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Christmas Memories

by dearie daley holcomb

AS THE LEAVES START TO TURN VIBRANT COLORS AND FLOAT TO THE GROUND signaling the fall and winter seasons, the holidays quickly follow reminding us that family memories and traditions are what make Christmas merry.

Some Christmas memories bring heartwarming thoughts and laughter while other memories bring tears of joy or a remembrance of times past.

The holidays are a time to renew values and commitments, to share and give of ourselves. From the vintage Christmas ornaments, some battered and weathered over time, to the Christmas stocking surprise and the arrival of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve, these memories light up the hearts and minds of all of us – from children to adults.

A CHRISTMAS AT WAR

For Frisco resident Amy Bovard, now living in California, this Christmas will be bittersweet as her thoughts and prayers will be with her husband, Benjamin, a Marine serving his second tour of duty in Iraq.

Before they were married two-years ago, Amy fondly remembers a special Christmas

Mayor Mike Simpson with his brother, Tom and Fella. (left);
Mike Simpson in a recent picture with his Christmas train.
photos provided by Mike Simpson



moment they shared despite the fact Benjamin was in Marine boot camp and they were not together.

“When soldiers are in boot camp they can’t have contact with anybody and Benjamin was able to get a Christmas card to me and that was so special,” Bovard said. “I wasn’t expecting anything so that was really neat and it says a lot about who he is.”

Amy’s extended family in Frisco have collected treats, personal items and letters from school children to send to the 1/7 Weapons company in Iraq for the holidays. They have put together 166 stockings to ensure every soldier in the company is remembered this Christmas.

A FIFTY-YEAR-OLD FAMILY TREASURE

All the traditions and memories families share with children over time to make Christmas and the holidays special still shine through the eyes of adults as they reveal their stories years later.

For Frisco Mayor Mike Simpson, the 54-year old train he arranges around the Christmas tree every year brings back one of his fondest memories. When Simpson was nine-years old, growing up in St. Albans, West Virginia, Santa Claus left him and his brother, Tom, a train for Christmas.

“We were so excited and every year the train was put around the Christmas tree and I still carry on that tradition,” Simpson said. “I’ll put the train out, call my brother up on the phone and have him listen to the train circling the tracks. To this day we laugh about how I ended up with the train and he didn’t.”

Simpson added, “Seeing the train around the Christmas tree

was also special for my mother and my sister the year my Father passed away in 1987. It brought back so many wonderful memories.”

Simpson and his wife, Sandy carry on many Christmas traditions including decorating more than one Christmas tree throughout the house.

“By Thanksgiving we have what I call our formal Christmas tree up in the living room which the grandkids help us decorate,” Simpson said. “In the family room is a tree that is full of ornaments the kids have made – ornaments from their lives growing up over the years and college, or ornaments my mother or grandmother made. I call it the memory tree.”

Simpson laughs and adds, “My wife has more Christmas decorations than I’ve ever seen, and our house is full.”

Also close to Simpson’s heart is his special time on Christmas Eve with his grandchildren.

“Part of the deal is grandpa gets to read the Christmas story, ‘The Night Before Christmas,’ to the grandkids so we snuggle up and I read it to them,” Simpson said.

“We filled 166 stockings to ensure every soldier in the company is remembered.”

EARLY 20TH CENTURY TRADITIONS CONTINUE

For Frisco Chamber of Commerce President Audie Adkins, an orange in her stocking holds a special Christmas memory.

“It started with my Mom, Mary Liz Siegel, who grew up during the depression and in her Christmas stocking there would always be this excitement and anticipation of receiving an orange because back in 1915, citrus fruit was so expensive,” Adkins explained. “Then my Mom continued the tradition of putting an orange in our Christmas stocking to remind us what was real and important at Christmas. She later added silly putty to our stocking as a symbol of our time growing up.”

Adkins says years later the tradition of putting an orange in the Christmas stocking continues through her children and now with a fourth generation of grandchildren.

Growing up on a farm in central Missouri, Adkins says another family tradition included attending church on Christmas Eve but there was one Christmas Eve she will never forget.

