



Dear Friends;

The frost is on the pumpkin, Bismarck has had it's first winter snow, stores are closing out Thanksgiving merchandise (and no one's bought their turkey yet!) and Christmas décor is already on display.

Back in August, I (Nancy) began to prepare for Christmas – last minute shopping isn't my thing. Like Mother before me, Christmas is my favorite holiday. In the last fifteen years, Ron has come to enjoy it too, making for a happier time for him and our family.

It's so amazing how childhood experiences unknowingly set us up for a lifetime. In Ron's history, having a longed-for electric train, received Christmas morning and taken away by noon, doesn't make for pleasant memories. Neither does being punished for not being able to finish the drumstick. When parents celebrate with alcohol there's bound to be arguments turning to fisty-cuffs before long.


In my case, Christmas was one holiday that my nurse-mother didn't have to work – cause enough for celebrating! Homemade Swedish coffee bread, muffs (as we called them), Grandma's sumptuous pies, Mom's decorated Yule log cake and a tree in the bay window are gathered 'round the piano singing carols, later enjoying the goodies and just lovin' each other made Christmas very special.

Now take those two histories, put them together in a marriage and you have conflict – no, let's be truthful, you have war! Christmas, eagerly anticipated by my family, was boycotted by Ron. "You want a Christmas tree, then go in the woods, cut one down and drag it home yourself!" So we did - the girls and me. To be sure, once we would get to Grandma and Grandpa's house, Ron loved the food and the fellowship, but gifts were quite another story that we won't go into just now.

And then in 1991 it happened. Ron came face to face with his history – the reason why he hated holidays, and then he was **really** upset. It came to him over gingerbread boy cookies!

It was the Sunday after Thanksgiving, and I was into baking Gingerbread Boys for the numerous children in the church who would be coming to the Christmas Eve Service. Ron had been downstairs in his study, but the familiar fragrance wafting its way to him, brought him to the kitchen.

"Whatcha' bakin'", he asked.



"Well," I answered, "I thought I ought to get started on those Gingerbread Boys."

"Baking any for us?" was his next question. Now I was in trouble, because whatever I answered, I knew would be the wrong answer, unless it was yes.

I chose to say, "Well, we can have the broken ones. There's always a bunch of those."

Ron went to a number ten. "Yup, always the same. I get the leftovers!"

At this point, I turned to him, and knowing not where the words came from, I asked, "How many more Christmases are we going to have to suffer for what your parents did or did not do?"

Now he was steaming! He stormed out of the kitchen, stomped down the stairs and slammed the door to his study.


It was about two hours later when he came up to the kitchen. I was at the sink washing the cookie sheets as the Gingerbread Boys lay cooling on the racks. Ron came behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "you have had your last lousy Christmas. I'm done with the craziness. "

"Give me a second to dry my hands. I've finished baking for now, and we'll sit and talk about what you discovered, "I replied.

What a gratifying experience it was to actually choose to share with each other our holiday histories and come to understand rather than to resent. And yes, Ron usually did get the leftovers after all the friends and extended family had taken their fill of his mother's baked goods. The thought that his parents were still controlling him and his holiday attitudes from the grave, was the beginning of major changes for him – for me and our family too. And then began the joy of holidays together and with our children and grandchildren.

If you and your mate haven't compared notes and formulated your own traditions – little bit of his, little bit of hers and some new ones of your own, why not do it? Plan an evening of sharing soon so that you can incorporate your plans this year. That's why this "Holiday Letter" is beating the turkey and pumpkin pie to your door – so you can have time for a conference and for making plans with family and friends.



Let's remember to be ever-so-grateful for all we have – our relationships, our home, our churches, and our faith – not just the bountiful Thanksgiving feast. Let's keep in mind just whose birthday it is and the truth that "if we have done it unto one of the least of these, we have done it unto Him." Many hurting, lonely and needy ones could use your Christmas cookies and your love!

And as we contemplate 2008, why don't we as friends and supporters of the healing offered by God through the work of Life Renewal Institute, pledge to give the gift of hope and healing to at least two others this next year? Think of the number who could be blessed if each one chose two – or better yet, if you facilitated a group of 6! Wouldn't the world, your community or your family be a better place?

We covet your prayers and support as we launch, with our talented and committed team, into another year of ministry.

With love and gratitude,

Ron Roling
Chairman