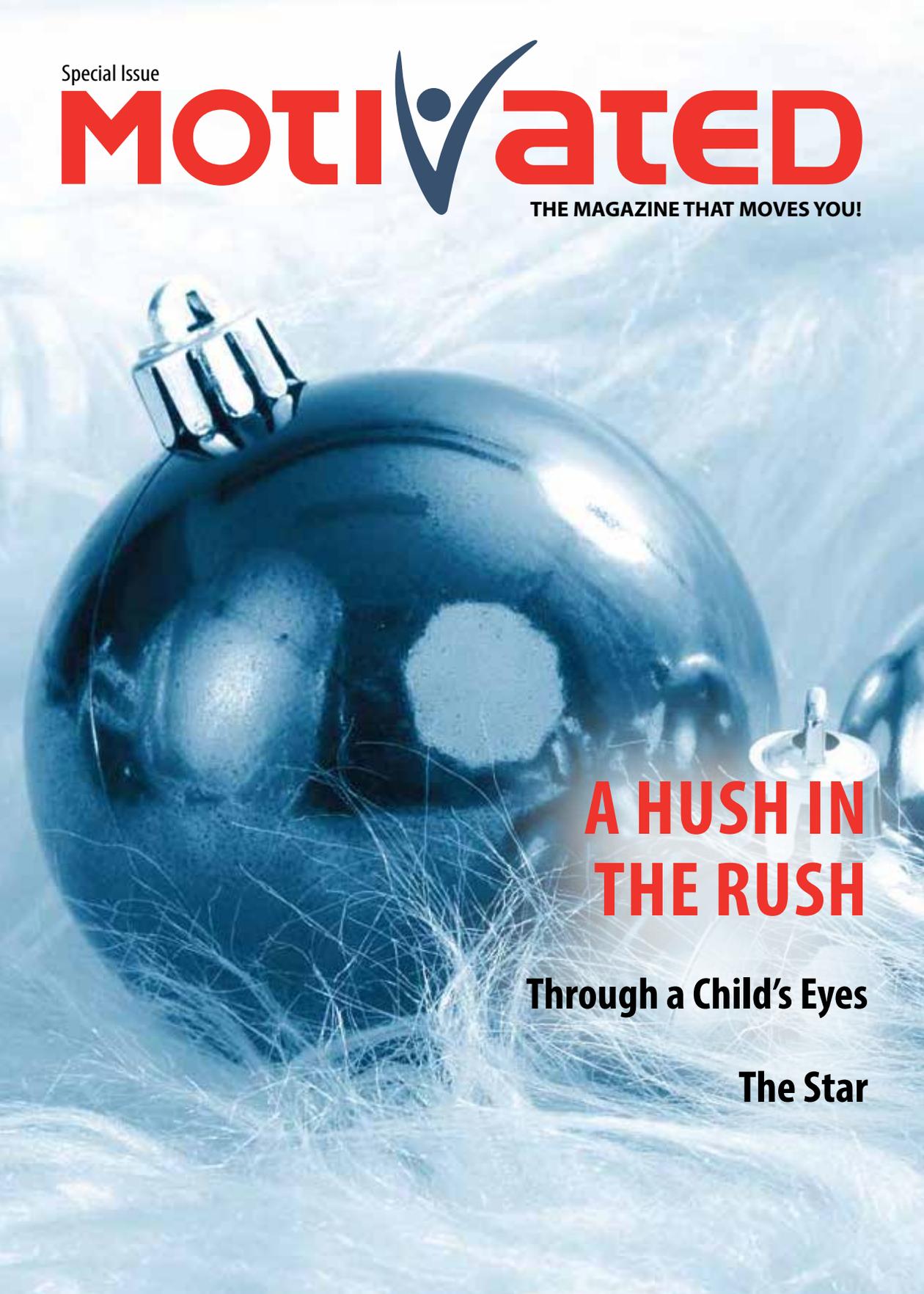


Special Issue

MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!



A HUSH IN THE RUSH

Through a Child's Eyes

The Star

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Special Issue
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from the editor

What is it that comes to mind when we think of Christmas?

