

# LAMPSTAND \_ Christmas Memories

## CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT

**I**t was a frigid Christmas morning in the 1960's. My grandfather had passed away the year before so my grandmother was staying with us. My oldest brother was home on leave from the Army so our little house was filled with six siblings, Mom, Dad and Grandma. As the day progressed, the wind and the snow picked up to almost blizzard-like conditions with temperatures near zero. By 6 o'clock that night, we had lost power completely. Thankfully we had finished Christmas dinner, had opened all of our presents and were relaxing. We bundled up in sweaters and blankets, lit all of the candles we had and played our newly gifted board games while listening to Christmas music on the portable record player. It was very, very special. It is one of my most memorable family Christmases; Our Christmas by Candlelight.

Kathy Higgins

**I** have many fond memories about Christmas growing up in a strong Catholic, Slovak family. We always had a traditional Slovak dinner on Christmas Eve mainly consisting of Bobalky and mushroom soup neither of which my siblings and I particularly cared for. There was no meat. My mother and grandmother, who lived with us, cooked all day and what was put on the table was what we had. Take it or leave it. I do remember liking the mushroom soup, however. On Christmas Day, we would wake up to many wrapped presents that Santa left under our big, live Christmas tree. The one thing I distinctly remember is that we could not open presents until after we went to Mass. I grew up in St. Vincent de Paul parish in Cleveland and back then, the school kids went to 9 o'clock Mass. I remember seeing all my friends at church talking about what they got for Christmas. They could not believe I had not opened any presents yet. It was not until my parents came home from 11 o'clock Mass that we finally gathered around the tree and opened presents. I use the plural lightly as I don't remember getting many presents but always the one we definitely asked for. The remainder of the day was getting ready for Christmas dinner which started with the sharing of Oplatky and its story which I continue to this day with my family. These are only a few of many happy memories

Karen Warren

From ANONYMOUS ONLY

I was born on the 18th Sunday of Ordinary time. My life has been one of mostly ordinary experiences.

[I wish I had been born on Valentines day]

[By the way, readers; in case this writing becomes too wordy (or boring) I have granted Father the editorial license to eliminate the bracketed parts (similar to what is done for the short version of the Gospel readings)]. So, if you do find this boring and or wordy please blame Father.

My early life began in a town about half way between Pittsburgh and Cleveland– and yes , I inherited the questionable privilege of being a Browns fan. But that was in the glory days of the Browns - Jim Brown etc – need I say more? And yes, I am actually older than Fr. Krizner but I will spare Father of any Steelers jokes. I am sure he has heard plenty this season (as have the Browns fans).

My parents were married twice – first in the Russian Orthodox rite, then years later in the Roman catholic rite- complete with 3 children attending in the front pew.

My mother was a convert who cherished her faith enormously. She above all else represented the essence of Catholic faith and love in our family. Her faith was unyielding under the most difficult of family circumstances.

My grandmother's Russian church would bless pussy willows on Palm Sunday which she would then use to bestow blessings on us siblings while uttering a short prayer. I wish I knew today what that prayer was.

We lived in a multi-ethnic neighborhood close to the church, so I had the privilege of serving 5:30 A.M.

Mass on many weekdays (just a sleepy me and the babushka ladies in the front pews with their rosaries and Slovak saintliness – Prayers were all in Slovak). These incredible ladies were there rain snow or shine – all saints, I thought. I'm sure I was right.

So – yes, as head altar, boy I had dutifully memorized all the Latin Mass responses – [Suscipiat) I still remember that one, I can barely remember the day's date but I remember the Suscipiat. Eight

years of Catholic grade school (which, by the way, converted a perfectly good gymnasium into a daily morning Mass venue much to the dismay of the basketball coach).

Our teachers / Nuns were from the order of Vincentian Sisters of Charity. I can tell you honestly I believe these saintly Nuns were a major reason I stayed on the disciplined path. I went on to Catholic high school where I became president of my class [They said the election was rigged].

[At our graduation ceremony I received the Bishop's Religion award , as the one student who demonstrated the most knowledge of the Catholic religion (as taught in Catechism). Heck, I was even chosen to be on TV representing my high school school on a Sunday program called "To Quiz a Catholic". [Not sure whether we got good ratings].[I wish in the future that Bishops' Religion awards would be bestowed on the basis of spiritual example.]

[I did manage some more- than- ordinary achievements in life – I married my wife shortly after graduation. [Boy, I'm glad I remembered to mention that at this point]. She is the bravest person I know – having dared to live with cantankerous me for 54 years so far. I hope she stays so brave. She is so much nicer than me. Her most extreme expletive is "Oh my".

[I also had the privilege of working on the Saturn 5 project – (first flight to the moon project under Von Braun's Marshal space flight Center team; first generation hybrid computers (now museum pieces) – So not only am I older than Father Krizner, I am capable of working on museum artifacts.)

