

We all have a tendency to take things for granted. It is amazing to me how quickly providing something new goes from a wonderful surprise to an expectation that better be provided in the future. But beyond this, we all get used to our experience to the point that we just don't understand that others don't have the same experience. We are not being selfish or spoiled, at least not knowingly. We just never experienced life a different way before.

I just received a wonderful phone call from my oldest daughter, Abrielle. She is on her own now, living and working in Wichita. Besides working with underprivileged children as is her job at Child Start (part of the Federal Head Start grant), she also volunteers time with Big Brothers/Big Sisters. This is a chance to connect with a child that could greatly benefit from a positive influence from an older person in their lives. She and her "little sister" have enjoyed their time together, having adventures both big and small.

A few days ago she called home with an unexpected message. Jen and I get calls from her often, to tell us about her day, or to ask how to fix something. I think I speak to her more now that she moved away than I ever did when she slept down the hall from me. So calls are frequent, but this call was special.

She said, "I just called to thank you both for such an amazing childhood that you gave me." "Wow, that is sweet, Honey. Thank you! What brought this on?" my wife asked. Here's what she said.

She had decided to take her "little sister" to see the Christmas lights in the area then back to her place to make some sugar cookies. Her "Little," as she calls her, was utterly amazed at the drive through lights. Then she had a ball making Christmas cookies with Abrielle. She had never done either these things before. It was an exciting adventure for her. Such holiday traditions are just not part of her family experience. Of course I know there are resources needed too in order to have such experiences, which may not be available to her Little.

Abrielle felt great providing this small adventure for her Little. But, she then recognized that such experiences don't happen by accident. Someone has to make the effort to create them. She realized that Jen and I had worked hard to make a great Christmas for her and her sister. And she wanted to call and thank us for it. Did I tear up? I'll let you guess.

She is getting married soon and has already talked about starting her own family someday. I told her, "Christmas is as magical for your family as you make it. But you have to make it." My mom is a huge Christmas fan, starting her shopping in July. There are traditional treats and the tree goes up as soon as possible. We always put lights up on our house, a tradition that seems to be waning, but something I still very much enjoy. Most of mom's traditions I have carried on with my family and I now expect that Abrielle will carry on with hers. But it does take effort.

So much pleasure in life comes from what you make it. The same thing is true from a college experience.

At NCCC our employees, faculty and staff alike, work hard to provide excellent education of course, but beyond that we provide wonderful experiences for students too. We have 30+ clubs and activities for students to join that range from educational program based, like the Student Nursing Association, to fun-oriented clubs such as the board game club. There are also a wide range of student government activities and events in the residence halls for those students.

We have so many events for students and the community to take advantage of such as concerts, art shows, honors posters, and plays. The college has a long list of sporting events for students and the public alike all free of charge to attend.

We want students to get the most of their college experience. Why? Studies show that students who are active in clubs and activities do better in class and are retained at a higher rate. They are, in fact, more likely to stay at college and complete their degrees. So while these clubs cost money, they pay off in students who stay and finish what they started.

We call all of this co-curricular learning. It's the things learned outside the classroom through all of these wonderful experiences that go beyond just the outcomes in the courses. It truly enriches our students. To encourage more students to be active in co-curricular learning we even started a new award, the Panther Claw. If a student completes all aspects of co-curricular learning they receive a special award and a medal to wear at graduation!

Much like Christmas, college is as memorable and as magical as you make it. But it does require a good deal of effort on both the person who creates the experience and on the person who experiences it. As I often tell our freshmen, college is like a bank account – you'll get out of it everything you put in it, with interest. But you got to get out and experience it.

Jen and I were very touched by that phone call from Abrielle to thank us for her childhood. Of course, we were having just as much fun as she was experiencing it through her eyes. The same is true at NCCC. We have just as much fun as the students do (well, most of the time) putting on these clubs and activities. Our goal is that beyond certificate and degree attainment every student at the college has a wonderful experience, one that they will never forget.

So from all of us at NCCC, I hope you have a magical and wonderful holiday season! Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays from the Inbody family!

If you have any questions about this article or anything else contact me at binbody@neosho.edu.