

The Ghosts of Christmas Present and of Christmas Concerts Past December 16, 2010

Christmas is many things to many people: a life changing inspiration to some, a time of sadness to others; a profound, religious celebration, or a marketing tool; a time of increased stress and worry, or an opportunity to experience deep and abiding peace; and all things between.

The teachers and staff and students of the Northwest School Division were asked to share their memories and their thoughts on the meaning of Christmas. What they said was funny, and touching and sad and joyful. What they said was from the heart.

“Every year we make an effort to make up food hampers and special gifts for families who need it, and Christmas at our school is decorating and candy-grams and celebrating and activity and trees down the whole hallway and lights -but especially for us there’s a sense of peace that comes into the school. It’s a time when people are more forgiving, and it’s a time when they come together. It’s also a time when we remember losses – we’ve had recent losses in our school -and we try to reach out to those families and those people.” Racquel Rawlake-Parker, Vice-principal, Pierceland

“There is a special joy that comes from being around children. Their innocence and curiosity is refreshing! Christmas is the perfect chance to build relationships with children. It is naturally easy to point out the acts of kindness, love and peacefulness that we observe daily. I hope to model to the children that Christmas isn't always about the "getting" but it is about the "giving" too and it’s the perfect opportunity to make someone feel good!” Leanne Hann, teacher, J.H. Moore

“I played the role of one of Wendy’s brothers in Peter Pan’s Christmas. In a mock fighting scene with wooden swords during the evening performance, my ‘brother’ clocked me across the nose with his sword. I dropped to my knees and rolled behind the scenery (...this is not funny people) trying to clear the tears and pain. It took a while and when I eventually reappeared, I kept my eyes and nose averted for the rest of the play.” Avril Tarasoff, teacher, Jonas Samson

“We have a tradition that goes back over thirty years. Every morning all of the school assemblies in the gymnasium for the first half hour of the day and we sing Christmas carols. We sing our hearts out. Before there was a gym we gathered in the hallways. A lot of parents have told us that it’s one of their favourite school memories.” Jean McPherson, teacher, Ratushniak Elementary

“I was overwhelmed by the generosity of a young grade 1 student who bought extra crazy carpets for some of our classrooms as well as books for the students in other rooms. At a young age he clearly understands that the true meaning of Xmas is in the giving.” Kim Fisher, principal, J.H. Moore

“It’s a wonderful opportunity to spread cheer joy and laughter, teach about the true meaning of Christmas and reflect on the gifts we’ve been given, like being born Canadian. Also, life’s

lessons like sharing, respect, sincerity and compassion fit in everywhere, creating a special atmosphere throughout the school and among the staff and students.” Jodine Wiebe, teacher, Carpenter High

“Back in grade four my friend and I made tree ornaments out of pine cones, with glitter and pictures and little red ribbons. Then we lost track of one another other for eight years and when we both ended up back together again this year we found that we both still have, and still love, those pine cone ornaments.” Emilia McCaffery, student, gr. 12, Turtleford Transition School

“I love being able to walk up and down the hall and sense the excitement, the happiness and the festive atmosphere that fills the hallways... and I love discussing holiday plans with kids.” Brad Freyman, principal, Ernie Studer School

“My best memory was from grade one, playing the part of Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer. I wore brown tights and a brown body suit. I’ll never forget it. I was so very proud.” Angela Ellis, teacher, Gateway Elementary

“When I was in grade two we sang ‘All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth’ and built a play around it, but I had my two front teeth. So we covered them up with black gum and the elves were pushing me out the door at the end and I turned to the audience and said the line, the ‘but all I want for Christmas line...’ and gave them a big smile and the audience laughed and they laughed and they laughed.” Gina Smith, teacher, Glaslyn

“Performing a hip hop dance with my friends at the Christmas Concert that was very creative but still kept the spirit of Christmas.” Taylor Nelson, student, Hillmond

“This year was the best ever! We got to paint the backdrop for the concert. The North Pole. It covered the whole length of the stage and took us two weeks. We used projectors and ladders and everyone was proud of the job we did! Ashly Baragar, student, grade 8, Greenacre School

“About the 1st of December the decorations start going up and the hallways become beautiful. We play carols in the school and the kids are very mellow and excited, at the same time, about being able to spend time with their families.” Theresa Lynn, teacher, Hillmond

“I’ll never forget a boy at our school – a student, since deceased, with special needs- he was up on the stage in his special chair being supported by his E.A. and he was an actor and a performer like everyone else and he had the most beautiful smile on his face, and I’ll never forget it.” Kelly Vaongam, Jubilee School

“In their writing our children explore both the happy and sad aspects of Christmas, because we have many children who know that there will not be anything under the tree for them.” Susan Hrysak, teacher, Lakeview

“Christmas is a time to give and be with friends and family. Everyone’s happier, there’s food drives and giving and people are trying to help as much as they can. You get to make someone else happy, and that’s what it’s about.” Walker Grassl, student, grade 7, Lashburn High