Christmas means different things for different people, but no matter what our background, most of us would agree that there are certain qualities that are symbolic of this special time: joy, love, gratitude, trust, and simplicity—all characteristics that kindle warmth within.

We found and adapted a short introduction on each of these topics, and then read through many pages to add just the right story to describe and highlight them.

The result is this compilation of holiday stories, emphasizing the good and the uplifting. The virtues are evident; the lessons are heartfelt.

Someone once said, "Telling a story is a gift of love." And so, this is our gift to you this Christmas season. We hope that the reading of these stories—whether alone or together with your family—will warm your heart and will bring you joy.

Christina Lane
For Motivated

Joy

Joy. A virtue all of us desire, most of us seek, and each of us would like to claim.

Joy. Such a small, unassuming word—only three letters long—yet often elusive, and just beyond our reach.

Joy. What is it? Where can we find it? And... how can we keep it?

You can discover it through sacrifice and service, or in creativity and purpose. You can find it in tender moments and in exhilarating events. You might recognize it in the promise of a day's dawning or the satisfaction of twilight's final nod.

But is it possible to hold on to that sense of joy? Of course! Although joy is often described as fleeting, it is possible to generate it again and again. The famous playwright George Bernard Shaw once said, "The joy in life is to be used for a purpose. And I want it to be used up when I die."

So let's invest ourselves with a purpose this holiday season: Let's give of our time, our energy, our talents, and our love. Let's spend ourselves freely...and discover joy.

The Christmas Scout



— S. D. Bogan, adapted

In spite of the fun and laughter, 13-year-old Frank Wilson was not happy.

It was true that he had received all the presents he wanted. And he enjoyed these traditional Christmas Eve reunions of relatives—this year at Aunt Susan's—for the purpose of exchanging gifts and good wishes.

But Frank was not happy because this was his first Christmas without his brother, Steve, who, during the year, had been killed by a reckless driver. Frank missed his brother and the close companionship they had together.

Frank said good-bye to his relatives and explained to his parents that he was leaving a little early to see a friend; from there he could walk home. Since it was cold outside, Frank put on his new plaid jacket. It was his favourite gift. The other presents he placed on his new sled.

Then Frank headed out, hoping to find the patrol leader of his Boy Scout troop. Frank always felt understood by him. Though rich in wisdom, his patrol leader lived in the Flats, the section of town where most of the poor lived, and he did odd jobs to help support his family. To Frank's disappointment, his friend was not at home.

As Frank hiked down the street toward home, he caught glimpses of trees and decorations in many of the small houses. Then, through one front window, he glimpsed a shabby room with the limp stockings hanging over an empty fireplace. A woman was seated near them weeping.

The stockings reminded him of the way he and his brother had always hung theirs side by side. The next morning, they would be bursting with presents.

A sudden thought struck Frank—he had not done his “good turn” for the day. Before the impulse passed, he knocked on the door.

“Yes?” the sad voice of the woman inquired.

“May I come in?”

“You are very welcome,” she said, seeing his sled full of gifts, and assuming he was making a collection, “but I have no food or gifts for you. I have nothing for my own children.”

“That’s not why I am here,” Frank replied. “Please choose whatever presents you’d like for your children from this sled.”

“Why, God bless you!” the amazed woman answered gratefully.

She selected some candies, a game, the toy airplane, and a puzzle. When she took the new Scout flashlight, Frank almost cried out. Finally, the stockings were full.

“Won’t you tell me your name?” she asked, as Frank was leaving.

“Just call me the Christmas Scout,” he replied.

The visit left the boy touched, and with an unexpected flicker of joy in his heart. He understood that his sorrow was not the only sorrow in the world. Before he left the Flats, he had given away the remainder of his gifts. The plaid jacket had gone to a shivering boy.

But he trudged homeward cold and uneasy. Having given his presents away, Frank now could think of no reasonable explanation to offer his parents. He wondered how he could make them understand.

“Where are your presents, son?” asked his father as he entered the house.

“I gave them away.”

“The airplane from Aunt Susan? Your coat from Grandma? Your flashlight? We thought you were happy with your gifts.”

“I was—very happy,” the boy answered lamely.

“But, Frank, how could you be so impulsive?” his mother asked. “How will we explain to the relatives who spent so much time and gave so much love shopping for you?”

