

HolidayGreetings.com

By Brenda Steffen

I don't do much for the holidays. I string up a few lights, more for a cosiness factor in the cold than anything else. And I have a single star I put in my window every year.

I also bake a few batches of gingerbread cookies and give some to the neighbours and to my high-school girlfriends at our annual holiday breakfast. My husband, who is a sailor, is gone every other Christmas. Last year, I spent the day talking with him on Skype, along with friends in Germany and Egypt, and eating the rest of those gingerbread cookies. I probably took a nap in between. All in all, I'm pretty low key as far as any holiday goes. Except for one thing.

Most of my friends tell me that mailing Christmas cards is a chore, and expensive, and something they put off until the last minute. But I love it.

I remember, as a child, getting pen pal letters from far away. Some pen pals I had met, through church or summer camp, but others I wrote to for school projects or in response to their ads in magazines asking for pen pals. I had my own little desk where I wrote about my life as a 10-year-old. Once I mailed the letters, I eagerly awaited replies.

How thrilling to know that somewhere on the planet, someone else eagerly waited to hear news from me. Me!

Checking the mail was (and admittedly, it still is) one of my favourite parts of the day. Sometimes there was a photo of a pen pal in one of the letters, or even some kind of trinket. Before the Internet made it so easy to share our every obscure thought and fuzzy photo, we kids measured our 'friend lists'

by the stack of wallet-sized pics we had traded with one another.

From our house to the mailbox was a good walk, and some days it proved fruitless except for the exercise. Sometimes my mom would get the mail and come back and joke that nobody loved us because there were only bills in the mail.

Even now, my husband says the same thing with a laugh when there

is nothing good in the mail. With a mailbox full of bills, rejection letters from various publishers, and flyers with special offers that aren't so special after they've sent the fifth one, good news is hard to come by.

There is something so refreshing about opening an envelope with a foreign postmark and my name handwritten on it, and reading holiday cheer—or indeed anytime-of-year-cheer—from friends far away.

Proverbs 25:25 says: 'Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land'.

The Message paraphrase says it like this: 'Like a cool drink of water when you're worn out and weary is a letter from a long-lost friend'.

I don't know about you, but I know a lot of worn out and thirsty people out there. Sure, the cost of stamps has gone up. And most greeting card companies charge a small

fortune to say something that you can just as easily email or post to 400 plus friends at the same time on Facebook. But really, how special does it make you feel when you get a mass message from someone that essentially says: 'You're a dear friend...but you are not worth 70 cents to me.'?

I have been guilty, more than once, of crossing someone's name off my Christmas card list because they haven't reciprocated for a few

years. I might have to rethink that policy, though. Maybe they're the very people who need to hear some good news, even if it's simply news that someone, somewhere, is actually thinking of them.

Perhaps it's time to add a few people to the list instead of crossing some off. Won't you join me? And while we're at it, let's not stop at just at the holidays. We can send a note to our friend's child at summer camp. We can mail a letter to a school friend we haven't seen in 20 years. We can put a family photo in a real card for the widow at church who always gives us a hug and says we remind her of her granddaughter on the other side of the country. It might be exactly what they've been waiting for in their own mailbox.

May we all receive a little good news from both far and near this holiday season!

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