

By Dr Karen Wong



Christmas

– Before and After Children

My brother and I pestering mum and dad to bring out the Christmas tree and decorations, and then spending an afternoon putting up the tree. Dad disentangling the string of Christmas lights and making sure they all light up. Helping mum wrap empty boxes to put at the foot of the tree. Writing my Christmas wish-list on a card, addressing it to SANTA CLAUS, NORTH POLE, and following dad to the post-office to send it by end November. (Yes, I fell for that one!) The whole build-up to Christmas included trying to stay up all night on Christmas Eve (never succeeded), waiting to catch a glimpse of Santa on his reindeer. And finally waking up on Christmas morning and finding the gift of my choice on my bed. These are my memories of Christmas as a child. It was always an enjoyable season.

CHRISTMAS RUSH

Well, 20 (ok maybe a bit more) years down the road, it is that time of the year again, with rains that threaten to continue forever, making it feel like our version of winter. I remember vividly, looking at the raindrops from our 13th storey flat – they look like snow. The smell of the after-rain air never fails to make me to associate it with Christmas.

The shopping malls start to carry beautifully enticing facades (and CHRISTMAS SALE signs) that seem to beckon you to 'come in'. The lights, beatific angels, beautifully decorated Christmas trees, images of perfectly dressed families gathering near the fireplace with chestnuts roasting on open fires, and couples kissing under the mistletoe, evoke a nice warm fuzzy feeling within. The constant strains of Christmas carols

are heard in almost every mall, and even on the toll-free lines when you are put on hold.

Before I realise it, I am caught up in the whirlwind of activities: shopping for Christmas presents, gift-wrap and cards; putting up the Christmas tree to add to the atmosphere; making sure we do not forget to give a present to the family who we left out last year; trying to remember what our friends gave our children last year, so that when we recycle gifts, we would not embarrassingly give these back to them; vowing to get everything done before Christmas Eve, so we would not be up all night wrapping gifts (like we did last year) ... et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Then come Christmas day, it almost seems an anti-climax. For those of us who attend the Christmas church service, the frenzy of finding your friends and exchanging presents begins right after the service ends. The same goes for the family dinner or Christmas party. We/The children open all the presents almost at once, and all that is left after five minutes is a pile of torn gift-wrap and many new gifts; and then the excitement ends. The new gifts are forgotten as quickly as they are opened. We almost forget there is more to Christmas – almost.

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Ever since we had children, our thoughts on Christmas have similarly matured. It is becoming clearer to us with each Christmas that we want our children Lydia and Timothy, to truly understand what Christmas is about; and what it is NOT. Christmas is really a celebration of Jesus' birth, a Gift to all humanity. Christmas is about giving – of ourselves.



Dr Karen Wong enjoys the best of both worlds as she works part-time with NHGP and spends the rest of her time as a full-time mum. Together with her husband, Andrew, they appreciate the warm company of family and good friends over a home-cooked meal, good wine and soothing jazz, while their children, Lydia and Timothy, serve as entertainment for all!

◀ Page 10 – Christmas – Before and After Children

I read this from an article about the meaning of Christmas.

“Each person gives and each receives. No one gives first so that others must feel obliged to return; all give and all receive at the same time (or rather each receives in his or her turn so that all can rejoice about each gift). Each person is grateful, each person is generous, and all are rejoicing. The gifts themselves are not simply things that people like, need or desire; they are sacraments of a relationship. By giving things, givers have given their own selves.”

“This kind of gift-giving turns the whole ritual into a feast of delight – delight in things given, delight in acts of giving and receiving, delight in persons giving and receiving, delight in community constituted by mutual gift-giving. When we have engaged in such gift-giving, we have tasted the advent of a new world in which love reigns. What better expression of the spirit of Christmas could there be than an enactment of a community of joyful givers and grateful receivers?”

THE GIFT OF OURSELVES

Some ideas my like-minded friends and I have exchanged, which can help us all make Christmas a more meaningful season are, for example, agreeing not to exchange gifts and instead save that money to donate to a worthwhile cause, encouraging our children to part with a portion of their new gifts to give to those who perhaps are less fortunate and may have never received a gift for Christmas before.

The opportunities are endless, once you start exploring and realise there are just so many around us and beyond our shores who, for no fault of their own, are in need. It may even be that lonely neighbour upstairs, who does not have a supportive social circle or family. Perhaps the simple gesture of a warm home-cooked meal on Christmas day would make all the difference

to her starved soul. Or maybe even a small token and a kind word of appreciation to the cleaner at work. Or even to your demanding boss.
Soul food!

Spare a thought for those around us who have recently suffered the loss of a loved one or for some reason are alone. It can be painful for them to be watching everyone else enjoy the festivities and loving company whilst grappling with grief and hurts. All it may take is a simple call to let them know we care.

Some of us made a trip to Cambodia last year to spend some time doing medical work in an orphanage. It was an enlightening trip for the children, to appreciate how different life can be for others, and how the seemingly little we feel we have is in essence luxury in comparison. Hopefully, this journey of understanding and hence appreciating what they have will be an impetus for them to enjoy giving. Not just on Christmas Day, but whenever the opportunity arises.

I leave with you the lyrics of a song from one of my favourite Christmas CDs.

*Why don't you give love on Christmas day
Even the man who has everything
Would be so happy if you could bring him
Love on Christmas day
No greater gift is there than love*

*What the world needs is love and the world needs
your love*

*Give love on Christmas day
Oh the man on the street and the couple upstairs
All need to know there's someone who cares
Give love on Christmas day
No greater gift, no greater gift
And have yourself a merry little Christmas now!*

*Wishing you and yours a blessed, meaningful
Christmas! ■*