[So I am a technical / scientific person. I actually believe that my knowledge of science has enriched and strengthened my faith in God. Not just because of the enormity of space but because of the incredible design of the entire universe. An example is the very concept of time and space and relativity Einstein was a believer - who saw God in every aspect of existence as well as extending beyond what we can perceive in the world. These things could not exist without the work of an INFINITE

DESIGNER.

A certain wise man once said "Time exists so that all things in the world don't occur at once". - joke likely from Big Bang Theory - ]

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So in some fashion during my earlier days (my pre- St. Colette days) I did achieve a functional foundation in the Church through discipline and Catechism. Indeed I have been very fortunate to have the parents, priests, and nuns who guided my early journey throughout life and life-changing events. In retrospect, the overarching principles were primarily disciplinary.

Later in life I became aware of the need for a SPIRITUAL growth more grounded in God's message of LOVE and MERCY.

So – my personal encounter that started my personal path to my SPIRITUAL grounding arose out of a soul-searching discussion within the walls of St. Colette with a certain humble understanding priest – whose identity a certain humble priest will not allow me to divulge. That discussion turned out to be a life-changing event that ultimately led me toward a more deeply spiritual expansion of faith, hope, and LOVE of Jesus – grounded in His infinite love and mercy.

It was here at St Colette parish that I learned to truly appreciate the significance of God's greatest commandment – in simple down-to-earth terms - and the truth of the forgiving merciful nature of Jesus Christ. For the first time in my life I became enthusiastic about hearing the Sunday message – delivered in the clearest most relatable way. Finding my way into St. Colette's years ago was not a simple coincidence – I believe it was a result of Divine intervention.

This is from parishioner Kathleen McDonald sent from her daughter for the Christmas Lampstand

**T**he year was 1952 and I was nine years old. Our family wasn't what would be called wealthy or even average. My father was out of work because of an unjust firing. He had a hard time accepting that and looking for another job. We got by with the grace of God and help from relatives. It was Christmas, we had a tree somehow, but we were told don't expect presents; as if we had to be told. Christmas morning came and under the tree was our family manger that was bought some years before. It was a simple cardboard manger with painted pictures of donkeys and cattle in their stalls. We had plaster statues of Mary, Joseph, a little crib with a baby Jesus, and an angel. As my brother and I stared at the empty spots, under the tree there still was the manger. My dad then said, "There is Christmas". He was so right as we sat to the table grateful for food, said grace and Merry Christmas! I still have the manger, held together with scotch tape and glue, many statues have been added, but the first one was Mary who cost 10 cents and a Christmas to always remember the true meaning of the words, "There is Christmas."

**THANK YOU for your shared memories! We are waiting for your Christmas remembrances. Please don't hesitate! The message of the GOOD NEWS is something we all can grow by! Send them to [info@stcoletteparish.com](mailto:info@stcoletteparish.com) or drop them off at the office!**





## My Lampstand Christmas Memory

By Ken Hahn

My memories are the same, from when I was six in 1948 until I was married and Grandma and Grandpa were gone, in 1967. The five of us lived in the old farmhouse together until 1947, when Dad and Grandpa went into the woods, cut down some trees, hauled them to the local sawmill, and built a 4-room cottage (no running water). It was about 40 yards from the old house, and became the center of my life. Grandma had a broken hip which never healed, so she walked on crutches for 20 years. It was hard for her to come to our house, but she always made it for Christmas Eve. She always said she didn't think she could "make it this year" and I would fret for days, but she always arrived on time.

I liked to go into the barn on Christmas Eve, just as it began to get dark. The cattle provided their own body heat, and it was surprisingly warm, and serenely quiet. As I walked in, the cows looked up to see who was there, and the mouse-catching cats prowled around hoping for a small bowl of warm milk, not unlike another manger many years before. Then I would wait for the chores to be done. From our kitchen I had a clear view of the old house, and when the light came on I could see Grandpa at the kitchen sink, washing up before coming over for supper. Then he would turn on the outdoor lights on the Norway spruce in his front yard – it started as a small Christmas tree in a bushel basket, planted for the future. It is still there today, growing for the past 75 years. And I still have one strand of lights that graced that tree.

After our traditional supper we retired to the living room, heated by a wood-burner, to open presents. We were poor, but I always got presents – books or cap guns or some such toys. Then Grandpa gave each of us a crisp new five dollar bill, packaged in an envelope with an oval opening where you could see Lincoln's face. Then I would settle down by the tree to explore my new books, and the folks would visit for a while. That was many years ago, but I recall all the details as though it were yesterday. Jeanie and I have made many precious memories since those days, but there will always be room in my heart for an old barn full of tranquility, and a small farm family filled with love.