

A JOURNEY INTO MY PAST

My daughter is finishing her first semester at university in about a week's time. She has been living in residence which includes a meal plan at the dining hall. Before she started her first semester, I tried to give my daughter as many tips as I could from the two years that I stayed in residence at Brock University and ate at that dining hall.

One of the things I did share with her was how in the beginning the food in the dining hall would taste really good, but after a while it would seem repetitive especially if menus did not change too often. For the first few weeks my daughter commented on how good the food was, but since the end of September she has not been giving it rave reviews.

I have been wanting since the start of the semester to try the food in the dining hall at some point. As part of the meal plan, my daughter is allowed to have a guest join her for free four times during the year. I waited patiently for the time when she would invite me to be her guest, and thankfully that opportunity came this past Friday at lunch. I was worried at first that I might be the oldest person in the dining hall. Fortunately, there was another parent having lunch and many of the professors had decided to eat there as well.

After checking me in, my daughter took me around to show me all the options I could choose from. Our first stop was at the coffee area because she knew I would eventually make a couple of visits there. She showed me the dessert options next, and I was glad to see that Jello was not my only choice. Then she took me to get some of the French fries that she raves a lot about. From there I had to make a choice as to whether I should have one of their hot dishes, a bowl of soup, pizza, a chili dog, or a sandwich from their deli bar. The last thing she showed me was the healthiest choice: the salad bar.

I wish I could still eat the same quantities of food I could when I was in university. I tried quite a few of the selections and loved experiencing once again the environment of eating in a dining hall at university. Many memories from 40 years earlier came back to me, but what I loved the most was sharing this moment with my daughter.

It may have taken 40 years for me to journey back into my past with respect to university dining, but thankfully I get the opportunity every year on Christmas Eve to experience more memories from my past. One of the things I enjoy so much about Christmas Eve is reflecting upon some of my past experiences from this special night. I often find myself thinking about:

- My father's family coming to our house on Christmas Eve enjoying my mom's mincemeat tarts and hearing them tell stories from their youth.
- The Christmas Eve services when I was a teenager and dressed up as a shepherd to take part in the play. (I forgot about these previous acting skills when I played my role in my daughter's school film last spring)
- Going to my wife's grandmother's house after the Christmas Eve service and enjoying the Christmas pudding she would make especially for me.
- How nervous I was leading my first Christmas Eve service as a minister in Petrolia, and how amazed I was afterward at how quickly the church cleared out. (I wondered at the time if it had to do with something I said).
- My daughter's first Christmas Eve service after her birth when she was dressed up as an angel for the play that evening and how she pulled on the wings of another angel in front of her.

These and so many other memories tend to flood my mind every Christmas Eve. This is a gift that started on the very first Christmas Eve after the birth of our Saviour. Luke shares with us in his Gospel how after the birth of Jesus, an angel shared the good news with the shepherds in the field. A vast host of angels appeared and praised God saying, **"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."** The shepherds then went to Bethlehem to see the child for themselves and after seeing him, they told everyone what the angel had said about the child. All who heard the story were astonished, but Luke was careful to include this detail that he wanted everyone to take note of:

But Mary kept all of these things in her heart and thought about them often. (Luke 2:18)

Mary was given the most special gift of all that very first Christmas by being able to serve God by giving birth to the Saviour of the world. An additional gift we see she was given was placing the memories from that first Christmas Eve in her heart and thinking about them often. Just like Mary, we too have been given the special gift of having Jesus present in our lives, and the memories that come from that first Christmas Eve and many more we have experienced since. On this Christmas Eve may we follow the example of the shepherds and celebrate the birth of Christ. May we also join with Mary and enjoy the memories God has placed in our hearts from past Christmas Eves.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean