

Christian businessman shares an abundance of blessings



Pat Gerbrandt
ChristianWeek Columnist

SENIOR FOCUS

We've been blessed." The strength of Walter Loewen's conviction is unmistakable, though he speaks quietly. God has entrusted Walter and his wife with financial gain, but monetary values do not define them.

Walter grew up in Winnipeg's inner city, knowing virtually nothing of economic advantages. He had no opportunity to go to university. Walter joined the family's music store business and hard work eventually led to greater fiscal stability. As an adult, he ventured into other opportunities too, and saw God prospering his careful investments. He has not forgotten his humble beginnings.

Walter was grateful for the things he learned. He saw a vibrant marriage modeled by his parents. His father was dedicated to his family, and treated Walter's mother like a queen. His wife Elly also grew up knowing blessings not associated with money. She and her seven siblings had family

stability, even though they moved many times due to their father's pastoral assignments.

Walter met Elly at her home church, where he occasionally attended with a friend on Sunday evenings. They now enjoy fellowship at East Braintree Community Church, and their church's Bible study program has become a special part of their lives.

The Loewens delight in the natural beauty of eastern Manitoba. Their respect for God and for the diversity of the province's vast woodlands and marshes led them to have a conservation easement applied to one of their properties.

Walter and Elly were not anxious to sell their home, even though many offered to purchase the property. They were concerned that the land be used as God intended. When Living Bible Explorers asked Walter about land, he recognized an opportunity.

"We like to do something significant. That has to be understood—significance is relative to person's background." He explains, "I had never, ever been able to go to camp. I only dreamt of it." It was easy for him and his wife to answer LBE's request.

"Now in my later years it is a thrill to provide some land, and a



Photo courtesy of Walter and Elly Loewen

blessing to see the results. When Eleanor and I visited [the Living Bible Explorers camp] a few months ago, it was heartwarming to see children enjoying the experience. Eleanor is the inspiration for all the things we've been involved in, especially in regard to charitable things. She's always been the first to say, 'Give it away.'"

As exciting as it is for Walter and Eleanor to see God blessing their property dealings, that pales in comparison to more personal experiences of His goodness.

"I'm 83 and very active. I still like to do something significant as the Lord provides health and strength."

Walter's business interests continue, and he applauds those who have helped him in his quest to handle resources with integrity. While his concern for good

management continues, he has another passion.

Walter currently serves as "a full-time caregiver" for Elly, providing care for the "vibrant woman" who he calls his "support and inspiration." Elly is able to do very little now due to health conditions.

"These have been some of the most significant times of our life. I've drawn so close to her, closer than I ever could have imagined."

They are more in love than ever, Walter says. His eyes glow as he recounts his gratitude to God for a harmonious marriage of 61 years. Although their lifestyle has changed significantly, Walter is clear about his priorities.

"I have many things to do but those things take second place. It's an absolute privilege to care for my wife."

Say "Yes" to inspiring others

Thomas Froese
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We know little about them, these grandparents—if they came to babysit on Friday nights or if they maybe played checkers with the curly-haired, laughing boy while he grew in wisdom and stature.

But it is that time of year for unusual questions, when strange stars and angels appear, when the word, even for a moment, becomes Yes.

"Yes, here I am. May it be done to me as you will," is what Mary said. And she had to get it from somewhere.

Now she may have been the sort of girl who would have been a saint anyway, that type simply destined for it all. But maybe there's more to the story, as there often is when earth and heaven meet, so we can't really tell where one begins and the other ends.

Tradition tells us Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, a long-time barren couple, later dedicated their miracle child, Mary, to service in the temple. There she was apparently educated before, at 14, she married the much older Joseph.

Some believers are told not to think much about this: texts outside the accepted canon, or anything diminishing Jesus' grand entrance which, with today's air-brushed images, we get largely wrong anyway.

But whatever we do or don't know about this family, it seems to me that if Mary was taught one thing, which she later got through to her unusual son, it was this divine Yes. Yes, you can do it. Yes, don't worry what anyone thinks. Yes, trust and obey. Yes, hold on tight.

This, at the end of this 2012th Year of our Lord; a year when certain girls said yes: from 16-year-old Ye Shiwen who swam into Olympic record books, to 14-year-

old Annaleise Carr who swam Lake Ontario, to 15-year-old Malala Yousufzai who swam in a pool of blood after she had the pluck to say yes to girls' education.

The story of Malala, the Pakistani girl shot in the head by the Taliban for her public insistence that girls have the right to schooling, has been especially moving in both the developing world and rich world.

And as I watched the news of her father smile and cry and give thanks at her bedside, I couldn't help but wonder of his own influence: maybe the regrets all parents have, but also the backlash, and how darkness is often pushed back after an attack on an innocent.

In this case the darkness is revealed in a recent global report that shows one in four girls—75 million Marys, so-to-speak—are not in school. I'm reminded even my own daughter, Hannah, a gregarious Ugandan we've adopted, could have easily had a different

life, up with the sun to fetch wood and water and help in other ways more akin to ancient times.

The point is not just about math and spelling, but giving all girls a shot at a life with some amount of inspiration and aspiration and dignity and capacity to hear that Yes.

Canadian school girls think of other things often seen as more frivolous. Yet their world is no less real and they are no less in need of that divine word.

This is the holy season's message. God is our parent, our Emmanuel, with us, beside us, whispering in our ear—Yes, Yes, Yes. We too are parents, or parents-to-be, or something else no less important, divinely placed in one sort of family or another, influencing this child or that one.

Christmas asks, what kind of influence is it?

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