



An Old-Fashioned Christmas

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Christmas in Indian Head was always a joyous and giving time that we greatly anticipated as children. We didn't start the season in November like we do now, but made a point of putting up the artificial tree before the round of staff parties began. Dad would invite his Credit Union co-workers over for a meal and mom would ensure that the teachers had an opportunity to celebrate the half-way point in the school year by coming over to the house for a little "cheer". We always tried to guess who would send us the first Christmas card and then, as they came in through the mail, we would hang them over red and green wool that was stretched across the archway in the living room.

The Town crew hung strings of lights across the Main Street. Stores added all the special foods that only appeared for a few short weeks each year. Mandarin oranges in boxes, candy canes and varieties of nuts that needed to be cracked and shelled were interspersed with displays of various types of boxed chocolates. I remember how much we loved Turtles the first time they were sold.

The Christmas concert was held in the Memorial Hall and every grade participated. It was quite an endeavor to ensure that the hundreds of children involved were lined up in the basement properly and then appeared for their two numbers at the appropriate time. I remember our Grade Six efforts under the direction of Rose McLaughlin, Benny Friesen and Colleen Nichols who were barely above the toddler stage were seated in a red sleigh that served as a prop for our rendition of "Sleigh Ride". We wore our best outfits and some even had a little sparkle in our hair (as well as our eyes).

The drug stores had boxed corsages that were made of various artificial ornaments and worn on dresses or even on the collar of a winter coat. As children, we traced reindeer and stars on coloured construction paper and built snowmen in the playground. We also exchanged names with our classmates and then kept the secret as to whose we pulled as we tried to figure out what gift we could give that would bring pleasure and still stay within the price limit.

The community worked together to ensure that everyone was part of the excitement. There was Santa Clause day at the Theatre where every child received a bag of candy after a free show. The Elks Club and other service clubs surprised us with gifts (usually handed out by Bucho MacDonald attired in full red suit and white beard).

The Salvation Army was collecting for the poor with their bell ringing and singing on the street. We delivered homemade candy to the shut-ins, poinsettias to friends and boxes of oranges to families we thought might not have any. The CGIT had a Vesper Service where we felt so mature to be walking with lit candles. Everyone smiled and chanted "Merry Christmas" even to people who they didn't know because they were guests of someone.

Because mom was a teacher, she would come home the last day of school with boxes of chocolates, ornaments and cards from appreciative families. She had given each of her students a bookmark with the words to "Silent Night". We didn't seem to have to hope for snow in those days as it came on its own. And there was always lots of it. We would have to shovel it from the outdoor rink at Dixon Park before we could skate or we would go to the old rink for the free skate. One or two adults were always there to just go from one child to the other to ensure that the skate tying was done. Around and around we went - always in a clockwise direction to the tunes played by the record player.

FINALLY it was Christmas Eve and we walked through the falling snow to the United Church for a service that was packed with people. Outside the life-sized nativity that had been built by some of the men of the church reminded us of the reason for the season. Inside the pipe organ and voices filled the church with carol after carol after carol. We always ended the service with dimmed lights and the strains of "Silent Night" with four-part harmony that touched the soul. We hung up socks even though we didn't have a fireplace and knew there really wasn't anyone but our parents who visit in the night. We just didn't want to admit that we had this wisdom, in case the tradition stopped.

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And on Christmas morning there was always an orange and unshelled peanuts and a candy cane to be found in that sock.

I don't really remember all the gifts we received over the years. Sometimes we would get some jewellery from the latest rummage sale, or skates or a toboggan. What I do remember, however, are the beautiful memories that were formed in a community where people cared about each other and wanted to celebrate the fact that Jesus had been born. Thank you, Indian Head, for these memories. Have a wonderful Christmas season!