

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE *Home for the Holidays*

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This year on the day after Thanksgiving as the smell of turkey and dressing still permeates the air, I'll take the Christmas decorations out of the attic and prepare for the onslaught of the Holiday Season. I'll also take my old Magnavox record player out of the closet, along with several old Christmas albums. Putting a record on the turntable, the scratchy sound of needle to vinyl will bubble out of the two detached speakers, along with the rich baritone voice of Robert Goulet singing "There's no Place like Home for the Holidays." While decorating, I'll think of friends and family in places far away and wonder what new Holiday memories they're creating. Earlier this year I emailed them, requesting their memories of past holidays. Some of their memories were funny, some were sentential, and some were sad. With that in mind, let me share what they wrote.



Camilla - Gulfport, Mississippi

"When our oldest son Henry was in kindergarten, I took a ceramics class and made a Nativity scene. That Christmas I decided to display my creation, and did so with great pride! While watching what I was doing with silent intentness,

Henry suddenly blurted out, "Mommy! Baby Jesus isn't born yet!" So... I quickly removed Baby Jesus, remembering to put Him back in His manger crib come Christmas Eve; the following year I forgot to. That Christmas morning, Henry dashed in all in a dither. "Mommy! Santa Claus forgot to deliver Baby Jesus!" I breathed a sigh of relief - at least I had someone else to blame!"

Faye - Birmingham, Alabama

"Growing up in the Riverside neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia, my family rode the streetcar into the city to shop at Rich's Department Store. It was such a treat to see the lovely decorated store windows, and of course, the Great Tree, a holiday tradition started in 1947. As a child, the huge tree was overwhelming, lit from top to bottom in brilliant, sparkling lights. It stood atop Rich's flagship store, and could be seen for miles around."



Kimberly - New York City

"Last Christmas, I saw one of those pre-fab gingerbread houses, and insisted that my husband purchase it for his mother. Turns out that gingerbread house brought back wonderful memories. When his mother was a child, each Christmas her mother baked a gingerbread house from scratch. Then my

husband's mother and her siblings assembled the gingerbread house in all its surgery splendor. It reigned supreme until Christmas Day, when it was gobbled up with much grinning and mouth wiping."



David - Gulfport, Mississippi

"When I became a vegetarian, I insisted on an "animal friendly" meal during the Holidays... so I purchased a Tofurkey. When I handed the box to my Dad, he didn't say much. But when the Tofurkey was cooked and plopped on a platter, Dad howled with laughter! "It looks like a cooked breast implant!" he said. And from that day forward, my Tofurkey has never tasted the same!"



Kenneth - Melbourne, Australia

“Shops will be well into Christmas with the start of the Melbourne Cup, which is always the first Tuesday in November. The Melbourne Cup is know as the “race that stops a nation” and is Australia’s premier thoroughbred horse-race.” We also have Christmas in July as a non-holiday event with Christmas-like meals offered at eating venues like hotels and special restaurants during that time.”



Uncle Pelham, who lured us with a big pot of homemade andouille sausage, chicken gumbo, and “from scratch” egg nog. And now that God’s called Uncle Pelham home to Glory, I sure do miss those wonderful holiday meals.”



some excuse to re-visit the stores we had just shopped in. She eventually returned with huge shopping bags, the contents of which we were not allowed to see. It suddenly dawned on me who Santa really was. BUT... I didn’t say anything because baby brother was not as “smart” as me. I still wrote Santa a letter that year, which was put in our coal burning stove, and sent to the North Pole via the smoke. When I expressed concern about this, I was told I could talk to Santa thru a hole in the chimney. When I did - and Santa (my dad in a gruff-sounding, Ho-Ho-Ho voice) answered back, - it frightened me so much that I ran into the next room... a believer once more!”

Jeff - Ilford, Essex UK

“The Harvest Festival I mentioned took place in the late 50s when I was in Junior school. The Festival was magic! I can still see the marvelous display of fruit, vegetables, and fresh flowers. The center piece of the display was a huge sheaf of corn made from bread. This was donated by the local bakers. We all sang our hearts out, singing the old hymns and giving thanks to God for our food. My favorite hymn was “We Plough the Fields and Scatter the Good Seed on the Land.” After the ceremony, the food and flowers were distributed to the poor and needy.”



Charles - San Francisco

“Growing up in East Texas, some of my favorite memories were of Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners. I always enjoyed seeing my family’s pressed-glass bowls and cake plates, which my grandparents filled with wonderful delights prepared by my dad. He was a chef, but the holidays were about the only time we got to enjoy his wonderful culinary talents! I inherited many of those lovely pressed-glass pieces, and proudly display them in my kitchen for all to see.”



