

A CHRISTMAS MEMORY
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‘Writer’s Corner’

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It was a big old white house that seemed like a mansion to me, since all I had ever known was small unpainted country houses, including the one we had just vacated on Upper Ferry Road just outside of Carthage. That part of Upper Ferry Road no longer exists, having been overlaid by the Highway 25 bypass.



I guess I spent a Christmas or two there on Upper Ferry Road but I have no memory of one before that one in 1949.

Daddy had just given up on farming, having suffered health problems and little luck as a farmer. These were lean years for us since “the little store” or the Community Grocery (later owned by the Alexanders) was being built, as was our house at 400 Jefferson Avenue in Carthage. If one were to endeavor to find 400 Jefferson Ave. today they would be hard pressed to locate such a place since, like Constantinople, one cannot go back there. Rather, in its place you would find 901 Dogwood. For some reason someone decided to change it and I really wish whoever makes those decisions would cease and desist since I am easily confused – but that’s not part of this story.

The big white house I am talking about now is the one directly across Highway 70N from the Gore farm, Mr. Albert’s place not Al’s place on the east side of the Benton McMillian Bridge. I’m not sure to whom it belonged, but Daddy had managed to rent the somewhat fallen lady as a place to shelter our family while Mr. Buck Massey finished our house on Jefferson and Dogwood.

The big old Victorian was huge by any standard that I had known, but it had no central heat, no insulation, no storm windows, no weather stripping on the doors, no inside plumbing and was something akin to living in an ornate old barn. Still, it did have a large foyer with a curved staircase which swept up to the second floor where the bedrooms actually had closets, a first in my experience. And wonders of wonders, inside the closets were hidden passageways that allowed one to go from room to room without going out into the hallway. I have no idea why it was built that way, but I was too young for my imagination to paint lurid pictures, as it might today.

No one in Carthage would have ever considered buying a Christmas tree in those days, since the pastures around were full of cedars which the farmers would gladly have you cut down to save him the trouble. So, as Christmas came closer, we did what everyone in Carthage did in those times. We ventured back through the pastures and found a cedar that was pyramidal in shape and full on all sides. When we found one that fit the bill which was less than six or seven foot tall, Daddy took the axe to it and cut it down. We dragged it home, stood it upright in a pickle crock, poured road gravel into the crock, filled it with water, put it into the entry hall which was unheated, as much of the house was, and decorated it with what ornaments we either had or had made.

We had lots of things that could catch the eye of a five year old boy, but none so intriguing as the bubble lights. That was years prior to the use of the tiny little bulbs everyone uses today and the bubble light were the icing on a very pretty cake. It would be a rare thing indeed to talk about Christmas past with someone my age or older and not have bubble lights come into the conversation. Roping, ornaments (Usually colored glass balls), and icicles were what finished off the work of beauty. It was several years before “angle Hair” came into vogue which folks placed in a little wisp around each light to cause it to have a gauzy appearance. The main thing I remember about Angle Hair is that sometimes about the end of January, those who had come into contact with the angle hair would stop itching since the spun glass had a long lasting effect on bare skin.

Mistletoe grew on lots of the old trees around, and the preferred method of harvesting the mistletoe crop was to take a 12 gage to it. Not many people had outdoor decorations back then and we, of course, had

none. But Mama, Daddy, and Daddy's Aunt Ada, who had just come to live with us, made it a very special Christmas just the same.

I remember that "Old Santie Claus" brought me a metal wind up toy. It was a man on a motorcycle with a side car. The whole thing was made from stamped metal and had a big key on the side to wind it up. We took it out in the big entry hall and would it up and let it fly. It was probably a "made in Japan" cheepie, but it was worth all the world to me. Daddy went to the Locker Plant and brought a big peppermint stick about a foot long and an inch thick and Mama and Adie made boiled custard, fruit cake, and shelled walnuts and hickory nuts (hick-er-nuts) for ua all to have to eat. They shoveled plenty of coal in the big "Warm Morning" parlor stove and we feasted like lords and were as rich as kings, or at least we felt we were.

I suppose we never had a lot by the standards of the greater world outside of the Upper Cumberland, but we were about as well off as the neighbors around. It was warm inside (so long as you stayed close to the stove) and we had parents and family who made us feel loved and special.

All of that brings a combination that is had to beat, and more money, or more things, could hardly have made us feel more blessed that we did already.

May God Bless you and yours with a special Christmas this year and give you freedom from money and things.

*Read more about Robert Rodger Chaffin in the Chaffin section at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>