

From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



What's on your tree?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 7, 2012)

What an amazing speed at which the holidays come our way each year. For those who celebrate Christmas, it's that time again when you pick out your Christmas tree. Whether it's only three feet or eight feet tall, the lights and ornaments are spread out all over the floor. After checking to make sure the lights still work, they are draped or wrapped around. Then comes the decorations you have saved through those many years.

Did you get a new Christmas ornament each year reflecting on something special, such as your children's first Christmas year or tiny teddy bear that reminds you of that favorite bear your son or daughter treasured all through their growing years? What do you have on your tree?

What memories does each ornament give you? Here is a possible list of what you just might have on your tree. Feel free to simply check them off. And if you don't have some, how about starting this year finding or making the perfect decoration memory?

- First Christmas together
- Your child(ren)'s first Christmas year
- Your child(ren)'s handmade decoration from school
- Thumbnail pictures of your child(ren) growing up

- Chosen colored lights as a family tradition chosen each year
- Family gathering together each creating their own ornament for that year
- Ornament used by grandparents and great grandparents
- Storybook theme
- Rhyming theme notes
- Treasure hunt notes

Ask your children what they want to see hanging from the tree? The ideas are endless for any family who truly want to create memories each year that will last a lifetime. And if you have an idea not listed here, by all means send it my way, and I will include in the next article. Tell me what is particularly important to you and your family during this Christmas season.

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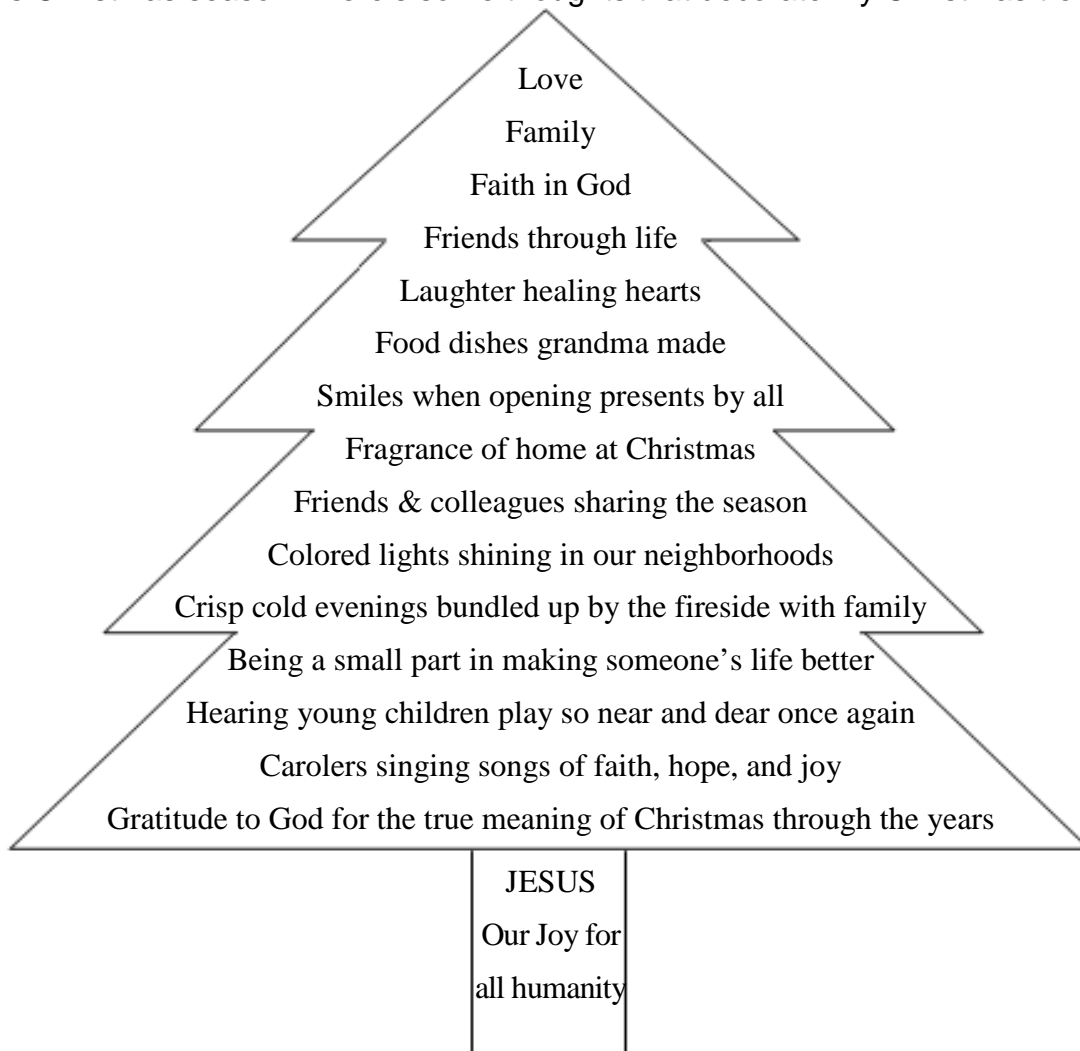
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



