

I know that Christmas has come and gone over a month ago, but the weather has been so rotten lately that I thought I would try to stir up a little Christmas warmth in February.

When I first sat down to write this column, it was December 30<sup>th</sup>, and I was filled with anticipation. Not the anticipation of writing, although I do enjoy it, but the anticipation of our family being together for the first time in months. Emily and her fiancé Pete live in Lawrence, KS. Katie lives in San Jose, CA and Jenni is normally away at the University of Iowa. Both Ted and Ben were home as usual. Everyone was coming home. It was going to be a houseful, and I was excited. That night we celebrated our family Christmas, even though the date wasn't the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup>.

Katie and her boyfriend both had to work over Christmas, but were able to make it several days later. Emily and Pete decided to work their schedule so that they could be with Pete's family over Christmas and be with us when everyone was available. Jenni even got off of work. Everyone made concessions and everyone made it a priority to make this a family event. We even included Emily and Pete's two dogs. Of all the kids, Katie seemed to be the most excited. Coming home is all she talked about for quite a while. That could be because she lives the farthest away, and therefore is unable to get home as often.

The plan that night was to pick up Katie at the airport around 9:35, load up the luggage in the minivan and travel back to Ankeny when Christmas will begin. Presents will be exchanged, smiles and laughter will be shared and it will be good to have everyone together, if only for a few days. Except that Katie's flight didn't land until after 10:00. Christmas didn't begin until after 11:00, and I finally got to bed around 2:30.

Up until this year we were comfortable in our Christmas routine, the same routine we established years ago. A very nice meal for Christmas Eve, open one present per person, go to mass then come home and open the rest of our gifts to each other. That night Santa would come and the kids would get up early to see if they got what they really wanted for Christmas. In the afternoon we would pack up the minivan and head to Sioux City for the Karpuk family Christmas.

This year was different. At times I think it was better because we waited until after Christmas for our family celebration. Other times I was sad that we were not able to follow tradition.

The 2008 and 2009 economy has caused a lot of businesses to change what they had traditionally done to turn a profit. Things were different, profits were a lot harder to find. As owners and managers of small businesses, we had to make changes just to survive. Practices that we thought were necessary had suddenly become a luxury. It was hard, and it was sad because we were not able to follow traditionally profitable methods.

But we changed and survived, made stronger by the changes. So today I ask, what changes did you make that worked? Which ones didn't work? One of the things that a lot of businesses didn't have that made times tougher was something called institutional memory. People in your company that remember what made the hard times hard, and how to best stay clear of trouble. Remember 2008 and 2009.

I am not sure what the expanded Friedman clan will be doing for Christmas next year. The only thing I do know is that it is likely to be different than our past traditions. What is exciting is that we now get to make new traditions, remembering the things that brought us together as a family. Memories that can keep us warm through a long, cold winter.

*Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ankeny.*