



Not for kids only

by MARGARET MILLER

There's a myth that seems to be a standard part of the Christmas season. It says you have to be a child — or at least be like one — to appreciate this holiday that can be the best of all days.

Only children, so the propaganda goes, have the innocence for the true spirit.

Anyone with the burden of a few years or a few responsibilities is just out of luck when it comes to real holiday joy.

Well, I see where the mystique comes from because I've watched children — my own and countless others — as the magic season approaches. Their eyes tell a story no one can fail to understand.

But I also submit that Christmas isn't a For Children Only booth at a bazaar. The preparation it requires may separate the I-can't-wait youngsters from their will-I-ever-make-it elders, but that doesn't need to dull the appreciation.

A COUPLE of Christmas Eves ago I was sitting in church when some words in a prayer jumped out at me.

"And grant," they read, "that when Christmas morning breaks for us this year, we may have something more to show for our running about than tired feet and regrets for things not done."

My feet were tired that year, and I had indeed not completed all the Christmas preparation I had hoped to do. I had rushed too much of it into the last few days, so my spirit was tired too.

I clipped and saved those words and decided that somehow I would manage to time things better for holiday enjoyment.

But by the time the next Christmas rolled around, I realized the problem was compounded. Various schedules in other compartments of our lives had led us to set up a two-week Florida vacation that extended almost to mid-December. If I was going to be ready for Christmas, I would really have to get started early.

That's when I started learning it could be done. A monumental task was always the mailing of Christmas cards.

I couldn't give it up, as many have done, because I so much enjoy the cards and messages that pour in during December. Neither could I bring myself to send a signed card and mimeographed message.

Furthermore, it was a year when we had moved, so we knew we should have our cards out earlier than usual with the new address labels.

MY HUSBAND and I set ourselves a schedule for writing those cards, and before we headed for our Florida flight we had big bundles of cards ready to mail.

That feat encouraged me to get some shopping done before leaving, too. And we took our catalogs along with us and sat on the beach selecting edible goodies to send to some of our family members.

Back home with nearly two weeks left before the big day, I still did some mad dashing and there still remained presents to wrap the day before Christmas. But I figured I was beginning to learn and my feet were not quite so tired.

This year we're heading south even later. We'll get back exactly a week before the holiday. But I may be learning a little about scheduling.

Again the cards are being attended to with early messages. And this year I've managed to start some early shortbread so maybe I'll have homemade instead of purchased edibles to present.

A little shopping is under the belt; most of another day has been cleared for that purpose. This year I think I'll take a vacation day to buy a few presents with a Southern accent.

That final week ought to be time enough for wrapping and getting Christmas out of its basement boxes and gathering the family to decorate the tree.

In fact, I'm already looking forward to Christmas. Who says it's just for children.

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