees were already half covered. But we persisted; Dad had the saw and axe and we got a tree no matter what. Dragged it back to the car and popped it into the open trunk secured with a bit of rope.

I never noticed how the presents got under the tree, but there they were after dinner. All the other lights in the room were off and Christmas music was playing on our phonograph when my sister and I were called into the living room. The tree had only a few ornaments but it glowed with the candle lights and a lot of that heavy metal tinsel of the early fifties.

I don't have any memory of the gifts I got or of presents being opened. Just of the wonder of the tree and being together.

Sixty or more years later we are living in a condo high above the ground. Residents are not allowed to have real trees so when we moved in I went on another tree hunt: this time at Plant World. I paid full money for a phoney tree with the lights already on it. We never really liked that tree. It was too big and bushy and it just didn't suit us.

So this year I headed off to Ikea and got a new four-foot tree. Its branches are spaced and symmetrical. It isn't

bushy like most of the trees you get in Toronto. The Christmas tree farms all trim their trees regularly so they become very full and the phoney trees resemble the trimmed farmed ones.

The Christmas trees of my childhood grew naturally and were sparser. You could hang tinsel on the branches so it fell in beautiful groups. My medium sized Ikea tree was a bargain and it resembles the fir trees I remember. Too bad it doesn't smell like a real tree.

Never mind. Santa will show up on Christmas Eve and put the presents under the tree.

Susanne Hynes



Christmas

I was 6 years old when we went to live in Hove, on the south coast of England. My father was the town's librarian and as such he was invited to join the Rotary Club. At that time there was one person per profession in a Rotary Club. I do not know if that still holds true today.

The Rotary club did numerous fundraising events to support local charities. Soon after dad arrived they decided they have a mobile Christmas tree and go around the town caroling, and collecting coins. They had a brightly decorated, ten foot tree, mounted on the back of a flat bed truck, a gramophone to provide musical backing and an ad hoc Rotarian choir. My Dad, who was also a musician, led the choir and decided on the carols. The singers sat on securely anchored benches around the tree. They had an advertising campaign to let people know they would be coming and when.

The non singing men and many of their wives went door to door with their collection cans. It was hugely popular. People would emerge from their homes and follow the tree for a block or two and a wonderful party atmosphere was created. It survived for several years, growing in popularity year by year. Requests began to come in

The Christmas Tree

from residents, asking if the tree could come along their street. It always ended up outside the town hall where a large crowd would gather.

At first I had to sit on the truck with the choir, until the exciting day came when I was allowed to carry a can around and collect money. It made the local paper and later some of the national papers. The only damper was the weather but it went out rain or shine. I honestly don't remember many wet days.

That is still the dominating memory for me of Christmas trees.

Judith Dallimore

The Coldest Christmas “A Close Call”

Carolyn Whiteside, January 2022 Time frame @ 2000

It had to be about 20 below (or at least it felt like that) the evening we took down the last of the Christmas decorations – the big tree from the living room. Everything else had been slowly cleared out of the other rooms over the past few days including the smaller tree from the back room that usually gets decorated in large gingerbread cookies, a different shape each year. But the living room tree often takes a good two or three days to undress, with all its fragile glass, silver and white ornaments carefully packaged into four boxes that go to the basement storage. So I procrastinate and leave it to last. Then the tree – a very thick, three piece, eight footer that I purchased several years ago when I got tired of doing the real tree with its hassle of buying and driving home, getting set-up in a stand, trying to keep it watered, then having to drag it to the curb as soon as Christmas was over, with all those dying needles all over the carpet. An artificial tree would be much easier.

In fact it's not. The thing weighs a ton, needs two people to get the box down from the garage loft, and then back again when finished. The only plus is it can go up early and stay up later in the Christmas season. So into the box it got squished, David and I holding the box tight between our knees while we put the cord ties around it, ready to get it up into the garage.

David wanted to head off to Starbucks for a coffee outing so he had his coat on ready to go. I said I would help shove

the box up on his way out. Assuming I would be less than a minute or two, and not wanting to hold David up, I didn't wait to go put on a coat, just pushed my feet into Ken's winter boots and grabbed my end of the box. David had the ladder all set up in the garage, we managed to push the box up into place and David took my car off to Starbucks.

