

Reminiscences



The Night Before Christmas 1998

'Twas the night before Christmas
When all through the house
Three children were stirring and so was the mouse.
The socks were hung by the beds with care
In hopes that Santa Claus soon would be there.
The children were restless and stirring in bed
With visions of Nintendo and dolls dancing in their heads.
And Mom in her babushka and I in my hat
Had just settled down with Leno and that.
When outside my window a bang much like thunder
Made me jump up from TV to see what was asunder.
The moon on the breast of the new fallen snow
Gave the luster of midday to objects below.
And what did my star shocked eyes behold
But a bright new snowmobile with a driver of old.
With a rev of the engine and a flicker of lights
We recognized Santa Claus at very first sight.
With more revving of the engine we knew he was here.
His whistling and shouting made it quiet clear
That this was still Claus, but without the reindeer.
With a swish of the blades, the snow did fly
As a doughnut spin Santa did try.
He slid through the yard and up to the door
With a bag full of toys straight from the store.
With the tinkling of keys and a turn of the latch
Then entered Santa with the big Christmas Catch.
He was dressed all in fur from his head to his toes
With snow and icicles covering his clothes.
With a bag full of loot he had flung on his back
He looked like a peddler just opening his pack.
His eyes were all bloodshot, his dimples sunk in
His cheeks were like cherries, his nose as big as sin.
His tiny lips blue as the sky,
And the beard on his chin was not even dry.
With a candy cane tight in his teeth—

He misses his pipe with smoke like a wreath.
 He had a thin face and a nice solid belly
 No fat one this elf, no trips to the deli.
 He was lean and mean, a 90's type elf.
 And I laughed when I saw him in spite of myself.
 A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
 Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.
 He spoke not a word but went straight to his work,
 and filled all the socks then turned with a jerk.
 And laying a finger aside of his nose,
 And giving a nod out the door he goes.
 He sprang out the door and slid to his ride,
 And away he went like the rip tide.
 But I heard him explain as he drove into the night
 "Christmas is tiring in the '90's—it just isn't right!"

—*Jeremy Helmbright,*
Juanita Lindgren, Tim Ross,
Shirley Tingler

Legend of North Bay

In January the winter winds blow cold across Kelley's Island. Visitors are scarce except for a breed of individuals known as "Ice Fishermen." In the early 60's, I was one of those risk takers. I can't remember the exact date, but the ice and the fishing were exceptionally good. The winter blast of cold weather had come earlier than usual that year. The ice had been building for weeks. The out-of-town newspapers were keeping up with the island fishing reports, and interest was high. Each weekend, the island air services were strained with fishermen. It was a lure most could not resist.

On a weekday, my flight left Carl Keller Field at first light. Off in the distance was a brilliant sunrise. Upon landing, I gathered my gear and headed for the North Bay. The best fish I had ever tasted were caught in North Bay. By the time the sun had reached its peak, I was a mile offshore fishing in thirty feet of water. I was pulling in fish and off in the distance I could see others doing the same. As the afternoon wore on, the weather started to deteriorate quickly. What started out as light snow had turned heavy. It soon became a "white out" condition with the wind gusting in all directions. With the wind and snow howling around me, I was hoping that this was just a passing squall, and I made up my mind to wait it out.

By the time I had gathered my gear and set out for shore, the storm had intensified. The temperature felt sub zero. I tried to pick up my pace. Glancing at my watch, I found that I had been walking for almost an hour and still had not reached land. Pressure cracks were starting to open up with water being forced up on the ice. Darkness was settling in rapidly and my mind was playing games with me. I realized I was lost.

Then it happened! I stepped into an open pressure crack and was in icy water up to my chest. Kicking desperately, I struggled to pull myself up on the ice. I lay there, both mentally and physically drained. It was almost completely dark now, and

the winds were blowing at gale force. While trying to gather my strength, I felt something touch my leg. I opened my eyes to find a large black Lab next to me. I didn't quite understand, but I knew the Lab was there to help me. Grasping the Lab's collar, I was able to pull myself up. Walking was difficult. My clothes were frozen, and pain from the cold was shooting up my arms and legs. As I held tightly to the Lab's collar for support, I couldn't help wondering if he might be leading me further out onto the lake. But it seemed he instinctively knew the difference between good and bad ice. His main purpose was to watch over me.

