

A FAMILY CHRISTMAS

When all of your children are home for Christmas, it is sure to be a memorable occasion. The tree, cut fresh in the back yard, was huge and I had a lot of help and advice decorating it. The crib under the tree, lit by a star, was a focal point and the three kings, with their retinue, were approaching far to the side. Each child had made or purchased inexpensive gifts for each of the other siblings. Needless to say, the gift area was full and colorful.

On Christmas eve, after a festive supper, Santa with his white beard and red coat (a rotund neighbor) appeared with candy. With him was Rudolph (a daughter with long braids fashioned into antlers and a very red nose). Then the doorbell rang. On the porch stood a man in a robe and on the sidewalk was a very "pillow-pregnant" lady on a donkey (a son had volunteered to be the donkey!). They asked if they could have a room for the night. Since our motto was "There's always room for one more at our house", we invited them in. When all were seated and quiet, we started the story of the first Christmas, each adding a little part of it that they remembered. Then, some of the children played guitars and we sang hymns and Christmas songs. Next, the gifts were distributed among much hubbub, laughter and comments.

For the finale, we sang Silent Night. Then, those who could stay awake attended Midnight Mass while the others nibbled on goodies and then went to bed. When those who had been to Mass come home, they snacked and visited until 3 A.M. In the morning, they slept late while the others attended Mass. The rest of the day was spent cleaning up the wrapping paper, munching, playing games with the little ones and much visiting and then hugs and good-byes for those who had to return to the dorms.

It was a Christmas that will always be remembered and treasured.

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You wondered one day what people got for presents thirty or fifty years ago. So I asked my mother, who is 70, and she said they didn't give or get presents in her family. At Christmas they had a tree trimmed with apples and stick candies and pictures of angels, stars, etc. They had frosted cookies and a small amount of candy. Relatives visited and someone played piano or organ and everyone sang.

I remember the Christmas when I was eight and we were in the midst of a depression--the only one I can remember in any detail. At any rate, it will give some idea how times have changed from generation to generation.

CHRISTMAS PAST

The presence of Christmases past comes back to me when I am asked, "Mom, what did you get for Christmas when you were little like me? What did you find under the tree?"

"Well, now, let's see."

"First of all, the tree was green--and it wasn't seen--until that NIGHT when 'Santa' trimmed it, with Mother's help, behind the parlor doors locked tight."

In happy anticipation, 'round the table we sat--or peeked through the keyhole or under the door, trying to guess at the unknown things that Santa had in store.

At last the waiting was over--the key turned in the lock--and Mother, smiling at her flock, said "Come." AND WE DID!

To the table, lit with a candle, we ran--and on it were Mother's best plates, filled with such goodies--things we seldom ate. An orange--the first I'd ever seen--and a polished red apple, perfect and gleaming. Cookies like stars and trees and bears, and nuts and candies clustered there.

But only for a moment did we pause, with our oohs and aahs--for in the parlor behind those doors was the most wondrous of all sights--the Christmas tree, shining bright.

With tinsel angels and colored balls, and strands that glittered as they rose and fell 'tween the branches. Cherries on wires and stick candy things hung everywhere mid the popcorn strings.

Up on the tip, a shining star reflected the flames of the candles. We could only stand and stare.

Then, under the tree we spied the gifts--I remember to this day--the doll bed for my sister and a wonderful doll for me. Why it

must have been 12 inches tall and could close its eyes and sleep. For the very first time in my eight-year old life, I had my very own doll to keep.

Besides that special something for each, other gifts were there--sweaters or long warm stockings and mittens--for each one a pair. Come to think of it, I didn't see any presents for Mom and Dad. Our happy faces were all they had.

Christmas was for kids, you see!

Well, we can't go back, for better or worse, to the days that used to be. The Christmas pageant now has a different cast, But no glitter of an aluminum tree can dim the glow of my memories of the presents of the Christmases past!