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W E S T V I E W

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 2

WINTER 1991 \$3.00



WESTERN OKLAHOMA
CHRISTMASTIME

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EDITORIAL STAFF

PUBLISHER.....	Dr. Dan Dill
EDITOR.....	Dr. Leroy Thomas
ASSISTANT EDITOR.....	Dr. Roger Bromert
ASSISTANT EDITOR.....	Dr. Jeanne Ellinger
ART DIRECTOR.....	Ms. Laurie Jolliffe

FOREWORD

There's one sure thing about life in the WESTVIEW Editorial Office: we have change and variety. We're now into our eleventh year, and we're in the process of becoming acquainted with our fifth Art Director. In the words of old Sulk in Flannery O'Connor's "Displaced Person," "We has seen 'em come, and we has seen 'em go."

Our latest addition is Ms. Laurie Jolliffe, who has a B. A. in Art from Simpson College of Indianola, Iowa; an M.A. in Graphic Design from Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas, and an M.F.A. in Commercial Design/Illustration from Fort Hays State.

Ms. Jolliffe has also had significant practical experience in her field. Before coming to Southwestern this semester, she was an instructor in Graphic Design at Fort Hays State and an Assistant Professor of Applied Arts at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio; she also held positions in newspaper advertising work for the Colorado Springs SUN, the Winter Park MANIFEST, and the Fort Morgan TIMES. We look forward to a long professional association with Ms. Jolliffe.

As the days pass, we continue to appreciate our many supporters and contributors, and we hope that WESTVIEW will be of interest to all our readers.

HOPEFULLY,



Leroy Thomas
Editor

WESTVIEW design and graphic arts production by Southwestern Oklahoma
State University Commercial Art Students.

AD LAYOUT I

Jill Barnhart
David Bryan
Scott Cummins
Steve Hammons
Beau Wade

Julie O'Reilly
John Peters
Gina Scheller
Jeromie Tate

AD LAYOUT II

Bradley A. Snow

Colynda L. Urton

Richard M. Alsobrook

WESTVIEW—FUTURE ISSUES

Please study our needs and submit something to us. Notice the deadline for each issue.

SPRING, 1992 (Western Oklahoma Relatives/Kinfolks; deadline:12-15-91)

SUMMER, 1992 (Western Oklahoma Daydreams/Illusions; deadline: 2-15-92)

FALL, 1992 (Western Oklahoma Dustbowl Days; deadline: 7-1-92)

WINTER, 1992 (Western Oklahoma Colorful Characters; deadline: 9-15-92)

SPRING, 1993 (Western Oklahoma Lawmen and Outlaws; deadline: 12-15-92)

SUMMER, 1993 (Western Oklahoma Feasts; deadline: 2-15-93)

FALL, 1993 (Western Oklahoma Farmhouses; deadline: 7-1-93)

WINTER, 1993 (Western Oklahoma Youth; deadline: 9-15-92)

SPRING, 1994 (Western Oklahoma Flora and Fauna; deadline:12-15-93)

SUMMER, 1994 (Western Oklahoma Hard Times/Good Times;deadline: 2-15-94)

FALL, 1994 (Western Oklahoma Terrain—Rivers, Lakes, Hills;deadline: 7-1-94)

WINTER, 1994 (Western Oklahoma's Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow; deadline: 9-15-93)

SPRING, 1995 (Western Oklahoma's Cowboys and Indians;deadline: 12-15-94)

SUMMER, 1995 (Western Oklahoma Transportation; deadline: 2-15-95)

FALL, 1995 (Western Oklahoma Heroes; deadline: 7-1-95)

WINTER, 1995 (Western Oklahoma Bible Belt; deadline: 9-15-95)

SPRING, 1996 (Western Oklahoma Lovers of the Land; deadline: 12-15-95)

STYLESHEET

Being published in WESTVIEW is mission possible if a writer follows these guidelines:

1. Always mail a submission flat in a 9 by 12 Manila envelope, remembering to include a SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) for a possible rejection. Mail to: Dr. Leroy Thomas; Editor, WESTVIEW; 100 Campus Drive, SOSU; Weatherford, OK 73096.

2. Use a coversheet that contains name, address, telephone number, suggested issue and date (eg. "Western Oklahoma Friendships"—Fall, 1990).

3. Remember to leave your name and address off the submission itself. We want each contributor to be anonymous during the Board's assessing procedure.

4. Remember the importance of a clean typewritten or word-processed manuscript (double-spacing for prose and single-spacing for poetry). Use a good grade of 8 1/2 by 11 white paper. Submit pen-and-ink graphics on white paper. Submit 5 by 7 or 8 by 10 black and white photos that you will let us keep on file in our office and not return. Please don't send valuable family pictures. Send copies.

5. Be sure to submit material that is related to Western Oklahoma. The geographical boundary is the area lying west of Interstate 35. However, we

don't require that our contributors be Western Oklahoma residents.

6. We prefer free-verse poetry that contains no archaic language and negative attitudes. We will seriously consider rhymed poetry that contains no straining or manipulating of meter and rhyme and no syntax inversions. Line limit is 25.

7. We prefer that your prose submissions be no more than ten double-spaced pages, that they be well organized and clear of purpose, and that they express worthwhile, upbeat attitudes.

8. We maintain that our journal will be wholesome to the extent that it can be appreciated by all readers.

9. Feeling that your submission will be accepted, you also need to send along a short biographical blurb written in third person. Example: MORTIMER MULDOON of Weatherford is a SOSU senior majoring in English Education. Mortimer makes his debut as a published writer in the present issue of WESTVIEW.

10. Strive for a natural writing style, good grammar, good taste, correct spelling.

11. Accentuate originality and creativity.

A LEVITE RELEASE

Review of Harold Keith's **KOMANTCIA**

by *Dr. Leroy Thomas*

Winner of the NEW YORK TIMES BEST BOOK award in 1965, KOMANTCIA has now been re-published by Molly Levite Griffis of Levite of Apache (a publishing company in Norman).

KOMANTCIA is the well-paced story of Pedro Pavon, a young Spanish nobleman and guitarist who was captured by and lived in bondage to the Comanche Indians.

Although Pedro resists Comanche ways, he is ultimately, if gradually, absorbed into the tribe to the point of accepting its folkways and mores.

The basic struggle of the novel is between Pedro's culture and the culture of the Comanches. Pedro is a sensitive young man steeped in his own culture, but he "grows to love the wild sweet life of the fierce Comanches" (quoted from promotional materials).

Other books by Newberry Award winner Keith, former sports publicist at OU from 1930-1969, are RIFLES FOR WATIE, BRIEF GARLAND, and THE BLUEJAY BOARDERS.

The book cover was done by famed Indian artist Doc Tate Nevaquaya of Apache. The attractive hard-cover book may be purchased from Mrs. Griffis (1005 N. Flood, Suite 105; Norman 73069) for \$17.00. Telephone orders may be made to 405-366-6442.▲

ANOTHER LEVITE RELEASE

A Review of Bessie Holland Heck's **DANGER ON THE HOMESTEAD**

by *Dr. Leroy Thomas*

Heck's **DANGER ON THE HOMESTEAD** is a superior story about the 1899 run into the Unassigned Lands of what today is Central Oklahoma.

The story centers primarily on a nine-year-old boy named Todd Kelly, who is allowed to go with his father on the Run.

Publisher Griffis correctly assesses Heck, one of my friends for many years, when she says, "Bessie Holland Heck is one of those rare people with a gift for speaking to the hearts of young people while touching chords in those much older."

Bessie Heck is an artist as well as a writer, and she paints beautiful word pictures. Of her book about Todd Kelly, she says, "I wanted to see it through the eyes and emotions of a child....During the Centennial, 1989, some Tulsa schoolteachers read the manuscript to their fourth and fifth graders, and the kids said they learned more about the Run from my story than from history books."

Griffis and Heck haven't mis-represented **DANGER ON THE HOMESTEAD**. It's definitely a book to own and read. Hard-cover copies are available for \$17.00 each from Levite of Apache (1005 N. Flood, Suite 105; Norman 73069). Telephone orders may be made to 405-366-6442.▲

TWO BY MCCORD

A Review of John S. McCord's **MONTANA HORSEMAN** and **TEXAS COMEBACKER**

by *Dr. Leroy Thomas*

John S. McCord, former stalwart member of the Oklahoma Writers' Federation, Inc., lives in Bedford, Texas.

His books under review are Nos. 1 and 2 in his BAYNES CLAN TRILOGY. Both were published by Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. and are known as Double D Westerns.

Charming is an appropriate word for McCord's Westerns. They are surely "horse oprys of a different color." As he reads every page, the reader is made aware of McCord's well-executed vocabulary and his spirited sense of humor. I was reminded of his gadfly role in an organization we once served as Board members. He knows the Baynes clan because he put a bit of himself into each character.

In **MONTANA HORSEMAN**, the Baynes clan is driven from its Texas home into Montana; the novel centers on Ward, of whom his father says, "He'll be a surprise to the unwary." Pervading all the action is the happy countenance of Retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel John S. McCord.

A favorite is a subtle name-calling scene which all readers must search out and enjoy.

The second work, **TEXAS COMEBACKER**, centers on Milt Baynes, who "battles vigilantes and a crooked sheriff to free historic Goliad from a reign of terror" (from the bookmark).

Each book may be ordered from the publisher (Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.; 666 Fifth Avenue; NY, NY 10103) or from a local bookstore for \$15.00. There will be no regrets even if the reader has never before liked Westerns. Tritely, these two are a "cut above the rest."▲

FOCUS ON A WEATHERFORD "BOY"

A Review of Elmer M. Mills' **ESCAPADES OF A DRIFTER**

by *Dr. Leroy Thomas*

Elmer M. Mills—now of Seneca, Missouri—spent his formative years in the shade of "The Hill." His dedication for *ESCAPADES OF A DRIFTER* reads: "to my wife, Bessie, and my dear family who have provided the love, support, and encouragement to make this dream possible."