His father was firm. “You made your choice, Frank. We cannot afford any more presents.”

His brother gone, his family disappointed in him, Frank suddenly felt dreadfully alone. He had not expected a reward for his generosity; for he knew that a good deed always should be its own reward. It would be tarnished otherwise. So he did not want his gifts back. However, he wondered if he would ever again truly recapture joy in his life. He thought he had this evening, but it had been fleeting. Frank thought of his brother and sobbed himself to sleep.

The next morning, he came downstairs to find his parents listening to Christmas music on the radio. Then the announcer spoke:

“Merry Christmas, everybody! The nicest Christmas story we have this morning comes from the Flats. A crippled boy down there has a new sled this morning, another youngster has a fine plaid jacket, and several families report that their children were made happy last night by gifts from a teenage boy who simply referred to himself as the Christmas Scout. No one could identify him, but the children of the Flats claim that the Christmas Scout was a personal representative of old Santa Claus himself.”

Frank felt his father’s arms go around his shoulders, and he saw his mother smiling through her tears. “Why didn’t you tell us? We didn’t understand. We just thought you lost the presents or something. We are so proud of you, son.”

The carols came over the air again filling the room with music — and Frank’s heart with joy...

SIMPLICITY

Too often, for many of us December arrives

wrapped in good intentions. Big plans, high hopes—and sometimes wishful thinking.

We expect to do it all—all at one time, all in one month, all in one breath—often at the expense of the people and things we hold even dearer.

But there is an alternative. A simpler Christmas! We can scale back in order to really “savor the season”. Instead of trying to do so much, we can focus on what we value the most and eliminate the rest.

Let’s slow down and enjoy each event. Savor it to the fullest. Hang onto it. Then—learn to hang onto it longer.

And tuck this among the gifts you give yourself and your loved ones this year: Simplicity.

A Hush in the Rush

— By Ann K. Brandt, adapted

I always began December with big plans: baking ten kinds of cookies, decorating the house creatively, and entertaining lavishly.

One bright morning in early December, while butter softened for the press cookies and yeast grew in sugar and water, the telephone rang. My recently widowed friend needed to talk. An hour passed. The butter melted; the yeast spilled over the bowl. And the clock was ticking. We chatted a bit longer, and her mood lightened as we made plans to meet.

A voice inside reminded me, *Christmas is, after all, about generosity.*

Our lunch the next day lasted longer than I anticipated, and snail-paced traffic slowed my trip home. When a car cut unto my lane, a flash of anger almost kept me from seeing the old man waiting to cross the street. I braked to a stop and motioned him on.

Patience, whispered the inner voice, *allow time for kindness.*

While I rushed to wash my front windows before decorating them, an elderly neighbor threw a sweater over



her shoulders and came over to pass the time. It got lonely, she confided, with her son and his wife at work all day.

Reluctantly, I set aside the spray cleaner and the rags.

“Would you like to come in for a cup of tea?” I heard myself asking.

Ah, I heard the voice say, *you’re getting the idea.*

Armed with a lengthy master list, I hurried off on the grim task of shopping. After an exhausting battle with crowds in overheated stores, I emerged triumphant and smug. Outside the mall, some volunteers shivered in the blowing snow while collecting donations, and I felt compelled to pull out my last bill to put into their can.

“Thank you, ma’am! Merry Christmas!”

I see you’re learning sacrifice, too, the voice praised.

Later in the week, my daughter

called long-distance, desperate for a heart-to-heart talk. I glanced at the unwrapped presents strewn across the floor. I looked at my watch. And back at the piles. Then I remembered the loneliness and isolation and frustration of young motherhood—and settled in the overstuffed chair for a long, leisurely chat.

“Check back with me again this afternoon,” I said, “so I’ll know you’re getting along.” I tossed another look at the presents and shrugged.

The gift of your time, I heard, is the best gift of all.

The Sunday before Christmas, our still-bare tree leaned against one corner of the living room.

“We should’ve bought a new tree stand. The tree is top heavy, and this one won’t hold it,” my husband groaned. Ignored in my holiday rush, he looked tired and lonely with his rumpled gray hair, worn jeans and untucked shirttail—this man who truly has been “my other half” in my life.

