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OLD ENOUGH

By *Carl Stanislaus*

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.