

## CHRISTMAS COMES TO HOBOKEN

by Charles Bogert

The days are becoming shorter as the temperature begins its annual dip towards the gray unpredictable dark side of winter. It can snow any day now, but usually we would see our first flurries after Thanksgiving opens the door to the Christmas season.

The week of Thanksgiving at Wallace School was filled with the anticipation awaiting the Wednesday before the big day to view the “Assembly” gathering in the auditorium of the school. Year after year we would view the program presented on stage by student “volunteers” about the beginnings of Thanksgiving and be taught, and expected to learn, the song “We Gather Together To Ask The Lord’s Blessings” in hopes we would understand the tradition better. For us, the first and second graders, it was entertainment for filling the day, but for the third graders and up it seemed like an excuse to get out of schoolwork for an hour or so. The day was usually short, for the school system saw fit to let us out early depending on school staffing, but no matter what, we looked forward to the upcoming celebration that every Thanksgiving usually brought to the Bogert household in my younger years.

Although Mom earned extra money doing “washing and stretching” curtains, house cleaning for various people and caring for us, she still managed to find time to shop and put together a Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings.

This dinner task would begin Wednesday night when Mom would be home awaiting my return from school and she would pack me up to go grocery shopping with her. We would have to leave the house before it got too late because once the sun left the sky the temperature would start to drop and we did have about four blocks to walk to the Safeway store on 9<sup>th</sup> and Clinton Street. Ready for this festive journey, she would grab her pocketbook and the \$20.00 she saved for the last several months for shopping and we bundled up and left our second floor apartment descending two flights of stairs to the Street. As we passed the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> and Park she seemed to speed her step, as I believe she felt guilty about passing Freddy’s Grocery and Ralphie’s Vegetables to shop at the cheaper Safeway. As we passed these stores her pace would return to normal and before long we would turn the corner on 9<sup>th</sup> and Park Avenue heading towards Willow Avenue and turn left. Just so happened Brodie’s Clothes Store was on the corner and she was always able to take a peek in the window at the latest arrivals on display before continuing the shortcut to the entrance of Safeway.

The parking lot for Safeway, although full, was seldom overcrowded with drivers waiting for parking spots, for most patrons of Safeway arrived by foot. Despite the shortage of traffic in the parking lot, Mom insisted we use the pedestrian footpath that ran the length of the front of the building. The parking lot ran between two apartment houses causing it to act as a channel for the cold winds blowing through it, and to me I couldn’t understand why Mom wouldn’t allow the eight foot shortcut to get in the store quicker. It was even worse when it snowed or rained. Nevertheless we were finally in Safeway.

We would usually enter the store with the same instructions from her, “Stay close to me as I don’t want you getting lost,” and grabbing the shopping cart would proceed in the same manner which she had traveled the aisles for years, down one aisle and up the next starting at the meat counter. The turkey was generally frozen solid and I do not believe personalized service was available. The housewives from Hoboken would pick up one bird, look at it, put it down and pick up another for several tries before making their final selections and moving on. Mom usually had her list of items for the Thanksgiving feast but they generally consisted of the most common dinner. The turkey, potatoes, turnips, cranberry sauce, bread used for stuffing, two large cans of pumpkin for pies and the ingredients for mincemeat pie; nothing for soups or appetizers. The final purchase was usually apple cider and the ever-present warning of “remember, don’t drink too much of that as it will give you the runs” and with that we would head to the manually operated “scanner less-computer less” checkout line for the journey home.

The return trip seemed enduring, for the fully packed grocery bags weighing us down felt heavier than four arms could handle, but we finally arrived at 1016 Park Avenue in record time to psych ourselves out to climb two flights of stairs up to our apartment. If we were lucky Rosemarie or Lillian was home to help us up the stairs with our load, but that was seldom. In later years Mom would finally get a two-wheeled shopping cart making her trips to the stores and climbing the stairs much easier. Upon our return we would quickly put away the groceries and stuff the refrigerator full and, except for a few minor preparations, we would stop for the day and look forward to the Thanksgiving gathering.

The night was short lived for me as the visit of Grandma and Grandpa was rapidly approaching. The house was expected to be cold as the kerosene stove in the front bedroom was seldom used and the kitchen stove would be kept on low, but today was different for Mom was already up, warming our black cast iron cooking stove. The other tenants in the apartment house seemed to have the same idea as the aromas of turkey dinners could be inhaled through the halls and dumbwaiter shaft entertaining our senses. After our quick bowl of oatmeal and a cup of tea I was told to leave the kitchen clear to await further instructions, for Mom was in the process of preparing dinner.

Our retreat found us in the living room watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade on our black and white 10” TV perched on top of the six-foot high china cabinet. A few years later this annual TV viewing would also be joined by the “March of the Wooden Soldiers” starring Laurel and Hardy and continue for many years. And then, just like now, our concentration would be interrupted by commands from the kitchen.

The table had to be set and the chairs positioned and Roe, Lil and I would be assigned this responsibility. The large dining room table stored in the other room for certain events would have to be cleared and moved into the living room, dusted off and have its folded extension sides opened. To position this huge table the living room furniture would also

have to be arranged to make room, but as a team effort we were able to accomplish this task. After these assigned duties we were told to get ready and be presentable for, as always, Mom wanted a good impression for the arrival of our distinguished guests, Grandma and Grandpa.

The minutes moved slowly as our anticipation grew when finally the doorbell would ring and our joys excelled. We would buzz them in and yell down the hail stairs ‘who is it?’ as if we didn’t know, and the response would be “it is us” as they proceeded to climb the two flights of stairs to our apartment. Their journey seemed endless when you’re a kid of six and full of excitement. As they approached their final destination, the aroma of Grandpa’s pipe filled the hallway air announcing their arrival. As they entered our apartment we were reminded to control our enthusiasm for fear we might race towards them knocking them over, but overcoming this we managed to greet them with hugs and hollers to welcome them for this festive day.

Grandpa arrived in his familiar attire, flat hat, blue wool sweater, high laced black shoes, his pants held up with suspenders and his ever-present pipe dangling from his lips as he headed directly towards the “Captains Chair” in the corner of the room with Grandma close behind. If this were the lucky day Dad was off, the Philco “Hi-fi” record player would be turned on to listen to German records and Dad would offer them a “schnapps” or a beer before dinner. As they got settled they would be surrounded by the three of us grandchildren offering the latest in “Show & Tell” and forcing them to recap their thoughts of what they’ve gotten into by accepting this invitation for this day. Grandma and Grandpa must have been blessed with endless patience for it was times like these when it proved itself many times over.

After much general conversation between us all, Thanksgiving dinner was finally ready for presentation. With help from Roe, Lii and Grandma it was placed on the holiday decorated table. As Mom placed the turkey on the table Dad would perform the honors of the carving and once again mention when he did this occasionally while serving on the passenger ship the “Leviathan” in the 1930’s. After disputes as to who would get the drumsticks we would finally be ready to eat. A few moments were taken to say “Grace” and ahead we would go to enjoy our long awaited dinner, Few words were spoken during dinner, but old tales were rehashed during dessert. The record player would once again be playing German music (silenced during dinner), Grandpa would be smoking his pipe, Dad his cigar and if we were lucky Grandma and Grandpa would very quietly sing the words to the music and tell us a story about Germany and their families. To me, it was an informative session and one I would cherish in future years. Their thoughts perhaps reflected a sentimental tear for their native country, but being with us today we hope that their memory would be shared with today’s moment.

The long awaited Thanksgiving dinner event was over and it was time for them to leave

to return to their home at 911 Clinton Street. They would re-bundle themselves for the cold weather and the short walk home and with Dad as an escort say their goodbyes, leaving us with a mile of memories for another year. Christmas wasn't far behind.