I had no idea how long we traveled together. Finally I felt land under my feet. As I whispered, "We're OK now," I started up the embankment toward the road. In the distance I saw headlights approaching. It was the Village Police Chief searching for lost fishermen. As I got in the car, I turned to look for the Lab. He vanished as fast as he had appeared. I imagined that he headed for home and a warm bed. I told the Chief that tomorrow I must locate the Lab and thank his owners.

After a quick ride up Division Street, we arrived at the Lodge, The Chief helped me inside. Joe, the owner, offered me some hot soup and a badly needed brandy. I was able to tell the others of my frigid ordeal after heat from the old stove had penetrated my frozen body, When I finished my story, Joe said he knew for a fact that no one on the island had a black Lab. I said it couldn't be true; one saved my life today.

Joe was very thoughtful for a moment before stepping into his back room and returning with a tattered scrapbook. I could see in his eyes the tenderness he felt for this old scrapbook. Joe said he had a story to share with me. Turning the old pages, he pulled out a newspaper clipping from 1924. It told of an island resident who perished along with his black Lab when their auto plunged through the ice on North Bay. As the story stated, both were able to get out of the auto before it went down, but the man could not climb out of the icy water. Each time he pushed

the dog onto the ice, the Lab would jump back into the water to try to save his master. After a few minutes, neither could struggle any longer. Both of their lives' voyages had come to an end. Neither had ever been found,

As Joe talked, I let my mind drift back to the Lab, truly convinced that the experience was real. The depth of serenity I had felt could not have come from a myth. Was it possible, while I lay there on the ice, I had indeed passed through that doorway of lost souls? Could that black Lab still prowl the North Bay, always willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for any unfortunate soul lost on his journey?

To you, My Loyal Companion, I vow to keep your spirit alive.

—Phillip Edwards

A Christmas Memory

As a child, I remember, we didn't have many toys. But we had a very big Christmas tree my mother had put up for us. We were poor, but most of all we had lots of love.

I remember the tree was very big. She had lights on it that bubbled and a few bulbs. She had put icicles on one by one in layers. On top was a big star she had made from a shoebox and covered with shiny paper. With the lights on, the star would shine.

I remember my grandma playing Santa Claus for her five grandchildren. On the front porch there was a loose board. My grandma stepped on the board, and it came up and hit her in the head and made a knot. She still was Santa, the one with a knot on her head. That Christmas we had some apples, oranges, bananas, candy and a toy each.

Our Christmas was a good one. Our grandma was OK. We played with our toys and watched the tree lights bubble and the star shine. Most of all, we had love.

—Kathryn Yaden

Bulletin Board

I am a single parent of four beautiful children and a grateful recovering alcoholic.

Recently, I had the opportunity to participate in a recovery program through the Veteran's Recovery Center at the Veteran's Hospital in Brecksville, Ohio. While there, I was assigned the task of writing appointments for other veterans on the bulletin board—information such as location and time of the appointment, as well as with whom the appointment was scheduled. Even though each veteran was required to check the bulletin board daily, missed appointments were common. As a result of these missed appointments, I came up with the idea of giving each veteran a motivational thought, the title of which was "Thought to Live By."

These daily motivational inspirations were intended to provide comfort for veterans when they found themselves feeling angry, alone, depressed, or simply wondering, "Why am I here?" One evening I was sitting in the day room and overheard two ladies talking. One of them seemed especially distraught over the consequences of her alcohol abuse, particularly, her appearance, which was pallid and repulsive. She was withdrawn and did not seem to grasp the concept of powerlessness. The following day, when writing the veterans' appointments, I included the following thought: "When we were drinking and drugging, denial caused us to blemish our appearance; but, when we admitted we were powerless, it promoted our inner beauty to flourish." When the young lady read it, her whole attitude changed. She started being more open and felt better about herself. She told me that she appreciated me giving her hope, and I replied, "The hope I gave you came from God as He works through me." Now, the veterans look forward to reading the board each morning. When they seem down or depressed, the writings seem to help carry them through the day.

*Note: Although the above inspirational thought was written for the young lady, it has a very clear message for me; it serves as a reminder to keep me focused on what I need to do to bring about a change in myself . . . and that is to share my experiences, hopes and desires and to help another, just like Dr. Bob says in the Big Book.**

*Doctor Bob, a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, June 10, 1935.

