

The New Year's Eve We'll Never Forget



Bobbye staggered to the phone. She was barely able to shout "Help!" to the operator, then she fainted.

Two women and three small children are alone in a house—with a "killer" you'd never suspect!

By MRS.
CLARA DETJEN

as told to
George J. Jaffe



COVER:



No, this is not the beginning of an igloo but a snow fort fashioned by a fun-loving dad and daughter team. Scene was photographed by Vivienne Lapham.

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I'M THANKFUL that I'm alive to see another New Year come in. Last year, I almost didn't make it.

On Dec. 17, 1962, my husband Robert and I left Melbourne Beach, Fla., for our new home in Ginger Blue, Mo. Our daughter Bobbye; her husband Al Huff; and their three small children came along to help.

We rode in two cars. Near Ozark, Ala., the car my husband and son-in-law were driving went over a fairly steep embankment. Fortunately, no one was injured. But the trailer the car had been pulling was smashed beyond repair, and some of our furniture was damaged.

My husband hired a hauler to deliver the things he couldn't carry with him. On Dec. 27, the delivery man arrived in Ginger Blue with our suitcases, furniture, and Christmas toys. Our refrigerator was damaged; but we needed it, so we connected it anyway. Then Bobbye and I sat up until 3 a.m. putting broken toys together. By not turning on the radio, we had kept the children from learning that Christmas had passed!

By 6 a.m. of the 28th, the youngsters awoke with shouts of "Get up. Santa was here last night!" Since the men had returned to Florida because of their jobs, there were just we women and the children to celebrate our belated Christmas. We gathered in the kitchen because it was the warmest room. It was a happy day; the only sour note was sounded by the refrigerator—it was making an unusually loud noise.

For some reason, all of us had headaches by evening. A neighbor who dropped by said we probably had a touch of the flu that was going around. But headaches or no headaches, I insisted we spend part of each day outdoors exploring our new surroundings. I'm a bug on exercise; looking back, this probably helped save our lives.

When my daughter and I went to bed on New Year's Eve, we had made up our minds to take the children to a doctor by Jan. 2. But that night they seemed to be sleeping soundly. Robbie, 6, Kenny, 5, and Dorrie, 4, were on cots in one bedroom. My daughter slept in the second bedroom, and I in the third.

AT 4:50 NEW YEAR'S MORNING, I was suddenly awakened by Kenny. "Dorrie's vomiting all over her bed, Granny. I don't feel so good, either, and I can't wake Mommy!"

I tried to get up but the instant I was on my feet I collapsed to the floor. Half-conscious, I whispered, "Kenny, try to wake your mother." But soon Kenny was trying to arouse me again.

"Mommy won't wake up! Mommy won't wake up!" he whimpered.

Somehow, I dragged myself across the floor. Fighting to keep conscious, I shook her as I moaned, "Get up, Bobbye! I'm going to faint!"

"Faint" was the magic word that saved us. Kenny had seen people faint on television, and he knew what to do—he went all over the house opening windows! Each time I came to, I told him, "Put wet cloths on everyone's head," which he promptly did, using everything in reach: undershirts, towels, Dorrie's dresses. Carried away by his role as rescuer, Kenny even began throwing glasses of water on us! It was this that finally roused his mother.

Bobbye slowly got up and staggered to the phone. It's a crank-type phone on the wall. She was able to reach the operator and shout, "Help!" But then she fainted and, in falling, ripped the phone off the wall.

Luck was with us, however. Mrs. Jewell Butts, the telephone operator, roused her son Gene, and he drove six miles to our home to investigate. He found Bobbye unconscious on the front lawn; she had tried to crawl to a neighbor's home.

Carrying Bobbye into the house, he discovered that Kenny was the only one conscious. Since our phone was useless, he rushed to awaken the Ed Clock family, who called the medical center. Mrs. Clock and her daughter Linda came to our aid immediately. Both are registered nurses, and they gave us artificial respiration until the ambulances arrived.

What had almost killed us? The damaged refrigerator! From the accident en route, it developed a slow Freon gas leak, which had been poisoning us for four days.

What had saved us? Two things: the grace of God and the alertness of little Kenny who, at 5, was a man-size hero.