Thanksgiving began the countdown to Christmas. Kids all over the world in the "believable age" were busy writing letters to Santa expressing their wants from dolls and dollhouses to Hopalong Cassidy and soldiers, and I know I was no different. The one problem I did have, however, was that at this early age I couldn't write, so Mom and my sisters would do their best to help. I believe I wanted everything the media advertised, but like all things I would settle for whatever Santa brought me. Several more weeks and I would find out for sure.

Christmas season was rapidly filling the Hoboken air. Mr. Boz, living across the street from us, would be displaying his eight foot hand-made Santa Claus in front of his house, truly bringing Christmas to Park Avenue. In the years to come a sleigh and reindeer and several wooden packages would also join his display. Ralph would begin receiving his shipment of Christmas trees for sale at his vegetable store and Freddy Nissen likewise would be setting up his Coca-Cola Santa figure in his window. One by one the neighbors would join in and as the day approached fully decorated trees would begin appearing in their windows.

Our tree was usually put up in the middle of December. Our Christmas decorations were buried in our storage bin in the basement of the house and to lug about seven to ten boxes up two flights of stairs was an accomplishment in itself. Dad was not the most energetic Christmas decorator, so after buying the tree, mounting it and putting on the lights it was usually left up to Mom and us for completion.

The tree itself was about six feet high to start, but allowing for the top ornament and base to fit in the lighted stand, some minor surgery would have to be done to its stump. The direct bottom of the stump would have to be dead center to fit the pointed mound in the stand and the three screws tightened to assure proper security to prevent tipping. As a secondary precaution, Dad would tie it to a wall by wire that also helped to keep it straight upright. He would string the "bubble lights" and various other colored lights around the tree, while Mom was in the kitchen making a "snows" dressing from Ivory Flakes and water to be spread on the branches. This idea, she claimed, helped prevent fire, but we never knew for sure. We usually began this coating when Dad was finishing his lighting and for the most part his contribution was complete. Finished, Dad would head for his chair, light up his cigar and watch the rest of us create our Christmas monument.

The lights in place, the branches "snowed" and the excess tree branches accounted for, at

long last, out came the ornaments from their boxes and the stories that came with them. The boxes themselves showing Uncle Sam shaking hands with Santa Claus were “Made in Hoboken” but the ornaments themselves were made in Germany. Accordion players, birds with feathers, teacups, odd shaped ones, zeppelin shaped and bells and balls some as large as six inches all found their way to our tree. Tinsel, strings of glass beads, stars and plastic reindeer as well joined the collection now on display. The pointed glass top highlighted the tree and the extra branches, put up with red cellophane backing, graced the entrances to several rooms signaling that our task was almost complete. Final touches were many, but one I was usually assigned, was pinning the Christmas cards to the drapes with the straight pins that were ever-ready sharp and setting up the Manger on the book case, The shelves in the living room also found them being occupied by Christmas decor and after a quick glance and cleanup our house was decorated for the coming season to greet Dad who was now probably awakening from his mini-nap. “After all, he did help a little.” To us Park Avenue was ready to reflect the joyous season, as was the rest of the City of Hoboken.

The Christmas lights stretching across Washington Street from 5th Street to Newark Street would be turned on Thanksgiving weekend as well as the Christmas music broadcasted over the loudspeaker system, a special gift to the citizens of Hoboken. “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”, Frosty the Snowman” and “Here Comes Santa Claus” newly released for the season by the “Singin Cowboy” Gene Autry would greet the shoppers as they entered the predominantly business area of Washington Street.

