

ANNETTE FRANCIS



Christmas has always been a time for family, for Church because this is Jesus' Birthday, and for sharing with others.

As a child, I had wonderful memories of our family of 5 attending the Christmas pageant in November, and then a variety of activities as we got closer to Christmas Day, including a drive to look at the houses which were decorated with Christmas lights and displays, walking along the section of the River where the brewery had a display of moving decorations, with Christmas Carol's playing. This display is still set up each year even though the brewery has closed.

Christmas Eve was always a huge day, because it is my sister Carol's (Kent) birthday, and we always celebrated with her, and ate birthday cake etc before Christmas could begin. We were a nuclear family of 5, with Mum's many relatives in NSW, and Dad's family scattered. Christmas Eve finished with singing Carols together, and sitting on the front verandah together, cutting the Christmas cake, and drinking "spiders", before putting out cake and Ginger beer for Father Christmas.

Christmas morning meant opening gifts, followed by Church, and then our Roast Chicken dinner, followed by Christmas pudding, complete with threepences, and custard, and time to investigate further our gifts. We were not a wealthy family, in fact Dad really worked hard to support us, and we were delighted to receive a lovely gift from Mum and Dad, and a couple of smaller gifts in our stocking. Many times, we had other people at our table, who were alone for Christmas, and we enjoyed sharing our joy with them.

Every two or three years we made the trip to Maitland, New South Wales to visit Nanna and Pa Parker, Aunties, uncles and cousins, and to attend Tiona Reunion together. In between we attended reunions at Grace Valley, and later at Mountain Hut, with Church family.

For me, over the years it has been a great

bleasing to be able to serve others on this special day too. For many years I have participated in Reunions, as an adult mostly at Grace Valley and Mountain Hut, then Kallara, mostly sharing my gifts by cooking for the camps, but also teaching children's classes. What a joy to be with my Community of Christ family in this period.

In Adelaide, the congregation has sponsored Community Cafe, and it has been great to be able to share with local community on Christmas Day, serving a full Turkey and ham dinner, with pudding and treats, and a little take home package of sweets. We had various members serving, others singing, or leading Christmas Carol singing, and a very joyful day (although tiring) all round.

Several of our patrons would then spend the afternoon riding on buses or trams "sharing" their joys with drivers before attending another charity meal in the evening.

As with most families, as we have grown up, and included other family members, it has become more difficult to get everyone together on Christmas Day, but we have always had a gathering including as many as we could. With Tim in Sydney with his family, and Leanne's family, and Rachelle in England with her son, this has been more difficult again, and since Covid-19, impossible. We are so looking forward to being able to hug our missing family members again, and celebrate Christmas together again. Unfortunately, Mum and Dad are no longer with us, and we miss the family "glue" but always try to keep those family bonds alive. They would have loved to share with their 8 great grandchildren, as well as grandchildren. Family was always of great importance to them.

This year I have experienced great joy sharing the Christmas story with my youngest great nephews and niece, and seeing their joy as Christmas becomes real to them, and helping them to prepare for the special day to come. We will miss those who can't be here, but will share love and joy together.