

Original - too many words

CHRISTMAS 1970

With a family of eleven children, any holiday is a fun event but the one I remember most fondly is Christmas, 1970. Each year, in November, I got to choose, from our double row "windbreak", the Yule tree for the holiday season. That year, I chose one that had five tips instead of the usual one. The trees were twenty-plus years old, so my husband, Hugo, climbed up a tall ladder and cut off the top seven feet or so. The trees then gradually grow a new tip from an upper branch.

When we set up the tree on the 24th of December, the five tips spread out about two feet in five different directions, allowing me to show off my antique ornaments safely from tempted little fingers. The spreading tree and many gifts (all exchanged with each other) took up nearly one-fourth of the living room.

With the table in the dining room extended to maximum, we had a festive supper, after which we moved chairs, and bodies, to the living room for "the program". After achieving relative quiet, Dad or Mom would start the familiar first Christmas story, and each child would add something they knew to it.

While the younger ones looked hopefully at the colorful gifts under the tree, Ann announced that the gang had planned a little surprise for us--they were going to do a reenactment of that first Christmas, the birthday of Jesus! After a brief wait and some giggling from our bedroom, the program began. "Joseph" and "Mary", obviously pregnant, had sneaked out the back door and came in the front one. Mary was riding on her brother, Bill's back--he had been 'conscripted' into being a donkey!

When Joseph rapped on the closet door, Ed opened it and said, "Sorry, we're all filled up." Seeing Mary's condition and her disappointed look, he added, "But there's a stable out back--it will be warm at least."

Meanwhile, Kathy had taped a red ball onto her nose and braided her waist-length hair onto a stiff wire. She fastened the braids upright to depict antlers. She was Rudolph, though we didn't quite know how a reindeer fitted into the story!

Joseph and Mary then found refuge in an imagined stable and a baby (doll) miraculously appeared from her voluminous gown, fully clad in swaddling clothes, and was laid to rest in the manger (doll bed). Soon a couple shepherds (in dad's bathrobes) came, carrying stuffed sheep and knelt at the manger. Next, two little angels in white, with rather floppy wings, came in. They led us all in "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" and finally, in our traditional ending of our usual Christmas programs, "Silent Night."

The program was quite funny but very meaningful for all of us.

After the program, the gift sharing began, starting with the younger ones who get restless and tire easily. Our oldest daughter had set up a tape player (I wish now we had had a video camera) to record the evening for our eldest who was not able to be there. Linda, about age 4, happened to be seated near the recorder, and, as each gift was opened, she said, "WOW" clearly which dominated on the tape along with other comments and a lot of background noise. I don't know how much Jim could decode. He must have missed being with us.

There have been many other holiday gatherings over the years, but this one is remembered often for the joy it brings to a mother's heart.

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