

By Jim Langham

Add another special Thanksgiving to memories I eluded to in last week's column. It was spent in Chicago with our daughter, Sandi. Our other daughter, Julie, took the train out of Waterloo and joined us on Thanksgiving morning. Then Sunday, we joined up with son, Jason, and granddaughter, Kirsten.

Thankful? What more can you say when you hear those 22-month-old feet come running across the floor and that little voice yelling, "Papa, moo moo?"

But there was another special moment that was an integral part of this Thanksgiving. It was a young man who was a high school junior born with spina bifida. He has spent his entire life either riding in a wheelchair or, on rare occasion, walking with crutches.

In our special chat, he told me that he knows nothing else than the chair; he can only imagine what it is to walk from one room to the other, but shares the same feelings of love, hope, aspiration and desires that the rest of us do.

So committed is he to enjoying a "normal way of life" that he is one of the best basketball players on a wheel chair team in the Fort Wayne area. He loves the friendships, enjoys playing with a happy spirit and is glad he doesn't have to worry about all of the pressures of "regular" high school sports.

In fact, his "thankfulness" expressions are quite a bit different than many people. Some have sad roots, but in his cheerful attitude, he has managed to turn them into character-builders.

For example, when people walk in front of him going in to stores, and then let the door slam in his face, he is thankful for the ones that come along behind and think to open the door, or he

purposes within himself that he is always going to try to assist people in any way that he can within his power.

When people cut him off at the cash register line and pretend like he's not there, he is thankful for the virtue of patience that he is being taught in the midst of the frustration.

At times he asks, "Why," concerning the selfishness of others around him, but most times he backs off and utilizes his "extra moments" as a time for prayer or to think about other things that he needs to do.

When it comes to genuine thanksgiving expressions, Randall is thankful for his family, friends, the opportunity to attend public school, job opportunities for the future and the insights that God gives him into understanding the life around him.

That special visit reminded me of a list of names I hadn't thought of for years, but it also reminded me to be thankful for a deep concern for those who are hurting that was instilled in me when my parents helped assist a neighbor in caring for an autistic neighbor man when their family needed assistance.

So, as I reflected over my childhood in elementary school, I thought of Sharon, who had been afflicted with polio, she limped, carried one arm, and was often pushed down or pushed off the merry-go-round on the playground.

I thought of my good friend, Dan, one of my closest friends, who had also suffered with polio and walked with braces. I used to play basketball in his hay mow, spend the night with him, and marvel at his sharp shooting skills and tremendous sense of humor.

I always felt for Doris, whose father was a severe alcoholic and abused both her and her mother at home. In all honesty, it didn't bother me to take ridicule from other kids on the bus, because I sat with her and visited with her.

More Thanksgiving memories

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I ran into her a few weeks ago; she visited with Joyce and I. Tears welled in my eyes as she told Joyce how she never forgot that I talked to her and was her friend. Of course, my grandmother was the best to her mother; we used to walk to their house together to take things to them and listen to horror stories of their treatment.

I know it's a strange train of thought for a, "Thanksgiving, part II, column," but somehow, those names united with Randall's attitude made me thankful for those who have endured and developed character that I pray I might have some day. Somehow, that all adds up as something to be sought after and thankful for at this time of the year.

In fact, again I remember the words of the child born in the manger who said, "Those who care for these care for me."