What's on the top of your Christmas List?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 14, 2012)

In the rush of the holidays and Christmas just around the corner, what's at the top of your list? What is particularly important to you and your family during this Christmas season? Here's some thoughts that decorate my Christmas tree:



How about getting out a sheet of drawing paper. With the whole family gathered, write down your own Christmas list of what is most important to your family and loved ones. Be sure to save this in your family scrapbook to remind you of how wonderful it is to have family and loved ones near and dear.

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Christmas Compassion during this Season of Grieving

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 21, 2012)

With the joy of having our family and children near us this Christmas, how can any of us not reflect on the tragedy of those families and victims of the most recent school shooting, including 20 children and six adults, who were shot to death at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut. What can we all do to offer solace and compassion for these families and all those affected by this horrific event?

I couldn't let us just ignore this tragedy during this coming Christmas day. I consider this a time for national mourning but also for personal reflection that reaches deep in each of our hearts. Their sorrow and loss is our sorrow and loss. Let us then reflect on these precious souls taken and families left behind. Let us know who they were, never to be forgotten, and how we can make a difference not only in their lives but in the lives of our own families, children, and neighbors nearby who are struggling during this Christmas season.

The list of 26 victims of the Sandy Hook massacre contained the names and ages of 12 girls, eight boys and six adult women. All of the children were in the first grade, between the ages of 6 and 7. I now offer the full list of children and adults who lost their lives in the Connecticut shooting:

- **Charlotte Bacon**, 2/22/06 (Age 6), female
- **Daniel Barden**, 9/25/05 (Age 7), male
- **Rachel Davino**, 7/17/83 (Age 29), female.
- **Olivia Engel**, 7/18/06 (Age 6), female
- **Josephine Gay**, 12/11/05 (Age 7), female
- **Ana M. Marquez-Greene**, 04/04/06 (Age 6), female
- **Dylan Hockley**, 3/8/06 (Age 6), male
- **Dawn Hochsprung**, 06/28/65 (Age 47), female
- **Madeleine F. Hsu**, 7/10/06 (Age 6), female
- **Catherine V. Hubbard**, 6/08/06 (Age 6), female
- **Chase Kowalski**, 10/31/05 (Age 7), male
- **Jesse Lewis**, 6/30/06 (Age 6), male
- **James Mattioli**, 3/22/06 (Age 6), male
- **Grace McDonnell**, 12/04/05 (Age 7), female
- **Anne Marie Murphy**, 07/25/60 (Age 52), female
- **Emilie Parker**, 5/12/06 (Age 6), female
- **Jack Pinto**, 5/06/06 (Age 6), male
- **Noah Pozner**, 11/20/06 (Age 6), male
- **Caroline Previdi**, 9/07/06 (Age 6), female
- **Jessica Rekos**, 5/10/06 (Age 6), female
- **Avielle Richman**, 10/17/06 (Age 6), female
- **Lauren Rousseau**, 6/1982, (Age 30) female (full date of birth not specified)
- **Mary Sherlach**, 2/11/56 (Age 56), female

