



December 2009

Development Directions

A free resource for pastors, principals, development directors, volunteers and anyone engaged in the ministry of Catholic development.

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A Christmas Story

By Frank Donaldson, President



It was in the Fall of 1996, traveling on a plane back to New Orleans from the west coast when I first got the idea to begin a series of stories about my childhood, adolescence, and young adult years. Sitting next to a child psychologist for over three hours, we discussed the fact that with our changing world today, families seemed to have lost the art of storytelling - of handing down the history, the traditions, and the culture - from one generation to the other. Shortly thereafter, I began writing stories of my youth - growing up in the country on a farm in south Louisiana during the summer months and on the weekends, and also living in the city of New Orleans during the week so my brother Don and I could attend Catholic schools and my Dad could work in his mortgage and loan business.

The first book, distributed as Christmas presents to family and friends in December 1996, was entitled "Morgan River Recipes" and contained many of the dishes and treats of a southern family from Tennessee that was transplanted to the land of Cajuns and Creoles. The next five years, 1997-2001, five books were written, each with ten stories in them, and they are called "Morgan River Recollections" - about life growing up in the country. Beginning in 2002, the scene changed, and the next series of books was called "Recollections of a New Orleans Childhood and Adolescence." All in all, 100 stories have been created. Most are humorous; some are poignant; a few are sad, but they do chronicle the life of the Donaldson Family from the late 1940's through the mid 1960's. I would like to share one of these stories with you as our way of wishing you a Most Blessed and Merry Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

The Most Wonderful Gift of All

I think I can mark the exact date and time when I realized that life isn't always fair, and yet it is so much better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

It was Christmas of 1954; I was ten years old and alive with visions of Santa Claus and the hundreds of presents I knew would be waiting for me under our tree on Christmas morning. I was so convinced and dared anyone who even mentioned that Santa did not exist to say so, because I wanted to personally rearrange his face. (Actually, it was all talk).

The Donaldson family lived in an apartment in uptown New Orleans on the corner of Valmont and Perrier Streets, about four blocks from St. Charles Avenue where the streetcars run. We also had a farm outside of Slidell, LA where we went on the weekends and spent the summers. However, in the city neighborhood where I grew up, many sights were always seen because our apartment bordered an African-American neighborhood on the right, a middle-class white neighborhood on the left, and a lower-middle class, Hispanic neighborhood behind us. We were multi-cultural before the word was invented.

Christmas at the Donaldson home was a fantastic time every year. My mother decorated the entire place with long-leaf pine boughs from our farm in Slidell; big, red bows; large, sprayed pine cones; holly wreaths; and bunches of mistletoe that my dad always shot down from the top of one of our oak trees in the swamp bordering our property in Slidell. My brother, my dad, and I always picked out the family Christmas tree from about the 20th tree lot we surveyed. I can still remember "the old man" cussing all the way home saying, "It's a crime and a shame for those people to charge such exorbitant prices for a tree." "Exorbitant" - that was his word back then. I always figured that it must have meant expensive.

With the apartment decorated, the tree up, the presents wrapped, school out, and the turkey and cornbread dressing in the oven, Christmas Eve was always the longest day of the year. I can still remember going outside to play "cops and robbers" or "cowboys and Indians" or "kick the can" and thinking that 2-3 hours had gone by, only to discover after running inside to look at the clock, that barely 15 minutes had slipped away. What a long, boring day! But, I survived and made it to nightfall when the big deal at our house was to open one Christmas present from some faraway relative or friend. I can remember tearing off that wrapping paper with visions of a Rawlings basketball or a Wham-O slingshot, only to find a stupid, awful tasting fruitcake or a box of dates. It was a good thing those gifts were not foreshadowing what was to come.

But, Christmas of my tenth year was a never-forgotten memory. Distinctly, I remember trying to go to sleep around 9 o'clock and never knowing if I was dreaming or actually hearing the sleigh bells and the "Ho-Ho-Ho!" Somewhere in between, Santa brought the gifts, drank the milk, ate the cookies, and left in a flash.

On Christmas morning, 1954, I was overwhelmed with joy and excitement when I woke up, ran out into the dining room where the tree was, and saw all of the things I had gotten: a new Schwinn bike; a Daisy B-B pump gun; two tickets to the Sugar Bowl basketball games; a new basketball; an electric train set; a portable, rocket-shaped radio; plus so much more. I yelled; I shouted; I screamed for joy; I couldn't get over how generous Santa Claus had been. I really must have been a fantastic kid that year!

Then, around 10 o'clock that morning, I carried my new bike down the back steps and out into the street for the first time. What a thrill! No more would I have to ride that old bike I had gotten as a hand-me-down three years before. I now had the "master". As I turned onto Perrier Street, I saw a boy about my age sitting on the street corner with his head in his hands, crying. Not noticing the tears yet, I shouted at him, "Decca, look what I got from Santa Claus!" His look told it all as he lifted his head. He had gotten one thing for Christmas - a piece of wood out of which was carved a western pistol that was painted black. His mom could not afford anything else.

I slowly got off my bike and sat down beside him. I didn't know what to say, and so for a long time we just sat there in silence. For me, the glitter was gone and Santa had been unfair. What had

happened? I thought Santa Claus took care of everybody.

After awhile, I left Decca and headed home, not even caring to ride the new bike again. My brother was playing with his new basketball; my mom was trying on new sweaters, and my dad was busy making egg nog in his new blender. I slowly opened the kitchen door that led up from the basement and with tears in my eyes told my dad and my mom and my brother the story of Decca. I had lost the "Santa Claus Dream."

But, it was also at this time that I realized that the "Santa Claus Dream" does live inside of each of us.

Later that day, down in the basement, my old bike was painted; a new horn was installed; the handlebars were lowered; the seat was adjusted; a basket was put on the back, and Decca had a Christmas after all.

It is indeed so much better to light a candle than curse the darkness.

Join Us for a 60 Minute Webinar

ISPD will offer a year-long series of \$39 sixty minute Webinars on Catholic Development.

Listed here are our upcoming Webinars:

- **"Organizing and Implementing the Total Stewardship Process"**
January 14, 2010
- **"How to Invite the Gifts"**
February 22, 2010
- **"Getting Your Parish and/or School Ready for a Capital Campaign"**
March 9, 2010
- **"Integrating Total Quality and Customer Service into Your Catholic Development Efforts"**
April 22, 2010
- **"Hosting a Gift Reception"**
May 5, 2010
- **"How to Effectively Host Input Sessions and Town Hall Meetings"**
June 8, 2010

- [Register for a Webinar Now!](#)

ISPD 2010 Mardi Gras Development School



In case you haven't heard, we are bringing back the most popular three day workshop ISPD has ever introduced - the ISPD Mardi Gras Development School which will be held at De La Salle High School on February 3, 4 and 5, 2010.

The ISPD Development School will have many advantages:

- At a Catholic high school located directly on St. Charles Avenue on the streetcar line
- Numerous hotels up and down the streetcar line where attendees can stay and simply ride the streetcar to De La Salle High School
- Over 15 courses on Catholic Development, Advancement, People Engagement and Total Stewardship
- Many presenters - ISPD associates and guest presenters from throughout the country
- Mardi Gras parades beginning the day the Development School is over
- Park bench sessions with presenters
- ISPD socials
- Networking luncheon
- Plus much more

Make your plans & mark your calendar for a great time in New Orleans!

- [Click here for more details & list of courses on Mardi Gras Development School](#)

Visit our ISPD Web Site for Free Resources

- Educational DVDs on Catholic Development
- Development Job Postings across the country
- Monthly Newsletter Archives
- Library of Development Articles

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