

Day Nine, Grandma's Christmas



By Anna Von Reitz

People sometimes ask me how I got to be so smart. I prefer to think of it in terms of ---how did everyone miss this?

Now, it's true that I continued to educate myself throughout my life. I didn't just leave school and never pick up another book, so that is probably part of the story--but, I actually think that it also has to do with a peculiar kind of mindset that is more common among mathematicians and scientists.

Here is an example of it gleaned from the Christmas Card rack:

"Christmas is a strange season. We sing songs in front of dead trees and eat candy out of our socks."
--- John Wagner

There's a dispassionate observer in me that doesn't have a dog in the fight. I can just stand back and look. And when you do that, it's surprising what you see both in terms of forests and trees.

This Christmas is going to be different. No big family dinner. Probably no Christmas tree, either. Darn few presents, if any. I just don't have the energy and "heart" and money for it after all that has gone on here---- but Christmas will come anyway, just like it came for the Whos down in Whoville.

Christmas for us is a time to remember the widows and widowers, the elderly, the sick, the prisoners --- all those who feel forgotten and alone and left out. It's a time to make sure children have what they need as they face a long winter, not a time to con them with lies about Santa Claus.

So I am writing Christmas cards to men who are falsely detained and imprisoned, away from their families and friends for no good reason. I am stocking up depleted shelves at the food bank. I am "making my rounds" to the elderly and the sick and the widowed. I am lighting my one little candle in the dark.

Mother Theresa was right. It's not the grand gestures and tons of money that matter. It's the small things done with love that add up, and that create happiness and peace of mind.

So I look at our one tattered string of Christmas lights that are still hanging on our porch rails and which, thanks to my husband plugging them in, are shining their bright colors against the December night ---- and I smile.

It's not just what we do at Christmas, it's what we do all throughout the year. No doubt that is a big reason that I don't feel the stress most people do, and just plod along being pleased with whatever I can do, to smile a little brighter and be a littler kinder this time of year.

That's what I am doing in the midst of the earthquake disaster, and it's what I recommend to all of you. Just call it quits to all the craziness and be at peace. Wait for the season to come to you. Watch

for those times when you can be of service and notice all the people around you, some of whom need some extra care.

Last night as I was leaving the grocery store I stopped to stuff a fiver into the collection pot for the Salvation Army. When we had the Miller's Reach Fire disaster, they were the first group that came to help and they were the last to go, and now with the earthquake, here they are again. If I have any change at all in my pocket, their bell-ringers never go without a donation.

The man doing the collection was old and black as coal and he had been standing there alone ringing his bell for a long time, with all the busy, distracted holiday shoppers rushing past him. I was the only one in that whole big crowd to stop and fumble with my purse and smile at him as I folded the bill and stuffed it into the familiar metal pot.

"Thank you!" he said. I paused and looked him in the eye, and said, "Thank you, for being here." He gave me back a tired smile and a look of rapid understanding. He was standing there for you and me and everyone else, doing our good works for us.

That's why when I hear the bell-ringers of The Salvation Army, I don't cringe and look away; in fact, I lift my head and feel a little lighter, as if some unseen yoke shifted off my weary shoulder. There are good people in this world. They might not be fashionable, but they are true, and day after day and year after year, like the Gideons, they quietly serve their mission.

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