*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Fond and funny Christmas memories**

The older I become the more I appreciate the little things about Christmas and cherish memories of Christmases past.

It’s hard not to get nostalgic over the holidays, especially when we view them through misty filters clouded with emotion. I enjoy steeping myself in the warm and fuzzy memories of years gone by.

Some of the memories are tender and precious – like my Grandma Cecile Hardie’s Christmas mittens.

The pile of presents at our family Christmas with the 12 grandchildren didn’t come close to fitting under the tree, but we all knew there would be one special gift for each of us.

The task of knitting mittens was a year-round endeavor for Grandma, whose hands were always busy as she sat in her padded swivel rocking chair. Grandma was a pure multi-tasker – she could carry on a conversation, drink coffee and knit at the same time. She used different skeins of colorful yarn and knew just what size our growing hands needed.

Grandma died in the fall of 1979. Not long after that, the family Christmases stopped as the grandchildren had children of their own and the family grew too large for a single gathering.

But I did receive a special pair of Christmas mittens in 2008 when Grandma’s sister Elsie Young sent me a pair that she knitted along with a note that she hoped I enjoyed them. I tucked them away for safekeeping. Aunt Elsie died in 2010.

Not every Christmas memory is warm and fuzzy – like Christmas 1988 – the first holiday with both of our children. Our daughter Jessica was 3 and our son Ross was nine-months-old.

Jessica’s main present from Santa that year was a toy kitchen set that included a stove, sink and a dining room table. Since it was too big to be wrapped, we waited until the kids were asleep before pulling them out.

I knew there was some assembly required, but my Christmas spirit soured when I looked at the detailed instructions and the large pile of hardware. Those were the days before battery-operated drills were prevalent and my electric drill was missing. So we did the best we could with my manual screwdrivers.

I was beginning to think that Santa would arrive before the task was complete, but we managed to assemble the package before dawn. My Christmas Day gift was blisters on the palms of my hands from pushing down on so many screws to get them to bite.

Another memory was Christmas 1995, when we broke down and entered the gaming age with a big joint gift for the kids – their own TV set and a Super Nintendo with a couple of games. The kids had experienced gaming fun at their friends’ houses and had begged and begged for their own system.

The big moment arrived. The kids tore apart their gifts – first the TV and then gaming system. But instead of shrieks of joy, Jessica turned up her lower lip and proclaimed: “But I wanted a Sega Genesis,” and stomped off to her room.

Doing my best to ignore the ungrateful urchin, I proceeded to set up the TV and the gaming system in Ross’s room. He started playing a game and a few minutes later the sounds of fun were too much for Jessica, who overcame her disdain and joined in.

Now we have grandchildren to celebrate the holidays and create new memories. But I’ll always remember near and dear loved ones no longer with us, cherish the imprints they left on our lives and keep their legacy alive.

What doesn’t change is that Christmas is a day for sharing goodwill and peace. Heaven knows the world can always use a little bit more of that.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at* *chardie1963@gmail.com**.*

Grandma: Cecile Hardie, Chris Hardie's grandmother, always knitted her grandchildren mittens for Christmas. And she loved coffee!