

Phil's Forum 12/14/07 Raggedy Ann & Andy

Everyone wants to know. Was that story about the Raggedy Ann & Andy towels that I've been telling on the radio true? Yes! And as Paul Harvey would say, "In a moment you'll hear the rest of the story."

Not only was it my first Christmas memory, it is the earliest memory I have of any kind.

Christmas Day, 1969. My parents had a small deacon's bench, natural maple wood, just big enough that my sister and I could sit side by side. Was it a Christmas gift that year or something my folks had picked up from the Toy House earlier? I couldn't tell you. But over the years that bench has seen the rear sides of every kid who entered that house, my sister and me, our cousins, our friends, even my own children have sat on that bench. And many an adult has parked there for a moment or two.

In fact, I hold all child-sized chairs we sell to the same standard as that bench, built strong enough that it will hold an adult (Phil-tested, we like to call it), and built to last so that generations can enjoy.

On this particular Christmas morning it was my grandfather sitting on that bench, grinning so wide the whole room was aglow. In his hands he held two small packages, one for me, one for Laura.

Laura was ten days shy of being two years older than me. Wise beyond her years, she was my guide through childhood, leading the way showing me how to divide a chores list so that she always got the easy chores. Teaching me what to do to get in trouble with Mom & Dad, so that I would know what mistakes not to make. Yes, we fought. Do you know siblings that never did? But we were close. Still are.

But there we were. I was three, Laura five. She knew what Christmas was all about. I was just learning. But I knew about opening packages. When Gramps handed me the gift, I tore mine open quickly. It was a towel. A white towel with a picture of Raggedy Ann on it.

Maybe in today's world of Dora, Elmo, Thomas the Tank and SpongeBob you might not know who Raggedy Ann is. Sometime in the early 1900's a cartoonist-illustrator-author named Johnny Gruelle brought Raggedy Ann and her brother Raggedy Andy to life through wonderful stories and tales of their adventures. He patented his creations in 1915, and they have been the most beloved rag dolls for boys and girls for ages. We still sell dozens of Raggedy Ann dolls every year.

And there I was, with a beautiful Raggedy Ann towel. I was in preschool at the time, so I knew what a towel was for - nap time! I immediately laid out my towel and plopped down.

By this point my sister had finally opened her package, also a towel. And boy was she mad. I couldn't figure it out. Her towel was just like mine, except that her towel had Raggedy Andy across the front. I was too young to understand why a girl would rather have Raggedy Ann than Raggedy Andy. I thought both were cool. One more lesson I had to learn from my sister.

But there we were with our towels. Laura was crying, Grandma & Grandpa were laughing at the mix up and I was wondering why everyone was hovering over me and Raggedy Ann. When they took Raggedy Ann away I never fully understood, even when they gave me Laura's Andy towel to replace it. And although she was the first to cry, we both shed a tear that morning.

Good thing I can look back on it now and smile. Every time I see that deacon's bench, I see my grandfather sitting there with his ear-to-ear grin shining at me. I can't help but smile back.

And now you know... the rest of the story. What's your earliest Christmas memory?

Merry Christmas!
Phil Wrzesinski