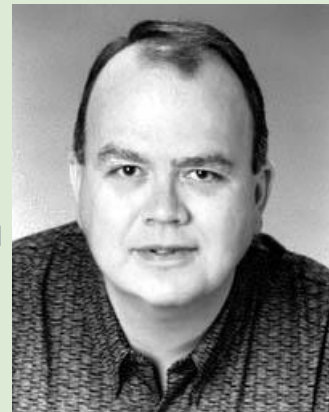


December 2009

"Home" for Christmas

by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President, Development

"The prairie has put on its winter garb. A shining white carpet lies over the broad expanse and hides the withered, tawny grass, the yellow-gray stubble, and the black autumn-ploughed fields. Winter has made its entrance, shrouding everything in pure white linen," wrote my grandfather, John Brostuen, in a letter home to Norway, dated December 1914, ninety-five years ago as war was raging in Europe. "As far across the distance as the eye can see, there lies the prairie in all its majesty, like a great frozen sea."



He was writing from a homesteader's shack in McKenzie County, North Dakota, not far from the Canadian border, alone with only his cat for companionship, far from home, "dreaming of snow-covered spruce trees and blue-hazy mountains, of sleigh bells jingling and church bells tolling." He would marry my grandmother Anna, another Norwegian immigrant, eleven years later. My mother, Dorothy, is the first of their six children. That generation of immigrants, like those from other countries, brought with them their traditions, their food, their faith, and built new lives in a new and very different land.

About those food traditions - Norwegian cuisine is mostly beige and bland - think boiled potatoes and pickled herring. The less said about lutefisk (literally lye-fish) the better. But there is one cherished food tradition that I break out every year at Christmastime: Julekage, or Christmas bread, filled with dried fruit, nuts and cardamom (insert your own fruitcake joke here).

When our kitchen fills with the cardamom-scented aroma of freshly baked Julekage, I am instantly transported back to my mother's kitchen in Indiana, to my grandmother's kitchen in North Dakota, and, figuratively, to my great-grandmother's kitchen in Norway. I feel surrounded, in the words of Paul writing in Hebrews, by "a great cloud of witnesses," family ties stretching over generations, legacy upon legacy.

My mother is the person who taught me my first lesson about stewardship. I remember

our Sunday morning ritual, rushing to get all six of us to church on time, Mom pulling out the checkbook every Sunday and writing a check to our church and placing it in the little green offering envelope, kids taking turns placing it in the offering plate. I asked her once, "Do they make you do that?" I don't remember her exact answer, but I remember the ritual, the discipline, the commitment.

Other than my prized phonograph, I don't really remember any Christmas gifts my parents gave me as a child. But the important gifts remain. My folks, in their quiet way, gave my sisters, my brother and me far more important gifts - the importance of love, faith, community, giving - timeless values that remain solid as bedrock no matter the economic turbulence we live in these days.

And so it goes. Our daughter Carrie, who was born with Down Syndrome, suggested to her mother and me the other day that instead of spending money on gifts this year, we should give each other memories.

I think Grandpa John would approve.

By the way, if you'd like a copy of the Julekage recipe, email Foundation@fumf.org and we'll send it to you.

The board and staff of the Foundation wish you and your family a blessed and generous Advent and Christmas season. Merry Christmas!

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As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to comprehensive Christian stewardship. For more information please call, click or write us at 1-866-363-9673 toll-free; www.fumf.org; or PO Box 3549, Lakeland, FL 33802.