
TWELVE TALES OF CHRISTMAS

Preface

Every Christmas is different. It is not so much that Christmas changes, but that we change. My earliest Christmas remembrances seem silly when viewed half a century later. My latest remembrances would be viewed as somewhat stilted and sober by someone much younger.

Early Christmas memories are dominated by Santa Claus and gifts received. Later ones are dominated by Jesus Christ and gifts given.

While each of these stories is based on actual people and events, each has been altered to some extent. Sometimes this has been to preserve the anonymity of those involved. Sometimes events have been combined to make a better story. The intent has not been to deceive but to entertain.

The final story is reported from several conversations with people who knew the two girls on whom Amy's character is based.

This book is arranged chronologically. Therefore, it begins with the very silly and ends with more sober thoughts. Such is life.

Chapter 1: I'm a Believer

I spent the first six years of my life living in my grandfather's house. I don't suppose that's too unusual, but most of my cousins also lived there. My grandfather believed a "family that stays together, stays together." So when he built his house he built with that philosophy in mind.

The first floor of the house contained a living room, dining room, kitchen and pantry, master bedroom, library, and bathroom. The second floor had been divided into six small apartments, each with a bedroom, sitting room, and bathroom. My grandfather expected his children to marry and move their spouses into the apartments they had occupied while growing up in his house. Surprisingly, most of his children did just that. To this day, fifty years

after my birth, I call my parents by their first names, since I heard a multitude of aunts and uncles address them that way during the formative years of my life.

It was a great experience. With all my cousins growing up in the same house, we never lacked a playmate. It also led to memories of Christmas that were, to say the least, unusual.

Behind the kitchen and pantry on the first floor of our home was a screened-in sitting porch. Since air conditioning had not yet been invented, this screened-in porch provided a place to sit on a summer's eve, be protected from bugs, and yet take advantage of any cooling breezes. On the second floor was a similar room built above the sitting porch. It was called the sleeping porch.

The sleeping porch was about ten feet wide and as long as the house was wide, about forty feet. During the winter months the screened windows were cornered with insulated panels, and the sleeping porch became a playroom for all of the children in the house.

Every family has developed its own set of legends about Christmas. At our home Santa Claus decorated the Christmas tree. The morning of Christmas Eve a large pinon pine was pushed, pulled, and forced through the front door into the corner of the living room. The ceiling was ten feet high and the tree always brushed it. A delicious aroma filled the house. Once the tree was placed in its stand, there was considerable discussion, adjusting, and turning before the tree was finally secured. Pinons are really not shaped like traditional Christmas trees. There are always bare spots where a branch should have grown but didn't. When the tree was brought into the house it was supposed to "come down." this is a non-faith-promoting experience in which nonexistent branches are supposed to relax in the warmth of the house and magically droop into place, filling the bare spots on the tree.... But the aroma was marvelous.

During the afternoon, all of the grandchildren who were old enough to not wet the bed pulled their mattresses onto the sleeping porch. Pillows, sheets, and down-filled quilts, called "down puffs," were arranged for the night.

Dinner was over by seven. The tree stood undecorated, still waiting to "come down," in the corner of the living room. Stockings, many stockings, were hung from the mantel. Children were tucked into bed on the sleeping porch. Then two different events began simultaneously.