In his "Note from the Author," Mills says, "This year I will celebrate my eighty-fifth birthday. It seems as if it were just yesterday that I was a lone drifter, roaming the West like a carefree nomad. I sit daily and review these tales and marvel at the fact that I wrote them, let alone lived them. The perusal of these essays brings much joy to this old man's life—as I hope it will to yours. A lifetime is not too long to realize your life was worthwhile and can contribute to the lives of loved ones, as well as friends you've yet to meet. Enjoy reading the book as I have enjoyed living it."

Some of the pieces in the collection will be familiar to *WESTVIEW* readers; we have published several of Mr. Mills' sketches that appear in the book, such as "R.B and I" and "Oscar and Vida."

The book contains thirty-nine selections. Of especial interest to Weatherford readers will be "Dear Classmates of WHS," which he wrote to present to his high-school class' fiftieth anniversary held in Weatherford on June 6, 1975.

For the past fifty-five years, Elmer and Bessie have made their home in the Ozark hills near Seneca, Missouri. The family has steadily grown from four children to eleven grandchildren and sixteen great-grandchildren. Since the 1970's, following his early retirement, Elmer has spent numerous hours compiling the thoughts and memories of his colorful youth into *ESCAPADES OF A DRIFTER*.

A statement on the back cover of the book reads, "It is with this literary contribution that his family is indebted to him for his priceless gift of a glimpse into their past."

Anyone who likes nostalgic humor needs to buy Mr. Mills' book. Send \$10.00 to his granddaughter-agent, Lori Le Bahn (Posterity Publishing Company; Route 2, Box 218A; Seneca, MO 64865). Help make a granddaughter happy; Lori has poured a great deal of effort and love into the project.▲

THE WORLD'S GREATEST HORSE RACE

A Review of Hazel Ward Adcock's **PRAIRIE HOPE**

by *Dr. Leroy Thomas*

PRAIRIE HOPE by Hazel Ward Adcock, formerly of Stillwater and now of Falls Church, Virginia, is an exciting frontier novel.

Although the plot unfolds slowly at first, which is fitting for the waiting around before the "world's greatest horse race" begins, the tempo never slows as we get into the famous land run of 1889 into Oklahoma.

Adcock has skillfully used three or four sub-plots, but the reader never loses sight of the main plot—the one dealing with Joseph Bonelli, an Italian sculptor turned sign painter in the frontier setting, his halfbreed wife, Ramona (Rainbow), and their son, Carlo.

The author has also shown poignantly that racial prejudice isn't a new thing—that it was very much alive in early-day *Prairie Hope*. For instance, Rainbow, although she is a well-educated, cultured, articulate woman, isn't socially acceptable to the *Prairie Hope* dowagers; and Joseph, a sensitive artist, is called "that Eytalian" and is the object of derision by both genders. After all, anyone who draws and sculpts nude women isn't decent according to the *Prairie Hope* vanguard.

One of the most amazing things about **PRAIRIE HOPE** is Adcock's ability to deal with the life process in a satisfying manner without vulgar graphic details. She demonstrates that it really is possible in the late twentieth century to write novels without emphatic crudeness and coarseness.

I have given my review copy to my mother; it's the kind of book that anybody's mother would appreciate. The publisher is Dr. Walter J. Raymond of the Brunswick Publishing Corporation (Route 1, Box 1A1; Lawrenceville, VA 23868); cost is \$18.95 plus \$3.50 for mailing. It's a "steal" for \$22.90.▲

THE SCOPE OF LIFE

A Review of Dr. Shyamkant Kulkarni's **THE WAR AND WANDERINGS**

by *Dr. Leroy Thomas*

Dr. Kulkarni has a new address (2501 Hunter's Hill Drive, Apt. 822; Enid, OK73703), and he has completed a new poetry collection (**THE WAR AND WANDERINGS**).

The book, a good purchase, may be ordered directly from Dr. Kulkarni from his home address for a total of \$7.00 (includes tax and mailing).

THE WAR AND WANDERINGS, dedicated to "Peter Arnett and other war journalists who endangered their lives to follow the truth," is very current in its treatment of the Gulf War. Dr. Kulkarni says in his preface, "Television cameras brought the Gulf War to the living room of every American household and took everybody's sleep. You could watch war going on as if from the window of your living room." And his poetry collection brings the war to a personal level in such poems as "Keep Them Marching," "War and a Coin," "Hungry, Thirsty, Homeless," and "The Great Victory."

Kulkarni's collection has the scope of life. Throughout we see the poet's desire to express himself in writing. The range is from war to love to freedom or desire for freedom. Part of the charm of his poetry lies in his use of the idiom.▲

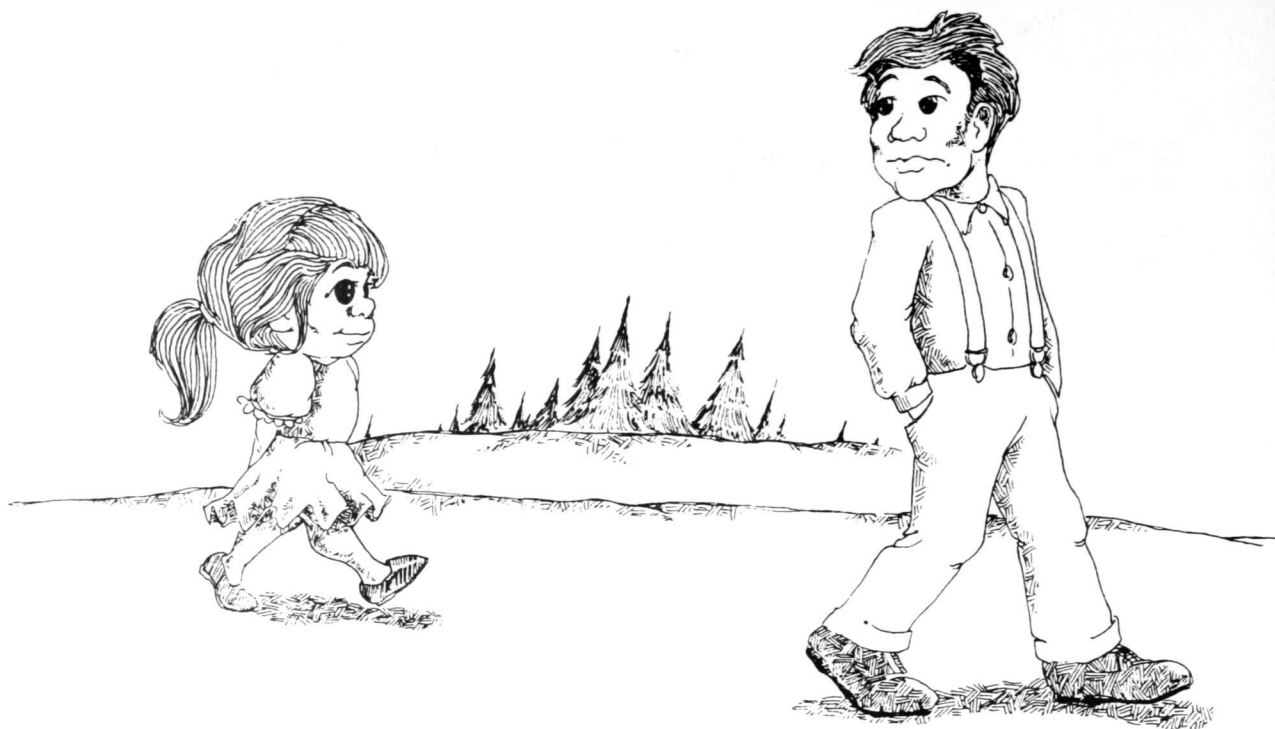


illustration by *Brad Snow*

RUTHIE PENN'S CHRISTMAS

by *Mary Stover Redmond*

The year was 1928, and Christmas wasn't very far away. We played with many of the neighbor children; but for this Holiday Season, I have memories of one very special child named Ruthie Penn.

At age 5, she was the youngest of the Penn family, and she followed us everywhere we went. We really didn't care much for Ruthie's company: she was no help at all hunting snakes or digging sheep out of the bog. From my vantage point of 13, I looked down upon Ruthie—and forgot

about when I had been only five years old.

Even so, the holidays tended to bring out my better nature. All throughout the year, I had played with Gladys Penn, Ruthie's 11-year-old sister; Ruthie's two brothers were much older than she was—and she even had another sister, Ada, who was almost grown. Ruthie didn't really have any playmates—and I began to feel very sorry for her because she seemed banished: her lot in life was simply to follow us older children around on our

adventures, forever barred from actual participation. Perhaps, I thought, things would be better for Ruthie if she just had a toy to play with. These were, it must be recalled, very hard times.

So I made a very hard sacrifice for a 13-year-old. I made a plan with Mama to forget my Christmas present—and to give me the money she would have spent on me so that I could take it and buy a doll for Ruthie Penn. I had already made my selection: I had located a beautiful doll in the Montgomery Ward catalogue.

I told Gladys and Ada about my plan because I needed their help. I waited for the mail each day until the doll I had ordered arrived; then I summoned Gladys and Ada. Now that we knew the exact size of the doll, we were ready to set to work with the apple and orange crates we had collected, hammering nails and painting little pieces of wood which would become doll furniture. We worked at my house, of course; the project had to be kept completely a secret from Ruthie, who still believed in Santa Claus.

