

Christmas is coming!

By Robin Roberts
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Editor's note: This week features parts one and two. See the conclusion next week.

Preparations

As a small boy I thought of Christmas other times of the year, though not often in the heat of summer. I looked forward to each season — Fourth of July, Labor Day, Halloween — eagerly, and seldom looked beyond one to the next. But Thanksgiving was different. Following my mother about the kitchen as she cooked and set the dining room table, I could feel an extra thrill. Christmas was coming! Our conversation around the Thanksgiving table would include Christmas lists, shopping for gifts and trips to the post-office with the car filled with brown-paper wrapped packages addressed to places at once foreign and familiar. We would talk of Christmas vacation and preparations for The Trip.

Christmas was coming! A time of holiday and good cheer. But more than that, a time for the annual get together of our large, extended family. A lot of people celebrate their family at Thanksgiving. But Christmas was the big get-together for my family. I suppose it was because we lived so far from each other. Both my parents had been born and raised in Minnesota, my mother in Minneapolis and my father on a small farm in the north. My father was the oldest boy of eight children. He had two sisters, one older and one younger, along with five brothers. My mother's family was equally large. She and her five sisters doted on their baby brother. Two of my mother's sisters and their baby brother, Ken, remained in Minneapolis, but the rest of the family spread south to Iowa, Missouri and Kansas; and west to South Dakota, Idaho, Oregon and California.

I think that was the reason Christmas became our time of gathering. There were so many of us, so spread out and so many children involved that there wasn't enough time on a four-day weekend for everyone to

travel and visit and return.

It was a long drive from San Francisco to Minneapolis, and there was a lot to prepare beforehand. As the first days of December arrived my afternoons and evenings were filled with shopping trips with my mother. There were presents to buy for a dozen aunts and uncles and more than twice that many cousins ranging from infants to young adults. My mother compiled long written lists of names, but seemed to have everyone's age and size in her head.

"This would be perfect for Uncle Walt," she'd say and hold a sweater up before us.

My brother and I would nod, our heads and hearts swiveling toward the toy department.

The city

Preparations for the trip back east always included a trip to the city, San Francisco. This was an adventure in itself because we got to take the train. The same mysterious and magical conveyance that transported my father to work and back. My mother's attire included hat and gloves just like on Sunday so my brother and I knew we were going someplace special. We fidgeted at the station, leashed to my mother's side by a stern warning, as we waited for the three o'clock into the city. It seemed to take forever but arrived at last with the deep, throbbing pulse of the diesel and the squeal and shriek of the breaks. We were only the second small stop on the return trip to the city so the train was nearly empty, and my brother and I quickly took window seats so we could watch the mysterious towns slide by, each stop announced by the conductor as he strolled the aisle.

In the city, my father met us at the station, and then the real adventure began. One thing you have to understand. The town I grew up in was rural and small, a main street and state street crossed at an angle by first street and second. That was it, a few dozen shops and services. Most of the small population was spread out over 50 square miles of orchards and farms. Store owners decorated their windows with lights and small displays, a nativity scene or two, but this in no way prepared me for

the dazzling production that was the city the week before Christmas. Never before had I seen so many people in one place and all of them seemed urgently hurrying to one place or another. Only the sky was dark, the streets aglow with unbelievable displays that moved and sang and glittered from every window front. My folks managed to urge me away from one window wonderland only to discover another even more wondrous and magical. Window after window of unbelievable scenes awaited my wide-open stare of amazement.

We went to untold giant stores in the city. I don't remember them all, but I do remember two in particular, the Emporium and the City of Paris. The first featured the largest toy section in the city and on the roof Santa's Village, a winter wonderland with rides and booths and a visit with Santa. The second featured the tree. The City of Paris had a rotunda that towered four stories high and in the middle of it stood a tree that reached all the way to the glass ceiling overhead. It was mounted on a rotating base so if you stood in one place long enough you could see the decorations all around the tree. And what decorations. Bulbs and lights and tinsel, of course, but in addition to those every object one could think of. I can't even begin to list the things that ornamented that tree. Every toy ever received at Christmas hung in miniature glory among those boughs. We would stand there, my brother and I, mesmerized, as the tree slowly rotated. It took many rotations before we thought we'd seen them all.

