

Christmas Ornaments, Christlike Friends

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Preparing to decorate our Christmas tree, I unpacked a box filled with Christmas decorations that I hadn't seen or used in several years. As I pawed through the Christmas lights and linens, I discovered a dress box filled with Christmas ornaments I had collected when I was single and teaching school. I discovered a plain, cross-stitched ornament that simply said "Christmas Open House—1984." My mind raced back to that year. I was unmarried and had apprehensively moved from a young single adult ward to a family ward.

I love the Christmas season, but some had been very lonely for me. Being in my 30s, single, and not having children, I sometimes felt left out. It was easy for me to feel sorry for myself, falling back into what I called the "poor little old me syndrome." That particular year, 1984, I remember making a conscious decision to conquer the syndrome, to look beyond myself and see what I could do to make Christmas joyful for others.

I was relatively new to the ward

and thought that opening my modest apartment to members of the Relief Society would help me celebrate the holidays and become better acquainted with the sisters.

As I reminisced about that open house, I remembered the small Christmas tree decorated with my box of ornaments, the smell of the shortbread cookies my single friends helped me bake, and the sweet taste of Mom's "white Christmas punch" I served to the guests.

As I studied the variety of ornaments, warm feelings of love and gratitude filled my heart as I thought of the many Christlike friends, young and old, who loved and mentored me through challenging times.

I picked up the starched, lacy snowflake that an older woman had crocheted for me and was reminded of her caring ways. I thought of the older sisters of the many wards in which I had lived who had passed on their knowledge to me. I learned to crochet, knit, sew, and tat from these sweet sisters who were willing to give

their time and especially patience so that I could enjoy what they enjoyed.

I held the tiny brass horn and thought of the invitation of the musically gifted choir director who invited me to join in early morning practices for a special musical program as a teenager. Her confidence instilled in me love of classical music and the confidence to participate in choirs the rest of my life.

With a smile I picked up the Mickey Mouse ornament and was grateful for the couple who shared their toddlers with me. Their children became my children. I held them in church, read to them, played with them, and loved them, helping to fill a painful and empty void.

The Savior taught us in Matthew 10:39, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

That conscious decision in 1984 to "lose my life" by looking outward was indeed a turning point in "finding" myself. As I pondered the past, I realized that many, in turn, had followed our Savior's words and lost their life for me. *Christmas* ornaments had become a sweet reminder of *Christlike* friends. ■