

MY REASON FOR BEING GRATEFUL...

When my father was just a little tyke, he worked in the mines helping my grandfather who was always a coal miner also. My grandmother used to tell me that when my father began to work in the mines his miner's pail would drag the ground if he did not hold it up. There were no child labor laws in those days.

For anyone not familiar with a miner's lunch pail they were probably around 2 feet tall. The top portion held drinking water, the bottom was for food. There are two things that stand out to me concerning miners. There are few jobs that are more dangerous or work you harder, and a coal mine's family is never going to have a life of luxury.

There were four of us kids in our family. My brother and I and our two older sisters. So our father raised four kids and kept us and our mother clothed and fed on a miners pay. Our mother didn't work. She had a full time job just raising us four kids. So while we as a family learned to go without many things we were a happy family. All my memories of growing up are very pleasant ones.

Christmas time was a happy time for us even though we never got all that much. Our parents always tried to get each of us the thing we wanted most and usually did, however unlike many kids of our day, our expectations didn't really run all that high. I would say that was no doubt because on some level we just knew not to reach for the sky. In our family the sky was never the limit.

I recall one Christmas I wanted a pigskin football. I wanted that stupid thing as bad as I've ever wanted anything. Come Christmas Eve, there was an oblong present under the tree wrapped in green Tissue paper. That was pretty much the extent of my Christmas that year, but no matter, I had the thing I wanted most. I remember very well that I slept with that thing for I don't remember how long.

I recall one Christmas I wanted a Mickey mouse watch. They had just come out and I could think of nothing else. That year I think I was around 12 years old. I didn't think there was much chance of getting it, but I spent my days in the month of December hoping and praying that the watch would show up under the Christmas tree. On Christmas

morning sure enough it was there.

I could not tell you what else I got that year but I've no doubt it wasn't much. I got the watch and of course slept with it every night leaving it on my wrist. I always slept with something that my parents bought for me, I appreciated it that much. I'll say one of the things that resulted in all our Christmas's being on the meager side, was the fact that without fail the mines would shut down about two weeks before Christmas and would not open up again until two weeks after it was over.

I recall one particular year my mother told us that we were not going to be able to buy a tree that year because there was just not enough money to spend for one. I was in 7th grade that year. We had about a 9 foot Christmas tree in our home room class. It was the last day in school before the school let us out for a two week Christmas vacation.

We were just about to wrap up that last day before the holiday and the teacher asked me and another boy in class if we would be kind enough to take the Christmas tree outside and put where it could be hauled away during the holidays. I blurted out "Mrs. Kirk, may I have the tree?" She told me that I could have it but asked me how I would ever get it home. I told her not to worry, that I would manage, it was a very large tree.

There was about two feet of snow on the ground that day but I still managed to drag it all the way home, which was several blocks from the school. When my father came home that day he cut some off the bottom of it so we could get in the house. That Christmas we had the biggest and the best tree we ever had. I was the hero of the day. ☺ We wore patched clothes a lot of the time because there was no money for new ones.

Our mother always felt bad about it, but to me, it was all a part of life I guess, because it never bothered me that much. Four days after I turned 18 years of age I and my first love, {she was 16} were married and although I was never a coal miner, in my town there were no decent jobs so my wife and I lived on "**barely get a long street**" but hey... I had a job that enabled me to rent an apartment and put food on the table, we were in love and very happy. That was 1954.

There's been a whole lot of water gone under the bridge since then, and as I look back over my life I have to say that I am grateful that I was not born into a family of wealth, because I know that It's the life growing up on "**barely get along street**" as a coal miners son that has resulted in my gratitude for all the many blessings I enjoy today.

In my work I often see those who live on the street. They sleep wherever they can find a place out of the weather. Many sleep in dumpsters, back alleys, in doorways and on it goes.

I have friends who care. I have a family that loves me, two daughters and a significant other who thinks I walk on the water. I have my health. I have a job that provides much of what I could not enjoy without it.

I have so much to be thankful for. I am even grateful that I'm grateful. I am happy that I have eyes to see how very blessed I am. I do not say a formal grace today when I sit down to eat a meal, but the gratitude is ever there for every bite I take.

In this life we at times make the mistake of comparing ourselves with the "**rich and famous**" but we're a thousand percent better off to compare ourselves with the down and outers, because then, perhaps without even realizing it, we are counting our blessings.

Perhaps this is a strange post, but these are things that have been touching my heart now for quite some time, and I wanted to share my gratitude and thanksgiving with the board. I trust there will be others who will identify with my story here and join me in sincerely counting our blessings.