Our major production was to be a doll bed. The apple crates of that time had

thick boards that made a nice headboard and footboard. Short two-inch blocks of wood served well as legs for the bed. It was impossible to sand the splintery orange crates, but we applied a nice shade of blue paint which covered most of the blemishes. We dyed some of Mama's old sheets that weren't worn out on the edges, and Ada Penn made pillows, a mattress, and little sheets from the best parts. Ada could also crochet, so she made some wonderful little clothes for the doll, including booties.

Working on Ruthie's gifts was great fun. Until that year, Christmas had been for our family what it was for most families of little means—not a day for gifts, but instead a day on which we ate much better than usual. But from becoming so involved with adding every little touch to Ruthie's doll furniture that we could think of, I suppose we began to learn something about what Christmas was all about in the first place—something about giving.

I was up early on Christmas Day of 1928, and I hurried to the Penn house to see Ruthie's surprised and presumably ecstatic look when she discovered what Santa Claus had brought for her. We who had worked

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so hard watched as Ruthie unwrapped the doll and looked at the doll bed and bedding. Her manner was pleasant and polite—but certainly more reserved than we had anticipated. She even seemed a bit embarrassed to be receiving a gift at all.

The day was pretty and Gladys Penn and I set off on a hike through the woods, where we ended up walking along Buckhorn Creek, one of our favorite spots. Sometime along the way, we realized that we had company; as usual, little Ruthie Penn was following us. She had deserted her Christmas presents—perhaps the first real ones she had ever received—to tag along behind us again. This routine seemed to be a way of life for her which brought her a pleasure that we didn't understand. I also didn't understand why we were denied the gratification of seeing her pleased by her presents. The family stayed on in our area for another year—and then they went away. I don't even remember seeing Ruthie play with that doll. Was it because she had become so accustomed to being without toys, and to her role as tag-along, that she didn't even feel herself to be worthy of these gifts? I'll never know. But I



illustration by Brad Snow

do know that I shall always remember that Christmas anyway—and the pleasure I received, not from making Ruthie happy, as it turned out—but from anticipating how happy she would be.▲

MARY STOVER REDMOND, a free-lance writer, was reared on the family farm located four miles south of Rush Springs. She is the author of a book titled *ADVENTURES IN THE FOUR-MILE STRIP: AN OKLAHOMA CHILDHOOD*. "Ruthie Penn's Christmas" is her third submission to *WESTVIEW*.

A Light At CHRISTMAS

by *Elva Howard Deeds*



illustration by *Brad Snow*

She blew gently on the tiny flame to ignite the kindling under the coal in the huge pot-bellied heater. The simple task of getting a fire going in the frigid morning air of December added to her feeling of happy well-being as the glow of the fire spread its warmth about her in the little one-room school in Northwestern Oklahoma. It was Miss Howard's first year as a teacher on her own, at Fairview, about seven miles from Forgan in Beaver County near the mouth of the Oklahoma Panhandle.

The room was becoming pleasantly warm when she heard the lively chatter of the children approaching the door, and she moved toward the doorway to welcome them in. The entire school had arrived together. Only five children, but a rewarding challenge to Miss Howard, spanning five grades in one day's lessons. Six-year-old Ben Mullinax was first in the room. Leaning down to greet him, she was bothered by a niggling worry that touched her mind. Her lack of experience with beginners hadn't been apparent so far,

MEMORIES

but a day must seem long and boring for him as the other classes were reciting. However, many concepts could be shared among the grades, and a student could learn merely by listening to another pupil from a higher grade-level.

Little Ben had three older brothers ranging upward to grade eight. Martha Pfeiffer was 12 and in Seventh Grade. There would be two of Miss Howard's pupils to take county tests in the spring when the county superintendent came to visit Fairview. Martha had one sibling, Carl, who was an older teen-ager out of school. He was industrious and intelligent, and he helped his aging parents run their small farm. The family made the farm prosper when the droughty winds discouraged many farmers during the "Dustbowl Days." They owned a new 1935 Ford sedan, kept shiny clean despite the blowing dust. One day on the slick frozen road, Carl was bringing Martha to school when the car flipped over on its top with its wheels still spinning. He got out and helped the shaken Martha to her feet; then he managed to get the car upright again and calmly drove on to school.

It was that time in the term to begin on the Christmas program—a new experience for the children, and they were very excited. Of course the plans included a nativity scene. (It didn't enter Miss Howard's mind that there might be a different belief in the community.) Her concern was centered on adequate lighting—at least enough light so the children in the play could be identified. There was no electricity in the little school, so they would rely on kerosene lanterns.

The stage was an area at the rear of the classroom with a slight incline above the floor for separate instruction or more private recitation. Carl had rigged up an adequate curtain over the exit door and arranged for a small space for behind-the-scenes props and changes. Lanterns were hung on wires suspended from the ceiling.

At last the TIME was upon them. The parents had chosen to have the program on Christmas Eve to make it more meaningful to the children. The people of the little district began arriving at dusk. Nobody stayed away that night. The children were aquiver with excitement. They proudly showed parents their handmade decorations and ornaments

on the big tree and stole peeps at presents brought by parents, but kept concealed in a big Santa-Bag.

The play had been planned for a minimum of scenery and changes. Christmas carols began to emerge from the handwound Victrola, making Buster Mullinax busy keeping it going and changing records. Then the greetings of welcome and recitations over, the scene was set for the "Christmas Story." The curtain was removed from the nativity props; a reverent quiet hushed everyone—and Miss Howard began the narration while the infant (doll) lay in the manger and Martha Pfeiffer sat beautifully serene as "Mary" robed in a sheet and blue towel. Carl, playing Joseph, stayed in the background.

The three older Mullinax boys dressed in robes appeared in the subdued light as shepherds, then slipped away and reappeared as wise men carrying gifts of shiny foil and wearing colorful turbans. Miss Howard carefully maneuvered the action as she continued the story.

Now the moment for little Ben was at hand, but Ben stepped close to his teacher and whispered worriedly, "It's too dark! I

can't see the Baby Jesus' face and Mother Mary." As he moved closer to get a better view, SUDDENLY A BRIGHT LIGHT SHONE ON THE MANGER, and Ben's mouth opened in awed astonishment. He swallowed deeply and began to sing softly...

"AWAY IN A MANGER, NO CRIB FOR A BED..."

And a lovely light shone out on everyone, as Carl Pfeiffer held up the big electric bulb attached to a large battery, powered by a windcharger that he had provided for his family's farm.▲



ELVA HOWARD DEEDS *is a retired public-school teacher who enjoys free-lance writing; she lives on a farm near Sentinel with her husband, Eldred.*

OLD ENOUGH

By *Carl Stantlaus*

The year was 1937 at Christmastime, and Dad had a bad case of rheumatism.

Even before I was born, Dad was in the poultry business. In 1927, he worked for the Live Poultry Transportation Company running chicken cars from Paris, Texas, to New York City.

After I was born in 1929, he opened his own business and bought about anything a farm family could produce. He processed those items and sold them to a wholesaler or back to the farmer.

It was a dirty job at times; but as they say, "Somebody had to do it." We scraped and salted cowhides and then put them in fifty-gallon drums of brine. We mounted different furs on boards and sold the furs to manufacturers who made hats and coats from them.

Brother Gene was born when I was four; but when he got older, with Mom, all of us worked in the store. Dad tested cream; the rest of us candled eggs, sacked pecans, and fed the chickens until they could be picked up. In the later years, we concentrated on custom mixing and grinding feed because the rest was such a mess.

When Dad built his store, he put a high loft over the office for storing boxes. It was a perfect place for Santa to leave our presents until Christmas. There was no way he could be everywhere on the night before Christmas!

On Christmas Eve, 1937, Dad couldn't climb the fifteen-foot ladder to the loft. I was seven and brother Gene was three. Gene was too small to climb, and Mother didn't want to

try it. So we had a problem.

Dad thought and then said, "Carl, I think you're old enough to help Santa out this year. Can you climb up to the loft and get the presents? I just can't make it." He added, "Now don't tell Gene where Santa hides his presents; Gene's too young."

Gee! Help with Christmas! I felt so grown up right then. Gene and I had always been too scared to climb way up there, but now the words old enough made the difference. I held my breath and climbed the steep ladder to the top, not daring to look down. After I reached my destination, I yelled, "Hey, Dad, I made it!" Oh the feeling of exhilaration and joy from that accomplishment!

The next morning, Gene and I raced down the stairs at home to see that Santa had left an electric train and football for me and a box of Lincoln logs and Teddy bear for him. The excitement wasn't diminished by the previous night's revelation. It was enhanced by the larger part I had in helping.

Now each year when Christmastime rolls around, I think about that cold December night when I grew up just a little bit because I was needed.

From telling this story, I think there must be a Christmas message in it somewhere. Maybe people, even nations, would grow up a little if they would admit that they needed others more. Then, it would seem, love and trust would follow.

No, I didn't tell Gene where Santa hid his presents—well, not until he was "old enough."

CARL STANISLAUS, a retired employee of OTASCO, lives in Chickasha. He enjoys doing free-lance writing and learning the intricacies of his new computer.

CHRISTMAS NEVER CHANGES

By Georgia C. Lowenberg

Somehow it wasn't Oklahoma that I was returning home to, but the memory of Christmases I had known there. Now when I thought of Oklahoma, I was able only to visualize some vague red-earth land where oil-field derricks taunted the sky and dust clouds mockingly obscured steel and sky alike, sucking in the desolate vistas, shrinking my horizons. There was a brief recollection of cowboys and Indians, but perhaps it was the product of a country-western song breaking through the static of the pick-up radio. *Okie* was part of my vocabulary because men like Merle Haggard and John Steinbeck had endowed it with an indelible image and branded it on my brain. The years had effectively separated me from the place I had grown up in.