And then the real miracle took place, for every floor above was also open to the rotunda, and each floor as we ascended brought a whole new perspective of the tree and another unbelievable panorama of ornaments. Thanks to my mother's eternal patience and indefatigable belief in the magic of Christmas, we usually got to view the tree from top to bottom more than once.

We had to be back at the train depot by eight-ten. That was the last train back down the peninsula. I don't remember much of the trip home. Sated at last, I slept.

Robin Roberts is a writer who lives in Canyon City. See the conclusion next week.

OUT OF THE PAST

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50 years ago

City Park Gains \$6,705 For New Development

Funds of \$6,705 have been approved for the development and enlargement of the John Day city park covering a three-year period, announced Councilman Gordon Glass at the John Day city council meeting Tuesday. Mayor Les Meyers commended Glass for his "outstanding effort and contribution" in working for the city park improvement program. Congressman Al Ullman made an announcement of the approval of the funds Friday.

The money will be available to the city on a matching basis. One of the special features of the

development program is the restoration of the Chinese building by the city park. According to plans, it is hoped that the building by the city park can be made into a museum in memory of the Chinese who once lived in the John Day area. "It is the opinion of some state and historical people that the Chinese building could be a major tourist attraction," said Glass. Mrs. Cecille Lewis of John Day has been selected to head up the Chinese building restoration project. The city has two projects: acquisition of two parcels of land consisting of an eighth of an acre to the present park and the development of the park area, said Glass. Part of the land purchase is for the playground and the other part will be for enlarging the

picnic area. The development of the park will consist of acquiring playground equipment such as one heavy duty four-swing set, one 10-foot slide, one 10-foot merry-go-round and an enclosed Tot-Lot play area for small children. The project is to be completed in three years depending on the availability of local matching funds. Glass says any civic or fraternal funds may be used. Private and business contributions, which would be appreciated, are tax deductible. Cooperative efforts of the city, the John Day grade school and Grant Union high school are being made to develop a complete summer recreation program for both boys and girls of all age groups, said Glass. Serving as a liaison officer between the local

program and the state is Gary Woodring, assistant state recreation director. Monies for the local project are derived from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.



File photo

The reindeer get into the act at a previous Prairie City School Christmas program. Programs are planned at several area schools, including Prairie City, Wednesday, Dec. 14.



The deadline for What's Happening items is 5 p.m. Friday. Call the Eagle, 541-575-0710, or email editor@bmeagle.com. For meetings this week, see our list in the classifieds on Page B9.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 14

'Little Town of Christmas'

- 6:30 p.m., Long Creek School
Students in grades preschool through 12 will perform.

Dayville School talent show

- 7 p.m., Dayville School gym
The community is invited to the Dayville School talent show where Dayville students in preschool through 12th grade will show their talents. There is no cost to attend. For more information, call the school at 541-987-2412.

Winter concert

- 7 p.m., Grant Union Junior-Senior High School old gym
The junior band, senior band and combined choir will perform.

Prairie City School program

- 7 p.m., Prairie City School new gym
Students in kindergarten through sixth grade will perform.

TUESDAY, DEC. 20

Christmas program

- 6 p.m., Monument School gym
The event will feature music and a special visit from Santa at the close.

Timber Truckers Light Parade

Parade Theme
Hometown
Christmas



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Grant Western Lumber
Malheur Lumber Co

Mary Ellen Brooks Ranch
Huffman's Market
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Pioneer Feed
Jerome Natural Resources
Doug's Repair
Gibco Ag & Industrial
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John Day River Vet Clinic
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A Flower Shop 'N More
Chester's Thriftway
JD Rents & Power Equip
Wildhorse Hotel & Casino
Senator Ted Ferrioli
King's Variety Store
H & R Block
John Day Elks Lodge 1824
Melissa Pettyjohn at Polished
1188 Brewing Co.

Squeeze In Restaurant
Tidewater Contractors
Land Title Company
T&H Automotive
The Ugly Truth Bar & Grill
Associated Oregon Loggers
Kenworth Sales
Chuck's Diner
John Day Auto Parts
Oregon Trail Electric
Blue Mt Eagle
Russell's Custom
Meats Mill's Bldg Supply
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Kathy Bishop
Prime Time Video
Better Blooms & Garden
Town of Canyon City
Eastern Oregon Realty Rude
Logging
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CLP Ranches
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Eye Care of John Day

04905

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Saturday December 17th, 11am - 5 pm



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Snowballers
food drive

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pick a prize off the tree –
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