

My Favorite Christmas Memory

By Kern Hagg

At a recent family Christmas party held at my sister Kay's home in Wasco, Illinois, while sitting around an elongated table eating a wonderful Christmas dinner and with a lull in the action, my brother, Steve, asked if we could go around the table to describe our favorite Christmas memory. It was a really fun experience and it evoked wonderful memories as well as much laughter – especially from the children and grandchildren.

Our parents bought the home at 112 S. Derbyshire Lane in 1953. I was five-years old. It had to be in '53, '54 or '55 when a large Christmas gala was planned for the Windsor Parkway. It was a weekend day, there was snow on the ground, and it was in late afternoon when the festivities began. At the east end of Woodford and in the center of the Parkway was and still is an enormous pine tree. It had a twin brother about 75 yards straight north at the other end of the gala. Large colored lights had been strung from these two pine trees, and as the sun set slowly in the west, a sense of Christmas time was profound.

Residents of Stonegate had arranged to bring goodies as well as hot chocolate milk and perhaps other beverages preferred by moms and dads. I remember that there were cookies, brownies, pies and cakes galore with tables set up in the snow and each table attended by its chef's family. There were large canisters of hot chocolate which were absolutely necessary to keep us warm on that cold December day. There was music blaring from loudspeakers all of the favorite Christmas carols of the day. As the crowd grew, the singing began. There must have been 50 adults and 100 children playing in the snow and singing carols. If that was not magical enough for this five-year-old little boy, there suddenly appeared a sleigh being pulled by two plow horses coming from the southern end of Windsor Parkway. The sleigh went around the large pine tree and stopped in the middle of this magical party. Santa had arrived to share the festivities with us. Each child had a short time to spend on Santa's lap and to try to explain the list of requests Santa needed for his trip back the next week. Each child was given a copper cow bell from Santa Claus, and they rang throughout the event in a haphazard coordination with the Christmas carols. I had that copper cow bell for at least 10 years on my dresser at home before it finally disappeared.

For me, being with my mom, dad, brother and sister it was a Christmas celebration I would never forget. Now, at the age of 71, and with so many more Christmases under my belt, I have to confess to the fact that the Stonegate Association's Christmas gathering on that dark, cold, wintery day was and always will be #1 in my book.