It was this last stretch of the journey that was hardest for me. The truck, its grimy box haphazardly brimming with cable, air-hose, and the sundry used and abused tools of the welding trade, had always afforded me a sense of belonging, of purpose in life. It had been some seemingly blind, relentless sense of destiny that had again and again compelled me down the interminable miles of highway to each new job; to the rivers that ran blue on

the map but, more often than not, dirtier than hell underneath me because mud and pollution had fouled their waters—toward the stalwart bridges that spanned them. I had long ago lost all semblance of upbringing or family ties in the role of the hooded, faceless form that straddled the girders, hunched over the precisely aligned joints, indefatigably striking the glaring electrical arcs fated to consume or obscure it. Watching other welders from a distance, I would never be sure which. I had learned to measure a day's work not by the electrode-stub piles that gave wanton testimony to my industry and skill, burned as they were to the very last inch of flux, where the coating tapered, then yielded to bare metal for the alligator-jawed stingers to bite. We bought our welding rod in 50# tins. I emptied one almost every day out. And I was very proud that I could work that hard!

My pride sustained me because now the pick-up box was devastatingly clean, devastatingly empty. This year it wasn't only inclement weather that had closed in on us, but the floundering national economy. There would be no winter shop work for anyone. If (*If, not When!*) we went out again next

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spring, it would be with the same broken-down, run-down and worn-out equipment that had carried us through this past construction season—in the same aggravating state of despair, but even more in need of paint after the intervening months of exposure. Even the illiterate laborers who couldn't read the headlines that screamed RECESSION had heard the news broadcasts and/or the despairing words from the tight, grim lips of the afflicted: there was no work anywhere. No place! Nor any excuse not to go home for Christmas.

I don't really remember when I crossed the state line, not even the rush-hour traffic on the Oklahoma City bypass. Maybe it was just the mood I was in, but Interstate 40 West seemed no less nondescript than had Interstate 35 South earlier in the day. An unspectacular sunset had swiftly, inexorably, donned a vaguely menacing night-cloak. Nonetheless, it was this darkness in which I now sought refuge. It seemed as much a shield to me as did my welder's gear. But what it protected me from was either ill-defined or completely unknown. Maybe it was nothing. In any case, I was too tired to think about it.

I still don't know how I garnered the presence of mind to head south at Weatherford. It was, in retrospect, less a conscious action than a dormant habit resur-

rected by some memory-trace of place or landscape. A few miles later, I became aware of wind buffeting the truck and great slashes of rain assaulting my windshield. The crackle of static became unbearable, and I replaced it with the less obtrusive, more rhythmic slapping of the wipers. That sound, in turn, was all too soon obliterated by the tinkle of ice. Tightening my grip on the steering wheel, I bit my lip and resisted a strong temptation to vent my frustration in pent-up road-gang expletives. Much to my relief, the sleet was short-lived. It had, in fact, only heralded the arrival of the snow. My headlights illuminated a myriad of dancing ghosts. Snow! Schnee...

A, B, C,

Die Katze liegt im Schnee.

Der Schnee geht weg,

Die Katze liegt im Dreck.

It was funny how things started coming back to me, the kinds of things that invaded my mind: a German nursery rhyme, the spellbinding chant of the auctioneer at the Mennonite Relief Sales, the toe-tapping square-dance music to which I had too often turned worldly ears. The snow fell harder, swirling at unpredictable intervals like some out-of-control welding arc under the influence of conflicting magnetic fields. It had become difficult to see the road ahead of me, and I strained forward in my seat. When I hit the brake, it was with a senseless, spasmodic

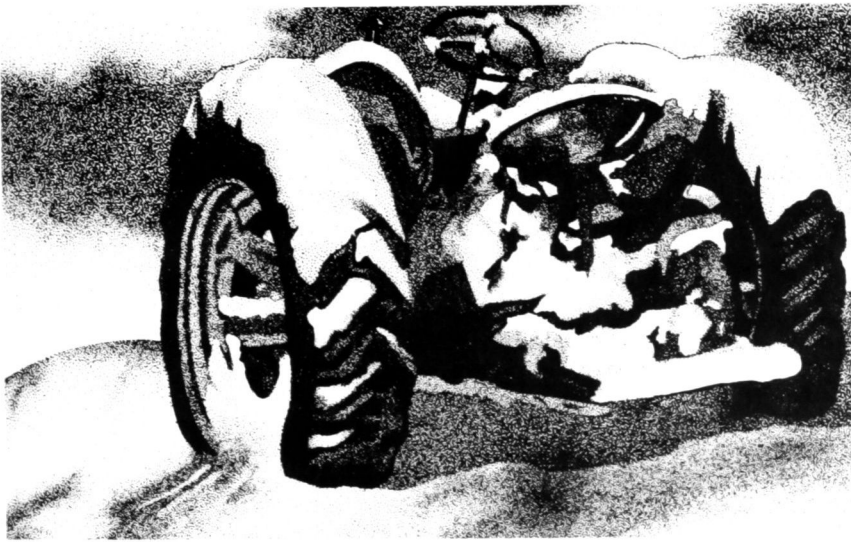


illustration by Dawn Hebert

action that sent the pick-up box fish-tailing across the now-slick asphalt. My panic was brief. Deliberately turning into the skid, I regained control of both my vehicle and myself and—more prudently—pumped the brake pedal. I was slowing down for the inevitable turn home.

The reassuring glow of the yard light was enveloped by the drifting snow, but I instinctively knew that it was there and that it was on for me. An angry wind caught the truck door and assailed the sprawling white fields that surrounded me with a lusty roar of malicious intent. Ravished, unraked leaves, the last remnants of the previous season, lashed at me, stinging my face and hands. Suddenly a porch light flickered, the heavy storm-door groaned open, and two large collies bounded out and about me, barking excitedly. "Hans! Susie! Haltet die Munder! Eli's zu Haus'!" It was my father's voice.

"Eli's home!"

I slept fitfully that night. It had been a long, hard trip, probably too long for a single day on the road. Indeed, my arrival had been so much past my family's accustomed bedtime that I had promptly pleaded exhaustion—and gone to bed hungry. Predictably, I had dreamed about food:

There were four of us around the campfire that night. All of us were abundantly conscious of the snow clouds riding darkly against the western horizon. One by one Larry retrieved the bulging foil packets from the eerily glowing coals. With his characteristic lack of ceremony, he meted them out. Like a lot of road-gang cookies, Larry had learned his skills in the railside 'bo camps of his wandering days. And he was as good as they came! The random concoctions of meat, potatoes, onions, and whatever—liberally sprinkled with Lowry's seasoned salt and swimming in beer—never failed to tantalize. We ate them without benefit of silverware, the grimy oil-film of the rolling mills transferred to our hands from the steel, from our fingers to our mouths. A gust of wind...

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The whole house shuddered in the fury of the wind. I awoke with a start, momentarily unsure of where I was or how I had gotten there. The intensity of my dream had sent my stomach into painful turmoil. Or maybe my hollow interior had—in simple desperation—precipitated my dream. There would probably be proponents of both theories. (I don't know which one I subscribed to myself) The clock struck two a.m., and I willed myself back to sleep.

When I awoke again, my first impression was of the cold. Extracting my face from the feather pillow, I could see my breath hanging in the frigid air each time I expelled. My father had always insisted that a house must have two stories, with a closed staircase between. The upstairs registers had been tightly shut the very day that we had moved in—and never re-opened. Each year, after the heat was turned on in late autumn, the door to the stairway was kept shut, too. Sleeping with heat on was a self-indulgence that neither could—nor would—be tolerated under my father's roof. It was a bleak day, but some of my memories were even bleaker. The cold, ominous silence was broken by the throb of the tractor's engine, the defiant, determined scraping of the plow-blade.

He worked several hours in record-cold temperatures, pushing a half foot of snow, breaking through drifts as high as our

fenceposts. Once he caught a glimpse of me watching from the festively decorated windows, and he raised a half-frozen arm in greeting. I waved back. "Er ist ein guter Mann," my grandmother said over and over again, each time with the same unfailing conviction. "Ein sehr guter Mann!" His name was Harvey Engel, and he had purchased the property next to ours. He and his family belonged to the Church of the Brethren. "We couldn't have gotten better neighbors if I had picked them myself!" my father proclaimed with no little pleasure. "Ja," Grandma agreed. "Das ist wahr."

By mid-afternoon the house was full of people—and still the cars turned down the lane that Harvey had cleared for us. The wall-peggs bulged with overcoats. One coat over another, I thought with irony. Buckle-type overshoes—designed for utility, definitely not for fashion—lined the baseboard, as neatly set on the old plank flooring as row crops planted in the Oklahoma earth. Grandma tended the guest-book with her usual fervent delight. Peering over her shoulder, I half-expected to see the names inscribed in Fraktur as I had when I was a boy. The names still betrayed their German heritage, but now the writing was in English. Not so surprisingly, I could still write the fine, flowing German script that I had learned at home and perfected in Sunday School. In contrast, from

the very first stroke, my English writing had been small, incomplete, nearly illegible. On an impulse, I leaned over and scrawled my hand that recalled the old days.. Grandma busied herself with the task of dating another page. She couldn't look up at me; she was crying.

Almost from the beginning, the guests had separated (segregated?) themselves—the men in the dark, formal parlor, the women and the youngest children in the ample kitchen. The boys weren't boys, but little men; the girls were little women. I headed for the dining room.