Although the stores from the 10th and Washington towards 6th and Washington would be decorated, they were generally not considered to be the downtown area of shopping splendor. For on these blocks were bakeries, drug stores, grocery and hardware stores and many residential areas along the wad’, but to me the “official” shopping start was Beacon Auto Supply on the corner of 6th and Washington Street and Stan’s hobby store right next door. Beacon’s was the exclusive distributor for “American Flyer” electric trains. As Mom and I would approach the corner she would let go of my hand to allow me to run to their windows, With my nose pressed against the glass I was mesmerized by the set of trains circling the show view window. To accent the track layout was a number of moving accessories such as loaders, cattle cars, lumber cars, etc., surrounded by village buildings such as houses, schools, churches and the like. After endless coaxing Mom would allow me to now look in the window of Stan’s hobby. Here the window was saturated with building models of all types. Army tanks, racing cars, boats, aircraft, some that actually flew, as well as knights in shining armor and “Invisible Man & Woman” lined the display shelves leading to the entrance to the store. The store itself also sold Boy Scout equipment as well as trophies, athletic gear, sports jackets and school letters, Everything a sport enthusiast could imagine all in one store, but it would seem like an eternity before I would be able to patronize these stores on my own. So putting dreams aside we would continue our trek down Washington Street to conquer our Christmas shopping.

The stores we seemed to visit were always on the right side of the street as we headed south towards 1st Street. Perhaps the first stop could have been Baron’s Drug on and Washington to buy perfume, or Epstein’s baby clothes also somewhere in that area, or could it have been Chasm’s Stationery for pens or pencils or Whelan’s Drug on 3rd for a number of gift ideas, but usually the highlight was the “5 and 10’s.”

The first stop I believe was W. T. Grant 5th and Washington. The stop offered two floors to explore for gifts and I remember being fascinated by the wooden escalator between floors. Huge globe lights hung from the paint chipped ceiling between unused Casablanca fans, but this seldom was noticed by anyone except kids like me who were bored because I wasn't in the toy area of the store. Just when my spirit was bolstered because Mom completed her purchase, she would decide to change stores, leaving any visit with the toy department behind. Out we would go to continue our quest down the street already passing Terminello's Vegetable Market, Al & Sid's card store, a liquor store, a furrier and a shoemaker, finally crossing 4th Street.

On the corner stood Abelson's Jewelry, a store I never visited, a few more stores, and one store I always was ready to visit to see my friend Sid Caesar, Fuji's Luggage. Actually, Sid Caesar was a cardboard standup, advertising luggage in the window, Because he was so well known from TV on Saturday night people took notice and I was no exception. After greeting him for several moments we would move on to continue our Christmas journey. A few doors up from Fuji's was another shop that seemed to dominate this block, and that was the "Pawn Shop" with its three gold balls hanging over the door and its showroom windows protected by iron bars on the window. On its shelves was everything from watches to musical instruments or anything else of value, but to a kid my age I thought "What Junk! Let's move on" and with Mom in full control we did, right into Fisher-Bier, another 5 & 10 store.

Fisher-Bier would change its name several times in the next few years, but to me it was always memorable. Along the walls they had reserve merchandise piled high to the ceiling and I wondered how they got that down if they needed it, but with Mom's travel speed I didn't have long to dwell on this thought While Mom inspected the cloth and sewing section area, I hoped to make a quick appearance in the toy area, but once again was hustled out by Mom to continue our shopping. Mom was beginning to accumulate a few packages by now, but her speed was still top form as we finally proceeded to the last few blocks of Washington Street.

Heading towards 3rd we would pass Loft's Candy and the corner house over the store where Mom told me they once lived. Looking west down the street toward the corner of 3rd and Bloomfieri Street would be the future site of the "Dairy Queen" ice cream stand, but that would come later in the next year. Finally reaching the corner of 3rd and Washington, Whalen's would greet you with its windows full of Christmas decorations. You had to be very careful you didn't trip on its marble steps to view them, however.

