

RING IN THE SEASON OF JOY

Intergenerational Service

Rev. Scott W. Alexander and Ministerial Intern Bobby Kilgore, Preaching
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach
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Rev. Scott W. Alexander - The Christmas Nose Bubble

My father, Wendell Wells Alexander...

[PICTURE OF MY DAD IS PROJECTED UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREENS]



Wendell Wells Alexander

Here he is in 1953 (when I was 3 years old, and he was a steel manufacturing executive in Sterling, Illinois)... my father was the only man in the world as far as I know who had his own extensive collection of Nosebubbles. What's a nosebubble, you might ask?

[PICTURE OF A BABY WITH AN ACTUAL NOSEBUBBLE IS PROJECTED UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREEN]



Here is a baby with an actual, real-life nose bubble...but that's not what we are talking about here!

[SCOTT SHOWS THE CONGREGATION A GLASS NOSEBUBBLE]

A nosebubble is a party gag...it's made from a glass pipette (whose smooth end slips easily into your nostril...and whose large end looks like a bubble of nose goo) and is used to shock people at social gatherings, by inserting it and then pretending like you have a terribly runny nose!

[SCOTT DEMONSTRATES THE NOSEBUBBLE FOR THE CONGREGATION...AND WALKS THE AISLES SO THEY CAN ALL SEE IT]

My father – who had a very lively sense of humor – would regularly pull one of these out at a fancy dinner or cocktail party and with his handkerchief surreptitiously insert it up his nose, then turn to the person next to him and say in a nasally, congested voice, “Oh, I’ve got terrible allergies!” The person would look at Dad in absolute shock...until my father would pull the thing out and enjoy a good laugh with the victim of his prank.

My Uncle Lloyd, who was an M.I.T. engineer, made about a dozen of these for my Dad...all different, which were kept in a jewelry box on my Dad’s dresser...each one labeled for the social occasion it was made for. For example, one of my Dad’s nosebubbles was called “The Nor’Easter” and tilted noticeably out of the nose as if it was being blown by a strong wind! This was to be used at elegant yachting occasions...and then there was “The Double-Dipper” which had two globs of glass on the end of it. Well, you get the idea.

As we Alexander boys reached puberty, my Dad (with the help of Uncle Lloyd) made sure that we each received our own “Alexander nosebubble” as a Christmas present. And as we got married or partnered, each of our spouses at Christmas ceremoniously received a nosebubble of their own....and this family tradition continued even after my Father’s untimely death at age 68.

[FAMILY PICTURE WITH OUR NOSEBUBBLES GOES UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREENS]



Here is my Mother Marcia and my three brothers (George, Glen and Erik) and Collins and me at Christmas 1984. Notice please that we are all proudly wearing our nosebubbles...this was the year Collins (you see him there with the bushy hair behind me – when I had hair!) received his welcome into the clan by getting a nosebubble of his own! Collins will tell you that it was that Christmas when he felt unconditionally accepted into our Alexander family...I mean getting a nosebubble of your own is the penultimate expression of belonging!

I want to tell you this morning the story of the last nosebubble my family has bestowed on someone. Some of you know that over recent years, I have been lucky enough to get to know a half-brother of mine – Dr. James Alexander...

[PICTURE OF DR. JAMES ALEXANDER WITH HIS BROTHERSCOTT IS PROJECTED UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREENS]



Dr. James Alexander with his brother Scott

...a leading psychologist and University professor from Salt Lake City whom I did not live with or know growing up. Jim was the only son of a very unhappy and short-lived first marriage my dad had just before World War II. Dad got divorced, went off to war in Europe and when he got home, never looked back. He married my mother and settled with her in Wisconsin where they started our family. For reasons I really don't fully understand, my Dad (although he supported Jim financially through college) never reached out to or saw Jim again...I guess he just couldn't handle the pain of that first failed marriage. In any case, although we knew Jim had become a successful psychologist and professor, none of us in the Alexander clan had ever met him.

Well, to make a long story short, after my Dad's death, I located Jim in Salt Lake City and reached out to him, and we slowly began to build a familial, "brotherly" relationship. Although Jim was always hurt by my Dad's inability to have a relationship with him...he has responded enthusiastically to our Alexander outreach, and over recent years, all my brothers have met Jim, and we now regularly see each other at family reunions and the like.

A couple of years ago, I was scheduled just before Thanksgiving to fly out to Salt Lake City to spend a few days with Jim and his wonderful wife Mary Beth. My brother George – who took over the family nosebubble manufacturing process from my now-departed Uncle Lloyd – asked if I would give Jim his Christmas gift, his very own Alexander nosebubble when I saw him, and of course I readily agreed! But George and I first had a problem...we had to come up with an appropriate name for the nosebubble. I very quickly realized the perfect name "The Runaway" because Jim had spent his whole professional life working with juvenile delinquents and their families and we all know how noses can "run away" with goo...so "The Runaway" was the perfect name for his nosebubble!

