

UNTO YOU A CHILD WAS BORN

It was Christmas morning. Jean and I smiled at each other as Paul, one year old, and Sophie, a cocker spaniel, fondled and chewed their new toys. Almost forgotten was the bleakness of the trip a year earlier to celebrate Christmas with my mother and stepfather on the family farm in eastern South Dakota.

It was Christmas Eve and we had just landed at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport. We could feel the bite of frigid arctic air as we claimed our luggage and exited the baggage claim area looking for the rental car shuttle bus. My right arm was immobilized in a sling after surgery for a dislocated shoulder. We had to get help loading our bags on the bus. Since I was unable to drive, Jean drove the rental car to the farm five hours west of Minneapolis.

We were a yuppie couple married for ten years climbing our respective corporate ladders. When we were ready to have children, we discovered we couldn't! We already had gone through a two-year ordeal with fertility doctors trying to have children. Nothing seemed to work. Desperate to have children and discouraged by the expense and failure of fertility treatments, we decided to try adoption. But we were already too old for most adoption agencies. One agency agreed to work with us but warned that there might be a long wait. We decided to take the chance and jump through the necessary hoops.

The snow was gently drifting across the nearly deserted Minnesota highway. We could see the twinkle of Christmas lights as we passed farmhouses and glided through tiny towns. When we finally pulled up to the old farmhouse in late evening, my parents seemed happy to see us. However, they had expected us to arrive much earlier and were irritated that we had arrived so late. I tried explaining to them the vagaries of air travel, but my explanation didn't seem to help. I could tell that they both had been drinking.

We entered the farmhouse through the porch and kitchen. There were Christmas cookies and fudge on the kitchen counter. A large, gaudily decorated Christmas tree dominated the living room. We sat in the living room and talked about our frustration with fertility doctors and adoption agencies. Suddenly my mother blurted out, "Well, you can't have it all!" I replied, "But we want to have it all!" That retort triggered an angry response from her and she used words like "selfish" and "ungrateful". I was stunned and hurt. Since

our bags were still in the car, I looked at Jean and then turned to my mother and said, "We'll see you on Christmas morning. We're going to find a room in town tonight." My mother, in tears, disappeared into the bedroom followed by my perplexed, silent stepfather.

We checked into a motel in the town ten miles away. It was midnight on Christmas Eve. Jean and I had intended to spend two more days in South Dakota at the farm, but we were discouraged enough to cut the trip short. We talked about driving back to Minneapolis in the morning. Neither of us slept well that night.

When the sun finally rose on a crisp Christmas morning, I phoned my mother and apologized. In a guarded tone she said, "You are welcome to open gifts and share Christmas dinner with us." Although Jean was still upset by the night before, she agreed to drive us back to the farm. We were relieved to see three other cars parked next to the farmhouse. Inside were my brother Steve, his wife, their three small children, and my two sisters, Cindy and Patty.

No gifts had been opened yet because my stepfather insisted that only one person at a time, starting with the youngest, open gifts while everyone else watched. The children retrieved gifts from under the tree and delivered them to each person. I saw my mother's expression soften as she watched the great excitement and delight of the children opening their gifts. At that moment I prayed that she would realize why Jean and I wanted children so desperately.

It was late afternoon when we said our goodbyes and headed back to Minneapolis to catch an evening flight home. The return flight was uneventful and we arrived at home exhausted in the wee hours of the morning. There was a message from the adoption agency on the answering machine, "Unto you a child was born."