In a house superfluous with rooms, the dining room had always been my favorite. Years ago, I had deluded myself into thinking that the welding fumes had sorely compromised my sense of smell. To be sure, the acrid odor of purged acetylene, the stale, all-pervasive stench of sweat and grease in combination, had long ago ceased to offend my nostrils. Likewise, the exhaust fumes belched from the cast-iron digestive tracts of the gas-guzzling monsters that stalked the highways. Today the haunting fragrance hung in the air like the redolent ghost of an ancient, undefiled forest: cedar!

The black walnut hutch could be adequately, even eloquently, described in just three words: beautiful, dark, immense. I tended to think of the adjectives alphabeti-

cally because the object itself still inspired such awe that I couldn't rationally select a more appropriate word order. Grandfather had told me its story until I could repeat it in sing-song rote:

Noah Shertz had been raised in an Amish settlement somewhere in Illinois. But long after he had left his faith and his home to become a Mennonite, he remained inexplicably bound in Amish tradition. He bought black automobiles and painted the bumpers and chrome black in a futile attempt to deny their worldliness, then walked more than he ever had when he relied on a horse-and-buggy.. Utilizing Old World ideas of design and craftsmanship, he built magnificent hutches—solid, no veneers—as strong and imposing as an Amish barn and, invariably, lined them with the aromatic wood favored by his birth-people.

I thought of Pavlov's dog, trained to salivate at the ring of a bell. Thanks to Noah Shertz, I, too, had developed a conditioned response. Let the faintly intoxicating scent of cedar waft on a wayward wind—or softly, mysteriously, emanate from my mother's china service—and my mouth would water in pleasant expectation. I couldn't remember when it had been otherwise because the hutch had been a part of the family longer than I had been.

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As soon as there was an opening in the small group that had crowded around the great hardwood table (another Noah Shertz creation), I edged into it. The mere sight of the food regaled me: silver trays in every conceivable geometric shape inundated with sliced ham, sausage, and cheese; baskets of zwiebach (not the thin, dry toast of the supermarket, but tasty double-decker buns) and stollen; gaily-flowered china relish-dishes teeming with pickles, spiced apple rings, and minted pears; cut-glass compotes a-shimmer with jellies and conserves; fruitcakes and cookies everywhere. I took a plate and mounded it high with lebkuchen, several varieties of pfeffernusse, and the springerle that more closely resembled miniature bars of soap than anything edible. With a large mug of coffee in hand, I proceeded into the parlor. The voices of the women faded, their animated talk of rag-rugs and quilts and holiday candy-making. Between giggles, a few of the children were singing about Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer in the shrill, spirited, discordant—yet utterly charming—lack-of-togetherness characteristic of very young, untrained voices. Somewhat reluctantly, I left their sound behind me, too.

In the parlor, the conversation flowed in English, German, and some heavily accented blend of both languages. Resorting to a precarious balancing act with my food and

drink, I finally elbowed my way—as gently and politely as I could—across the crowded room, stopping only briefly to exchange pleasantries with the men who called out to me. The couch, the overstuffed chairs—even the straight-backed chairs brought in for extra seating—were all occupied. I pushed aside several houseplants and sat down on the window-seat—alone, in my own world—where I had always sat as a boy. It was a dismal, overcast day, but someone had thought to light the Christmas tree. The tiny colored lights danced in the dark corner recesses like stars twinkling in the vaulted depths of the night sky. I guessed that Grandma had strung the popcorn. There was also no doubt in my mind that she had baked most of the cookies.

I bit into a lebkuchen, the thin white glaze crackling between my teeth. It was heavy with the tastes of molasses, spice, candied fruit, and almonds.. I sampled the pfeffernusse; first one, then a whole handful. My grandmother's tasted faintly of anise. In the springerle the anise flavor was so strong as to be almost. overwhelming. I savored every mouth-watering bite of them.

"Eli! Harvey Engel!" A man I had never seen before introduced himself. With cookie crumbs still on my fingers, we shook hands. He had a firm, hearty grip that I instinctively liked.. "Glad to meet you, Harvey!

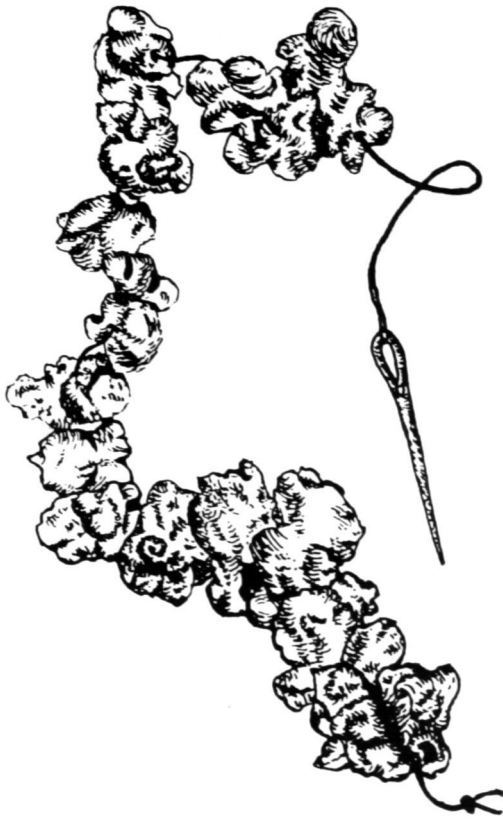


illustration by Dawn Hebert

I didn't recognize you without your hooded jacket. I can never thank you enough for what you did for us today!" I slid closer to my mother's flower pots. "Sit down, Harvey! Please!"

We talked about a lot of things. People came and went around us—and still we talked.. For some indeterminable time period, I had been vaguely conscious of a certain elusive transparency, a subtle play of light on the fields. Harvey must have noticed it, too. "Well! It's going to clear off after all!" The clouds thinned, grew wispiest, and then dissolved into the off-blue of a winter sky in late afternoon. The sun broke through with

benign intensity, the snow-shrouded earth beneath it glittering like a sea of diamonds, the light-rays glancing off the random wind-strewn ice-crystals

of the storm front.

"You know, Eli, we have so much to be thankful for. A blizzard last night, this change in the weather now. Western Oklahoma's a beautiful place!" He shifted his gaze into the room. "And we are privileged, indeed, to live amongst such fine people." The words of my grandmother came back to me: "Er ist ein guter Mann, Eli." She had been right.

I touched his shoulder and smiled. For a brief moment my hand lingered there. "I know. That's why I came back!" Harvey returned my smile. "Merry Christmas, Eli." Then almost as an afterthought, he repeated himself in German: "Frohliche Weihnachten!"

Outside, the Oklahoma sun reflected a radiance as brilliant and blinding as any welding arc ever could. At long last, I knew that I was home.▲

GEORGIA C. LOWENBERG, of Lincoln, Nebraska, is a certified structural welder and has been employed in bridge construction.

OUR FROZEN ASSETS

by *Carl Stanislaus*

Pictures in time capsuled albums
viewed after a Christmas dinner
recall the best and worst of times
when we were young and eager!

A snow-covered holly berry bush,
the top of Grandmother's head,
Dad's usual silly, sleepy look
as he blinked when the shutter closed.

The horse play, scared-stiff poses,
and cheesy smiles for the candid camera,
now are treasured frozen assets
since we didn't have video tape.

Funny glasses, longer hemlines, oh
the wide ties and pants with cuffs!
What's her name and Uncle Henry
raking the leaves of a golden autumn.

Gone are Granny and little Trudy
with time and tides and sunsets,
but the love locked in the old box camera
is the thing we will most remember.▲

CHRISTMAS IN SILVERPOO

by *O r v O w e n s*



illustration by *Mongo Allen*

Christmas in Silverpoo (all names have been changed) is like any other celebration in Western Oklahoma. If the description sounds familiar, it's because it might be your town.

Tree-named streets run east and west, and streets named for local citizens run north and south. There's a star on the wheat elevator that can be seen for miles. A favorite watering hole for tourists is Maggie Stupends Cafe east of the elevator.

The downtown business section, decorated at Yuletide with wreaths and imitation candles, consists of four blocks on McGilicudy (most towns call it Main Street). One of the banks available for Christmas loans is on McGilicudy. The other is on Oak Street a block off the main drag.

The town's pride and joy is Stuckerball's Department Store. Unfortunately it doesn't stock enough of the right kind of goods and toys to fill demand.

As a result of understocking and lower prices, folks drive over to Silvercoo (sister city to the east) where they have a Chocolate Hut Drive-in featuring Oklahoma's staple—burgers, fries, cookies, and ice cream for dessert or a banana split if the spirit moves.

In Silvercoo, there's a minimall that caters to common folks, who outnumber the affluent by a considerable margin. The mall stocks all the Christmas goodies you could ever wish for.

Ever since the oil boom boomeranged, Silverpoo has been going downhill. There have been more people starved out than Slewfoot Jones' pa can shake a stick at. What happened was that money, being plentiful, was spent as if it were going out of style, and Christmastime was rich beyond imagination. Just because Silverpoo can no longer compete with New York doesn't make it less painful.

If it weren't for the stoplights at Four

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Corners, loads of tourists would never know they were here. Slewfoot watched a man glance at his watch one day and back up in surprise. He found himself on the outskirts of a town he didn't remember seeing.

Slewfoot's pa spent most of his life on Walnut Street. Pine Street is one block south and Sycamore one block north. Both these streets dead-end on Broadhurst Avenue, named after a bakery owner who used to sell day-old bread for a nickel a loaf.

Slewfoot's pa lived in an imitation brick-sided house that had three rooms (living-bedroom, kitchen, and another bedroom off the west side like an afterthought). The living-bedroom had two cast-iron four-poster beds and a pot-bellied stove.