I reached out and touched his rough cheek. “I’ll help with the tree.”

Good, said the inner voice, you’ve

remembered the love.

Throughout the afternoon, we pruned and sawed. We got out ornaments accumulated and treasured throughout the long years of our marriage. And when the tree was trimmed, I made hot chocolate and served it in the little pot we first used so many Christmases ago.

On Christmas day, our children arrived, and the house rocked with laughter, conversation, grandbabies, and music.

No one noticed the smears on the window where decorations hung askew, or the branches missing from one side of the tree. No one cared that dinner was a potluck affair. No one commented on the lack of variety on the cookie tray.

But when I brought out a simple cake with one glowing white candle, the room hushed. Every one of us—wide-eyed children and solemn adults—held hands while we sang “Happy Birthday” to the One whose Birthday we celebrated.

A feeling of contentment welled up inside me that had nothing to do with cookies, clean windows, or fancy wrappings.

And that still, small voice said, *Yes!*

LOVE

At one time or another, each of us must face life’s tough, emotion-wrenching moments. We might deal with the trials of rejection, poverty, terminal illness, conflict, loneliness, unhappy partnerships, or even

death. No matter what difficulties we may face, love is the universal answer to them all.

The power of love—that spark of the divine inherent in each of us—smoothes and soothes, heals and restores. We long for it in our relationships; we desire it in our lives. We admire it in others; and want to cultivate it in ourselves.

We grasp for it with both hands and, if we are wise, we give it away with both, understanding that love, like music, is a melody that lingers in the heart long after the words have been sung. Love is what helps us to feel for each other, to put ourselves into our neighbor’s places. It helps us to see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and feel with their hearts. Better yet, it teaches us to view others the way God sees them.

What better time than now to reach out in love and accept others into the embrace of our family’s circle.

We were the only family with children in the restaurant. I sat Ilias in a high chair and noticed everyone was quietly eating and talking. Suddenly, Ilias squealed with glee and said, “Hi there!” He pounded his fat baby hands on the highchair tray. His eyes were wide with excitement and his mouth was bared in a toothless grin. He wriggled and giggled with merriment.

I looked around and saw the source of his merriment. It was a man with a tattered rag of a coat, dirty, greasy, and worn. His pants were baggy and his toes poked out of would-be shoes. His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed. His whiskers were too short to be called a beard and his nose was so varicose it looked like a road map. We were too far from him to smell, but I was sure he smelled.

His hands waved and flapped on loose wrists. “Hi there, baby! Hi there, big boy! I see ya, buster,” the man said to Ilias.

My husband and I exchanged looks, *What do we do?* Ilias continued to laugh and answer, “Hi, hi there!” Everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the man. The old man was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby.

Our meal came and the man began shouting from across the room, “Do ya know patty cake? Do you know peek-a-boo? Hey, look, he knows peek-a-boo!”

Nobody thought the old man was cute. My husband and I were embarrassed. We ate in silence, all except for Ilias, who was running through his repertoire for the admiring old man, who in turn, reciprocated with his comments.

We finally got through the meal and headed for the door. My husband went to pay the check and told me to meet him in the parking lot. The old man sat poised between me and the door. *God, just let me out of here before he speaks to me or Ilias,* I prayed.

As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back trying to sidestep him and avoid any air he might be breathing. As I did, Ilias leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby’s “pick me up” position. Before I could

THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES

Author unknown, adapted

stop him, Ilias had propelled himself from my arms to the man’s.

Suddenly a very old smelly man and a very young baby expressed their love.

Ilias in an act of total trust, tenderness, and submission lay his tiny head upon the man’s ragged shoulder. The man’s eyes closed, and I saw tears hover beneath his lashes. His aged hands full of grime, pain, and hard labor gently, so gently, cradled my baby and stroked his back. No two beings have ever loved so deeply for so short a time. I stood awestruck.

The old man rocked and cradled Ilias in his arms for a moment, and then his eyes opened and set squarely on mine. He said in a firm commanding voice, “You take care of this baby.”

Somehow I managed to say, “I will”, from a throat that contained a stone.

He pried Ilias from his chest, unwillingly, longingly, as though he were in pain.