I pushed the inside button to start the door closing, bent down to head beneath it and there was a resounding CRASH as the door plummeted straight to the floor, right in front of my nose. “Wow, that was a close call. What on earth happened to the door?” When I pushed the button to open the door, nothing happened. I tried it a few times and no, the door didn't swing up. OOPS, what's wrong here. I tried pulling it up by the handle but not even a budge. The thing must weigh 500 pounds if an ounce and needs the power chain to hoist it up.

“Well this doesn't look good. I can't stay out here. It's unheated, a desperately cold night and all I have on is a sleeveless linen blouse and lightweight sweater. Why on earth didn't I at least take time to pull on my coat?” It's FREEZING in here....and a bit dark with only the one dim light bulb up in the loft.”

It took a bit of trouble-shooting to figure out the problem. I kept hitting the opener button and the chain would go around on its loop, but the door was not attached to it. There is a wire, with a triggered hook on it at the top of the door, and it must latch on to the chain at one certain clamp point on its rotation. The problem was that once I've pushed the button, I cannot race up the ladder fast enough to meet the clamp point as it goes past. It really needs two people to do it — one at the bottom to push the button and another at the top of the ladder to catch the clamp. Obviously there was only me inside the garage.

“How long might I be locked in here?” I began to wonder. The cold seeped even further into my bones as I scoured the garage for anything extra to keep me warm. There was nothing. No old burlap rags, no cardboard pieces, not even any dried leaves that usually might be scattered about the pots of clematis I drag in there to overwinter. Only my feet were still warm in Ken's old boots. “How long can I last in here?” was the next question that started to nudge my brain into a bit of a panic.

Then there was a big whirrr noise as the canister and motor for the central vacuum system that is housed in the garage burst into life. That meant that Ken – ‘Mr. Super

The Christmas Tree

Clean' – had got out the hose and was busy vacuuming up every last bit of green artificial needles and other bits left on the carpet. He could be at that for ages...might even vacuum the whole downstairs now that he had it out. He wasn't missing me yet, if indeed he ever did. He could put the hose away and head upstairs, thinking I might have come back in while he was working with the vacuum and be elsewhere in the house, head off to bed and be asleep without wondering where I was.

And I was freezing! "Where was a hot flash when I needed one? Goodness, I could sure use one of those now." It was beyond just goose bumps. I realized that I could actually be trapped in here overnight. David would come home from Starbucks, and unless he happened to hear banging from inside the garage, would head straight inside and up to bed. Ken would never think to check on me. I usually go to bed much later than he does. It could be morning before they started to search the house for me and figure out to check the garage.

How long does it take for hypothermia to set in? "Best to not panic right now, Carolyn."

Suddenly I can hear Ken's muffled voice outside the garage "Carolyn, where are you?" With relief that at least someone knew where I was I yelled back "Ken. Thank heavens you've found me. I'm locked here inside. The door won't open and I'm freezing. Can you try pulling it up from your side?" No luck on his own, but a concerted effort with us both pulling up on the handles, inside and outside, managed to get it a few inches off the ground, just enough for me to shove a brick under the bottom.

Then I had an idea. "Ken. I know what to do. You have to get the jack out of the trunk of your car and set it up under the door. A few pumps up and I can wriggle out beneath it. I'll pile bricks as you go so there is a safety stop if the jack gives out. It will work perfectly"

"That's a ridiculous idea" was his response. "No it isn't" I shouted. "It will work fine. It's built strong enough to hold up a car and we can worry about getting the door fixed tomorrow. For now, you just have to get me out of here."

"No it won't work," he yelled back. "I'm going in to call David and get him to come home from Starbucks".

As he retreated to the house, I called back. "He can't do anything more either. JUST GET THE JACK!"

Left in the cold again, it dawned on me that he doesn't

know how to use a jack but won't admit it. I probably haven't used a jack in 50 years either, but I'm sure the directions are taped to it or in the car manual.

As I waited, I figured I might as well continue with my runs up and down the ladder trying to manage a catch on the chain. At least it will help keep we warmed up. All of a sudden there was a SNAP...and the hook caught the clamp! With a most welcoming sound, the chain pulled and the garage door slowly rose. What a relief to have the empty driveway come into view, just at the headlights of my car swung into my face. David hopped out and said, "Mom, what on earth are you doing still out here? Dad called and said there was an emergency and I needed to come home. What's going on?"

I retorted, rather sarcastically: "NOTHING. I'VE JUST MANAGED TO RESCUE MYSELF!" and stomped into the house.