Slewfoot's pa said nobody ever thought about air-conditioning in the summer because they couldn't afford it in those days.

The kitchen stove was one of those wood stoves that could cook a pot of beans or fry potatoes as well as a gas stove. The kitchen was furnished with a battered oak table, chairs, a kerosene lamp, and a battered cupboard sitting against the north wall. Slewfoot said his pa's folks couldn't afford electricity even though it was available.

The living-bedroom was the scene of bedlam come Christmastime. A small cedar strung with popcorn and homemade trinkets reminded Slewfoot's pa more of elves than Santa and made Slewfoot wonder where all the cheer went.

His pa's four brothers and two sisters

never sang around the tree. They spent their time wishing and knowing in their hearts that what they wished for wasn't possible. Christmas was celebrated with homemade clothing, an apple, orange, rag doll, or a clear glass gun filled with white pellets called candy.

Parents didn't have time to go caroling. They were too busy concentrating on supporting their families. The best presents that mamas and papas of those Depression days could have had would have been sunup to sundown jobs at a dollar a day. Even fifty cents would have been welcomed.

Slewfoot's pa never believed in Santa Claus, but he did believe in a Higher Power, whose birthday they celebrated.

People needed faith as they never needed it before. Slewfoot said that times never change much between generations. Faith is ever in demand.

No matter what period of history a person delves into, people needed something greater than themselves to believe in. If Slewfoot's Christmas could be a cause, he needed to back it with words and action.

His grandma often cried at Christmastime because she couldn't do more for her kids. Sometimes the kids cried—not because they couldn't do more for their parents, but because they were disappointed about what they received. They acted cheerful on the outside and cried on the inside. Time hasn't changed much. Kids still do that today. It's a terrible way to feel; but if a person is going to cry, he ought to get it in

the open where everyone can get a handle on reasons why.

Not getting what you dream about hurts; it makes you think there's no justice in the world, and there's no way to ease the pain.. But as years pass and understanding comes, Slewfoot is thankful he was born in his own generation and not somebody else's.

There were times when Slewfoot wanted to cry when Christmastime rolled around. Maybe it was because his pa never got what he wanted, or maybe it was because his grandma cried.

Being poor. is hard on people. Slewfoot noticed that being rich is just as hard on those who don't know how to handle wealth. It makes them miserable to think of all that money being in someone else's pocket, or somebody enjoying the misery of those who don't know how to handle wealth.

Slewfoot said that money should be enjoyed because it's security.—no matter that it's a dollar-mad world with some people scratching, clawing, and conning their way to prosperity. The thing that gave him heart was that some people didn't seem to worry.. They enjoyed what thy were doing with their lives—whether it was banking, teaching, selling insurance, or mowing lawns in a sun-filled summer.

Thinking ahead to Christmastime and preparing to do all they could for loved ones is what made those people happy.

Slewfoot's pa tried to save for rainy days, but somehow those rainy days came and

went and what he tried to save.did, too. He did manage to pay off a three-room house in a small town and not only fulfilled a dream but had the best Christmas of his life—ghetto or not. It was a situation of soul over matter, and a man who had nothing to fill his soul was indeed in poor condition.

Slewfoot witnessed the disappointment in his pa's steel blue eyes most Christmas mornings.. His pa longed for a decent life, but most of all, he wanted Slewfoot to grow up straight and proud and to make his own way in the world.

Slewfoot could feel the longing on Christmas Day as Pa stared at the shortage of gifts, but food was more important for a growing family.

Slewfoot rambled on about how hard his pa had worked—about daily exhibitions of words and actions that were more precious than any gift Slewfoot could have received..

"More precious than gold," Slewfoot said and turned away as though he had already bared too much of his soul to a stranger.▲

ORV OWENS *writes a column, "Reflections," for the WATONGA REPUBLICAN and regularly submits manuscripts to WESTVIEW.*



illustration by Brad Snow

NANNY'S CHRISTMASES

By *Ida Vowell Robertson*

Dear Nanny,

Everybody in third grade has to tell a true story about how people kept Christmas in the olden times. Please write me about Christmas back on the homestead when you were a kid.

Love from your granddaughter,
Nancy Elliott

Dear Nancy,

I am ready to celebrate my seventy-eighth Christmas and every year as the Holy Season nears, the straits of "There's No Place

Like Home for the Holidays" stirs the memory of my mother "getting ready for Christmas"!

That memory brings a veritable avalanche of more memories with it—memories of children secretly making and hiding gifts from one another; counting the endless December days; watching for the mailman's slow hack and rushing to the mailbox to see if the Christmas postal cards had come from Mama's aunts in faraway Indiana. Such beautiful cards they were, encrusted with velvet angels or Santa Clauses amid sprinkles of gold or silver glitter. Now, you can understand why Christmas cards are the remembrances I cherish most of all even today.

My childhood home was a small frame farm house on the Custer County homestead my father had inherited from his father. In that rather isolated area, all holidays were big events, but Christmas was the favorite and most exciting for us all.

Mama had been orphaned when very young and thus had formed an unusually strong bonding with my three older siblings, my father, and me. She showed her love by always being cheery and happy with us. Every day was a day to remember—"This is the day the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Papa was a serious-minded little man whose whole world revolved around Methodism, family, school, and the outside world of the DAILY OKLAHOMAN.. Papa was full of

music. When I was little, I sat on his feet while he played the guitar and sang to me. Strangely, I remember only "Old Dan Tucker." He was a terrific fiddler, and I loved to hear him play "Dead Sea Waltz," "Turkey in the Straw," "Red Wing," and the Methodist Revival Meeting songs. He thought that dancin' was one of the seven great sins. With a guilty conscience, I would hide behind the door in the next room and twist and twirl in my grey outing flannel petticoats to the beat of "Red Wing."

At night, Papa and Mama sat at opposite ends of the "library table" with a kerosene lamp between them. He would read and she would either read or crochet. Then just as my brother, Lee, and I would be having great fun, Papa would lay the paper down, hand the Bible to Mama and say, "Julie, it's time to read." Then "Julie" would read a chapter from the Bible. (one winter she read *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* to us). Then we would all kneel on the cold floor and Mama would pray. If Papa wasn't too tired, he'd say, "Julie, let's have 'Sweet Hour of Prayer'." She would accompany his fiddle on a pump organ (before we got the piano) to play that beloved hymn. Many evenings, he would just sit and "fiddle." Doubtless this nightly ritual was the sustaining force that gave them strength for day after day of endless work.

My niece, who lives in California, took the old violin after Papa's death; her husband

refinished it and mounted it on red velvet. Today, it hangs in her beautiful home—far removed from the humble farm home where it had brought so much beauty into the lives of our little family.

And now for Christmas. Papa and Mama always made Christmas special, regardless of whether the crops had been poor or good. One Christmas, Papa made each of us little trunks for our doll clothes. Mama covered them with bright cretonne, and they were real treasures.

The first Christmas that I remember must have been when I was about three years old. I got a rag doll almost as tall as I was. She had shoe-button eyes, embroidered features, and long black braids made from "Old Dollie's" mane. How I loved "Old Sal"! Her body outlasted three or four heads, but the braids were always transferred to the new heads.

I remember quite well my fourth Christmas. Mama had us all gathered around the heating stove after dark. All at once, we heard a terrible clatter and Lee said, "Oh, Santa Claus on the roof!" He took me to the door to look for Santa; when I turned around, Mama handed me a beautiful baby doll which I supposed Santa had put down the chimney. I was so excited that I didn't notice Papa, slipping down the stairs or guess that he had made the reindeer clatter.

Then I started to school and the whole month

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of December we "got ready for Christmas." We prepared little plays and learned the old Christmas carols. We always had a big cedar tree which we lavishly decorated with paper chains and strings of popcorn and cranberries. On the big night, there would be a basket filled with sacks of candy, nuts, and oranges under the tree. These sacks were called "treats." Parents would bring gifts for their children and hang them on the tree. That first Christmas, I spied a beautiful bisque dolly high up near the top of the tree. I never for a moment considered that this beauty could be for me. And then Santa took it down and said, "This doll is for a very good little girl, Ida Vowell." Before I recovered from the shock, he handed me a little red doll buggy, and wonder of wonders, I was again surprised when he presented me with a book titled NIXIE BUNNY IN WORKADAY LAND. My teacher had given it to me for reading the most books in my class. My great night ended when we rode home through the snow in the buggy. I clutched my dolly in my arms and went to sleep between Mama and Papa. Heaven surely could hold no greater joy!

My most treasured memory of a Christmas is the one when our family was plagued with illness and crop failure. I was nine years old and in the fifth grade. There were no school buses in those days, and Papa rented a room in a friend's home in Clinton for Lee, Muriel, and Nell to live in and go to high

school. They came home each weekend. Lee was fourteen years old and in the ninth grade.

We had had a drought and had not made much money from the cotton crop. Papa and two neighbors got jobs in town and drove to work in an open Model "T" touring car. With his earnings, we were getting along fine, but Papa was never a strong man and about the first of December, he was stricken with rheumatism and was bedfast for months. He lay and endured great pain and worried about his family, but he never complained. Mama would heat the smoothing irons, wrap them in towels, and put them around him to ease the pain. He had no medication except Rawleigh's liniment.

One morning a couple of weeks before Christmas, Mama walked out to the gate with me to start to school. I had my lunch in a Mary June Molasses bucket and my book satchel over my shoulder. I wore a long stocking cap that wrapped around my neck, my wool mittens, and a pair of despised black overshoes. It was very still, no wind at all, and the snow was falling in big white, feathery flakes. Mama said, "The old woman up in the sky is picking her geese." Mama was wearing a long black coat. She held out her arm, let the snow flakes fall on it, and said, "Millions of snowflakes, but no two are alike." I could see many shapes and sizes of snowflakes on her black sleeve.

