

The Easiest Gift You Can Give Someone This Christmas

When I was young, I knew things were about to get boring when someone around me began a sentence with “remember when.”

Now I have become one of those people of a certain stage of life who begins their sentences with “remember when.”

My sons, in the patience that comes with young adulthood, no longer roll their eyes but hear me out.

We are at that time of year when we do a lot of reminiscing.

We use the holidays as mile markers in our journey, such as our first Christmas together, our last Thanksgiving before the stroke, the New Year’s Eve when they announced their engagement, the last holiday before his death, the year we got our kids the puppy that knocked the Christmas tree over, the time I got my first bicycle, the holiday she did not come home for the holidays for the first time.

The holidays are a time to catalogue our joys and sorrows. Depending upon the hand life has dealt us, they go by far too rapidly or they cannot be over soon enough.

Jonathan Tran, in his book, “The Vietnam War and Theologies of Memory,” observed that memories come to us as part of a broader narrative; we remember in context.

He writes, “Even if we had ‘the facts,’ before narration facts remain unintelligible.”

Communities, be they nations or families or churches, are bound together by memories embedded in narrative, by stories.

Tran writes, “Rather than historical facts and ‘the way it was,’ communities tell stories and through these stories – the past configured by way of narrative – communities remember.”

You can tell when you are in a community of people if they are telling stories, many of them already familiar; nonetheless they are listening patiently to one another.

A group of people who listen to one another’s stories, many of them shared stories, is a good indicator of community.

Remembering the past is not the same as being captive to the past. Telling stories can be a way of disarming the power of a past we can never really forget. It is healthy to let memory have its place.

She asked if I would come by on the first anniversary of her husband’s death; I had done his funeral service.

We drank coffee, ate some cake and then she handed to me the order of service from the funeral.

She asked that I read through it with her. We did so together, and then she put both copies back in a drawer.

She went on to tell me about the trip she was about to take. She wanted me to know that her life was moving on; she was not a prisoner of that loss.

Openly and actively remembering her loss liberated this woman to embrace the present. She carried her memory; the memory did not carry her.

Listening to one another’s stories is a gift we can give to one another this holiday season. If someone tells us the same story many times, perhaps it is because that story is important to them.

So as sentences begin with “remember when” and we know what will follow, let

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us listen with warmth knowing this is a good gift to give to one another this Christmas season.

[Jim Kelsey](#) is executive minister of the American Baptist Churches-New York State. A [version](#) of this article first appeared on his [blog](#) and is used with permission.