

A child shall lead them



Memories preserve past Christmases

MYRA HUMPHREY, hospitality minister at Corpus Christi Church, was raised with her seven siblings in Rochester.

Christmas, she said, "was always about family. When the day got going the house would be filled with people. We never had a Christmas with less than 30 people." Neighbors, relatives, her sisters' and brothers' friends, and people her mother had taken in over the years to help raise all gathered for Christmas dinner.

"We'd sit around the piano and sing pop and rhythm and blues songs, sometimes before the meal, during the meal, and certainly after the meal," she said. "We did a lot of Stevie Wonder, ... 'Go Tell It On the Mountain,' gospel versions of it."

SISTER AGNES CATHERINE BATTERSBY, SSJ, pastoral associate at St. James Church in Waverly, admitted to a bout with impatience during gift-opening as a child in Elmira.

"We opened up presents one at a time, and that was not fun to have to wait. Some people would take a great deal of time," Sister Battersby remarked.

She also noted that the festivities took place in a seldom-used room: the parlor.

As she reflected on these past Christmases, Sister Battersby recalled "the joys, the faces, the happiness. I feel as if I'm in that room again and I'm a little kid."

STEVE NEWVINE, a parishioner at Avon's St. Agnes Parish, recalled singing with the church choir at midnight Mass.

"One year, our Christmas choir was without the services of our beloved organist," Newvine said. "We were told Sister Agnes was not feeling well and was ordered by her doctor to stay at the convent. For the first time ever, she would miss Christmas Mass and her beloved choir. Our group plugged along and left that midnight Mass satisfied that we had done our job, eager for Christmas morning, but a bit sad."

On Christmas Day, he said, "I made a few phone calls and on that Christmas night, the entire choir became carolers and paraded our way to the convent to give Sister Agnes a Christmas gift she would remember forever."

BARB IVERS AND SUSAN BIERL, staff members at Holy Cross Church in Dryden, found that their Polish heritage spawned similar Christmas memories.

Ivers and Bierl recalled large gatherings where relatives would share *oplatki*, or unleavened bread. They exchanged both the bread and special blessings.

Both women also noted the mysterious absence of one guest whenever "Santa" would arrive with a bundle of gifts.

"My aunt always missed the visit — what a coincidence!" laughed Ivers, who grew up in Vermont.

"The seminarian usually didn't usually show up until right after Santa had been there," said Bierl, who hails from Buffalo.

GRACE CARSON, of St. Leo's Church in Hilton, recalled one eye-opening Christmas at Rochester's Holy Rosary Church.

"As a Holy Rosary eighth-grader, being sent to the school hall shortly before Christmas shattered a cherished illusion," Carson stated.

"Stacked on long, fiberboard tables were huge boxes of Christmas hard candy. We eighth-graders were handed a scoop and a stack of brightly colored, string-handled cardboard boxes. Only they weren't boxes — they were flat rectangles! We had to form them into boxes and fill them with candy."

"I still remember my disillusionment that our pastor's gift box of Christmas candy actually came in bulk, with flat boxes, and all those years had been packed in the school basement by the 'big kids.'"

CATHERINE E. MCHUGH of St. Boniface Church, Rochester, has favorite Christmas memories from 1933-1935.

"Our Girl Scout Troop 44 went carol-

ing up to Monroe Community Hospital and the penitentiary on South Avenue," she recalled. "Our leader Eva Schreiner (later Sister Eva Marie, SSJ) took us along with Father Eugene Golding, assistant pastor of St. Boniface, who was chaplain of the hospital and penitentiary."

"We gave out candy canes as Father Golding always had his car trunk full of candy and clothes to be given away."

"Mrs. M. Fallon (Arlene McDonald's mother) had us up to their home for hot chocolate after the caroling."

McHugh added that after the girls outgrew Girl Scouts, 16 of them formed a club. Nine club members still meet regularly.

XOCHITL PALACIOS, diocesan regional Hispanic pastoral associate for Yates and Ontario counties, remembers celebrating posadas in her native Mexico.

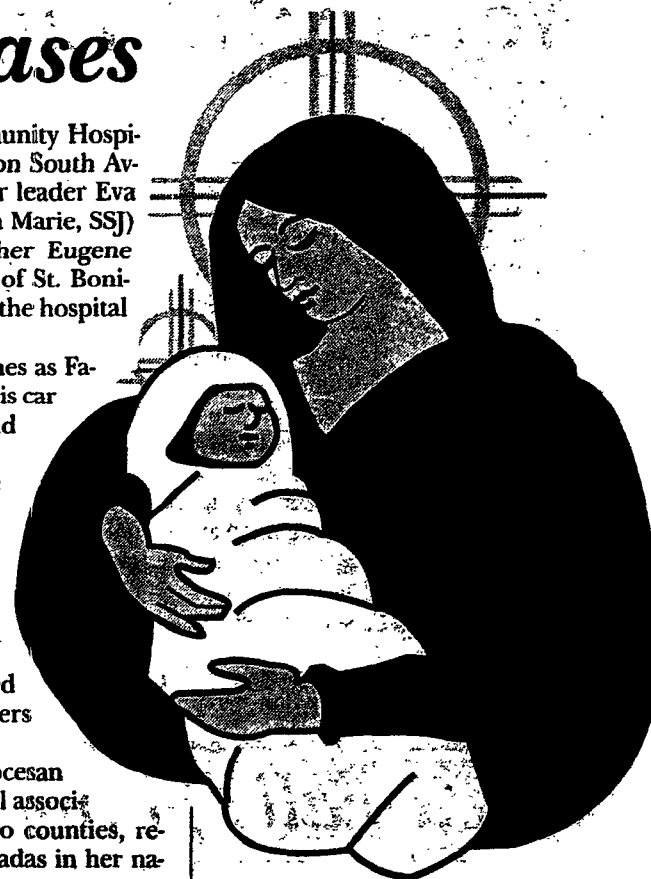
"In my family we used to have a posada every year when I was little. It's when we get together nine days before the 24th of December, before Jesus is born," she said. "A group of people goes singing from house to house, nine different houses (one each night), to sing songs. Like Jesus and Mary did, going to different places asking them to let them come in."

"You go with candles and knock on the door and start singing. ... People in the house are answering back, singing back to you a different song."

"... you have pinatas and little treats like bags of candy," she said. "But the purpose is to be remembering and thinking about Joseph and Mary before Jesus was born, and all the way till the day he's born."

MARYROSE BARRON, secretary at Auburn's St. Mary's Parish since 1940, fondly remembers the annual Christmas party for students at the parish's school — who included herself, "around 1914."

"Every year the Rosary and Scapular Society would spend the year raising funds for the children in the school," Bar-



ron recalled. On the day of the party, the children would march over to the church hall. Each grade put on a Christmas skit or play. The children would each get a bag of candy and an orange, and, she said, "Santa would come out at the end with gifts."

The annual party, Barron said, is "something people still talk about today."

JOHAN ENGSTROM, youth ministry coordinator at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Brighton, grew up in Sweden. Throughout Advent, he remembered, his parents grew grass to cut and put in a manger on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve, Swedes set up their Christmas trees and enjoy a large dinner. In the evening, a neighbor or a friend dresses up as "Jultomten" who comes with a bag of toys to everybody's home.

Jultomten is not a "cuddly grandpa" figure like Santa Claus, he emphasized.

"He's like one of the creatures that lives out in the woods," Engstrom said. "You're not willing to jump into the lap of Jultomten."

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