Well, it snowed and snowed and the

beautiful snowflakes became deep drifts and practically blocked the roads. Lee finally realized that Mama couldn't do the chores and take care of the animals alone, so he came home to help. This broke my parents' hearts as they knew he would probably lose a half year of school.

Mama was afraid the girls wouldn't be able to get home for Christmas. I heard her worry to Lee that she hadn't bought me a doll before the storm and worst of all she wouldn't be able to get out to cut a Christmas tree. One day, Lee went out into the pasture and brought back a little wild plum bush. Mama wrapped each branch with green crepe paper, and Lee found some old strings of tinsel. We strung popcorn and made paper chains from the colored pages of the Sears catalog. We had great fun making the decorations, and we thought that our Christmas tree was simply beautiful.

Muriel and Nell got home some way—I have no idea how—but they did. Mama and Papa were so relieved and happy to have us all at home. The girls had brought a doll for me and got it to Mama. I was sent to bed early every night, and I could hear whispers and giggles—but never dreamed that they were dressing my doll.

Christmas morning dawned. It was cold and the ground seemed to have been covered with snow forever, but everyone was so happy because "Baby" wouldn't be disap-

pointed. Papa's bed had been moved into the living room by the heating stove, and our beautiful tree was where we could see it. I really let out a yell when I saw that lovely bisque doll on the tree. Mama had managed to make gifts for the others, and Papa seemed to feel better that day, but not well enough to play the Christmas songs on his fiddle.

We had a merry time around the breakfast table of hot biscuits, pork, and gravy. Then Mama started making the Christmas dinner. We didn't have a turkey, but Mama baked a big fat hen. She didn't have the oysters she loved so well for the dressing or our beloved cranberry sauce. But Mama had all kinds of canned goodies in the cellar, and our healthy appetites were receptive to what we did have. We also didn't have the pretty striped Christmas candy, oranges, and nuts; but Mama let us make sorghum molasses taffy; we messed with it and pulled the gooey stuff most of the afternoon.

There was a chain of sand hills about a mile west across the flat prairie, and Mama called our attention to the sun going down behind the snowy hills in a big reddish, orange ball. She never let us miss any beauty around us. She taught us the names of all the wild flowers and all the different kinds of birds. We learned all the different kinds of bird nests and colors of each bird's eggs. I especially remember the blue and brown flecked mockingbird eggs, the white and

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brown scissortail eggs—and the little white eggs in the doves' nests on the ground. She remembered much poetry she had learned in school and would recite poems to us as we walked across the field to work in the vegetable garden. She especially loved Lord Byron's "Roll on thou deep blue ocean, roll/ Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in Vain." In my childish inexperienced mind, I couldn't associate an ocean, which I'd never seen, with the rolling prairie.

Well, Mama finally got to visit both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in her later years, but not with Papa. He died at age sixty-one, two months to the day before my first baby was born.

Then, one by one, we grew up and left the farm, but it was always "Home for Christmas." Times got better and gifts more plentiful and expensive, but we never forgot any of those childhood Christmases. Once, several years ago in mid-summer, my sister abruptly wrote at the end of a letter, "Say, do you remember the Christmas tree Mama made from a plum bush?" And another time, she wrote, "'Do you remember that winter that Mama read PILGRIM'S PROGRESS and BEN HUR to us?"

Mary Anne was six months old our first Christmas without Papa. Mama and Nell and her family were there. We delayed the meal, dreading to sit down with Papa gone. Little Mary Anne saved the day. Her high chair was

close to the table, and she leaned over and grabbed the turkey by a leg. All of us laughed. Always when I am doing my Christmas cooking, I remember how Mama loved to cook for us. I remember her gumdrop cakes, her banana nut cakes, her popcorn cakes, and all her pretty little salads. In later years, when we went to her home for Christmas, she would rush outside from the kitchen to greet us, rolling her kitchen apron around her arms to keep warm. Such wonderful love!

Finally she had a beautiful set of china, crystal, silver, and a linen table service. She always said, "I love to set a pretty table!"

Mama had the real spirit of Christmas in her heart, and she passed it on to each of us.

Thank God for Mama and Christmas!

We're looking forward to another happy Christmas with YOU!▲

Love,
Nanny

IDA VOWELL ROBERTSON *is a retired public-school English teacher who now lives and writes in Clinton.*

A HOLIDAY BEGINNING

by *Dale W. Hill*

"Why don't you take Dee Dee with you?" my sister offered as we prepared to head out to visit my wife's folks after opening gifts at my parents' home in Newkirk.

Dee Dee was my sister's only daughter and our only niece; and we were dumfounded by the offer. Less than four months before, we had lost our only daughter, Darla, a healthy 17-month-old toddler, in a tragic domestic accident. My wife and I, along with the members of our small Northwestern Kansas church, were struggling through the "How comes?" and the "Whys" of such a tragedy. Still in mourning, we now were experiencing our little one's should-have-been second Christmas, but sadly, without her.

"Dee Dee?" was Marcella's stunned response. Already our lives had begun to take a different direction. Within the month after our daughter's death, we had become involved in foster care. Three toddlers and now a teen-ager, Patty, later shared our lives. But we still suffered daily.

"You can start over. You're lucky that you're young," people had comforted, but we really didn't want to start over. We yearned to go back. Tragedies do that—make people want to turn back pages. We were no different.

Even though our newly acquired teen-age,

foster daughter was finding this to be the best Christmas of her life, it was our worst. Joyful Christmas festivities only magnified our loss. Christmas toys only reminded us of what could never be. Giving thanks during holidays for the suffering is indeed difficult.

Marcella dreaded this Christmas with her family. Our little toddler was her mom and dad's only grandchild, and they, like us, were devastated. "Why in the world?," I remembered, was my father-in-law's, grief-stricken reaction when I had told him that September evening. No, this Christmas wouldn't be easy at all.

"We'd love to! Why not?" my wife excitedly accepted as she thought of the prospective experience. "Having a five-year-old around might help Mom and Dad make it through the holidays."

Holidays, after the loss of a loved one—especially children or spouses—are indeed difficult. No wonder so many suicides occur before and during holiday seasons. No wonder holidays sometimes deepen depression rather than lighten it. The opportunity to take our niece along brightened the prospects of fellowship with our incomplete family—prospects of family photos with a member conspicuously absent.

The December Oklahoma wind had picked up on that cloudy Christmas day, with our foster

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daughter enjoying her first new coat. The warm car was almost inadequate in shielding the effects of the chilly northern as we drove to Hennessey, where Grandpa Jack was a truck driver in the oil-boom economy of the early 70's. Their mobile home snuggled between several others in a small trailer lot on the east side of Hennessey, and our thoughts turned from the tragedy to our niece, as soon as we arrived, who engrossed us in her kindergartener experiences.

Jack and Norma were delighted with our little Snow White; and after a full and active day, Dee Dee fell asleep on the divan, where we gently tucked her in.

"Do you think it might snow tomorrow?" was her final anticipatory question as she dozed off. Every child hopes that the Christmas holidays will bring about a snowman-type adventure, but we knew it wasn't to be. The Canadian cold front was to blow away the clouds through the night, and meteorologists had predicted a very hard freeze.

The aroma of coffee awoke me the next morning, and I was drawn to the sound of a mother-daughter conversation around a breakfast table cluttered with half-filled coffee cups. Starting over isn't easy, and it involves verbalizing the events and feelings; and this morning, so close after the tragedy, the discussion lingered around the funeral and efforts at keeping our spirits up.

As I passed by our niece, she slowly opened her blue eyes, rubbing the sleep out with

two small clenched fists. I glanced at the clock. "7:30," I thought. "A short night for such an active little one."

"Did it snow out?" she queried as she lifted herself up on her knees to look out the north window covered with Mr. Jack Frost. Slowly Dee Dee pushed back the curtain and peered out to see if one of her Christmas prayers had been answered.

"A fire!!! Oh my goodness, that trailer house is on fire!" she shouted as she stood up and looked even closer.

My first reaction was denial. I smiled a little disbelievingly and then slowly pulled back the curtain too. Shocked by what I saw, I was momentarily frozen. Flames were shooting out of the eastern end of the mobile home which was adjacently north and parallel to ours. The flames had broken the windows on that end of the trailer and seemed to be trying to escape, sucking the curtains with them—five, no ten, feet in the air.

"That house is on fire!" I yelled in contained panic. "I hope no one is in there."

We quickly broke into action as Grandpa hurriedly threw on his clothes and shoes and Grandma called the Fire Department. The garden hose was frozen as my wife's dad threw it down out of frustration and headed for the storage building to get another. The rest of us headed around the trailer, praying that we would find no one hurt.

As we turned the corner, we were startled

to see two little barefoot boys still dressed in their pajamas and holding a bird cage.

"We saved our parakeet!" said one of the boys to Grandma.

"We didn't mean to do it," the other whimpered. "It was just an accident."

As Grandma led the boys inside to warm them up with cocoa and warm clothes, we found out that their mother and father had left them at home while they went to work. The mother was scheduled to be back shortly.

By 7:40 the firetrucks arrived. The garden hose was useless against the fire, so Grandpa used it to shower down the north side of his house where the siding was buckling and turning brown under the intense heat generated by the blaze some one hundred feet away. Even firefighters found their hoses to be less than useful. The fire was quickly consuming the rest of the trailer and by 7:50 had engulfed the western end of the house. Soon an oil-truck filled with tons of water pulled in and literally dumped the water on the raging fire, quickly and efficiently dousing the flames.

