

The Wooden Bowl and The Angel Tree

By Frank A. Schersing



I guarantee you will remember the tale of the Wooden Bowl tomorrow, a week from now, a month from now, a year from now.

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and four-year old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together at the table. But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth.

The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about father," said the son. "I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor." So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl!

When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometime he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food. The four-year-old watched it all in silence.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?" Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up." The four-year-old smiled and went back to work.

The words so struck the parents so that they were speechless. Then tears started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled.

On a positive note, I've learned that, no matter what happens, how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow. I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. I've learned that, regardless of your relationship with your parents, you'll miss them when they're gone from your life. I've learned that making a "living" is not the same thing as making a "life." I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back. I've

learned that if you pursue happiness, it will elude you. But, if you focus on your family, your friends, the needs of others, your work and doing the very best you can, happiness will find you. I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision. I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one. I've learned that every day, you should reach out and touch someone. People love that human touch -- holding hands, a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back. I've learned that I still have a lot to learn!

One of the things that HCCDC practices around the holidays in lieu of a gift exchange is to draw names for the angel tree. This is an opportunity to give back to the community again. We have been doing this for over six years. This year we have we have a 1-Year old male angel, 10-month old female angel, 15-year old female angel, and 17-year old male angel. It starts with a gift, but it's so much more. These are children that are being helped through the Human Services Department in Winnebago, who have various difficulties going on in their lives. This is a way for us to give back to the community knowing that it helps the children of Winnebago. Many other organizations and charities say the same thing but you're never really sure if the gifts or contributions you make really are going to help people in the local community or if it is just some gimmick used by someone to get people to loosen their wallets.

In Wisconsin, there was an organization that would call requesting donations that would help the local police department and after I did some investigating found out that these organizations paid the telemarketers sometimes as much as 50% of what was donated. As for the claim about coming back to the local community, it was fabricated. The funds went in to a pot and the areas of the largest population received the benefit. So when I would donate something in Northeastern Wisconsin expecting it to come back to the community, it would really go to Milwaukee or Madison after the telemarketers received their cuts. I stopped doing this a few years back. Instead, I would always select a family or child from the local area and provide donations directly to those individuals. I might not be able to take a tax write-off on it but I knew that it was going to help someone in our community.

The Angel Tree program is done in many communities across the country for various purposes. Angel Trees are formed to help children of prisoners, as well as those who have physical or mental challenges in their daily lives. They help those children in the community whose parents are finding it difficult to make ends meet in this economy. They help those children whose parents are little more than children themselves cope with making some of those difficult adult decisions we must all make in our lives. Sometimes it is not with a present, but with the gift of time. Many parents, in this economy are both working and do not have the time to spend with children to be role models for them. Sometimes they just want to know that someone cares. Sometimes the best way for us to give is with a story, something they will remember as they grow up and be able to pass along and create their own traditions.

Remember the people less fortunate than yourselves this Christmas and do something that you and the Creator will be proud of. We all still have a lot to learn.