

By Lori Pankonin

Confirmed by daily comments by others, I'm not the only one who finds it unbelievable that Thanksgiving is upon us. Yes, 11/12 of the year has already happened.

Five weeks until Christmas was announced at our staff meeting Friday. Whoa!! So what does that comment do to you? Unfortunately to far too many, it turns the stomach and creates natural body signs exclaiming STRESS!!!! Obviously remembering the birth of the Christ child in a stable (without lights and major hooplah) isn't what's being considered. You know . . . the real reason for the season.

While on the road this weekend, this very subject was addressed on a radio talk show. One woman commented about feeling excitement when she saw a crew putting up Christmas decorations as she started to descend on the escalator at an airport.

Yet she heard someone behind her with a far different impression of the sight. Excitement was not the emotion they shared.

Why doesn't it surprise me that Celeste, our youngest daughter, already put up a Christmas tree earlier this month in the beautiful home she shares with college friends? And not just one tree. There's one downstairs and a set of three skinny trees upstairs. Decorating was something I managed to procrastinate on for years and years. The look had to get worse before it got better as boxes, etc., came out of the closet, so I struggled to get started.

Celeste has been my angel in that department since she was probably 10 years old. I recall coming home from work after a stressful day more than a decade ago to an ultimate surprise. Celeste had spent her snow day home from school putting up the tree and decorating all by herself. Lights were dimmed with sparkles of lights peaking out over the cupboards and best of all . . . the mess was put away.

Even since she left for college, she's put up the tree over the Thanksgiving holiday and I've pleaded that she come home forever and ever to do that. A couple years ago, she suggested an upgrade on the tree, maybe a pre-lit one. But why? I've never noticed any hassle in putting the lights on. Oh wait. I haven't had to do it.

Of course by agreeing to that, that freed up a tree for her. Fair trade I'd say!!

And just because she's already put up trees doesn't mean she's done. She's stopping at her sister's on the way home for Thanksgiving to help the Lutz family get in the Christmas spirit and she's agreed to follow tradition in the Pankonin home as well. Yipppeeeee!!!!

To me, acts of service are beautiful gifts. Several people called in on the radio talk show expressing concern for how to teach their children that it's not all about them. One mother called to say that she and her children had a ball shopping for presents for the less fortunate and when Christmas came, one of her daughters kept wondering if the other kids liked their presents.

That brought back great memories of shopping with our girls in their younger years when we picked names from the giving tree and helped fill the wish list of others. I love when the youth groups adopt such a project to learn that it is as much fun to give as it is to receive.

We were psyching up for the Husker game Saturday when Allen Beermann, our Nebraska Press Association state director, addressed our group of newspaper colleagues and friends. In

wishing everyone a Happy Thanksgiving, he added, one filled with an ample dose of THANKS and GIVING.

I challenge everyone to carry that concept throughout the holidays. Avoid the stress and focus on simple acts of kindness for others.

On our return trip home, we stopped for birthday cake and ice cream to celebrate the sixth birthday of Austin, our grandson. He could actually eat the cake this year as he is now off of the diet that returned him to a happy seizure-free lifestyle. We'll be forever grateful to Dr. Eric Kossoff who not only shared his knowledge but opened his heart to the Lutz family.

Happy Thanksgiving to all!! (one filled with an ample dose of THANKS and GIVING!!)

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