“I was about nine-years old and we were coming home from a church service and it always ended after midnight so it truly was Christmas Day and I vividly remember seeing the Northern Lights or Aurora Borealis light up the sky,” Adkins said. “I’ll never forget the red glowing Aurora Borealis and it looked like the sky was lit up, so bright and intense with all the different colors, it was beautiful.”

Born and raised in Frisco, historian, humorist and former Frisco Mayor Bob Warren published his reflections of a 1930s Christmas in Frisco *STYLE* Magazine years ago.

In the beginning, Frisco was a prairie of farmland, cotton gins and grain elevators along with the railroad line that was an important part of the town in the early to mid-1900s. The railroad served as a retail and shipping point for farmers compared to the bustling suburb of shopping, restaurants and the cultural arts that represent the town today.

Warren said families grew the food they would eat at Christmas and throughout the year. The Christmas stocking was

an important symbol of the Christmas celebration and the anticipation of waiting to find out what was inside your stocking was difficult as a child, but exciting.

“Years ago, the custom in many families was to hang their stocking for Santa to fill and I would be so excited to get an apple, an orange, some assorted nuts, maybe candy and, if we were lucky, some sparklers and fireworks,” Warren said.

He said he would never forget his find inside the “tip of the stocking” toe. It was a one-dollar pocket watch.

“I was around six or seven-years old when I got the watch and I was so excited. I remember it came with a one-year warranty and the watch actually did last a year. That was 1930,” Warren said.

Warren and his wife, Ann, enjoy long-standing Christmas traditions but he clearly remembers when he was growing up in Frisco, decorating the cedar tree out in the front yard of his home.

“My mother would go out and put a cedar tree in a can of sand to keep it alive and we would decorate it with paper chains,” Warren said. “Back then they didn’t have colored lights so we would make these chains and wrap them around the tree.”



*Sara first experiencing the tradition of making a birthday cake for Jesus. (top)
Now Sara repeats the party with her family & friends. (bottom)
photos provided by Sara Kimmich*

MULTI-CULTURAL TRADITIONS

For Frisco volunteer and this year’s recipient of the “Spirit of Frisco” award from the City of Frisco and Frisco Chamber of Commerce, Sara Kimmich celebrates a multi-cultural Christmas every year. Her mother is American, her father was born in Chile and Kimmich was born in Mexico.

“We have three countries represented in our Christmas family traditions that go through the first week in January,” Kimmich said.

Growing up, one of the many Christmas celebrations Kimmich enjoyed is called Posadas, a nine-day celebration



The Allison family Christmas photo. (left) photo provided by Jay Allison Scene from *It's A Wonderful Life*, 1946



leading up to the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Eve. It begins with the traditional caroling to the enactment of Joseph and the Virgin Mary finding a place to stay for the birth of Jesus.

In Frisco, Kimmich carries on the Posadas tradition with her three daughters during a one-night celebration with family and friends.

“The kids start out caroling throughout the neighborhood singing Christmas songs in English and Spanish,” Kimmich explains. “Then we arrive home for bunuelos, hot chocolate or punch.

Kimmich says another family tradition is creating a village around the birth of Jesus with a huge nativity scene, arranging it on a table in the family room.

“It was taught to me by my aunt’s friend in Venezuela and I think it’s an important part of our family traditions because it illustrates the true meaning of Christmas,” Kimmich said. “For us it’s important to celebrate Jesus and we also have a birthday cake for Jesus.”

Kimmich adds, “The message I want to send with my daughters as they grow up is how important family unity is and that it doesn’t matter how far apart we are, we are always together.”



KEEPING FAMILY TRADITIONS ALIVE

What Christmas illustrates more than anything is how important every family member is to the cycle of life and family beliefs and traditions.

For Richard Beaver, Vice President of the Frisco Independent School board, one memory stands out above all memories and traditions.