- **Victoria Soto**, 11/04/85 (Age 27), female
- **Benjamin Wheeler**, 9/12/06 (Age 6), male
- **Allison N. Wyatt**, 7/03/06 (Age 6), female

And let us not forget the suspected shooter, Adam Lanza, 20, who died Friday from self-inflicted gun wounds and his family during this time. Authorities have said he first killed his mother Nancy Lanza at her home before proceeding to Sandy Hook Elementary School. No matter how we feel about this tragedy, all need our prayers and compassion.

I ask that you and your family read their names as prayers and blessings are lifted up during this season. Then, together, consider reaching out in some way to make a difference in their lives. You can learn more about the victims and their families at

ABC News, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/12/connecticut-school-shooting-complete-list-of-victims-names/>,

USA Today, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/15/victims-connecticut-school-shooting/1771765/>,

Fox News, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/12/17/officials-release-names-victims-in-connecticut-elementary-school-shooting/>.

Also, you can donate to United Way, <http://www.unitedway.org/blog/entry/united-way-establishes-fund-to-support-newtown/>. Be cautious about any other so-called Sandy Hook Funds out there. Check them out with Better Business Bureau before donating any amount,

<http://www.bbb.org/us/charity/?gclid=CKCNxrbCprQCFS-RPAodV0YAhg>. The BBB reports several scams out there already. Let us all honor these precious lives and their families with due diligence during this season of Christmas and compassion for those in need.

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First Thing I Do in 2013

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 28, 2012)

Besides putting away all the holiday decorations, doing a vacuum/dust once over, and giving myself a few moments of complete quiet sitting in my backyard musing with our Koi still swimming around, I pondered what will be the first thing I do in 2013.

Just as with our flipside weather where one day it's 80 degrees and the next it's 25 degrees, I can't seem to decide. Neither can the Koi . . . whether to go dormant for awhile or assume spring is coming. Then add the Mayan calendar predictions that the world was supposed to end on December 21, 2012 . . . which many claimed will herald a massive global transformation (whatever that means).

With the 2012 presidential elections, horrific violence, economic rollercoaster ride, heat waves, droughts, fires, and flooding that seemed to become the norm rather than the exception, we all wonder what 2013 holds for us all. So, I am thinking I just might hold off deciding until I see the morning sun on January 1, just to play it safe!

Yet, predictions abound about not just for 2013 but our very existence. Predictions have been going on since the dawn of creation. Even the Bible has offered clear as well as shadow predictions yet to be understood. In the book of Daniel an Angel told him about the last 70 years of humanity's rule all tied to

God's timetable for Israel, the second coming of Jesus, and the Tribulation . . . supposed by some to be 2016. Here we are again awaiting another date, since the early Christians, to see if that one will be THE ONE.

Whichever treatise you consider more exacting, when uncertain times are felt by nations and the globe, it gives us pause to reflect on those uncertainties but also what we all experience together through time.

Since, being human, I tend to believe that I am limited in knowing with all certainty, I will put my own speculations and predictions aside. As the ancient text simply offers, "This is the day which the Lord has brought about; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (Ps 118:24)."

Although plans are always a good thing (and I have many like most of us), I will simply be glad for this moment and the hopeful prospect of waking up January 1 to a new day to rejoice in the possibilities and those purposes gifted to me. Yet, I commit to not let this moment be neglected in attitude, thought, or deed. For this moment is sure sharing the hopes of tomorrow together. HAPPY NEW YEAR to all!

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