

There's this crazy family story that runs through our house nearly every single December. It's not the traditional story of presents, tinsel, and snow. It's one of those true stories that somehow becomes family legend as more years go by.

You see, seven years ago we did this crazy wild thing called buying a house. We'd been bumping from rental to rental at an alarming rate, and that particular year found us, once again, caring for Nana.

Now, I confess, she is not my Nana, but my mother-in-law, whom I simply called Nana. Mostly because when my children were young and anyone called her anything else they'd very politely, but firmly, tell you that was not her name.

This particular year Nana had fallen and broken her hip. The story is sketchy, and we only know details second and third hand as we weren't present when she fell. The gist of the story is that she was at one her craft club gathering in the dining hall of her retirement village. This was a little *club* we encouraged her to organise, and the other residents were so excited by the prospect that those who didn't like to craft came along just to offer advice, supplies, and enjoy the nibbles that the kitchen staff happily provided.

In anycase, there she was at her meeting working on a quilt for the newest incoming grandchild. The story goes that she received a text, or perhaps a phone call, indicating that the new grandchild was predicted to be a little girl. Further, the parents indulged her with their choice of name. Nana, quite beside herself with delight, told all the ladies present that the same name just so happened to be the name of the quilt she'd picked to work on.

I can just see all these lovely older women delighting in all this joy that was rocketing around the large dining area. I wouldn't be at all surprised if the men, busy on the billiards table, joined in. But one lone voice wanted proof, or perhaps it was that Nana felt the need to show how honest she was being. We'll never know. In either case, she ran back to the table where she'd left her supplies, grabbed the pattern, turned, and fell on the floor.

Now, I have an idea if she cried out in pain. You see, Nana has a very high pain tolerance level, and a very low acceptance of pain medication. Whatever the case was, they tried to

help her up and found that an ambulance was necessary instead. Staff called our home and alerted us to the situation. The medics loaded Nana on a stretcher, and bless their kind hearts, rolled her back to her apartment so she could grab her overnight bag.

They rolled her out to the waiting ambulance and drove off with her. Somewhere along the coast line she requested they stop in at the local craft store one had to pass in order to get to the hospital. You know, *that's* a scene I can actually envision, because no matter how jovially she made that request I can assure you that she likely really hoped they'd stop. Fortunately, or unfortunately for Nana, they told her they couldn't take her in because she couldn't walk, and much to her disappointment {as she recalled to us later} they even refused to push her around the shop on the gurney she was laying on.

She spent a week in the hospital before being released, and another week later there she was sitting in our living room keeping watch over the whole house by watching everyone's movements via their reflections in the tv. My own mother used to say, "Kendra, be careful what you pray for!"

I used to laugh. I shouldn't have laughed. I shouldn't have continually prayed for patience, because it seemed the more I prayed the more my patience was put to the test. I should have prayed for miraculous healing, or at least sanity for myself.

It was a long few months of recovery, nightly anti cugaluate injections, long lectures about doing her physical therapy exercises. At one point I thought I was going to go completely crazy and sent my husband a text to warn him I was going walkabout and had no clue when I'd be back. Dear Readers, please never do that. Not unless you want your husband to "stop drop and roll" at work, call you in a total panic and ask what's going on.

And somewhere down the months of recovery and having an extra adult under the roof we realised that we really needed a home where Nana could have her space and we could have our own. You know, without being watched in the tv. House hunting began, and what an adventure that was. We saw some very interesting homes, and to this day I wonder what poor soul purchased them and how they fixed the messes inside.

When we finally purchased our own home we were set to officially close in January. After months of interruptions to life, homeschooling, and all the extra curricular things the kids had missed out on, it seemed satisfactory that we could all pretend to be calm and normal during the final weeks of December.

So it was that my children and I were gathered around the old unfinished oak table tending to school work. That sounds quaint doesn't it? In reality I was likely lecturing the youngest to stop drawing battle scenes on his math paper, while telling the eldest to stop erasing everything he wrote in an attempt to make it look perfect. I likely even knocked feet off the table, took a break to pull laundry off the line, threw the treat ball a hundred times for the dog, and if it was a typical morning asked why the guinea pigs were screaming and carrying on. To which a child would have simply said, "They want more celery."

Amongst all this quaint chaos my phone beeped and I glanced down to note a text from my husband, whom I have always been convinced had much quieter mornings in the local office. Although he assures me the chaos he dealt with was just as bad, but on an entirely different level... I'm sure he's right, but in that moment of trying to shush guinea pigs, dogs, and children I likely disagreed.

