

## My Best Christmas

by Chet Bowling

As I began to reflect on my memories of Christmas I realized that no one Christmas really stuck out for me as the "best" Christmas I could remember. At first this bothered me. But as I continued to reflect on the Christmases of my life I began to realize that of the happiest memories I had I did not want to label one better than the others by calling it the best. So rather than a best Christmas story I will share Christmas memories and perhaps the most talked about Christmas.

I remember being a child and making cookies with my mother. We would spend hours in our warm and cozy kitchen making dozens of springerlies, snickerdoodles, Anise cookies, date bars, coconut balls, lebkuchens, and of course the ubiquitous sugar cookies which we loved to decorate with vast amounts of frosting and sprinkles. Many of these irresistible cookies never made it to the cooling racks and many a wintry evening my brother went to bed with our stomachs full of warm flour, sugar and butter.

One year one of my dad's war buddies from Australia showed up for Christmas. He had never seen real snow or stood on a frozen lake. Being young and living our whole lives in Michigan my brothers and I had a hard time believing there was anywhere in the world that did not have a winter like ours. We taught him how to ice skate and play hockey.

Every Christmas Eve we would go to church at mid-night. My dad would lead us in hymns in the car on the way to church and on the way home. I can still remember is wonderfully deep bass voice as he sang O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

The most talked about Christmas I have had was spent with my in-laws. My wife and I had only been married for two years so I was still on my best behavior while staying with them during the holidays. On this particular Christmas my four brothers-in-law were home for the holidays as well. I have always gotten along well with them and this particular Christmas Eve we were all in good spirits. After mid-night church we decided to stay up for cards and Christmas libation. Before we knew it, it was 5 AM. For some strange reason we decided to go out to breakfast!

After driving around for an hour and not finding a restaurant open, imagine that, we retreated to the house. During our drive something strange happened to us. I can't really explain it but when we got back to the house one of us suggested that we rearrange the furniture in the house so people that had been sleeping all night would be surprised, confused, baffled. I guess it was our way of playing the Santa Claus myth.

If things were different in the house in the morning it must have been Santa who did it. So we moved all the furniture, including the Christmas tree, from the living room to the dining room and vice versa. An hour later when my mother-in-law woke up she was so upset she got a skillet and a large wooden spoon and came into our bedrooms banging the spoon on the skillet. She made us get up even though we had only been asleep for one hour.

She has, tongue-in-cheek, told many of her friends about what happen and how her son-in-law is a bad influence on her sons. Her friends always laugh and say what funny story it is but she insists that there is nothing funny about it. From that day on the relationship there has been a special bond between my brothers-in-law and me. It's almost like we had to be mischievous together to get past our polite relationship and into real relationship.