“It’s so difficult to identify a special memory

since there are so many but after thinking about it I decided to share a tradition that we do every year,” Beaver said. “Since our children were born, each year we bake a baby Jesus birthday cake and have a little Birthday party on Christmas Eve, complete with candles and singing Happy Birthday.”

For Frisco resident Jay Allison, President of Comstock Resources, the Christmas Eve family gathering at the home of Gertrude Reid, grandmother of his wife, Jenny, established a collection of memories over the years.

Every year, Allison said more than 100 family and friends gathered at Reid’s 100-year old white house with green trim. The Christmas celebration definitely resembled the Christmas party scene straight out of the movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” the holiday classic starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed.

“There would be so many people you sometimes had a gathering by the piano where someone would play and others would sing Christmas hymns throughout the night, others would visit or eat and the kids played games and ran around,” Allison said. “No telling what kind of food you could have with everyone bringing a dish. And every year, of course, Santa Claus would arrive for the kids.”

Allison said each of the dads would take turns dressing up as Santa Claus.

“When the young kids started getting older they would recognize their Dad’s shoes or recognize their Dad’s voice so

“The Christmas Celebration resembles a scene from *It’s a Wonderful Life.*”

that was fun," Allison said. "It was a great time for families and children, babies and friends, with all of the music and laughter and it was a time to get together and share over the years."

To close the evening celebration, Allison said Grandmother Reid had memorized the Christmas story, "The Night Before Christmas," and recited it to all of the children.

"The children gathered around as Jenny's grandmother recited the story and eventually all of the kids grew up learning to tell the story," Allison said.

SPECIAL DECORATIONS

As Christmas decorations begin to light up your home and your neighborhood it becomes a time of reflecting back on special holiday memories and looking ahead to the future.

For former Frisco Mayor Kathy Seei, her family memories and traditions started when she and her husband Bob were first married, the day after Christmas.

They immediately moved and became transplanted Midwesterners here in North Texas.

"In the beginning we didn't have family here so we gathered with neighbors and friends we met," Seei said. "Eventually we had brothers, nephews and other family members move to Texas. For 34 years we have gathered at our home for the holidays with a combination of Texas friends and transplanted family members."

Seei says the family gathers for Christmas Eve dinner, opening of gifts and they wrap up the evening's festivities by going to the midnight candlelight service at their church, a tradition she carries forward from her childhood.

Although this holiday season is a year of transitions for the Seei family, holiday traditions remain strong.

Seei said a precious family symbol she displays every year is the crèche her parents hand-painted the year her daughter, Erin, was born. Her parents traveled from Illinois that year to celebrate Christmas with their new granddaughter.

"My father and mother hand-painted the figurines and my Dad meticulously constructed the stable," Seei said. "They are

both deceased now and placing the crèche under the Christmas tree each year holds a special place in our family."

Seei says an important family tradition is decorating the tree with ornaments chronicling the family's lives throughout the years. Many of the ornaments they hang on the tree are handmade by her children or are family heirlooms. A tradition is for the parents to give both of the children a special ornament

that depicts what was going on in their lives that year.

"It is like a history of their lives. The tree is filled with memories," Seei said.

Their adult daughter Erin, who works for Equity Properties, helps decorate her parent's home with decorations that have been used since her childhood.

Seei explains, "Erin notices if anything that has been used in the past has not been put out, including the stockings that I

made for each of the children for their first Christmas. Those stockings are too frayed to actually be hung any longer, but we still find a special place to display them."

A special reunion will be included in the Seei's Christmas this year. Their son, Rob, who is training as a Green Beret at Fort Brag, North Carolina will be coming home for the holidays. The family is very proud of Rob's choice to fight for our country.

"Our holiday prayers are for all the soldiers fighting abroad and their families," Seei said. "The most important thing is family."

Holiday memories last a lifetime and begin with the smallest effort. Decorations or activities adults remember from their childhood spark family traditions with their children. The gift of a family tradition can continue for a lifetime and beyond.

DeAnn Daley Holcomb is a freelance writer living in Plano.



Rob, Kathy, Bob and Erin Seei in their annual Christmas picture. photos provided by Kathy Seei

