

Hand Carved Christmas Joy

Each year our church is involved in a program to help provide Christmas gifts to those in need. The pastor is given information about families who signed up for assistance through several community agencies and members of the congregation are invited to “adopt a family” for Christmas. I shall never forget the Nordyke family and the joy the Master Carpenter had carved for all of us.

When I volunteered to participate, I thought I’d just pick up a few gifts, some groceries, and perhaps some decorations and simply drop them off to someone less fortunate than I. The Lord had blessed me, and it seemed like a nice thing to do.

When I was given the details about the family that was chosen for me to help, it became more personal. It wasn’t like buying a few toys and dropping them in a donation box as I had in the past. I was learning about a real family with real needs.

The index card I was given listed two names in the family, Laura Nordyke and her son Joshua. She had stated she would like some food items for Christmas dinner. Her son’s interests were common for any boy – computer games, sports and horses. It seemed simple enough.

I took my grandsons shopping with me, and they had no problem picking out a computer game and regulation NFL football. I took them home and went on to the grocery store. I bought a turkey and all the trimmings, and plenty of nonperishable items. Now, I just needed to drop them off at the Nordyke’s and I could get on with my own Christmas preparations. I was feeling pretty pleased with myself.

On the way to making my delivery, I passed by a Christmas bazaar and flea market. I never could resist a good flea market, so I made a U-turn and headed into the parking lot.

The old warehouse was filled with all the sights and sounds of Christmas. I picked up some handmade items I just couldn’t live without. Then I saw a beautiful hand-carved horse with a young cowboy on it. The card said Joshua liked horses, but would this be something he would like? It was so beautiful I just had to buy it. I gathered my newfound treasures into the car, put the horse in a sack of groceries, and I was off to complete my mission.

Soon I was pulling up to the Nordyke’s house with a carload of Christmas cheer. Laura came out to meet me. She struck me as a very sweet young woman.

Though she kept her composure, I could see her eyes welling up as we carried the bags in the house, and she thanked me over and over.

She insisted I sit down and have a cup of tea. “There are some items in those bags that will need to go in the fridge,” I told her as she started unpacking the groceries.

She was so grateful. She continued to say she had never expected so much, thanking me again and again. Suddenly she stopped talking mid-sentence. She was holding the horse in her hands, staring at it with tears flowing down her face. She clutched it to her chest and began to sob.

I didn’t know why she was crying. I didn’t know what to say. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know her at all, but I got up and held her as I would have held one of my own daughters. We made our way to the sofa, and it took her several minutes before she was able to brush away her tears and speak.

She softly explained that her husband, John, had been killed several months earlier by a drunk driver. “That’s why I asked for help. I wanted this first Christmas without John to be best as I could make it for Joshua,” she said in a trembling voice.

I began to understand her pain. I tried to offer a comforting smile. She held up the wooden horse and shook her head in amazement. “This cowboy looks just like Joshua.”

I’m sure she thought it looked just like her son, and I smiled sympathetically, but I figured any mother would think it looked just like her son. After all, a kid in a cowboy hat looks like any other kid in a cowboy hat. However, I soon began to share in her amazement when she told me John had been a carpenter. It was a craft handed down to him from his father. She took me to his workshop in the basement. Everything was just as he had left it. On the workbench was a piece of wood with a carving knife left out to start the job. Taped on the wall was a diagram John had prepared to carve the shape.

To my amazement, it was a sketch of the very horse and rider I had purchased at the flea market. Laura explained that every year since Joshua’s birth, John had carved a horse for a Christmas gift for him. The sketch was the one he had planned to make early that year, but he never had the opportunity to even start it.

I too, just shook my head in astonishment, and tears welled up in my eyes. I left that house knowing that somehow, I had been a part of some kind of Christmas miracle.

I prayed as I drove away, “Jesus, I know you were a carpenter when you walked on the earth. Did you carve that horse to show a father’s everlasting love to a little boy who would be without his father this Christmas?”

I didn’t understand it, but I knew I had witnessed the work of Jesus and His love. I shared that touching moment with everyone I knew. It was a Christmas that I truly felt the love, and joy, and peace, and good will toward men we hear so much about.

The day after Christmas, I got a call from Laura. She told me how much they enjoyed Christmas and how much Joshua enjoyed his gifts, especially the wooden horse.

John’s mother had joined Laura and Joshua for Christmas. She, too, recognized the wooden horse. John’s father had made it for John when he was just about Joshua’s age. The cowboy was made in the likeness of John. The piece had gotten lost many years earlier when the family moved.

I believe that was a masterpiece carved from love, and the Master Carpenter held it in His hand until a little boy needed a Christmas gift of love.

God has a special gift for each one of us. Jesus is that special gift. That’s what Christmas is all about.

A little over 2,000 years ago, God sent Jesus to earth as a baby in Bethlehem, and He grew to be a perfect man. He taught the multitudes, healed the sick, showed compassion and forgave sin. Though He was completely innocent, He was nailed to a cross and died to prepare the way to heaven for us by shedding his blood on the cross at Calvary.

He took the punishment for our sins. If we believe that in our heart and ask Jesus to forgive us of our sins He will! So, when this life is over, we can have a home in heaven.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
John 3:16*

Merry Christmas!