

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES AT THE WOBURN SENIOR CENTER

by Marie Coady

Since September, it has been my pleasure to be working with some truly wonderful people at the Woburn Senior Center. For these last few months, they have been working on writing their life stories. December's assignment was to write a short account of their most memorable Christmas. Here are the results of that assignment.

Frances Capuzzo's parents died when she and her 9 brothers and sisters were still very young, so there was a good reason she clung to the belief that there was indeed a Santa Claus.

“When I was 9, I still believed in Santa Claus. I can still see myself walking down the street, arguing with my chum. She insisted that there wasn't truly a Santa. Well, I knew there was. My parents died very young, and we were 10 children left all alone. My oldest 2 sisters quit high school to bring us up. How could they possibly put up a tree, then put gifts under it? Maybe there wasn't a Santa theoretically, but we sure had a spiritual one.”

When Clara Jane Hook lost her husband, she never thought she'd meet anyone again with whom she could share her life. But one special Christmas Eve, Ed Hook came along and proved there really is a Santa Claus.

"Today my name is Clara Jane Hook, but I used to be Clara Jane Mahtesian. I was a widow of five years when I met Edward Hook at a Parents Without Partners dance, and we dated twice just before Christmas.

“He called to say he'd like to spend Christmas with me, but I informed him I had a very bad cold and hadn't planned on doing anything but sit home alone in abject misery.

“However, he insisted on coming all the way from Holliston, although I warned him he'd be exposed to some pretty rotten germs.

“My daughter and son, ages 16 and 14, were next door at their friend's home when suddenly he was at my front door, tall and thin with a big smile and carrying a small wrapped present and a bottle of wine. The first thing he did was light the fireplace, but because the damper was not where he was accustomed to seeing it, the living room filled with smoke until he corrected it.

“The kids had come home in the meantime and soon all three of them were in the kitchen making cocoa (saving the wine for later) and cutting some cake while I sat, wrapped in a blanket in front of the fireplace.

“That act of real kindness from this man diminished my cold misery that afternoon and made it a memorable Christmas for us all. And No he didn't catch my cold!”

Neeless to say, Clara married Ed Hook and lived happily ever after.

Claire Krause lives on Menchin Hill on the West Side of Woburn where her ancestors had a family farm and many family traditions. Today, Claire keeps those traditions alive.

“Family jokes, stockings, cookies, family traditions--old and new--are some of the things that come to mind at Christmastime.

“When my mother was young the children didn't see the Christmas tree until Christmas morning. They believed that Santa Claus brought the tree to the house and doctorated it on Christmas Eve when he left the presents.

“When my brothers and sisters and I were young, mother carried on this tradition. The tree, with the presents underneath, were on the sun porch, and the glass door that opened onto the sun porch was covered with blankets that were taken down when the door opened on Christmas morning.

“My sister and her family have always come down from Maine to have Christmas with us. When our kids were older we started this tradition of drawing names and filling that person's Christmas socking. Everyone was included. It also was important to have jokes, especially a joke that fit the person whose name you had drawn, and it was important to keep that person's name a secret.

“We'd go to Christmas Eve church service, come home and have a snack. Then everyone would sit around waiting for everyone else to go to bed so they could fill the stocking of the person they had drawn. Sometimes I've gone to bed, set the alarm and got up to fill the stocking in the wee hours of the morning. We'd have breakfast and then check our stockings. We had such fun opening the stocking and laughing at all the jokes. We just enjoyed it all.

“We had always kidded Aunt Jean about her really bad handwriting. One year we really interpreted her Wish List to say she wanted a basketball and hoop, which we gave her. For some reason she seemed surprised.

“My mother and I would get together a few days before Christmas and bake breads and cookies. We would make up baskets and give homemade gifts to family and friends.

“Now that my mother is gone, our daughter, Diane, comes over, and we bake 5 different kinds of cookies together to carry on the tradition, but chocolate chip seems to be the favorite of everyone! For the past few years our grandson, Andrew, comes over that day and helps out too. He loves to mix the batter and take a taste to see if it's okay. It has become a fun day as well as a productive one.

“There was one special year that mother planned and Open House for family and friends on Christmas Eve. A blizzard started in the afternoon and we were snowed in for Christmas several days. It was so beautiful up here on Menchin Hill on the West Side. It just got so nice and quiet. It was a great Christmas to remember.”

Phyllis McEwen remembers a very special Christmas in Canada when her son Kip was only 5-years old. She calls it “The Homecoming”.

“Christmas in Canada is a joyous and spiritual occasion when families gather together. On Christmas eve, the air is crisp and street lights sparkle amidst the falling snow. It's my first visit to Canada in years, and my son Kip and I are singing Christmas Carols, feeling the snow crunch under our feet and stopping to watch the colorful Northern Lights dancing in the sky. What a sight for a little boy who has never seen such a phenomenon before. “Oh Mummie. It's beautiful, he says. “Is Santa up there?”

“The Christmas party at Aunt Annie's is a family tradition. Everybody brings special goodies. The Christmas tree is decorated with popcorn and beautiful handmade ornaments and tree lights reflect outside on the snow, creating a festive atmosphere that is enjoyed by all. Christmas goodies are spread out on the table, and the fireplace casts a warm glow on everyone's face, adding a cozy atmosphere that is enjoyed by all. The children are busy roasting chestnuts on an open fire and having fun shaking their gifts hoping to catch a peek inside.

“After dinner we opened our presents and sang around the piano. The next morning, gifts and food were boxed for needy people. This is called “Boxing Day”, an English tradition. The older people deliver the boxes of food while the children enjoy sliding on the snow and helping Kip to make a snowman. Older children skate on the pond, playing “crack the whip” and the boys light a bonfire to keep warm. This was all new and exciting for Kip.

“These are my memories of Canada that I will always cherish.”

Merry Christmas everyone!!!!

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