

2019-20 CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 20

Family Christmas Stories

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, this Christmas is the most challenging one many have ever had to face. I know it is the most difficult Christmas our family has experienced.

At this time of year my wife and I often attend Blue Christmas services to celebrate friends and family members who have died in the past year. But I don't think there will be many live remembrances given the restrictions on gathering in place this month.

But in spite of it all, Christmas has always been a time of stories: Santa Claus and Rudolph, the Grinch, Charlie Brown & Co, Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" and so forth. And then there are the family tales we like to tell around the Christmas tree. Maybe my sharing will inspire you to resurrect your family's favourite "gems".

One of my earliest memories is of the time I woke up with a start in the middle of the night on Christmas Eve. Something had made a noise. I rushed into my parents' bedroom, woke them up, and said, "*I just heard a noise on the roof. I'm sure it was Santa and his reindeer. We have to go downstairs to see what presents he left us!*" From under the covers came a grumble along with my marching orders: "Get back to bed.....now!"

Here's another story I will forever remember. It occurred one Christmas eve in the early 70s. A small group of friends and I had created an organization called East Side Projects. We were assisting folks who lived in Milwaukee's East Side counter culture community. Among other things, the hippy part of town had become a magnet for teen aged runaways. That week a teenager with a new baby came to us. Her parents had told her to leave and she needed a safe place to live.

On Christmas Eve, just as we were sitting down to supper, I got a phone call. The young girl had found an apartment but she had to move in

immediately. We hustled over to the address to give her a hand. A pickup truck loaded with furniture was parked at the curb. We found her and the baby in an upstairs apartment...at the end of a very, very long and narrow staircase. I've thought of the young girl and her child many times over the years. I hope they are well.

Another of my favourite stories took place during our 5 years in Houston, a resource town in north-central British Columbia. I was working as the administrator of a community based health centre.

The snow was very deep that year. A few days before Christmas, I took our son out to the bush to search for a Christmas tree. We were both wearing snow shoes: me in big wooden adult sized ones and Brendan, four years old at the time, on little red plastic ones. As we were walking along through the bush I heard a yell. It was Brendan. I looked back and all I could see was his face sticking up out of the snow. He had fallen off his snowshoes. I picked him out of the hole, we got our tree and then returned home to tell the tale.

That afternoon our staff—the doctors, nurses and a few board members — were preparing a Christmas dinner for some of the clinic's regular clients, a group of men who lived in shacks in the hills above town. Brendan was coming along with me to deliver our part of the meal. On the way I asked him if he knew the story of how Mary and Joseph had searched Bethlehem's hotels and motels for a place to have their baby. Brendan sighed a bit and said, *"Yes Dad, I know the story. But there were no motels back in those days"*. Four-year olds are definitely smarter than in my time.

I remember another man telling a story about him and his wife going to see their children in a school Christmas play. At one point the three children came on stage. Each one of them was dressed in robes and carried a decorated box. The first wise person bowed, held out his box, said, "This is gold," and dropped the box into the straw. The second wise person bowed, held out her box and said, "This is myrrh," She, too, dropped the box into the straw. The third wise person bowed, held out a box, said, "Frank sent this," and dropped the box into the straw.

Then there was the time just before Christmas in Frobisher Bay (now called Iqaluit). As you probably know there are no trees in the high Arctic so the RCMP would order trees from the south, fly them into town and distribute them in the community.

Our priest was an elderly man who had worked in the high Arctic for many years. We asked him if we could set up the decorated tree beside the crib scene in the sanctuary. He wouldn't allow it. We said, "Why not, it **is** Christmas." He refused, saying that Christmas trees were not an Inuit custom. We reminded him there were no Catholic Inuit in our church but lots of Anglican Inuit in the Anglican Church. Maybe that was a sore point....he still refused. But after more negotiations we reached a compromise. He allowed us to put the decorated tree on a hand truck. During Mass the tree stayed at the back of the church. After Mass we rolled it up the main aisle and placed it next to Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph for all of us to enjoy.

To the future

When we think of Christmas we automatically think of children. What stories will our children and grandchildren have to tell?

Will they have a sense that they are children of a living Earth that has given life to them and will continue to do so? Will they develop a sense that the world is something they must care for?

Will they learn that their experiences and stories are gifts, gifts that originate in the living Earth and dwell deep within them, transcending all religious traditions?

And will they become inspired to make a commitment to care for the Earth that has cared for them?

I certainly hope so.

By way of conclusion, I want to thank you for reading our chronicles and encouraging us to continue writing them. In response I give you our very

favourite Christmas story told by a group of children in New Zealand. Here it is. I'm sure you will enjoy it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zduwusyip8M>

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