

## 12-23-11 Christmas Messages

For several years now I've shared ideas for fun, simple, and thrifty Christmases. Those goals have settled into a downright necessity for most of us, you know that "99%" of us. Fun, simple and thrifty just isn't enough, though, in really challenging times. The gifts must still be meaningful. Isn't the meaning of Christmas what it is all about? While it may vary for each of us, expressing that meaning is so important.

The meaning of Christmas varies from year to year, not because our beliefs have changed but our lives have. One year brings a new child into the world; another brings the tragedy of lives lost. My personal need for thinking about and expressing this year's meaning has recently taken shape. Months ago it seemed to be a beach theme, as I constructed my first driftwood Christmas trees. It was an excuse to walk the beach and gave purpose to the activity of beachcombing. Is life a beach, as I have seen in writing? Not this year. If life is a day at the beach, this year has needed life guards with occasional life-saving rings tossed into the waters. And they arrived, too, in the form of friends, phone calls, cards, notes, and emails of support.

And, so it is that my chosen theme for this year is Christmas Messages. My tree is made from driftwood and is called the Tree of Hope. If the Joy seems unachievable at times, Peace and Love and Hope will do just fine. It is adorned with small pictures of the grandchildren, everyone with a gold halo added above their angelic faces. Here and there the messages of love, hope and peace sway from branch tips.

The children and grandchildren will receive messages in a variety of forms. Some embroidered and framed messages, found on sale at a local gift shop, will adorn their walls. There's a tiny one reminding the receiver, "Be courageous." One made me laugh when I read, "If at first you don't succeed, just do it like your mother told you." Feeling thankful, I also liked, "Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have." Being Santa comes in handy; I gave myself one saying, "Look for the small miracles and you'll find they are everywhere."

The grandchildren don't know it, but back in the summer when I was visiting my siblings in the Portland and Cape Elizabeth area of Maine, I gathered small rocks at Ferry Beach for an idea that hatched in my mind that day. Many of the huge outcropping of rocks in this part of Maine split off in straight sections and then roll around as all beaches stones do from the action of waves. Here, the small whittled

down strips gave me opportunity to easily spell words on the sand. Back home, I would rarely find a straight narrow rock, leaving me with the necessity of creating letters with a polka- dotted method of lining up lots of little round stones. On that beautiful day in August, though, I had fun writing names easily with the occasional need for a round stone for the letter "O".

I took pictures of them thinking they might make nice postcards. (And they did, but that is still a surprise "Christmas Text"). Combining the beach image with words has resulted in

other possibilities, too. Since I spelled out "Grammy" in stones, also, the grandchildren each can have a tee shirt announcing my love for them. "Grammy loves Anna Coryn", written in beach stones will look good and are easy to make at home with iron on transfers.

Despite the family need for a life raft this year, you can see that I am well-off and have lots to be thankful for compared to others' defining messages. Someone's might read "Will work for food." Another might say, "Will work for home heating oil." And all too many might say, "Christmas? I need a job!" Those messages indicate just a few of the public health problems out there related to the depressing economy resulting in children going without or parents going into debt they cannot afford. Keeping Christmas simple goes a long way towards keeping it meaningful.

I wish you a Wonderful Christmas simply filled with lots of love. If you have a Christmas message for others, I hope you will share it. Just don't send it by text while driving!

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