

Today's Advent Devotional Is Offered by Greg Snyder

Seasons' Greetings

When Rev. Robin asked me to write something for Advent, I first thought that I don't have anything special to contribute. In fact, although I was raised Roman Catholic and attended catechism classes every Saturday as a boy, almost all those religious lessons have left me. The only reason I know it's Advent is because Advent calendars appear in my Trader Joe's store this time each year.

But I have one Christmastime story I cherish. Just before I turned two years old, my father suddenly died. He did not have any pre-existing conditions; he just had a massive heart attack at his office one day. This left my mother to raise me as a single parent—something she never expected she'd have to do. My mother was always a worrier and I imagine this was especially scary for her. Figuring out how to make our mortgage payment, how to raise a little boy, how to feed me and get to me school, and more.

One of my father's work colleagues was a Mr. Bernstein—I don't recall his first name. My mother told me many times how he, his wife, and his family took care of her after my father's death. They would come to our house, bring prepared meals and help her with all the things that come with someone's death. They were incredibly important to her making it through my father's death. She loved them and they must have loved her.



She always referred to them as “our Jewish relatives”—and always with great love and appreciation. Ever since I can remember, she told me stories about “our Jewish relatives.”

This was in the 1960s when people bought boxes of Christmas cards

to mail to family and friends. This was always a big production at our house since each card had to have a handwritten note on it. It would take days to get all the cards written, addressed and mailed. When I got old enough to read, my mother gave me a special job: to find a box of Christmas cards that were not religious or mentioned “Christ” or “Christmas.” I felt like she gave me a weighty responsibility and I rose to it. I was quite good at finding cards that said things like “happy holidays” and “best wishes this holiday season.” Of course, we needed these special cards to send to “our Jewish relatives.”

As I remember this, I tear up a bit. I don’t know if my mother intentionally meant to teach me about respecting the religions or traditions of others. In fact, I suspect she gave me this job mostly to keep me occupied as she did her other shopping. But I have known this story for as long as I can remember. It is a very special one for me, it’s unique to me and my family, and although it brings sadness with it, I love remembering it at this time of year.