—Ron C. Lewis

Joy

I never could understand
why my grandma could sit on the porch all day long.

The older I get, the more I understand
it's life's simplest things that give me the most joy.

The joy of waking up to a brand new day,
the joy of spending time with family and friends,
the joy of watching flowers bloom in the summer
that I planted in the spring.

These things give me the most joy.
I can now understand why grandma could
sit on the porch all day.

—Katherine Moore

My Most Memorable Toy

The year was 1951, and I was eight years old. We lived on a farm in Delta, Ohio. It was in northwestern Ohio. We had a big family; I had four brothers and three sisters. There were eight children and my Mom and Dad at that time. Anyway, we didn't have a lot back then, but my mom and dad made it work.

It was Christmas Eve, and everybody was excited about Santa Claus coming. Inside, we had decorations all over the house. My dad and I went out to the woods to cut down the Christmas tree. It was all covered with snow. It was big, bushy, and beautiful when all the ornaments and garlands were on it. Outside, the roof, cars, and sidewalks were covered with snow.

In the house, my mom was letting my brothers and sisters and me get the food ready for Santa and his reindeers. We put celery and lettuce out for the reindeer. Then we put cookies and milk out for Santa. The most I thought I would get from Santa was a teddy bear or a model car. Earlier on I saw this Red Flyer train set in a store window. It had coal cars, the engine car, a caboose, animal cars, flat bed cars, and passenger cars. It was beautiful. I never wanted anything so bad in my life.

Well, it was bedtime, and Mom and Dad tucked all of us kids in bed and told us to go to sleep because Santa was coming soon to leave our presents under the tree. Needless to say, the next morning when I got up it was Christmas Day. I woke my brothers and sisters up. I was the first one to the tree. To my amazement, I saw that beautiful Red Flyer train set. My eyes got as big as saucers. I got as excited as our cow Betsy did eating her favorite cud. My Dad looked at me, smiled, and said, "What do you say, Son?" Then I turned and gave my Mom and Dad a great big hug and kiss.

—*Jim Flowers*

My Memories of the Village

Duong Son is a village where I was born and grew up. It has brought me many good memories.

Duong Son is a small village, about seven miles from Hue City and along the river Bo. The river flows from the mountains to the sea. The village is enclosed by green bamboo. The front of the village is a small field of paddy (rice), and behind it is a field of vegetables, cassavas, corn, and peanuts. In between it has a church with a belfry and a school from kindergarten to grade five. This center is also a place for people in this village to gather and communicate with each other. From far away, you can recognize this center because the church's belfry is the highest. When people got lost, they used the belfry to orient themselves and find their way.

The weather in Doung Son changes depending on the season: spring and autumn are comfortable, while summer is hot and winter is cold. In winter, it rains persistently—all day long. Annually, we have floods two to four times or more; therefore, the ways (roads) are muddy, and it is hard for us to walk or ride. Each family has a little boat when the flood comes. During the flooded nights, I remember the sounds from the frogs, bullfrogs, and hylas; their sounds were sorrowful. When the tide ebbed, we usually had boat races on the river or on the flooded fields. We really enjoyed this game.

Most of the people in Duong Son made a living by cultivating and breeding; therefore, when there was inclement weather, we had a bad harvest. Many people in the village worried and had to cope with this problem.

Every morning the bell from the church was rung, and cocks crowed like an alarm to awake everyone. After that, I heard the noisy sounds from someone who called others. Some villagers went to church, to work, prayed at their homes, or prepared to go to school. The bell also rang at noon and evening to remind us that it was time for lunch or time to go to evening church. When I was young, my friend and I prayed in

the evening at church; afterwards we usually stayed to practice singing and dancing, or we just talked or played. We really enjoyed playing and talking under the moonlight. We also liked to breathe the fresh air in the summer.

My memories of Doung Son are engraved in my heart and my mind. Although I am now far from it, I will always remember this lovely village.

—*Phuong Nguyen*

A Surprise Visit

All the little boys and girls
Were waiting patiently
For Jolly Old Saint Nicholas
Was coming there, you see.

Bringing gifts for everyone,
Even Mom and Pop,
Janie wants a dolly and
Billy wants a top.

Oh, what was that noise I heard
By the Christmas tree?
Do you think it could be
Santa leaving toys for me?