"Hey, are you good if we close on the 19th instead of the 20th?"

"Sure, what's a day's difference?"

"No, Honey, I mean.. The 19th of December."

"Um, I guess?"

"Okay, it's just that the buyer wants to close sooner."

"Sold."

And then I immediately dismissed school for the year. My kids are absolute legends when it comes to packing a house, and why not? At that point we'd already moved 5 times in 6

years! They knew the drill, and we'd already been collecting plenty of boxes for the event. We spent the next two weeks packing the entire house, labelling boxes, and stacking them in the same sunny area we'd been doing school in.

The catch to the whole move was that when you live on an island everything shuts down for two full weeks between Christmas and New Year. I don't mean a little shut down, I'm talking full blown no mail running, might see those missing letters and packages sometime in February. My husband's company was no different, and he was in full tilt, "end of year" mode.

As a web designer this means everyone decides to wait until December to report all the problems they are having. Or, they want a complete makeover leading into the New Year. Or, or, or.. We've grown use to it, and learn to roll with it. After all, I'm sure every occupation has the same hazard at some point in the calendar year.

The other catch was, we didn't want to pay another month's rent and a mortgage at the same time. We had until the rental company reopened sometime in January to vacate the home we were currently occupying.

The day we got the keys the kids and I took load after load after load to the new house in our very purple station wagon. Hey, don't laugh, station wagons are still a thing on that island. They no longer have wood paneling though, thank goodness! At some point during this frantic game of load and unload a family in the local homeschool group reached out to us.

They too, it turned out, had moved that close to Christmas, and they knew the frantic pace that was needed to vacate one home in a timely fashion. We knew this family, but we didn't know them well. And I confess I struggle to accept help even from people I do know well. I was worn out, tired, and in dire need of help so when they offered to make the long drive to our old house with their horse trailer in tow I did not turn them down.

They didn't miss a beat jumping right into the action. They filled their trailer, their towing vehicle, and our car. My young boys were in awe of these lovely young men who came along to help and nary a whine or complaint was heard escaping anyone's lips. We managed to get

beds, and appliances moved in one load.

And then, and this Dear Readers is where my heart was truly overflowed with gratitude, the Mum turned to me and said, "If you are comfortable giving me the key to your old house we'll go back and get one more load for you. What do you need, specifically to have us bring?"

I was overwhelmed and tired and needed a month's long nap, but it turns out I didn't pack anything like that. We had our "go box" in the kitchen, a pressure cooker to make dinner in, and an assortment of kitchen boxes already there. So one lone child piped up with, "Christmas."

Our Sweet Friends went back to the house and filled their vehicle and trailer with every box marked Christmas or holiday, and then filled in the extra space with anything else they could. I was truly blown away by the kindness shown to us. My children were giddy with joy, and only a little disappointed when I said I was too tired to set up the Christmas tree that night.

Yet, once they were tucked into bed, my husband and I yanked out the box and assembled that goofy fake Christmas tree, we strung lights on, and dug out the box of ornaments and left it sitting under the tree for the kids in the morning. And then, we laid on the living room floor in absolute exhaustion.

The next morning there were cries of, "You DID set it up!" and while it seems a small and trivial thing, that silly glowing tree inspired us to unpack at a rapid rate. To picnic on the floor in the living room while we ate our meals, and to smile while we worked.

Every single December when we set up our Christmas Tree someone eventually whispers, "Do you remember that year when..." Oh yes, I remember, and my heart fills to bursting with gratitude and love for the kindness shown to my small family that December.

We still have that Christmas tree, this year it's sitting in a cold dark storage unit because our current home is too small for the likes of it. Yet, here I am thinking of the lovely family who offered their help to us.

Author's Note:



It's a story I often retell every December, and sometimes my kids roll their eyes until they are reminded that there might not have been a Christmas tree that year. Sometimes they like to talk about the fun they had with the young men who helped move all our goods into the new house. Or the gasps of shock a friend let off as they walked through the home later that evening, climbing over boxes and peering into rooms.

The funny thing about the move is that Nana never did fully live with us. She did have her own room, but she only used it on occasion. Like the time she had a cancer scare, or the time she was enduring blood clots, or every Christmas. The bed was always made and ready, sometimes she had to request that a bedside lamp be found. On occasion she'd find someone had left her a drawing, a book, or other oddity on the bed.

She brought neighbours and friends through the doors. Sometimes, at the most unexpected and awkward moments. We celebrated her birthday and even a family reunion or two in that very same house. At times her mail was even delivered to our home, but in the end she never did officially move in with us.

The Reluctant Author:

