

Sunday, December 25, 2005
Christmas Day
Stories from Christmases Past
Enjoy!

Christmas 1913 in Doniphan, Missouri
Story shared by Ruth Paulling

When I was a little girl in Doniphan, there were only about 1500 people living there, and eight of them were in my immediate family. My mother and father had six children, but we had lots of aunts and uncles and cousins living there too. I still have a cousin who lives in Doniphan.

Every Christmas my father – who was also the first county superintendent of the schools -- dressed as Santa. Santa would fill our socks with nuts and candy and fruit, and we would each receive one main present.

My favorite Christmas was when I was five or six and I received a doll with eyes that opened and closed. She had curly blonde hair and was wearing a blue dress, and blue was my favorite color. It was a wonderful Christmas.

But to tell you the truth, I am still having wonderful Christmases. I now have two children, 5 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. I've had such a wonderful life. I think I've had more Christmases than anyone else in our church family.

Christmas 1937 in Hickman, Kentucky
Story shared by Virginia Bruch

Daddy was a loving person. He had his own business in Hickman, Kentucky – a “men’s furnishings” store called Sullivan Brothers. They sold men’s clothing. He was a good and wise salesman. But during the Depression, business was not good. And Daddy was so generous. He never turned anybody down who came to him for help.

I remember a man came to the store and told Daddy that his son didn’t have a suit to wear for graduation. And Daddy took him into the back and found a suit for the man’s son. Someone would come in and need a shirt. And Daddy would give him a shirt.

He eventually lost his business. He sold suits from a mail order place, but it didn’t happen very often. We lived with my grandparents and Daddy grew vegetables, so we always had good vegetables to eat.

I had always loved books. *Don't you love the way they take you away to a different time and place?* One Christmas, when I was sixteen years old, I wanted the book *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo, but of course Mother and Daddy couldn't afford to give us anything. I told Daddy that I really wanted that book. And I don't know how he did it, but he pulled together enough money for me to have it. He was so generous and so sweet.

I didn't know it, but that would be our last Christmas together. But I remember Daddy as a very loving person. He would have given me anything.

Christmas 1944 on Espritu Santo, New Hebrides By Don Quigg

On Christmas '44, we were on Espritu Santo, New Hebrides. Our division had been sent there to reform after being pretty well shot up on Saipan. That was a beautiful island that had been used by the U. S. Air force during the Guadal canal campaign. A large part of the island was covered by coco nut plantations. However, a part of the island was still occupied by cannibals.

We had to build a camp from scratch. Our Artillery was fortunate to have a dynamic Protestant chaplain, Joe Matthews, a Methodist minister. Joe was instrumental in obtaining materials with which we built a chapel. The chapel included a choir loft and from somewhere we obtained a foot pedal pump organ.

Joe put together a nice Christmas service. We had a male chorus of about 20 voices and I was privileged to be the soloist, singing "God Bless Ye Merry Gentlemen." Somewhere, I have a copy of the service bulletin. However, at the present time I have been unable to find it.

I cannot put into words what that service meant to a group of men that had been away from their families and friends for a prolonged period of time and who could not see the end of the war occurring in the foreseeable future.

Christmas 1986 in Schaghticoke, N.Y. By Jan Edmiston

Schaghticoke, New York was a village of 700 people close to the Vermont and Massachusetts borders when I lived there as a new pastor in the mid-80s. In December of 1986, I was newly engaged to Fred, and Christmas was going to be especially wonderful that year. Everything was funnier, everything was more meaningful, everything was more possible because we were newly in love.

Christmas was on a Thursday that year, and on Tuesday someone in the church I served gave me an envelope with a couple hundred dollars in cash and asked me to find a family who could use it that Christmas. The town was small enough so that I pretty much knew every family, and most of them were either members of the Presbyterian Church or the Catholic Church across the bridge.

There was one family, though, who were new in town, and nobody seemed to know them. I had asked Father Richard if he knew anything about the little boy who could often be found playing by himself in the Post Office parking lot. The boy was about 6 or 7 years old.

Father Richard didn't know the boy either, but we learned that he and his mother lived in a rental unit in a poorly kept blue clapboard house behind the Post Office. She was out of work and didn't come out of the house much. And her son looked a bit like a lost child playing with sticks in the Post Office parking lot, trying to talk to people who came by to pick up their mail.

This was the family we decided to help. I recruited Fred and an 8 year old neighbor to be my official toy consultants, and off we went into the city to buy presents and food for this family. I imagined doing this one day with Fred with our own children, and so it was a little glimpse into the future.

We bought a small tree and a few decorations. A turkey and vegetables and a few necessities like milk and eggs. We found a great red bike (and a helmet of course) and some action figures (the 8 year old consultant was especially helpful in that department) and some cool boots with Batman on the side and a red sweater for the mother.

We went back to my house and wrapped everything but the food and the tree. We put a big bow on the bike.

And then Fred went back to his home for Christmas Eve services at the church he served in New Jersey, and my 8 year old neighbor went home to his house.

On Christmas morning, with a Plymouth Reliant full of gifts, I knocked on the door of the blue clapboard house and the little boy opened the door. "Excuse me," I said, but is this where _____ lives?" "That's *my* name," the boy said.

"Oh great!" I said. "Santa must have gotten confused because all these things were left on my porch with your name on them."

"Whoa!" the boy said. "Look at all this stuff." And he proceeded to help me take the decorated tree and the presents into his living room. His mother stood in a corner and watched, giving me a slight smile.

“Look at all this stuff!” the boy said again and again, until finally all the gifts were inside and the turkey and groceries were in the kitchen. “Well, I guess I’ll be going,” I said. “I’m glad I found out where these presents went.”

“I know,” said the boy looking at them all. And then he paused and said, still looking at the presents, “I had no idea I’d been this good.”

I’ve long been haunted by those words from that morning. I’ve wondered what he would have thought if he’d receive no presents that year – that he’d been “that bad”?

The truth is that it’s not about how good *we’ve* been. It’s about how good God has been. How good God is to us whether we deserve it or not. This is the message of Christmas.