Note: This all sounds amusing, but I have had a few nightmares over this incident. It would only have taken a slight slip somewhere for this to have killed me. I'm not sure how long someone can last in that kind of cold with no real proper clothing on, for the hypothermia to be fatal. I no longer go out there, even for a quick errand, without a coat on in the cold of winter.

Carolyn Whiteside

An Ecological Christmas Tree

In 1978, Steve and I were eco-freaks. I was working as editor of Eco-Log Week at Corpus Publishers, and I'd give my parents a hard time for leaving too many lights on or setting their water heater temperature too high. It made sense that we would carry our environmental friendliness into our Christmas traditions.

We always had a real tree — never artificial. When I met Steve, and we lived in residence at Carleton University, he and a group of guys even went so far as to steal a tree from the Ottawa Experimental Farm. Not his finest moment, and not an ecologically friendly practice.

In 1978, we did something different. We bought a tree with a root ball and planted it in the front yard once the festive season was over. We got the tree from George Zane, one of Steve's mentors during his early days writing about the hospitality industry. George owned Fantasy Farms, the wedding venue nestled in the Don Valley. He

The Christmas Tree

also owned The Plantation near Vandorf, Ontario, off Highway 404 northeast of the city. He had a spacious home on 200 acres planted with Christmas trees. He invited us up for a visit and to dig up a tree.

The tree we chose was about 30 inches tall, with a root ball almost as big as the tree. We took the tree home to Woodfield Road in our 1970 Ford Maverick, the root ball nestled snugly into the trunk.

Our house on Woodfield Road was east of Greenwood and south of Gerrard in the heart of Little India. It is one of the few houses we lived in that has not subsequently been torn down and made into a two-storey mansion. It was one and a half storeys, with a red brick façade and brown aluminum siding on the sides and back. It was a cozy place with a welcoming front porch outside, warm wood paneling in the living and dining area, and a bay window upstairs. We bought the two-bedroom house in 1976 with \$4,000 down, and a \$40,000 mortgage at 10 per cent interest.

We put the tree on a table and decorated it. We must have kept the root ball damp, because the tree survived the Christmas season and long into the spring before the ground thawed enough to plant it.

The back yard at our house on Woodfield was huge, but the front yard was the size of a postage stamp with nothing but grass and a few annuals by the porch. The centre of this patch of grass was just the place to plant our Christmas tree. One spring day, we dug a hole perfectly centred between the house and the sidewalk, our walkway and our neighbours' home. We planted the tree. It looked adorable.

Trees from The Plantation are tough and sturdy. That little tree grew and grew. In the two years before we moved to our second house on Perry Crescent in Etobicoke, it grew a foot or two. I came back in the 1980s when my son David had a school trip to Little India — the tree was maybe six feet tall and looking good. By 2000, it was as big as the house and took up most of the front yard. And by 2020, it was way too big and straggly for that lot. It obscured the entire house. In short, it was an eyesore.

Nothing I can do about that! It's been almost 50 years since we planted that tree. Over the years, Steve and I had a weakness for fir trees. Steve grew up in a home with a Colorado Blue Spruce in the front yard. We bought 126 Perry because of the twin pines out front; 15 Elstree Road



had a big pine tree in the front yard by the driveway; and our current home has two pine trees in the side yard, planted in honour of the children who grew up in what is now our home.

As a side note, George Zane offered to sell us two acres of The Plantation along with the house in 1980, as we were planning a move to a bigger home. The price was a deal, but still way more than we were budgeting. Think of what a different life we would have had, raising our family in Vandorf, Ontario, the birthplace of our Woodfield Road Christmas tree!

Colleen Isherwood

Christmas Tree

When Steve and I decided to get married in the summer of 1967, no one tried to talk us out of it. That is amazing to me now, for, in hindsight, we were absolutely crazy to think we could make it work financially. However, we were sure that two could live as cheaply as one and I guess our parents and grandparents must have thought we were smart enough to have figured the math correctly. Either that or they just thought we needed to learn the hard way, since we already thought we knew it all!

First of all, the only apartment we could find near U. of T. was quite a bit more rent than we had hoped. Secondly, I could not find a good paying job and ended up making much less than we had thought I would. When Christmas

rolled around we were subsisting on soup on rice and Kraft dinner. However, it was our first Christmas as man and wife and I bemoaned the fact that we had no Christmas tree. As I recall, it was Steve who found the solution. Canadian Tire had a pile of the newest Christmas fad - artificial pine trees. Steve brought one home. It came in a compact, rectangular box that we could later cram into our storage cage. Most important, it was really cheap.

