

County-Wide Chaplaincy

Happy New Year!

January 2024

Christmas 2023 may be history by the time you read this, but Christmas is actually always with us. The following is an account written by one of our Chaplains. This is his personal story of love demonstrated.

Salvation Army Story

I was born into a poor family, but my parents always met our needs and were willing to make sacrifices to do so. We were a family of 6. I had an older brother (Larry) and younger brother (David) and a little sister (Kathy).

My dad (Chris) worked hard in the lumber business hauling logs. Most of the time he owned his own truck. As a result of this we moved about every four years up and down the Oregon coast which made it hard to develop lasting and long term friendships. It even made connecting with relatives difficult. Our family was raised Mennonite. We did not have a church home in many of the areas we lived in. My folks would take us to church (usually in Sheridan, Oregon) whenever they could, and believing in Jesus was a high priority.

In 1955 we found ourselves living south of Brookings, Oregon, one mile from the California border. We lived on a small acreage. My brother David had begun to have problems with his legs. My parents took him to a doctor and it was determined that he had a disease called Perthes that attacks boys in the hips and girls in the shoulders. As a result of this he was confined to a bed with weights hanging off his legs for a year. Soon thereafter my mother (Barbra) had a minor heart attack and she was laid up.

My older brother and I had to do all the family chores. Mom would lay on the couch and tell us how to fix a meal or do the laundry or clean the floors, etc. She even taught us how to darn a sock with a light bulb and sew on buttons.

While all of this was going on my dad was hauling logs and he made a trip to the sawmill in Crescent City, California. While unloading his logs he pulled on the chain that had secured the load, and a log came loose and directly hit him, burying him in the solid earth. They carefully removed the dirt around him and rushed him to the hospital. Upon arrival a doctor pronounced him deceased and called the morgue. A nurse decided to check him one more time and found a tear in his eye. She alerted the doctor who immediately took him into surgery. His recovery was a miracle, and is even recorded in the old medical books at that hospital for it was a rarity that anyone could survive such a horrendous accident. He was months in recovery.

Our family fell on hard times financially and it was all we could do to make ends meet. My folks rented a room to an uncle which gave us a little income to buy absolute necessities. I remember in early December, my mother with tears streaming, telling us how badly injured our father was and that we would not be able to have Christmas this year and they would try to make up to us later.

As Christmas approached mom encouraged us to go out back and find a tree to use. Then we would make the decorations for it. We made popcorn ropes and paper ropes, and the tree was beautiful, but no gifts under it this year. We kids seemed to take the lack of gifts in stride and did our best to make it a festive time.

I don't recall just how it was that we were not home on Christmas Eve, but when we returned that evening the house was lit up with Christmas lights and the tree was filled with gifts for each of us including our parents and food galore. It was a complete Christmas meal. To our utter amazement we heard that all of this came from the Salvation Army. Somehow they learned of our family's plight and came to our rescue.

It was so amazing, the tree was covered in lights and gifts under the tree and up into the branches, with toys and food products. I can still see that beautiful tree. I remember with great fondness the toy tractor and log truck that was given to me. I remember long hours of playing with the toys. Some of the Salvation Army ladies came on Christmas morning and cooked the meal for us. It was a Christmas I have never forgotten.

It is our family's way of thanking the Salvation Army by ringing the bell and manning a kettle each year. I remember with fondness the joy that came to our home that year and envision how many families are impacted by the generosity of the Salvation Army. As I ring the bell I will be thinking of families similar to ours who find themselves destitute not by their poor planning, but by unfortunate circumstances.

As chaplains we can bring the joy of Christmas to every home we serve throughout the year, not just at Christmas time. We bring Joy! We bring Peace! We bring comfort! We bring Love! And most importantly we bring Jesus!

To God be the glory, great things He is doing!

Lyle Coblentz

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2500 NE 78th St. Vancouver, WA 98665 ~ (360) 573-7127