

Learning to be a kid again



Thomas Froese
ChristianWeek Columnist

CROSS CULTURE

It's the children who in the end will be given the keys to the Kingdom.

This is what Jesus said on the matter. Be a kid again. The way up is down. If you want even half a shot at eternal life, as if it were somehow possible, go and grow young.

Not because Our Lord thought kids are perfect, but maybe because He knew they're not, that they will inevitably need to climb down from up there, or clean that mess, or stop playing with their peas.

Yes, this is the rub of it: children have a different angle on life altogether and when you're too grown up, like with that strange passage-way to Narnia, it's all but impossible to find your way back through

it again.

Maybe the Lord was also alluding to the fact that kids often have a way of giving thanks for even the smallest of pleasures.

"Mommy, daddy, brother, sister," is how my youngest, Hannah, once put it when asked what present she enjoyed most after her first Christmas with us.

That's all. Nothing more. Just this. Family. Belonging. Home, whatever bumps on the way that may include.

Hannah knows the life she could have had. She sees it routinely on morning school runs when we drive the streets of Uganda. She knows her story.

This includes the fact that long before we met her, my wife and I sat in our kitchen in Canada to pray for an adopted girl we could name Hannah, a particular name for a reason, to bring honour and healing into our family.

Eventually, we didn't find this girl. She found us. Yes, one day after that kitchen prayer this little

girl walked up to us at a Ugandan orphanage and tapped me on the side of the leg.

"And who might this be?" my wife said, looking down.

"This girl is Hannah."

So it goes, the mystery. Stop striving. Stop trying. Let go. Be more helpless. Maybe that's what our Lord meant when He said it's the children who will win the day.

Because no child ever earns their adoption. Ask Hannah. You just wait and hope until your turn finally comes up and you walk through that gate, hand-in-hand to your new home, your inheritance, your joy, a life planned just for you long before you imagined it was even possible.

That's thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving, the season when even adults can give thanks for this or that: maybe for, say, good health. Or your freedom. Or your spouse or that job or new car. These things, after all, can bring some happiness. And there's nothing wrong with happiness.

But with a bit of hard work and

luck anyone, really, can attain at least some measure of this. Joy on the other hand, the sort that children show, is something else. It's richer. Simpler, yet more profound. It's the sort that looks up with big round eyes and says "Thanks God, for adopting me into your family."

Now, while there's no official Thanksgiving holiday in Uganda, our family, with Hannah and our other kids and some friends, will still celebrate this Jour de l'Action de Grâce on October's second Monday.

Even in this corner of Africa, with our home-traditions, we'll remember why Canada's parliament had officially proclaimed the holiday, to "give thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed."

And with any good fortune, we'll be like kids about it.

Thomas Froese writes on themes of culture and faith. He blogs on fatherhood at www.dailydad.net. Read his other work is at www.thomas-froese.com

When God speaks, go for it



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SENIOR FOCUS

Adrienne Toews was a little at loose ends after her husband Eugene died in September 2012. Yet joy and conviction are equally clear as she remembers her role as caregiver during Eugene's journey through Parkinson's disease: "It's what you do for your best friend."

After Eugene's death, Adrienne, then 71, looked to God for direction, and soon found new avenues of service.

In her younger days, Adrienne poured herself her work in special education until her energy was depleted. She then moved on to a position as teacher-librarian. "I absolutely loved it!" she recalls.

In London, Ontario (Middlesex County School Board) she researched Kindergarten to Grade 8 library use. She worked hard to set up research stations in a school's library, encouraging

teachers to come in with their classes and eventually involved students' parents, too. "Those were probably the best years of my life," she says.

Eugene and Adrienne moved to Steinbach, Manitoba; Adrienne continued teaching. "After I retired from teaching I wanted to continue in the same area, so I applied to work part-time at the Jake Epp Public Library." She spent at least six wonderful years there. She also went to Lithuania and helped set up a library in a Christian college and taught some English, too, making four summer journeys to the country of her birth.

At first this European opportunity was daunting, as Adrienne had to raise money to cover all her own expenses, but she is glad she went. It helped that she had retained her fluency in the Lithuanian language. "If I had missed out, God would have found someone else. So, even when you're older, when God speaks to you, go for it!" she says.

Adrienne goes. She has found no example of retirement in the Bible. Eventually the Toews moved back to Ontario so they

could be closer to a daughter there. Adrienne has no regrets about the 15 years she cared for her husband—"God gives you strength," she says—and recognizes everybody has to make practical decisions when faced with personal care needs. Even though her husband did not lose his mobility, the couple had begun exploring care options shortly before Eugene died.

Shortly after, her family arranged a cottage holiday. "One morning I was sitting by the lake with my coffee cup, asking God, "What do you want from me?" Adrienne remembers.

The answer indicated she would work with people from other countries.

"I reminded God how old I was," Adrienne chuckles. Since then, she hosted a young Christian Nigerian pilot for three months, and had a Christian couple from India staying with her. Then she joined missionaries Jim and Hkaw Win Humphries in Thailand for a month, helping Jim edit some of his books.

Jim told Adrienne about Living Faith Bible College (Alberta) and

the need to have library books catalogued, so she went to enjoy the lovely campus and work among youth, whom she loves. Her own five grandchildren are becoming independent, so she focuses on praying for them, as well. She is grateful for family support for all these service ventures. One daughter said, "Dad would be so happy!"

Adrienne gardens, reads, has joined the Penuec Septuagenarian Exploration Society, taking frequent wilderness hikes, and is active in church. She hosts a writers' group in her home in Ontario. Members are preparing memoirs to pass on to their families.

Further adventure beckons on the horizon. Adrienne has to decide between returning to the Bible school for a three-month term as librarian, and going to distribute Bibles in Bulgaria.

"The Christian life is the most exciting life you can imagine...it's never boring!" she says. "It sure beats sitting home, watching TV!"

Pat Gerbrandt is a freelance writer who delights in sharing stories of God's work in and through His people.