Perhaps you remember those original fake trees. The box contained two sections of a large wooden dowel with holes drilled into it on the diagonal up and down its length. This pole had been given a skimpy coat of stain in a surreal yellowish- green tint. After screwing the pole together, it was inserted into a hole in a board to hold it up, precariously. Into the holes of the dowel were inserted the simulated Scotch pine “branches”, more offensive than anyone could possibly imagine. These dark green, very stiff and sharp toilet brush bristles projected from a stem of twisted green metal that ended in a dangerous point at one end. This point was to be inserted into one of the diagonal holes in the pole. There were about ten “branches” in all, of varying lengths, and one short one that projected like the final insult from a hole in the top of the pole. Any similarity between this ugly, prickly arrangement of toilet brushes and a Christmas tree would have been laughable — except for the jolly red addition of human blood caused by the wounds inflicted during assembly.

Once we had our “tree” erected we realized that we had no money left for lights or decorations. Standing bare in our living room, it was merely a sad reminder of our dire straits. The dark December days rolled by and one evening, a week or so before Christmas, a knock came to our door. Now, this was an exceedingly rare event. As you know, at the main door, apartments have a buzzer system, only by the operation of which any visitor could enter the building. An unexpected knock at one’s door could mean only one thing. Someone had slipped by the buzzer system and entered the building “illicitly”.

Of course, we hurried to see who was at the door. We opened it to see a young boy, quite small really, maybe eight at the most. He was right out of David Copperfield, a genuine street urchin. His clothes were ragged and not adequate for the cold. But, his eyes were bright. He was enthusiastic, a real salesman. In his hand he carried a large bag from which he pulled a clear bag of five Christmas balls in a row. “Look,” he said, “unbreakable Christmas balls! Just what everyone needs. Look, they won’t even

break!” And he gave the package of balls a resounding “Whap!” against the door frame. It did make an ominous sound and he looked like he might have realized that perhaps he had just disproven his “unbreakable” theory. But he quickly went on, undeterred. “They are really cheap, too. Only a dollar and a half.” The nylon covered balls were not only ugly but grossly over-priced. However, the look on the boy’s face was not only eager, it was also quite desperate and even somewhat fearful. We both knew that this boy had better not go back downstairs without having sold any balls. His “manager” would be waiting for him.

We didn’t discuss it. We scratched together the money and bought the ugly balls that we really did not want. We hung them on the awful artificial tree and a transformation took place, touched, as it were, by the spirit of Christmas. For years afterwards our trees improved but the “unbreakable” balls remained, even the blue one with the distinct dent along one side. They were a constant reminder of the year Christmas came to us in the form of an unexpected little boy selling the meaning of Christmas.

Eventually, the balls frayed away but, guess what, the memory stays fresh fifty-four years later. Certainly not the best but definitely our most memorable Christmas tree.

Donna McCorquodale



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Connections



How is God Coming to You in This Season? A Christmas Reflection

The angel went to her and said,
*"Greetings, you who are highly
favoured! The Lord is with you."*

Mary was greatly troubled at his
words and wondered what kind of
greeting this might be. But the an-
gel said to her,

*"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have
found favor with God."*

Luke 1: 28-30 NIV

Rereading this passage this week, we
were struck by this exchange between
Gabriel and Mary. Do you notice that
Mary's initial fear was not about getting pregnant,
but because she was told she was "highly favoured
with God". As a young teenage Israelite girl, this had
not been her life experience up to this point.

Instead of being confused/disturbed because literally
every experience in her past was telling her she was-
n't worthy, God was announcing to her, "you are
highly favoured and I am with you!"



How is God coming to you in this season?

Can you hear the still small voice of love
speaking these words over you? "My
child, I have some news for you. You are
highly favoured and I am with you."

Jesus, the Prince of Peace; Emmanuel-
God with us, always invites us into a safe
relationship that affirms our value speak-
ing words of comfort and gentleness and
understanding.

This Christmas our prayer for you is that
you are able to come near to the voice
that calls you 'highly favoured'.

Come near to calm, come near to peace, come near to the
Messiah who has come to bring you good news of great joy
for all people: "The light has come into the world and the
darkness has not overcome it."

With love and peace,

Trevor and Kate



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