Three doors up and there was the "Crème de Crème" for any shopper "Woolworth's 5 & 10". This store seemed to have everything, including a lunch counter. The aisles of merchandise were separated by glass partitions on wooden counters that tilted towards the customer for greater access. Below these counters were sliding wooden doors that held the reserve stock for replacement of sold items. The walls were also lined with various items for kitchen and bath, as well as blinds and shades. And way in the back near garden supplies was the mini-pet department, which offered canaries, turtles, ant farms and goldfish in little bowls and their required supplies. Cosmetics, toiletries, costume jewelry, plastic wares and fabric, to name a few, were also available for sale, but nothing interested me except the toy department located on the right side of the store. There, at last Mom would let me look and if I was lucky, she would buy me a little car,

truck or soldier for about ten cents. The choices were endless and difficult, but I did my best to choose the right one. There were no shopping carts or baskets available until later years so the responsibility of carrying my treasures to the checkout counter rested solely with me. Standing in line I grew impatient waiting for the final tally to add up so I could claim my prize, only to hear Mom say "Don't take it out of the bag until you get home or you'll lose it!" So with face dropped, I endured impatience once again. Out the door once again we would head towards 2nd Street, past Geismar's Men's Wear and arriving at John's Bargain Store before passing Crawford Clothes and Rexall Drugs on the corner.

Crossing the street, halfway down the block would be our final shopping goal "Sparrow Cigar Co." 126 Washington Street. It was here we usually bought Grandpa "Old Grainger" pipe tobacco in the can and Dad a box of "White Owl" or "Phillies" cigars for Christmas. Walking onto the hardwood floor when entering the store, the aroma of tobacco greeted your senses while the rows on rows of cigar boxes in display cases demanded your attention. Pipes in various shaped designs, either hand carved or machine made, reflected this era of smoking history along with ashtrays, cigarette holders and even smoking jackets readily available for purchase. If that alone wasn't enough they even sold boxes of candy of all types. If I am not mistaken there was a thin, bald-headed salesman with a pencil mustache at your service. His manner, patience and knowledge of his tobacco stock, especially cigars, were perhaps the reason the store still operates there today.

Our mission finally complete for this day, Mom would make a surprise announcement and ask if I wanted a jelly doughnut from "Schoning's Bakery" on 1st and Washington Street. And of course, I said "Yes", s-o-o with little effort we would walk another half a block past "Washington Furniture", "Mary's Toy Shop", several shoe stores, "Adam's Hat", "Marcus Jewelers" with the show piece "Clock" displayed in the window, and Goodman's Men's Wear on the corner. It would be here on this spot, I would learn later, Mom was deciding whether or not to ring the bell of 115 Washington Street for a quick visit with Aunt Frieda and Uncle Willy. Their marriage had at times moments of distress and this was a home one didn't visit unannounced, so to play it safe we would usually pass on the idea for the moment. Going into "Schoning's" located between "Marty Wadlich's Bar" on the corner and "Law's Sporting Goods" next to the "Oval Bar and Grill" and a card store on the corner, I would eye the display cases of the always crowded bakery. Mom would usually order a butter cake and a crumb cake, with crumbs the size of marbles, and finally six jelly doughnuts, again with the order "You can't have one until we get home." So paying for our purchases we would leave with me thinking what I would like to order next time.

As we would leave the bakery heading toward the bus stop, Mom would once again think of Tante Frieda, arriving at the same answer and we would board the bus. As we passed "115", I would look out the window to see "Carl the Jeweler's" shop and his 20 foot clock towering by the street curb guarding the entrance to the apartment house where Aunt Frieda lived and hoped to myself I would see her soon.

Before long the bus would stop at 10th and Washington Street and we were getting off heading down 10th past "Demarest TV Repair", "Tucker's Pharmacy", "Kussiluck's Shoes" (with the fat lady's picture in the window) and Lee Engs Chinese Laundry" finally arriving home to our warm apartment and a cup of tea and jelly doughnut, *ready* to start another Christmas venture tomorrow.

