



### **The Very Memorable UnChristmas**

By Becky Ramsey, Public-School Representative

When remembering a memorable Christmas, one usually does not go back to a Christmas that did not happen—or at least did not happen the way it was planned. The Christmas in question was the first after my parents and sister’s family had moved away to Ohio. It was a tough time, especially for my children who had seen their grandparents, aunt, and cousin on a regular basis. My father had been our pastor. My sister had been my youngest son’s babysitter, and my oldest son was missing his cousin and favorite playmate. We were so thankful that our new pastor was also a “grandpa” who was more than willing to love on my very lonesome boys. Finding a new babysitter and best playmate were not as easy, but we were adjusting.

#### **Planning a Trip**

We were so looking forward to our first trip to Ohio to visit our family’s new home during Christmas vacation. We made a big countdown calendar. We did our Christmas shopping early. We wrapped all the presents and packed them in boxes rather than putting them under the tree. We planned to leave straight from school and drive through the night so we could spend as much time as possible with our family members that we were missing very much.

Everything was going well until our last week before Christmas break. That Monday, we woke up to snow, and it was more than a dusting! It was obvious that day would be a snow day. Teachers and children often look forward to those special days when we wake up to a day off because of snow. I considered it a blessing because I could get the rest of the packing done and even work ahead on school stuff so I needn't take it with me to Ohio.

### **It Gets Worse**

On Tuesday, we woke up to even more snow! My children could not believe their good fortune of having a pre-Christmas break. Wednesday was not much better; there was not more snow, but temperatures had plummeted so low that it was difficult to keep the house warm even with the fireplace going. How cold was it? Newscasters were noting that it had not been this cold in Iowa in decades. We were experiencing temperatures in the negative double digits. We could not even let the kids play in the beautiful billowing snow drifts in the backyard.

We woke up on Thursday, the last day before Christmas break, with the intention of attending our Christmas parties at school and then heading to Ohio. We even got up early so we could put the last suitcases in the car before leaving for school.

Then we heard the news! Temperatures were even lower than the previous day. There would be no parties because, again, there would be no school. The boys were disappointed, but I thought we could just get an early start toward Ohio. We ate our breakfast. I asked the boys to put on extra clothes to keep them warmer in the car.

Then the phone rang. A close friend, one who had been like second parents to us after our parents moved, was on the phone. He advised us not to start toward Ohio. He told us he had heard of many stranded vehicles that just stopped and would not work because of the unprecedented cold. He said it was not advisable to start out when so many had experienced problems. The highway patrol was advising no travel Thursday and for several days after that. That extension included Christmas Day. We were devastated. Not only were we not going to get to share Christmas with our family, but we knew that we could not make it to both my parents' house and my husband's family's home after our trip to Ohio. Our whole vacation was going to have to be replanned.

### **A Change of Plans**

We eventually decided to head to Ohio as soon as the Highway Patrol said it was safe to travel, two days after Christmas. We would go to Phil's parents' house the weekend after school started back up because they lived much closer even though not in Iowa. We decided to open our own gifts at home on Christmas instead of carrying them with us to Ohio. We did enjoy our small Christmas at home in front of the busy fireplace, but it was not like Christmas with grandparents.

It was memorable because we talked about how much it helped us to appreciate our heritage, our traditions, and our family members. We love our time with extended family, but we also realized our own family times can be special. We valued friends that cared enough to wisely counsel us to protect our children and ourselves. This Christmas was memorable but not the way we had planned and anticipated. Nevertheless, we still talk about the Christmas that did not happen as well as the four-day snow holiday.

Proverbs 17:6 (NIV) says, “Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.” My parents loved my children, and I was more than proud of the parents who had shaped my life. However, we learned that year we could start new traditions of our own. And we certainly enjoyed our unanticipated second Christmas that year, because it was a Christmas we could share with those we loved.

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