We all surveyed the smoldering mass of twisted metal, charred wood, and melted artifacts as the two youngsters joined us. First the boys' mother arrived, hugged the boys, and fell to the ground as she ingested the totality of the destruction. Everything, yes, everything, was lost.

The father arrived. It had taken only twenty minutes for most of their earthly posses-

sions to be lost. Whisking away the mother and his two children, the father soon left, unable to bear the disastrous sight any longer.

All of us stood speechless, staring at the rubble while recognizing the awesome and destructive capabilities of fire. The young couple had to start all over.

We hugged one another, thankful for our answered prayers that no one was hurt, knowing all too well how this tragedy would affect the young family. The accident would either pull them apart or pull them together. We prayed it would be the latter.

As our family comforted those youngsters and their parents that morning, we seemed to be comforted. That tragedy strengthened our faith and helped us realize that we weren't the only ones suffering, and somehow it helped our family come to grips with the realities of starting over that Christmas in Western Oklahoma ▲

DALE W. HILL is an elementary counselor for the Anadarko Public Schools. Dale and Marcella, a nurse for Grady Memorial Hospital in Chickasha, have four children at home: Darrin, Holli, Nathan, and Drema. Mr. Hill has had numerous articles published in WESTVIEW, THE LOOKOUT, CHRISTIAN STANDARD, and other periodicals including an acceptance to GUIDEPOSTS.



THE PLAINEST GIFT

illustration by *Lisa Bradford*

by *Margie Snowden North*

I was in the fourth grade at Erick Elementary that Christmas in 1951. The Christmas tree was in place; gift-exchange time at school was approaching. The pile of presents grew daily. We all searched through them until each of us found his gift—everyone except me.

I anxiously searched each day, but not one present read "To Margie." On the morning of the gift exchange, I went to the tree as usual. An unfamiliar gift was there—a tiny one wrapped in smudged, once-white notebook paper. It was shaped like a candy tree that could be bought at

the corner store for a nickel. Immediately I knew the present was for me.

I was selected to help hand out the presents. With my head held high, I laid my present on the seat of my desk, hoping no one would see it. The boy who sat in front of me (and who happened to be from one of the wealthier families in town) snickered behind his hand. Somehow I ignored him.

The moment came that I had dreaded—each person was to stand and show the gift he received. They were such fascinating things: paper doll sets, perfumes, shiny cars, rugged trucks, books, games, and puzzles. How could I bear to stand and show what I had received? What if everyone laughed?

It wasn't fair! The teacher had stipulated that we should spend approximately a dollar for the one whose name we had drawn. I, the daughter of a common day laborer, had somehow scraped that much together and had purchased a lovely set of paper dolls that were even now being admired.

The boy in front of me stood and proudly showed his gift. I was engulfed with dread and close to tears, realizing I was next. Suddenly the bell rang, and I was spared the humiliation of showing my plain little gift.

It wasn't until later that I realized there was someone in the room that day who was perhaps more humiliated than I. It was the girl who had given me the gift. She was the daughter

of the town drunk and was considered scum by most. I'm sure that she cowered in her seat even more than I, dreading the moment when I would stand and display the lollipop and tell who had given it to me.

In the forty years since I received that disappointing present, I realize it helped teach me some needed lessons in humility, tolerance, and thankfulness. It has even served as a spiritual illustration in my writing and Bible teaching. For isn't it true that God once gave a gift that was disappointing, too?

They had expected an earthly king, decked out in royal robes, crowned with a golden crown, and seated on a commanding throne. What they got was a tiny baby, born in a dirty stable and wrapped in swaddling clothes. He was unacceptable to many; others received Him gladly.

This unusual gift still is being offered today. When accepted wholeheartedly, the gift teaches lessons in humility, tolerance, thankfulness, and more. Perhaps my receiving the lowly little gift forty years ago helped prepare me for later receiving the greatest gift of all.▲

MARGIE SNOWDEN NORTH, *a loyal WESTVIEW supporter and contributor, lives, near Erick.*

YULE SOUNDS

by Orv Owens

There are sounds vibrating in the air,
Over here, there, everywhere!
Sounds ever so beautiful and sweet,
Adding melodious rhythm to marching feet.

Sounds ever so clear and bold;
Music added when tales are re-told.
Sounds of timeless time and space
Pressing forever against my face.

Sounds of an old, almost forgotten time
Ringing out an ancient Christmas rhyme.
Sounds that haunt in dead of night,
Sounds that add immeasurably to sight.

Sounds ever so concise and unashamed,
Telling of history He has tamed.
Telling of millions of heav'n's stars,
Complete with nostalgic notes and bars.

Sounds heard each passing year,
Telling the newborn never to fear
Because His sounds have been reborn
Letting babes know his flesh was torn.

Letting earth's people know the King.
Letting all mournful bells ring.
Letting souls and time blend together
And blend sound with forever.▲

illustration by Tina Price

WINTER OUT WEST IS WONDERFUL

by Ken Shroyer

provide every kind of game thought possible—while the wife is making a favorite holiday candy.

Poor old Winter takes a beating, though. Most people like winter best when it's summertime and summer best when it's wintertime. At least that's what they say. Mention winter and many folks just say "Bah." The mere word *winter* sends shivers up and down their bodies. Such attitudes aren't fair, really, because winter offers many advantages.

We should just think about Christmas and the birth of our Savior, a time of worship, a time of exchanging gifts with our loved ones. Then, later, we enjoy the opening of packages and watching the children's eyes light up as they gather around the glittering Christmas tree.

Then one week later, it's New Year's Day—a time of making resolutions to strive for a better life. But some folks make resolutions knowing



illustration by Mike Sigurdson

One nice thing about winter out West is that it's a wonderful time for romance. Sitting around the fireplace eating a big bowl of popcorn is my ideal way of spending an evening. And if a person likes basketball, the TV will

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with the thought that we can do better.—even break some of those bad habits we've had for years.

Then before we have time to get the snow off the driveway, "Ground Hog Day" pops up. And we're hoping that little rascal doesn't betray us and go back into his hole for another six weeks of bad weather. However, wintertime is an excellent time for crops. The snow gives new growth to what we have planted; the cold kills off most of the insects. Too, we can plan what we are going to do next spring and summer—even schedule a vacation if we have a good crop.

Winter also gives us a chance to give honor to our two best-known Presidents' birthdays—Washington and Lincoln. Of course, we have to squeeze Valentine's Day in there between holidays. Then somehow some government officials thought it would be good to have a special day, so they declared a President's Day for everyone.

Now, in order to end our wintertime in patriotic style, we conclude

with Saint Patrick's Day. We put on anything green we can find and strut ourselves down to a local store or restaurant displaying our four-leaf clover and bragging about our Irish blood.

For sure, wintertime out West has many advantages—no lawns to mow, no shrub-pruning, no car-washing, staying at home to pamper a cold or the flu, no listening to golfers telling their tales, no salesmen or solicitors during snowdrift times disturbing our rest. We enjoy missing those things.

In short, wintertime in Western Oklahoma is great. Living and loving out West during the winter is like heaven on earth, and it's a deposit that can be made even without visiting a bank.▲

KEN SHROYER, *an OU graduate with a degree in Business Administration, and his wife, Reta, live in Weatherford.*

CHRISTMAS TREE

by Jill Logan

Boughs raised,
 rejoicing with the angels in Heaven;
 much higher than a terminating plaster
 ceiling.
 Top erected,
 proud and wise, keeping nature under
 a watchful eye;
 much more distinguished than a plastic
 stump.
 Tiny, yet powerful, needles,
 perfuming the air with the rich aroma
 of a score of censers;
 not even remotely comparable with the
 stench of aluminum and rubber.
 Roots of age and beauty,
 solidly wound into its pedestal of
 earth;
 hardly capable of being mocked by a flimsy
 vessel of metal.
 Conceived by the wind, the sun, and the
 precious assets
 held only by nature and its prodigy;
 unlike one born of machines, to a life in a
 cardboard grave.

A true Christmas tree is a miracle of nature.
 That is what gives it beauty.
 That is what gives it power.
 That is what gives it a possession that we shall
 never mimic.

So why do we even try?▲



illustration by Tina Price

JILL LOGAN, daughter of
 Dr. and Mrs. Jim Logan, is a
 sophomore at Weatherford
 High School.

DECEMBER MORNING

by *George L. Hoffman*

How cold and frosty is the air
This clear December dawn!
My steps are whispers in the grass
As I cross the whiskered lawn.

The streets are void of people yet
As I make my early round,
And the air is free of noise yet,
Unsullied by vulgar sound.

But from the silent housetops,
Like pendants hanging up,
The thin gray lines of chimney smoke
Are stretching up and up!

They streak the sky like pencil strokes
With scarce a twist or turn,
And I marvel at these simple folk
And the gentle fires they burn!▲



illustration by *Lisa Bradford*

GEORGE L. HOFFMAN *lives in Clackamas, Oregon.*

CHRISTMAS

by Wenona L. Dunn

A time to remember—

*Loving parents
and children, too.*

*Christmas Eve
and so much to do!
Tinsel and twine
and wrappings gay,
Candies and fruit—
Such a glad day!*

A time for praying, too—

*That soon we shall see
nations at peace,
Kindness prevail
and crime to cease,
Honor for God
and thankfulness, too:
Not just at Christmas,
but all the year through!▲*

illustration by Mike Sigurdson

WENONA L. DUNN is a free-lance writer from the Foss area.

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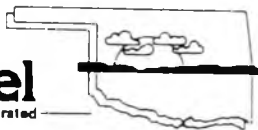
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