Besides Washington Street stores, there was another store that I would spend beaucoup time, beaucoup money and build up beaucoup memories of my life and childhood in general, and that was "Franklin's on 11th and Park Avenue, a "Mom and Pop" store of the time. Franklin's was the center of attention for the younger generation four years to about sixteen years old. This was the store where I bought my plastic models, picked up our daily newspaper, and purchased our ice cream cones and candy. It was also the store where I mentally "wrote" my wish list and "fantasized" my play world dreams would come true. If it was available, Franklin's probably had it. The latest in toy guns and holsters, army forts and soldiers, ears from "around the world" and dolls of every nation all "Made in the U.S.A." Their outside windows were usually a tease for what was available inside, but that was enough for a gullible kid like me. I found paradise when I entered. To the right was the huge rack of magazines and the latest comic books and the rack of "Adult Novels" which we were warned not to even peek over there. To the left when entering was the ancient cash register on top of the candy counter housing the malt balls, string buttons, and other penny candies, all loose, to be pointed out and packaged before being purchased. Atop the counter were the candy bars, gums, mints etc., and the tobacco products behind the wall. Several feet further in was the ice cream counter with the spinning seat stools in front. Behind the counter was a wide assortment of ice cream tubs, which corresponded to the selection sheet on the wall over the back counter, and atop of the ice cream counter were several soda dispensers and to the left side of the counter was another candy display. An ice cream sundae with the works cost about thirty-five cents, and a walk-a-way sundae fifteen cents. Cones with one scoop about ten cents, double scoop twenty cents, and malts and ice cream floats also about twenty-five cents. Directly on the wall behind the counter facing the patrons was the huge display of dolls of all shapes and sizes and the "Stieff" stuffed animals imported from Germany. It was from this display I decided to purchase a doll for Mom to display on her bed. I remember the total purchase of this doll was a staggering cost of \$4.98. I would be in debt for months.

Opposite the counter was the costume jewelry display case offering a selection of gifts, key chains, lighters, trinkets, etc., another place I would occasionally search for gifts, and a greeting card display to its left.

At the rear of the store stood the great adventure, the several huge shelf racks of toys, mostly catering to boys. Models, play sets, cowboy outfits, trucks, cars almost everything to excite a kid my age, plus the large assortment of "Plastic Ville" railroad accessories that would compliment any railroad setup. Franklin's was like heaven to me,

A few years later I would even have the honor of delivering their catalogue within the neighborhood. In a place in time Rosemarie and Lillian would both work there, and whether it was Christmas or not, Franklin's was always worth a visit and well worth the memory.

For the most part Christmas shopping was usually done by the 20th of December allowing us to savor other Christmas moments such as visiting Rockefeller Center's displays highlighted by its towering Christmas tree. For the most part at this age, all I remember was freezing cold weather and crowded people making "oohs and aahs" at the sites and Mom crashing through the New York crowds like a football player, clinging Lillian and me close to her side and yelling to Rosemarie to "keep up and keep close to her." The event was probably worthwhile, but to the sad fact I don't remember too much about it.

As Christmas Eve rapidly approached the days were filled with last minute details and Christmas greetings from neighbors and friends. Alfred Winters, one of Dad's maritime friends, we respectfully called "Uncle Al", would also drop by and bring Mom perfume or candy and give us either a toy or money. He had no family of his own so he more or less adopted us. He was a warm, gentle man that one wouldn't imagine him spending much of his life in the rugged world of maritime adventure and his visits regardless of season were always welcome. He even would attend Christmas service in church with us one year and this in itself left a lasting impression. Because of his sailing schedule, however, his visits were few and far between and this is our one regret.