I received my baby, and the man said, “God bless you, ma’am. You’ve given me my Christmas gift.” I said nothing more than a muttered thanks.

With Ilias in my arms, I ran for the car. My husband was wondering why I was crying and holding Ilias so tightly, and why I was saying, “My God, my God, forgive me.”

I had just witnessed God’s love shown through the innocence of a tiny child who saw no flaws, who made no judgment — a child who saw a soul, and a mother who saw a suit of clothes.

I was a believer who was blind, holding a child who was not. The ragged old man, unwittingly, had reminded me what Christmas love was all about.

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is a virtue worth perfecting. Let's take a moment and reflect on life's small blessings we so often take for granted: The first snow fall of the season, a warm comforter on a winter's night, an empty bus seat when we're loaded with holiday packages. Now let's count our larger blessings: A secure job, well-behaved children, the love of our spouse and family.

Next, let's think about those who have touched our life: Someone who soothed an ache or filled a void. Maybe we've been the recipient of a kind deed or an act of compassion. When we were torn, did someone mend us? When we were down, did someone lift us up? When we were tired, did someone help carry the load?

And above all, did we remember to express our gratitude?

It's never too late to show our appreciation to others.

We can make it quick, simple, and on-the-run. Or we can indulge in a full-bodied experience of expressing gratitude until it becomes a natural habit.

By elevating gratitude to a virtue, we might discover our own heart warms in the process.

St. Nick's Note

— By Pamela Bumpns,
adapted

As the weatherman promised, the temperature climbs to ninety-eight by mid-afternoon. I waste no time retrieving the mail from our box.

"Whew! The humidity must be 102." I collapse into a kitchen chair.

"You know it!" My husband agrees. He sits with both hands wrapped around a large glass of ice tea, still sweating after mowing the lawn.

"It's only July. Aren't you rushing the season a bit, Santa?" I tease.

"Are you referring to my red nose and cheeks?" He wiggles his bushy eyebrows. "Just getting a head start on Christmas this year."

My jolly old St. Nick delights hundreds of children—of all ages—each December. Whether he's appearing at schools or in parades, he spreads his special Santa brand of love and

kindness.

"Anything important?" He points at the mail on the table.

Fanning the pile, I hand him a farming magazine, a soil-and-water conservation newsletter and this month's electric bill. Toward the bottom of the stack, I pause to inspect a small white envelope.

"You're not going to believe this." I turn the letter toward Alan. "It's addressed to Santa Claus."

"Well, maybe I'm not so early after all," he chuckles. But instead of a wish list, he pulls out a hand-decorated card. "Thank You" is scrawled across the front. A trace of moisture washes his eyes.

"Remember these little guys, Mrs. Claus?" He hands me the card.



Oh, yes, I remember.

Each year I help Santa make “special deliveries” — for organizations or even concerned individuals—to single-parent families, newly widowed, unemployed, or those whose income hardly covers essentials. These anonymous deliveries from Santa mean more than gifts under their trees or dinner on their tables: These deliveries express love and concern.

And this card comes from one of those single parents.

A month before last Christmas, this young mother found herself alone and the sole provider for her seven-year-old twins. She had been left with little, and her little boys even had to let go of their prized bicycles.



According to a caring counselor, the distressed woman dreaded explaining to her sons that Santa couldn't bring new bikes this year. She'd accepted all the help she felt she was entitled to and wouldn't ask for more. Besides, bikes were a luxury.

Her friends didn't agree.

Because of those friends, Santa and Mrs. Claus delivered quite a load of groceries, brightly wrapped presents—and two new bikes to the grateful mother. Identical brown-eyed, freckle-nosed faces burst into smiles a mile wide as they peeked around her skirt.

“Oh, my goodness...we can't...who are you?” she stammered.

“Santa, of course! And this is Mrs. Claus,” my husband boomed with a wink at the boys. “You made a very special list this year, and we wanted to deliver these early.”

Santa's parting, “Ho, ho, ho,” still echoed on the porch when a small, excited voice reached us, “Mama, I told you Santa would find us!”

Opening the card that jolted my memory, I read aloud to Santa. “It took me seven long months to discover how to reach you. I was so surprised that morning you came, I'm not sure I remembered to thank you. You helped the healing process begin and gave us back faith and hope.”