Aunt Pitty Pat - Lynchburg, Virginia

“My dear husband and I love riding along the River Road, which runs south from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, and is lined with some of the most historic plantation homes in the South. It is a real treat to be there for the Christmas Eve bonfires on the levees. Traditionally, these fires were lit to light the way for “Papa Noel” as he glided through the dark bayous of Louisiana in his pirogue, on his way to the houses of good little children. But the fires were also lit to light the way for parishioners on their way to midnight mass in the days before electricity. Our ride always ended with a visit to see my husband’s



Boots - Baton Rouge, Louisiana

“This happened in the late 20s when I was six. That particular Christmas, my family rode from Pass Christian to Gulfport in our highly polished Graham Paige auto. We children were on mission to find something we wanted for Christmas; a letter to Santa would assure its arrival. My dad parked the car and waited while Mother and us kids shopped. As soon as we were finished, mother deposited us back at the car, making up



Carol - Katy, Texas

“When I was young, my family had a tradition of piling into the family station

wagon on Christmas Eve, and riding around the Mississippi Gulf Coast looking at the lavishly decorated houses. I was impressed by all this because other than our Christmas tree we displayed no other Christmas lights. And as a child I thought, "The more the better!" I really liked the colored lights and gaudy displays. One Christmas, my Dad heard about the King Family Christmas display. Families from all over south Mississippi came to see it, and in its day, some say it rivaled the famed Christmas display at the New Orleans home of Al Copeland, founder of Popeye's Fried Chicken. Don't know about all that, but do know the King's Christmas display was a wonder to behold!"

Eleanor - Gulfport, Mississippi

"Each Christmas, the grand kids gather at my house on Christmas Eve for my own little tradition. I instruct each child to find his or her "special" gift under the tree. When they do, they must unwrap the gift, and immediately put on what they find. I have a delight putting together mix-and-match Christmas "costumes," which are designed to cause squeals of laughter from the grand kids and a Kodak moment for their parents!"



Mary - Greenwood, Mississippi

"My town started hosting the Delta Band Festival in 1935. It was the brainchild of Roy Martin, the Greenwood High School Band Director who longed to give his poor, Depression-era students something to look forward during the Holidays when presents were few and far between. By the late 50s, his festival had grown into the largest parade in the Southeastern United States. Over one-

hundred high school and college bands participated, along with dozens of lavish, Mardi-Gras-like floats. So here's the scenario: Early December, always bitterly cold, just dusk, huddled on the sidewalk in front of my grandmother's Red Cross office with Shipley's donuts and hot chocolate, waiting... waiting... waiting. At precisely the stroke of 5pm, the Greenwood utility whistle blew, the Christmas lights strung along the streets exploded in a blaze of color, and the drum major's baton swung down, as thousands of teenagers marched through the streets, the sound of their music filling the chilly, night air. It took HOURS for the parade to pass. It was a magical time, and my best Christmas memory!"



Charles - Borough of Bethnal Green in London's East End

"One of my favorite childhood memories involves the Christmas pantomimes staged at the Hackney Empire Theater in the East End. Pantomimes are typically English and flourished during the Golden Age of the English Music Hall. The pantomimes were usually based on fairy tales like Mother Goose, Snow White, or Aladdin. When I visit the old Hackney today, the moment I step into the building I'm a kid again, the theaters evocative perfume filling my senses with memories of days long gone. The pantomimes I saw there as a child were as much a part of Christmas as Christmas dinner, Christmas pudding,

and mince pies." For more stories of the East End, please visit Charles' website at www.eastend-memories.org.uk.



Gretchen - Clinton, Tennessee

"Christmas 1987 was a terrible time for my family and me. Our only child died from injuries sustained in a car accident two weeks before Christmas Day. My husband and I didn't know what to do for Christmas that year. We decided to visit Asheville, North Carolina, and stay at a bed and breakfast inn. We were the only guests that Christmas, and nothing was open for dinner. The owners invited us to join them, but we decided to return home. I'm glad we did... because Christmas is for family. It was good to see everyone that day, and to celebrate the birth of our Lord in our own home."

And isn't that the way it should be? No matter what, come the Holidays it's good to be surrounded by family and friends, those who love you, care for you, and only wish good things for you. To paraphrase Dorothy, "Oh! Auntie Em, there's no place like home for the holidays!"

Please remember to keep our troops in your prayers. May God bless, and keep a song in your heart!

Kal



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