I looked around the corner,
And boy was I surprised.
There were toys and gifts for everyone
In every shape and size.

A flash of red was all I saw
As Santa got away,
The reindeer in the lead
And Santa in his sleigh.

—*Carol Rudder*

The Big Jigsaw Puzzle

Since reading a book about the Sistine Chapel, I have been adoring the Chapel. One day I stopped by a shopping center. The jigsaw puzzle of the painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was right in front of me. I thought to myself "I have got to get this one!" But the puzzle cost almost \$100 and on top of that, it was 8,000 pieces. I debated for a long time!

After the long debate, I started thinking, "Well, it would be cheaper than going to the Vatican to see it. As a matter a fact, in our house there is a person who is crazy about and good at jigsaws. Even though I may give up, my husband may be able to do it." So I did not waver to buy it any more.

For this reason, we got the 8,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. My husband was very excited before we opened the jigsaw puzzle's box, but I was a little bit nervous. Anyway we opened the box. Surprisingly these pieces were separated into four bags, 2,000 pieces in each bag. I thought something was not right, because we had to get \$100 worth.

My husband is completely crazy about doing jigsaw puzzles. He usually finishes 1,000 pieces in three or four business days. (Therefore I usually only buy cheaper jigsaw puzzles!!) He may finish a 2,000-piece puzzle in a week. It means we may need only a month until the 8,000-piece jigsaw puzzle is done. I did not think that we would get the \$100 dollars worth if we put together each bag of 2,000 pieces. So we mixed all of the pieces and ended up with 8,000 pieces in one box together. Finally, we started the 8,000 piece jigsaw puzzle.

Whenever we put together any jigsaw puzzles, at first we choose the frame pieces from all the pieces. Next we categorize color, shape, or specially printed characters from pieces left in the box. Then we use some boxes and categorize the characteristics of each piece which are shape, color, pattern, and so on. After we roughly finish categorizing them, we start to put together the frame of pieces on the table covered with paper.

The reason why the table is covered with paper is that we will use glue to save the puzzle when we finish it.

We started the 8,000-piece puzzle as we usually do. At first, we categorized like we normally do and brought all the pieces for a frame. Usually, this categorizing is very easy because those pieces have one or two straight sides. However, it was difficult this time to find them from a lot of pieces. We were somewhat discouraged; we barely found the pieces for the frame. Of course, it was impossible to do this jigsaw puzzle on a table. The long side consisted of 160 pieces, which was about 9 feet, and the short side consisted of 50 pieces, which was 3 feet. We decided that the small room in which we started this jigsaw puzzle was dedicated to the puzzle exclusively and put it together on the floor.

By the way, the picture printed on this jigsaw puzzle was a copy of the ceiling drawing of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. The original picture was painted by Michelangelo in the 16th century, and he drew pictures about some stories from the Bible. As the picture was painted with a lot of pictures of God, people, and angels, it is easy to imagine that Michelangelo had a difficult job. After he had done this job, a lot of ceremonies took place in the Sistine Chapel. Candles were used to light it for around 500 years. A lot of soot covered over his pictures; therefore, the color of pictures had changed, but this change was very slow, so everybody believed that Michelangelo liked to use sooty colors. About 20 years ago, priests in the Roman Catholic Church decided to clean up and repair all of the pictures on the wall and ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. When four specialists had done this job for almost thirteen years, bright and beautiful color pictures showed up. It was big news to change the definition of Michelangelo's paintings. The jigsaw puzzle we bought was made in the memory of the Sistine Chapel repairing.

Anyway, after we put together the frame pieces, we started to categorize the inside frame. However all pieces looked so similar because a lot of people were drawn. It was very hard, so we needed three weeks until we had done the outside and inside frame. Next, we did not know what to do about categorizing

because of so many pieces. We had around 6,500 pieces left yet. We started to find the pieces on somebody's face and body or the pieces that had obviously different characteristics such as color, shape, and so on.

Not only did we categorize them, but we also tried to put them together whenever we could. I wondered whether we could finish this jigsaw puzzle. We had to keep our concentration when we put together each piece, but I usually could not keep my concentration. I would try the jigsaw puzzle, give up, and play computer games or sometimes sleep next to the puzzle instead.

Even though I gave up, my husband never gave up doing the jigsaw puzzle. He had wonderful concentration. Since we opened this jigsaw puzzle, he enjoyed categorizing and putting it together everyday.