So, during my Salt Lake visit, Jim and his stepson and I had dinner with the UU minister and his wife at an elegant seafood restaurant the night before I was to preach at the downtown UU church. After we ordered, I told the table the long story about our Father's nosebubble collection...and all the ridiculous nosebubble lore from the family, and then solemnly presented Jim with his Christmas gift, neatly wrapped up in a jewelry box. He opened the package...marveled at his nosebubble...and read out loud the description we had drafted on "The Runaway." All of a sudden, tears...big, warm tears began pouring down his face...and he could not gain his composure for some time. He loved his nosebubble. I think the nosebubble symbolized for Jim some sort of final familial acceptance and love from us...and even from my long-lost father who had failed him.

I tell you this tender story from my own family to remind you what Christmas is – at its heart – all about. No, not nosebubbles...but love, family, and acceptance. Christmas is all about love, family and acceptance. The Christmas hearth reminds each of us that we have a place reserved just for us...right there...in front of the roaring fire.

Amen.

Bobby Kilgore - Christmas in Afghanistan

In January 2006 I was deployed to Afghanistan. As Christmas approached and the time to return home in January loomed, I knew that I was missing being home with my father for the holidays, and most of the young first-time-deployed soldiers would be missing home as well. I never realized how much I missed the festiveness of home during the holidays. The decorations in the stores, the holiday music on the radio... During the holidays it snowed a lot over there, I mean like a month straight it never seemed to stop. We had snowball fights.

[PICTURE OF G.I. AND SNOWMAN IS PROJECTED UP ON CHANCEL SCREENS]



We built a snowman just to remind us of home.

We had trees donated to the unit.

[PICTURE OF G.I. DECORATING TREE IS PROJECTED UP ON CHANCEL SCREENS]



So I decided to have a tree decorating party. I picked Sunday because that was the one day off a week for my unit. I got funding for decorations and small gifts a few months earlier. I had the dining facility fix cake and cookies and virgin eggnog for us as we are not allowed to drink alcohol except for our R&R in Qatar and then it's a two-beer-a-day limit – and we were in a combat zone and had to be ready to fight at a moment's notice.

I had Christmas CDs playing and told the soldiers "Let's get crazy and have fun!" Decorations and tinsel flew everywhere, even on each other!

I found a poem written by a Marine stationed in Okinawa, Japan. I read it as it truly captures how I felt serving our country during the holidays.

Twas the night before Christmas, he lived all alone,
In a one-bedroom house made of plaster and stone.
I had come down the chimney with presents to give
And to see just who in this home did live.

I looked all about – a strange sight I did see,
No tinsel, no presents, not even a tree.
No stocking by the fire, just boots filled with sand,
On the wall hung pictures of far distant lands.

With medals and badges, awards of all kind,
A sober thought came through my mind.
For this house was different, so dark and dreary,
I knew I had found the home of a soldier, once I could see clearly.

I heard stories about them, I had to see more.
So I walked down the hall and pushed open the door.
And there he lay sleeping – silent, alone,
Curled up on the floor in his one-bedroom home.

His face so gentle, his room in such disorder,
Not how I pictured a United States soldier.
Was this the hero of whom I'd just read?
Curled up in his poncho, a floor for his bed?

His head was clean shaven, his weathered face tan,
I soon understood this was more than a man.
For I realized the families that I saw that night
Owed their lives to these men who were willing to fight.

Soon 'round the world, the children would play,
And grownups would celebrate on a bright Christmas day.
They all enjoyed freedom each month of the year,
Because of soldiers like this one lying here.

I couldn't help wonder how many lay alone
On a cold Christmas Eve in a land far from home.
Just the very thought brought a tear to my eye,
I dropped to my knees and started to cry.

The soldier awakened and I heard a rough voice,
"Santa don't cry, this life is my choice;
I fight for freedom, I don't ask for more,
My life is my God, my country, my Corps."

With that he rolled over and drifted off into sleep,
I couldn't control it, I continued to weep.
I watched him for hours, so silent and still,
I noticed he shivered from the cold night's chill.

So I took off my jacket, the one made of red,
And I covered this Soldier from his toes to his head.
And I put on his T-shirt of gray and black,

With an eagle and an Army patch embroidered on back.

And although it barely fit me, I began to swell with pride,
And for a shining moment, I was United States Army deep inside.
I didn't want to leave him on that cold dark night,
This guardian of honor so willing to fight.

Then the soldier rolled over, whispered with a voice so clean and pure,
"Carry on, Santa, it's Christmas Day, all is secure."
One look at my watch, and I knew he was right,
Merry Christmas, my friend, and to all a good night!

We all cheered after the poem was read. HOOAH!!! United States Army!!! Everyone from the commander to the lowest enlisted soldier was there. It was festive, light and full of holiday cheer!!! We sang carols and I felt so happy inside.

I felt as if I was home and these soldiers were my family and we had sooo much fun. We did the pick-a-present or steal-a-present. We had so much fun and we all loved the small wrapped presents that we had. I felt full of holiday cheer. I called my dad later and told him how much fun I had experienced although I missed being home with him.

MORE CHRISTMAS MUSIC AND READINGS FILLED THE REST OF THE SERVICE