“My best memory? Last year. Going on the sleigh ride around town with our friends, and singing Christmas carols everywhere.” Natasha Hirschfeld, student, Ernie Studer School

“Our school is proud that we give back more than we receive, and that we help with a hamper for those in need. One great thing is that in a school of 150, more than 300 candy-grams are sent out. Christmas is a time to see family and friends, and more than that it’s a time that takes you out of yourself so that you can clearly see others, and the needs of others and do something about it.” Shanae Blaquiere, student, H. Hardcastle

“At Christmas everyone in the school is very festive. There are decorations everywhere and everyone’s relaxed and we play games together – the whole school. But more important than presents or decorations, what I love is just being with my entire family because I usually don’t get to do that very often except at Christmas.” Kale Ockenden, student, grade 9, Marshall School

“It’s a time of great excitement and joy and the kids -all the kids from kindergarten to grade twelve- their eyes are just twinkling: and just to see that excitement brings me great joy.” Colleen Hegel, teacher, Neilburg Composite

“We did our Christmas pageant and using technology and projectors we created a street scene in Jerusalem and the kids were totally into it and it came together perfectly.” Dean Powell, teacher, Paradise Hill

“Christmas means spending time with family and having fun with them! My best Christmas memory is the SCC Christmas Dinner for the whole school.” Student, Grade 6, St. Walburg

“There’s a severely disabled boy in my class, unable to speak or walk. As he sat on the stage yesterday afternoon with his class he had an ear to ear smile –he was making sounds as he sang along and he was smiling all the time.” Susan Hryszak, teacher, Lakeview

“My son was in grade two, dressed as a conductor of the musical in a suit and cummerbund. In the middle of it all he turned with a smile and gave us the biggest wave. When the kids turn and smile and wave at their parents in the middle of the concert – that’s the best, the absolute best!” Colleen Hegel, teacher, Neilburg Composite

“Christmas means getting to see family that I do not regularly get to see. My best Christmas at-school memory is participating in the Christmas Concert in my elementary years.” student, Grade 12, St. Walburg

“Last week we had our Winter-feast, all of the students and parents get together for a sit down meal with turkey, older students buddy-up with younger ones and everybody looks forward to it every year.” Brent Keen, teacher, Turtleford

“It’s about getting ready for the Christmas Concert of course and promoting and showing the real meaning of Christmas: doing things for others as an individual, as a group and, ultimately, as a community.” Abby Lundquist, teacher, Turtleford

“One of my best Christmas memories involves the entire school standing around the front entrance of the school...singing Christmas carols, and I love how, after three and a half months of work go by...and we're all feeling a bit exhausted, we can still have fun looking for 'ugly Christmas sweaters' or 'tacky ties' to wear that last week! It makes the holiday build-up seem special.” David Speirs, vice-principal, Maidstone

“My favourite Christmas memory luckily comes every year at our school. We spend the last day with a Christmas Bingo. The prizes are food hampers that we create with an item that is donated by every student and staff. The blackout prize is a frozen turkey. I will always remember the excitement on the face of the student who has just won a bag of groceries or a turkey. They are so proud to carry that prize home. Quite a few years back, one mom explained that her son kept the groceries in his room and then went to it every day to pick something to have at suppertime. It gives me a chance to renew my own innocence and the belief in the spirit of Christmas.” Lisa Morgan, principal, Marsden

“Around Christmas the SRC decorates the school and lights go up everywhere and then all the other lights go off and it sets the mood. The students get nicer and nicer and soon everyone’s talking and there are hugs everywhere. We run a secret Santa program for grades 10- 12 for those who want to join in and kids leave small gifts for one another or perform acts of service. The thing I love best is the adorable kindergarten class fumbling around at the Christmas Concert. Last year there was a Mexican theme. The girls wore big skirts and loose tops, but the boys came out in white outfits with red sashes which would have made them look like ninjas, except they were wearing these big sombreros so what you actually had were these tiny Mexican ninjas dancing around on the stage.” Allison Stremick, student, grade 12, Goodsoil

“Well, Christmas is everyone singing songs and having a good time and good behaviour and being with people you care about. But really, it’s about being caring and giving.” Cole Murray, grade 7, Dorintosh

“I was a big strapping girl in kindergarten so I was cast as Mary, which meant I got to rock the baby Jesus (my classmate Warren) in my arms for the whole manger scene.” Kendra Syrota, a teacher at Jonas Samson – who neglected to give us Warren’s opinion on this state of affairs.

“Gifts are not a consideration - Christmas is a time to spend with family and friends – love is the best gift, and often the only gift we can give.” Scott Thompson, teacher, Transition Place

... And from all of us at the Northwest School Division, may you and yours have a Merry Christmas, a joyous holiday season and the very best in the New Year!