On a business day, as soon as he got up, he spent around thirty minutes on the puzzle until he took a shower. After he came back home from his office, he did the puzzle until dinner. He ate his dinner quickly because he could not control his thoughts about his desire to put together the puzzle, and he worked on the puzzle until he went to bed.

Over the weekend, he sometimes did the puzzle all day. For instance, soon after he got up around 9 o'clock, he went to the puzzle room and started the puzzle. At the lunchtime, he stopped the puzzle and had lunch. Then he went back to the puzzle room and did the puzzle again until dinnertime. Of course, soon after he had finished his dinner, he started the jigsaw puzzle until he went to bed.

After two months, it seemed that there were about 2,000 leftover pieces. He became much more excited about finishing this jigsaw puzzle and he sped up putting it together.

Finally, this 8,000-piece puzzle was completed after two months and one week. While we put together the puzzle, I never vacuumed the puzzle room because I did not want to sweep up some pieces mistakenly, so there were no missing pieces. I really believe that we got our \$100 worth. The completed

puzzle looked gorgeous, and I was deeply impressed by Michelangelo's talent once more.

Now we have a new problem—how and where do we hang this complete puzzle? Since the size is nine feet by three feet, I cannot find a nice frame and I cannot find a big enough wall in our small house for this puzzle. Such being the case, the poor puzzle still lays on the floor. I hit upon the idea; how about placing the puzzle on the ceiling in our basement, as if our basement were the Sistine Chapel?

—Yuki Ohashi

A Christmas Memory

My best Christmas memory was growing up on the farm with my four sisters and three brothers.

My father and mother struggled during the Depression to raise eight children. They didn't have very much money to spend at Christmastime. We would always go out in the woods and cut our own Christmas tree and decorate the tree with our own handmade ornaments.

The night before Christmas, we would hang up our stockings around the fireplace. The next morning our father and mother would wake us up and say, "I think Santa Claus has been here." Our stockings would be filled with fruit, candy and nuts.

And for Christmas dinner we would usually have fried chicken with all the trimmings.

Those are the most memorable Christmases of all.

—*Ethel Bullock*

She

She had been so lovely to look at,
but her heart had grown cold.
Too many times of doing crack
with so many strangers untold.
Once she had been in love,
and that had been the start
of broken promises and a broken heart.
To get even, she found lots of men
to wine her and dine her for their own end.
She had given up her children
for drink, drugs, fun and men.
Now her children are all grown.
Their hearts have been hardened
with the pain when they were young,
To know they were not as important
to their mother as doing her own thing.
So when they looked at her cold, lifeless body,
they did not feel any pain,
or think of what might have been
had she loved and taken care of them.

—*Norma King*

My Most Memorable Christmas

Growing up in a mining town, Christmas was a happy and important event in our lives.

The miners and the company would see that everyone in our community got lots of goodies as this was the only time most of the children would get treats.

The miners and the company would match a donation beginning in early December. The company would purchase gum, apples, oranges, bananas, Cracker Jacks, and a good assortment of lots of candies.

A crew of employees of the company would meet at the company store and fill #8 brown bags. They would fill them so full there was only enough space left to twist the top to keep them from spilling. This would be a real treat.

The treats would be transferred to the church for Santa and his helpers to hand out on Christmas Eve. This was the only night everyone was in church. No one would miss their treat.

The church was high on a hill. The only way of getting there was by truck or by hearse. The ladies of the church and the school teachers would decorate the church. It was so beautiful when the lights were turned on; the church lit up the entire community.

Each Sunday School class would draw names. This would ensure that everyone had a gift under the tree to be given out at the end of the program with our bags of goodies from Santa and his helpers.

This Christmas I remember clearly because it was the first time I ever got a popcorn ball for Christmas. It was usually gloves or a hanky.

A girl named Boots drew my name. She informed me there would be no hankies, but something nice. I took her at her word, so when my gift was handed to me I anxiously opened it. To my surprise, I found a popcorn ball. I was more embarrassed than surprised, as everyone was watching.

My mother made me return the popcorn ball. Boots promised me a nice gift, but I never received anything from her.

Soon afterwards, she left our community and I never saw or heard from her again.

If I ever chance to meet Boots in the future, I know we could have a good laugh over my most memorable Christmas of all.

—*Oveda Pendleton*