

# ANDREA PUTTING

As we pull out the box, it feels like it was just last month that the Christmas tree was put away. Yet here it is again, December already. Decorating a Christmas tree seemed to have lost some of its appeal once our children grew up, however, this year we look at our tree with new eyes as we plan for Christmas with our young grandchildren. We piece together the tree and “re-fluff” the branches. The tree stands tall in our lounge room. Lights encircle it and are plugged in. We laugh about all the years when our children would say, “The Christmas tree is shrinking.”

There are ornaments and then there are “the ornaments,” the ones that are kept in the special box. These are the loved and treasured ornaments that get the first priority of placement on our tree.

As each of these unique ornaments come out of the box, Malcolm and I stop and reflect on the memories and loved ones they represent. We hadn’t intentionally collected these, it just happened over the years and now we take time to appreciate special times and special people in our life.

Tiny musical instruments from our first tree as a family have somehow survived. They remind us of those early years, with our toddler and newborn baby intrigued by the colour and lights. Our grandchildren Mason and Zoey are just a few months older than Rick and Chantel were back then. We look forward to the wonder and joy of Christmas this year as the children take in all of the delights of Christmas.

Out comes the green Christmas star from a trip to Adelaide when Rick and Chantel were teenagers. We were staying in a hotel with no decorations. The only decoration we could find from our walk down the streets of North Adelaide on Christmas eve was this star. So, this Christmas we had a Christmas TV. I have a great photo of it snapped at a timely moment during the news when a war story was being told. The star ruling over the tank. Every year since this star has had a special place on our tree.

Chinese wooden dolls. Brightly painted orthodox temples from Kazakhstani. A finely crotched angel and star from Germany. A crystal dove from St Pauls’ cathedral in London. A painted bell from Finland. Ornaments of places we have visited light up our memories. We chat about our favourite places we have been and of

people we met and travelled with. We start to dream of new horizons, new places to gather Christmas decorations from. We wish we had thought of this everywhere we have been. Where will our next journey take us? When will we travel again?

Small gifts and mementos from friends are waiting to fill our hearts. A precious porcelain heart, a gift from Muslim friends as a memento of their anniversary party reminds me of the power of friendship that crosses all barriers. It

represents to me, more than just this beautiful couple, I think of all the friends we share.

We stop for a moment as we pull out the next ornament. A beautiful red bauble decorated with delicately handmade lace. A gift made for us by Valerie Gray, Em’s mother (our daughter-in-law), from when they stayed with us for Rick and Em’s wedding. They had traveled over from Maine. We think of a friend departed and all of our friends and family who are no longer with us. We think of their loved ones with an empty chair at their Christmas table this year.

Then there are the most treasured ornaments of all. The dove that Chantel painted as a small child at a Kallara camp. The gold paint glistens as the light flashes on it. Then there is the large dove nestled in the tree, a gift from Rick sent home in his first year away from home, along with the over-sized star. It is always the final piece. Carefully I climb up on a chair and twist the tree top around it, to complete our tree of memories.

After our tree is dressed and the boxes cleared away, we take time over dinner to talk about the precious things of life. We look at each ornament and are reminded of our blessings. We are reminded of what Christmas really is about - Love.

This Christmas, may your tree light up your life with love. May the memories you create around it be filled with joy and blessings.



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