Written by Pastor Dan Eaton Monday, December 24, 2012 9:44 AM - Last Updated Monday, December 24, 2012 10:40 AM

Every Christmas is special, but some are more memorable than others. One of my favorite Christmases occurred 34 years ago. That was the year of the "Back Yard Christmas Day Pro Bowl."

Christmas morning was a wonderful one as Santa had been especially good to us. Under the Christmas tree our three kids had discovered presents from mommy and daddy as well as from Old Saint Nick. Chrissy's favorite gift was a toy kitchen set and Mike and John were especially excited about the football uniforms they received. It wasn't long before our nephew, Jerry, (who was like our third son) arrived to show the boys the football outfit he received.



The boys quickly got dressed in their football pants, jerseys, shoes and helmets while I got our old Super 8 movie camera and Kodak snapshot camera ready.

Those were the Days - The Back Yard Christmas Day Pro Bowl

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The boys opened the sliding glass door that led from our dining area to the wooden deck and went into the back yard. They were surprised and pleased to see that standing in front of our old oak tree was a red and white candy striped goal post that I had put in place early that morning.

It was a great day for football! The back yard was partially covered with snow. The temperature was warming up and the melting snow made the field slippery enough that you could have fun falling and sliding after making a tackle or attempting one.

Each year, the National Football League chooses the best players from different teams to play in the NFL Pro Bowl. Since each of the boys were wearing different football outfits, we decided we would call it our version of the Pro Bowl. I had the boys, (which included our next door neighbor, Ronny, who had showed up to play) line up and announced them as they ran out to the 50-yard line.

"And now coming onto the field wearing number 32 from the Pittsburgh Steelers is Michael Eaton. Next, wearing number 11 from the Los Angeles Rams is Jerry Dunn. And now here comes number 7 from the Baltimore Colts, Johnny Eaton. And finally, here is Ronny Moncrieff from the team next door." (Ronnie's football outfit was a generic one: not from a specific team).

We had so much fun watching the boys play. I can still remember it like it just happened a few weeks ago. Mike, 10, fakes out Ronny, 9, and scampers by him to score another touchdown. Jerry, 9, drops back to pass and Johnny, 7, keeps chasing him around trying to make a sack. The video camera recorded the highlights of the game which included Johnny kicking an extra point. "And the kick is good as it splits the center of the goal post!" Some days and some Christmases are better than others but each is a gift from God. That day and that Christmas was an unforgettable one.

This year will be a difficult one for many people including the families from Newtown, Connecticut. I pray for them and hope that God, as well as the family and friends they have, will cover them with much love. As for my sweetheart, Janie, and I, we're looking forward to another special Christmas. We'll hug our kids and grandkids and other loved ones a little tighter this year.

We are so grateful that God loves us so much that He gave us His Son. Jesus came to give us

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hope, to give us abundant life, and to give us the best gift of all: salvation and eternal life!

Until next time... "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas."