



## The Smell of Pine Needles

It is a Saturday morning, everybody is in town, and trying to do last minute shopping before the great trek to the coastal towns begins. By now, you wonder how many more times you have to listen to Jingle Bells (including the different variations your children are singing). The shops are moaning and groaning under the weight of this year's Christmas decorations and everywhere you look you see something shiny and you wonder why poor Santa is dressed so warmly for our hot summers.

This is also the time when parents become agitated with their young ones in the shops, preventing mom from moving quickly through the aisles. Parents use every last cent on buying the latest PSP game, or try to figure out which will be better - the Xbox or the convertible DVD player.

I remember the days when I was still a young lad in the country, when cell phones were still unimaginable, when my parents took us to the forest on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December to cut our own Christmas tree. We would walk for a while to find the perfect tree. With sticky hands, smelling of pine gum, we loaded the tree onto my Dad's bakkie to take back home for decoration. Great was the excitement when the tree was decorated and the lights were switched on for the first time.

Today, when I took out my plastic Christmas tree, smelling the dust of the year, I remembered the smell of the fresh pine needles that drifted through the house for two weeks. My parents believed that the decorations had to be

taken down on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January and we never argued their reasoning. We did not get fancy presents or very technical gifts. But we did get treasures of good memories, kitchens filled with the smell of freshly baked cookies and a house full of friends and family who came from far to visit.

As a parent it is easy to feel alone in the rat race, competing with advertisements and trends in new toys and gimmicks, forgetting the teachers who have worked through the year with your most precious possession. This time of year we as teachers stand back and have to say good bye with sadness to the loved ones in our environment. I wish I could buy a big present for each of the children who were in my care, take out insurance to protect them against the hammering of life and be there all the way to prevent them from getting hurt. But the teacher's hands are also tied, and all that they could do, is to hold on to the hope that they did enough.

I found an anonymous poem which inspired me:

### Unity

I dreamed I stood in a studio  
And watched two sculptors there,  
The clay they used was a young child's  
mind  
And they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher:  
The tools she used were books and  
music and art;  
One was a parent  
With a guiding hand and gentle loving  
heart.

And when at last their work was done,  
They were proud of what they had  
wrought.  
For the things they had worked into the  
child  
Could never be sold or brought!

And each agreed she would have failed  
If she had worked alone.  
For behind the parent stood the school,  
And behind the teacher stood the home!

The best gift that you can give your child  
is not the latest BlackBerry or the best  
Laptop, but the gift of love. This festive  
season try to make time to play with your  
child. Go shopping at the store of  
memories and build on a solid foundation  
for the years to come. One day when  
your children are your age, they will not  
remember the gifts you bought, but the  
laughter you shared and the good times  
you had together.

May you have a blessed Festive Season  
and I wish you and your family all the  
best for the New Year.

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