
Trampoline Magic

By [Davon Cook](#)

I've been blessed with a loving family and many wonderful Christmas gifts over the years. One gift from my childhood is particularly vivid.

When I was about seven, Santa brought my two older siblings and me a trampoline. That was certainly exciting, but the manner in which it appeared was even more special. Before Christmas, my whole family went on our customary 2-3 day visit to both sets of grandparents far away. When we arrived home, the trampoline was magically THERE—set up in our yard and ready to go! As a child, I was amazed that Santa was just that good. As a wise teenager, I assumed our farm employee did it while we were gone. It was only as an adult that I learned the true story.

Now, let's put our Christmas trip into context. My parents operated a cotton gin that shut down for only 48 hours at Christmas. We would make a 700-mile round trip to visit both sets of grandparents and extended families in 48-72 hours. Take that in. Twelve plus hours of driving time, a small amount of sleep (for the adults anyway), and precious time for kids to see their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—at two locations. And, we ate a few good meals in there somewhere! Plus, my parents went to the effort to bring a significant number of well-hidden presents along also!

So, back to the trampoline. That year, we must have had a little extra time on our trip because we stopped on the way home to see some friends about 45 miles from our house. It turns out, while the dads were gone "looking at crops" (which isn't unusual in any farm kid's world), they hightailed it to our house, set up the trampoline, and returned from their 90-mile round trip in time to be believable.

In retrospect, two things stand out to me from this story. Not only was the trampoline and the effort involved in it magical, but now as a mother myself, I am stunned by my parents' energy to prioritize that annual Christmas trip. They were slogging through harvest months of very long hours at a gin that runs 24 hours. I'm sure the last thing they wanted to do on their precious days off was to drive for many hours lugging around hyper kids, sleeping on sofas in crowded houses, and cooking a lot (well, Mom anyway). *That* was the gift--parents doing whatever it takes to give the kids and the grandparents a special Christmas. Now that I know how tiring this parenting thing is, I realize just how important that gift was. Thank you, Mom and Dad. To honor that, I'll be arriving in a few hours with your grandkids in tow!

A Difficult Gift, Part II

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

Last December I wrote about some unexpected developments in my family as a result of my mother's final illness. Her decline enabled the four sons to become much closer as we dealt with a myriad of issues relating to her care and estate. It also was the occasion for me to observe and appreciate the wonderful work done by selfless caregivers and hospice workers on behalf of those dying.

My mother died at age 88 just before last Christmas. There were mingled feelings of sadness and relief, but what we didn't understand then was how her death was going to impact our families further in 2017. Because it was winter, and families already had many plans, we decided to hold an intimate memorial service for her on what would have been her 89th birthday in June 2017. All fourteen of us (four sons,



three spouses, six grandchildren and one husband of a granddaughter) met at the home my parents bought in California in 1968 to celebrate her life. The evening was a joyous occasion—a big barbecue, a movie night and then, for about two hours, a family discussion. I realized that the fourteen of us had never been together all at once, so that gave the occasion both a serious and secure feeling.

We first had the brothers (born between 1950-60) speak, and especially speak of the most important lessons we felt our parents had taught us. My youngest brother also found a tape from 1980 of an interview he made with my father, who died the next year, of what it was like growing up on a farm in New York State in the 1930s. After the brothers had spoken, I opened the floor to the grandchildren. “What did they remember about Grandma Jean?” At first, they were reluctant to speak, but with a little prodding each related treasured stories about their grandmother. Most were funny, a few were sad, but they all illustrated the life of a person who lived well and loved her family.

Though the family gathering was itself a gift from my mother’s death, the truly unexpected thing was the way that the grandchildren, now mostly in their late 20s, began to connect with each other in new ways. They hadn’t all grown up around each other, but now, in the space of two hours, they deeply understood with what it meant to be a Long and what it meant to be strong and capable young people from the same family. Since that time, some of them have connected in person, with many more trips to see each other on the horizon.

Christmas 2016 was difficult, but it brought us unexpected gifts in 2017. Thanks Mom, and Dad, for all you did for us!

The Gift of Place

By [Lance Woodbury](#)

During my elementary and secondary school years, I lived in the inner-city Argentine neighborhood of Kansas City. But during the summers and on many school breaks, I traveled to far western Kansas, living northwest of Leoti and working on my family’s farm and ranch. I don’t recall saying “thank you” to my parents for the opportunity to live in both places, but in recent years I’ve reflected on what this gift of place has meant to me.

The chance to live in both places helped me relate to people from all walks of life. The rural exposure inspired my love for agriculture, while the inner-city fostered my appreciation for diversity. I saw first-hand the challenges of rural isolation and problems of urban poverty. I experienced the vibrancy of city-life and the astounding beauty of God’s creation. I jogged the banks of the meandering Kansas (Kaw) river before it entered Missouri, then drove each summer across the 100th meridian to run along our dry creek bed next to fields watered by the Ogallala aquifer. I saw both urban and rural small businesses, experiencing the satisfaction of working with the land and livestock which ultimately would feed people, and learning how to count change, sweep floors and stock shelves in an urban neighborhood drug store. I lived with my parents *and* my grandparents, benefitting from multi-generational wisdom...although I probably didn’t consider it “wisdom” at the time (I was a teenager, after all).

The distance between Argentine and Leoti – both geographically and culturally – was significant. Yet the impact of each place on who I am as a person was profound. Like Davon and Bill, I’m appreciative of my parents and want to say, “Thank you, Terry and Jeanne, for giving me such a gift!”

