

## **Christmas in Bynum As Told by Bynum Kids**

CHRISTMAS OF OLD

By Sheila Slaten Crump

After the second world war, the dads came marching home if they could but some had to stay in France, Germany and Japan, permanently. I was fortunate that my dad came home in 1947, mentally wounded but still able to work. The problem was that there was not much work. There were no building materials to be had for construction work, not much of anything around here. Times were rough but, then on Sand Mountain, times had always been rough, so not much had changed. If you had a cow you had milk and sometimes beef and also butter. If you had a pig, you had pork sausage and souse meat and everyone had a garden, which was the bulk of the dinner table fare. So, no one knew they were poor. It was just how things had always been.

Toys were hard to come by in those days after the depression. I do remember getting four different dolls at different times, but that was only later, in the 1950s. In the 1940s, my two dolls were one green and one red chalk Buddha ashtray from Japan. Daddy brought them back and, up until that point, my dolls had been hand-made rolled up towels with button eyes. These Buddha ashtrays satisfied my soul's longing for a real doll. I was three and they were my constant companions over the next two years. I would put them to bed gently in the laundry basket and cover them with a towel and they would sleep by the side of my bed in the basement of a service station on the old Guntersville Road. Daddy had rented the station to run after he came back and saw there was no work. But, I never remember going hungry. We had chicken stew, turnip greens, potato soup, cornbread, butter beans, and after all, what more does anyone need? No, we were not hungry nor did I feel we were missing anything in life. I had my babies and I talked to them as if they were real. They got very chipped and skinned and I am sure that would have horrified the Japanese had they known I was using their god for a doll, but they didn't know it. I have no idea what happened to my babies. They were probably left behind when we moved to Bynum in 1949.

Christmas used to be sparse and children nowadays would probably not believe it.

The ladies of the community would crochet scarves and little warm toboggans, starting early in the fall. Mothers would get out the sewing machine and make the younger children a coat with warm wool, if they could get wool. If not, they would make a quilted coat, whatever it took to keep the little ones warm. Sometimes they would take an adult's old worn out wool coat and remake it for a child. These would be the big Christmas presents. They would start early buying up boxes of peppermint sugar stick candy to set by for Christmas. They would pick up walnuts when they fell off the tree and let them dry to shell for later. Some people had pecan trees and also you could go to Oxford, on Main Street and Highway 78 and there was a pecan grove. You could pick pecans by the bucket so folks would sit on cold winter nights and shell the pecans to use for cakes and fruit cake and cookies. They would also bake the pecans and coat them in chocolate fudge to box up for presents. Nothing any better than chocolate pecans to give, never mind Godiva chocolates. One staple of Christmas happened to be tea cakes. They were

wonderful with hot coffee and hot chocolate. They could be wrapped in clean flour sack towels in a box and anyone would be proud to receive that for their Santa Claus.

We little ones would hang a stocking on a nail on the wall (if you didn't have a chimney). We did not have a chimney at Bynum I didn't understand how Santa could get in the apartments in Desoto Manor but I trusted that he could. Of course we left him some tea cakes with cinnamon sugar sprinkled on them. We would go before Christmas Eve and cut a tree and decorate it, mostly with aluminum foil icicles and lights. You have to check the lights from one year to the next. The lights were fairly large, heavy glass lights. We put a quilt at the base of the tree for a tree skirt.

We could not wait to open the stockings on Christmas morning. We didn't have I-pods, cell phones, electronics of any sort. We didn't even have a wall telephone back then. But, what we had was WONDERFUL. We would have pecans, English walnuts, boxes of dried muscat raisins on the stem, no less. It would not have been Christmas without the dried raisins and I am not sure they exist now, only in my memory. We would have a tangerine, an apple, a banana, and a wrapped Hershey bar. This was the entire content of our stocking and we felt so rich.

We then unwrapped our coats that had been wrapped just so in Christmas paper salvaged from last year. Then, my favorite package was a round box of hard candy, candy you could crunch and the crunch was SO satisfying. There was a variety of flavors and colors in the hard candy, peppermint, spearmint, and some of the candies had juicy centers that squished out when you crunched. That was the most fun of all. We didn't have to have wealth untold in order to be happy and have a wonderful Christmas. A coat to keep warm, fruit, hard candy, nuts, and peppermint were totally all we needed to be happy. It's too bad people cannot be happy with that these days.

