

They Stitched with Threads of Love

These ladies wove the fabric of family into meaningful Christmas traditions.

WHAT SAYS Christmas better than stockings hung over a fireplace? For one North English family, it's 14 Christmas stockings hung by fishing hooks on wainscoting.

Sherry Moffit was a subscriber to *Counted Cross Stitch* magazine years ago when a pattern was featured for a counted cross-stitch Christmas stocking. The design was a Christmas tree with a doll under it that Sherry thought would be perfect for her daughter Megan.

She finished Megan's stocking in 1988. Each year, the magazine published unique patterns for additional stockings, so in 1991, Sherry completed a second stocking for her son Hunter.

This was the beginning of her commitment to complete each of the magazine's stocking designs for her children and grandchildren.

Sherry "matched" her family members to the yearly designs. Eventually, with more grandchildren than there were designs, she needed to duplicate a few.

By 2016, there were five grandchildren who did not yet have stockings. Weighing heavily on Sherry's mind was her youngest grandson's battle with leukemia. Her goal was to complete the remaining five stockings by Christmas that year so each family member would have a stocking to hang.

With determination and commitment, she spent any spare moment during the year cross-stitching the stockings to meet her Christmas deadline.

In the past, some stockings had taken Sherry 2 years to complete, so this was an impressive feat by a dedicated grandmother. She customized each one with the birth year stitched inside a heart on the cuff of the stocking. And each is "signed" with Sherry's initials and the date she finished it at the bottom.

The cross-stitched stockings will eventually be passed down to each family member. For the present, though, they'll continue to be hung carefully every year in Sherry's home—not over the fireplace, but near the table where the family gathers.

The stockings are a treasured gift to Sherry's family to show how much Mom and Grandma loves them.

—Nancy Rash, Washington County Hawk-Eye



METICULOUSLY CRAFTED. These detailed stockings were made with love by Sherry Moffit, a grandmother devoted to giving her family handmade Christmas gifts to cherish.

Bader were married in 1963 in Monticello. They had three children—Dennis, Suzy (me) and Doug—and raised us on a dairy farm near Anamosa.

Mom sewed a variety of clothing for us. Among the items she made were flannel shirts for all three kids every Christmas.

Even after the boys graduated from high school, Mom continued making their yearly flannel Christmas shirts. And after Dennis passed away, Mom still made a flannel shirt each year in his memory.

This heartfelt gesture continued for 20 years after Dennis died. Mom would give his shirt to someone special at Christmas, with a note explaining the meaning behind it.

Mom was resourceful and didn't waste. She saved all the extra scraps of material from those shirts and eventually made a patchwork quilt from them.

She cut the legs from worn-out family blue jeans and saved this material too. The back of the special quilt is made from pieces of jeans worn by our family.

Mom left her physical life to join her son Dennis in Heaven on April 15, 2020 after a 7-year "adventure" with multiple myeloma. She considered her cancer an adventure, not a battle, because she was always optimistic and faithful.

—Suzy Kaufman, Anamosa

THIS IS the story of Carol Fairbanks and how she chose to honor the memory of her son Dennis, who died of cancer in May 1997 at the age of 31. Let me start at the beginning.

Charles Fairbanks and Carol

HER GIFTS FROM THE HEART. Carol Fairbanks, shown with husband Charles, warmed many souls with the flannel shirts she sewed.



Side Note: Every gift, though it be small, is in reality great if given with affection.

Hard Work, Discipline and Citizenship

*All were important ideals readers
learned from favorite coaches
and teachers.*



MANY STUDENTS have walked out the doors of Iowa schools for the final time, taking with them skills that have served them well in life.

We recently asked readers to send us the most important lessons they recall learning from a favorite instructor in school. Here are some of their stories.

MISS VACHA, or “Fannie” as she was affectionately known about the community, was my fifth- and sixth-grade teacher. She taught for more than 50 years in St. Ansgar schools.

She never married. Her family had immigrated to the United States from Bohemia, and she was a first-generation citizen of this country. Undoubtedly, this experience fostered the fierce pride she took in becoming an American citizen.

Miss Vacha drilled love of country into her students. The responsibilities of citizenship were a constant theme she included in our daily lessons.

We were in the midst of World War II; every morning, classes began with a minimum 30-minute review of what was happening around the world.

Many students had family members serving in the military at that time, and Miss Vacha had many former students serving as well. She gave us the opportunity to share news of the war.

Her students became the children she had never borne. She truly loved every one of us. She instilled a sense of self-worth in



Don Poggenase

IT TAKES GRIT AND DETERMINATION to play a fast-paced game like hockey. Youngsters benefit by learning from a dedicated coach.

each student—even to those few incorrigibles she would encounter each fall but was still thrilled to teach.

Miss Vacha beheld life as such a precious and fragile gift that each child was made to feel a part of her very existence. Her mantle of love served to protect all gathered about her. I have carried her influence with me all my life.

—Keith McKinley, Osage

MY HIGH SCHOOL football coach, Ron Beerman, had a penchant for conditioning his players with toughness.

During practice, our calisthenics were exhausting. They usually ended with leg lifts, when players had to lie on the ground and lift their feet 6 inches off the ground for a period of time.

Those players who couldn't do it had to run laps around the track. Whenever we complained of a little discomfort, Coach Beerman liked to remind us, “Pain is good!”

I guess I carried Coach's philosophy with me over the years—just ask my family! They heard me say many times “Pain is good” when they were tackling a tough job.

Coach Beerman instilled in me the importance of hard work while working toward a goal. It's a lesson I've never forgotten.

—David Bergan, Lake Mills

AT AGE 95, I still remember the impression made on me by Gayle Johnson, my high school basketball and baseball coach.

Mr. Johnson was on his farm hauling bundles to a threshing crew when contacted to become a coach at Whitten High School for the 1941-42 school year. I was a senior that year.

Mr. Johnson was a good teacher and a fair disciplinarian. And speaking of discipline, it took a lot of it for me to play high school sports back then.

I milked 12 cows by hand in the morning, then walked 4 miles to school. I went to baseball and basketball practice after school, walked the 4 miles back home and milked those cows again.

I have great memories of Mr. Johnson coaching in games and practices. One game in particular stands out when he showed confidence in my abilities.

Whitten High was playing Newburg High in a sectional baseball tournament. Our first pitcher had reached the number of pitches allowed by state rules, so the second pitcher took over.

This pitcher began walking too many batters, so Coach Johnson came to me and said, “You're the next pitcher.”

Well, I was honored, but I had never pitched in a game before. I gave it my best shot.

Whitten was trailing 2-0 in the final inning when I came to bat with the bases loaded. I hit a long double that cleared the bases, and we won 3-2. I not only had the game-winning hit, I was also the winning pitcher!

My wife and I had the opportunity to visit Coach Johnson many years later, and I'm so glad we took the time to see him; he passed away shortly after.

—Joe Rash, Union

WHAT DID YOU LEARN? If you recall lasting advice from a favorite teacher or coach, we'd love to share it in a future issue.

Email your thoughts to: editors@OurIowaMagazine.com and put “Best Advice” in the subject line.

Or mail to: “Best Advice”, *Our Iowa*, 1510 Buckeye Ave., Ames IA 50010. Include photos if you have them.