

Old School Parenting At Christmastime

Like millions of lower to middle income American families back in the day, my parents did an awesome job at Christmastime. With little money, they always found a way to give their kids happy Christmases. As the 9 year old eldest, I babysat my 4 siblings. I knew mom and dad did not have a lot of money. And yet, I never thought we were poor or felt shortchanged at Christmas. I don't remember my 3 brothers and sister ever feeling shortchanged at Christmas. How awesome is that? Given their financial challenges, my parents had to be magicians to pull off that trick. Somehow, they performed their magic every year. I kind of took it for granted. Looking back, all I can say is, "Wow!"

The arrival of the Montgomery Wards catalog was a major exciting event. Each of us kids circled the toys we wanted for Christmas.

I remember, my Roy Roger's pistol and holster. On Christmas day, I left my pistol outside for a moment. When I came back, it was gone. Mom was extremely annoyed at me.

I felt my Aunt Bummie and her 5 sons living on welfare were poor. Mom, dad, we 5 kids, Aunt Bummie and her 5 boys sat around a table, feasting on a mountain of fried chicken necks and backs. They were dirt cheap to buy. We laughed, joked and had a wonderful time. God has blessed me to travel the world, enjoying numerous five star dining experiences. I still love fried chicken necks and backs.

One Christmas when we were still living in the Baltimore government housing project, I found a used bicycle hidden deep in the closet. I knew the bike was my Christmas present. I was elated because I knew mom and dad could not afford it. Mom was

disappointed that I saw the bike. I told her I was a big boy and wanted to help her and dad play Santa; setting up the gifts Christmas eve for my younger siblings. She said, "Okay".

Then there was the Christmas we could have died. In 1952, the restriction of blacks being allowed to take the test to become Baltimore City firefighters ended. Dad became a firefighter. We moved out of the projects. My parents purchased a home in a small black suburban community; Pumphrey, Maryland. It was Christmas eve. Dad had to work the night shift at the fire house. Mom decided to paint a room with oil based paint. Dad came home 7am Christmas morning to find us all passed out. He rescued us by carrying us to the front porch. We recovered and opened presents.

My wife Mary said her parents were pretty awesome as well. They always found a way to make room and feed relatives in need. Mary's immediate family consisted of her parents and 3 siblings. And yet, Mary recalls washing dishes for as many as 11 people living in their home. She has wonderful childhood Christmas memories. Although, she has been scared for life regarding washing dishes. Mary cooks and I wash the dishes. Our kitchen remodel will include a dishwasher.

Old school American parents were awesome. They were responsible early in their adulthood, doing whatever needed to be done. My baby-boomer generation seems to be pretty spoiled and self focused.

At 29 years old, my Dad fathered his 5 kids and tried to be a stand-in father/role model for my Aunt Bummie's five boys. They loved my dad and envied me for having him.

I'm getting choked up.

Mom passed away 20 years ago. Our family's 2017 annual Christmas Eve gathering was wonderful. Everyone shared a spirit of making merry. Last year, Dad declared me the new patriarch of the family. At this year's gathering, I called

for a round of applause for my late mom and 89 year old dad,
thanking them for all the great Christmases.

I pray y'all had a Merry Christmas. Have a Happy and Blessed
New Year!

Lloyd Marcus, The Unhyphenated American

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