Periodically we would visit someone's home for coffee and cake, but the one "Big" visit for us was the Christmas Service at the "First Reformed Church" 6th and Garden Street. The special service was held the Sunday night just before Christmas and was geared to the younger generation allowing us our time to contribute to the blessed season. The church was usually full, as the various Sunday school classes would create the feeling of Christmas through song, poems or a re-enactment of the birth of Christ. The congregation on this night was usually friends and relatives of the "Cast" and the feeling of observance was quite obvious. The services usually began with an energetic welcome from Pastor Wettstein addressing us from his elevated pulpit on the right side of the altar and instructing us to sing the first of three Hymns posted on the hymnal advisory plaque behind him and on the wall left of the altar. The Christmas hymns were usually our favorites so little effort was made by us to sing them mostly from memory. Pastor Wettstein's voice was usually the first to be heard and he, truly having the gift for encouraging others to join him, would have the church filled with song in no time. The organ, played by Mrs. Hughes was in top form and our opening Christmas service began with full gala acclaim. After the last note was played the church was quiet again as we listened intently for this year's inspiration. One by one various Sunday school classes, mine included, would put on their performance and return to their seats, The organ would once again begin to play with the adult church choir singing "Silent Night" in both English and German if requested, and this song always brought a tear to Grandma's eyes for this was her daughter Rosie's favorite Christmas song before she died at a young age. It would be several years before I would find this out, and to this day appreciate the value of this song. Once again, after the organ and song stopped, the church was silent as Pastor Wettstein walked to the end of the altar and announced the moment we kids all waited for, the presentation of our Sunday school attendance pins. An attendance pin was awarded every Christmas service to those Sunday school attendees who attend class without missing one Sunday during the year, except when it was closed for summer, and I was about to receive my first. It was a wreath type pin cast to hold the second year pin. The yearly pins awarded thereafter would be a bar type pin which was easily attached. After I would receive mine I would return to my seat, waiting for Rosemarie's and Lillian's name to be called to receive their achievement awards. Looking closely at my pin I began to realize the sacrifice Mom made every Sunday to assure we got to church. Years later I would appreciate it more for I was to receive my 13th year pin before entering military service and for this I owed Mom a lot. This was a proud moment.

The final presentation after the Benediction was a box of chocolate distributed to all the Sunday school pupils. Although this seemed to some to be unusual for the house of God, we kids never complained. As the church congregation began to stir to begin the exit from church, I would be able to see and greet some members for the first time tonight: Mrs. Hilkey, Mom's first Sunday school teacher, Mr. Louie Detjen, Mr. John Cortes, Christina "Steenie" Winsch, Nellie Braak and

many others including the parents of friends such as Mr. & Mrs. Louis Muser, the parents of my best friend Louis.

Our church visitors usually included Mom, Grandma, sometimes Tante Frieda and when possible Dad, when not working. Through the years there were a few times Dad even showed up in police uniform, but his appearances were usually rare for he said he “Didn’t want the church to fall down.”

As we left the church to return home, the nights were usually crisp and clear and at this point in time the street relatively safe. We would wish Tante Frieda good night for she lived the other direction, and we would walk Grandma home before returning to our house. Upon our arrival home Mom would fix hot chocolate, and we would recap what happened in church and stare at our church pins before going to bed.

Several weeks before, we would attend an Odd Fellows Christmas party, Mom & Dad would attend a Policemen’s Christmas party, but to us the Church presentation was the beginning of the Christmas week. The joys and memories of this week would last for years and be reflected upon often. Although the usual Christmas visits of friends and loved ones, the exchanging of gifts, and the over indulging in sampling of our favorite food was considered Christmas for many, for me the guidance of church and what it offered me proved milestones in my life. The memories of Mr. Pete Dussman and Mickey Dugan playing Santa are vivid, but the overwhelming picture of Pastor and Mrs. Wettstein bellowing out Christmas carols will stand out forever.

Christmas Eve brought Santa to our home and the joys and pleasures with it, but the moments leading up to it, somehow deserve a lasting place in my mind.

As I get older I hope these memories will last, for they will be used often, lingered, savored and cherished. For those who read this, I hope a place in History was shared. Like other people and towns across America their reflections of Christmas replayed yearly, but at long last I finally have the chance of sharing our moment of a family who picked the City of Hoboken to grow up in at Christmas.

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