Twin smiley faces followed the mother's signature at the bottom. — They were identical to our own.

TRUST

The world runs on faith. Defined as “believing” and “trusting”, faith is—above all else—an action, one we practice nearly every moment of our lives. Our belief or trust is automatic on the most basic human level. In a material sense, we live by faith every day—from the magnificent to the mundane—by relying on the goodness of others, the principle of gravity, the diagnosis of physicians, even the descriptions in an encyclopedia.

On a more spiritual level, faith means taking chances. Sometimes we must dare to go further than is comfortable, further—at times—than we can see. That’s how we practice faith; we actually create more faith—stronger faith—by trusting.

As we exercise our faith, our lives grow stronger. We build our faith like a muscle. And it becomes progressively easier to exercise trust and to believe. Until, somewhere along life’s journey, we learn that an all-encompassing faith is our passport to joy.

The Star

By Harriet Wallace Rose, adapted

The classroom had that special festive atmosphere that can only be created by children. Handmade ornaments and bright paper Santas decorated the tree in the corner and a large colorful mural covered the two windows on the far wall of the room, forming a backdrop for the children’s Christmas program.

I sat with the audience of parents and friends on the opposite side of the room, enjoying the children’s portrayals of scenes from their Christmas calendar.

It was a scene that is repeated with some variations in classrooms all over town at this time of year. But this

performance was special, for it was the Christmas program at the Therapy Center, where the children were handicapped, crossing the “stage” on crutches or singing from a wheelchair.

Just that week the doctors had given me the bad news that my 18-month-old Nancy was considered to be severely physically and mentally challenged, and almost totally blind. Now I was no longer just an interested onlooker.

After the final skit the audience was asked to join the cast in singing



Christmas carols, and then the physical therapist announced that little five-year-old Beth would be the star of a Christmas miracle. I was somewhat startled. *A miracle?* I thought skeptically. If anyone is weary of looking for miracles, it must be the parents of handicapped children. Surely they—more than anyone else—must be resigned to the fact that there are no real miracles for their children.

Beth, the therapist explained, was a paraplegic; her legs had been paralyzed from birth. Injured adults with a similar paralysis have sometimes been trained to use their stomach muscles to move their legs. But an injured adult has the advantage of having walked before; to a child like Beth, the mechanics of moving the legs are nearly impossible to learn.

The therapist stepped back into the hall, then re-entered behind a child-sized version of an invalid's walker. In the center of the walker, her narrow torso encircled by the rigid ring of padded leather beneath her arms, her frail legs extending stiffly to the floor, stood a radiant Beth, her small heart-shaped face glowing with pride as her hands clutched the curved metal bars of the walker.

Slowly, with the therapist guiding her from behind, Beth placed one thin brace-encased leg in front of the other. There was no sound but the slight scrape, scrape of heavy shoes dragging across the floor as Beth moved, inch by inch, across the wide room. The silent classroom seemed filled with a warm glow as Beth's wide brown eyes shone like the star of Bethlehem, never indicating the tremendous effort involved in each miraculous step. Her gaze never left her

mother's face until she stood before her in the center of the room, acknowledging the thunderous applause with a proud bow of her head.

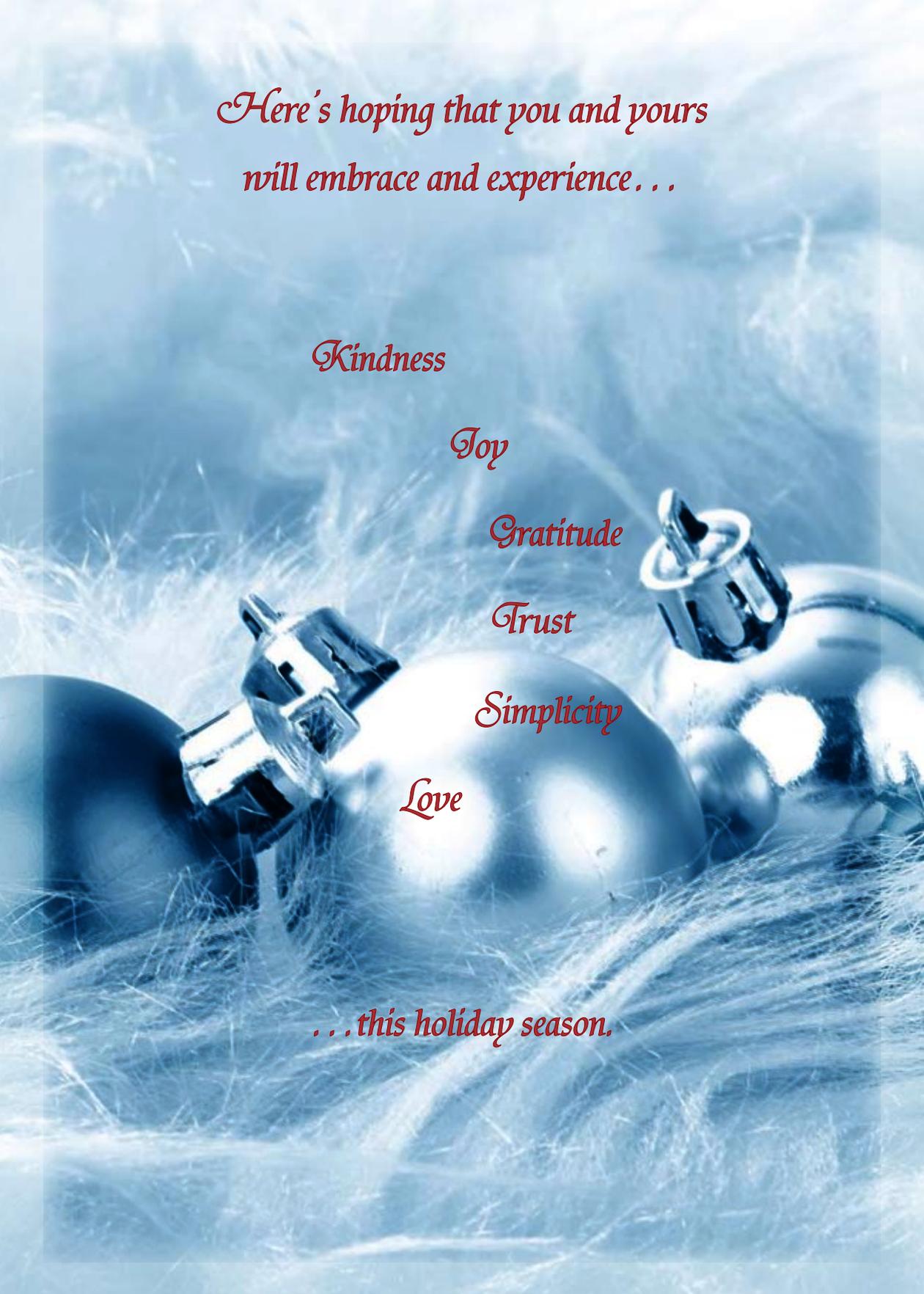
I was grateful for the applause that covered my noisy sniffing as I tried unsuccessfully to stop the tears from spilling down my cheeks. But as I glanced around the room I was bewildered, and a little embarrassed, to see that no one else seemed as emotionally undone as I was. *How can they help but cry?* I thought. I had never observed such a moving, dramatic, triumphant scene.

But no. Their faces were warm, smiling, full of compassion—but also something else I could not quite define. And then in a flash of realization I saw that their faces seemed filled with understanding. These parents were familiar with miracles.

To the parent of a child with special needs, any step in learning is a miracle; to the parent of the crippled child, one small step is a miracle. They viewed life with a real awareness of its wonder; my tears stemmed from my own inner blindness.

For how many times had I read that familiar promise made by the original Christmas Miracle—Jesus Christ Himself—and yet remained blind to its message? “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,” He said.

Though great is the sorrow of a parent whose child has physical or mental handicaps, it is that parent who comes to understand the promise of healing and the true meaning of a miracle. I realized, too, that with that knowledge I could face the future with new confidence and hope.



*Here's hoping that you and yours
will embrace and experience . . .*

Kindness

Joy

Gratitude

Trust

Simplicity

Love

. . . this holiday season.