### Christmas Memories of Bynum By Ronny Wheeler

There are small things from Christmases past at Bynum that I remember. They were just little things but for some reason, they linger in my mind.

Do you remember the treks to the woods to get a cedar tree for your apartment? The smell of the cedar seemed to permeate the air when you brought it inside and stuck it in a bucket of sand or rocks. We didn't even know what a bought tree stand was. You had to pour water into the bucket quite frequently because the old coal fired heaters dried up the air and the tree continuously.

WVOK Radio used to advertise Christmas ornaments for just a few cents that were cheap in price and cheap in appearance but we didn't know better. There were some that glowed in the dark for a while. Those were neat back then.

The families with a few extra bucks splurged and bought bubble lights. When the kids of the neighborhood came into a house with those they would sit in wonder at where the bubbles came from. The rest of us made homemade ornaments and some even brought things home that we

made in school. Do you remember the construction paper chains? How about the popcorn balls?

We put up our huge artificial, 9ft, pre-lit tree this year and I wondered what impression it would have had on a typical Bynum Kid back then. We don't use real trees anymore due to the fire hazard. Back in Bynum we used them because there was nothing else. Lights were something some of us just understood were not affordable. I never heard of a natural cedar tree catching fire at Bynum.

Of course there was our own Santa, Mr. Walker. Bless his soul. He was a very bright thing to us, all of us, at Bynum. And then there was that wonderful Christmas party at the base theater. Everyone was so happy to be there and sing those wonderful songs and get the presents (they might have been cheap in price, but they were big on happiness).

Some of us kids used to climb oak trees in the woods and gather mistletoe. We would distribute it out all over Bynum and everyone would hang it over their door. This was done so you could get a kiss from any pretty girl that came in. You never considered your sister as pretty but some of her friends were.

Remember the homemade wreaths? They were falling apart by New Years but, when first done were so fragrant and pretty.

At New Years, all the garbage can bins were full of discarded cedar trees with wisps of foil icecicles still on them. If you checked the discarded trees close, it was possible to find an overlooked ornament. You could tell who got nice presents for Christmas because they discarded pretty wrapping paper. You could also tell who was holding out on the good stuff because they also discarded the boxes that they came in. Secrets were hard to keep at Bynum.

Then there was the distinct sound of new roller skates scuffing the side walks on Christmas morning. I can still hear the sound. You didn't have to look to see how many kids were wearing them, just listen to the sound of them crossing the seam in the side walk.

And, there were the cap pistols. You could tell if someone in a particular apartment got them from the sulfur smell left in their back yard. Their moms would not permit popping those things in the house. By the end of the day Doc Stephens was sold out of rolls of caps and you had to go all the way down to Walker's Store on 78 for more. We used to cut the little bumps of powder out of the rolls and stack them up to make one large KAPOW when you dropped a brick on them.

Also, there was the smell of fresh fruit because that was what some of us got along with the few presents we were lucky to get. Remember those big red apples. You usually only got one. And there were the tart oranges from Florida.

We used to gather at the homes of those who had television and watch the Bob Hope or Bing Crosby Christmas specials and even watch "It's a Wonderful Life" or even "White Christmas".

Now days, you have to send out invitations for others to come into your home to celebrate

Christmas. Back in Bynum, they were in your home all the time. Christmas was a time of happiness and fun so it was just naturally celebrated all over the place with your friends.

These are just some of the small memories that come to my mind from Christmases past at Bynum.

Ronny Wheeler, Apt #10

THE WORLD'S UGLIEST DOLL  
By Sheila Slaten Crump

You know, girl children have an innate need to mother and boy children have an innate need to fight and demolish. If you give two 2 year-old girls Barbie Dolls, (and two year-olds don't know if they are boys or girls) they will undress them and swap clothes on the dolls. If you give two 2 year-old boys a Barbie Doll, they will sword fight with them and pull the head off. They are girls and boys from the get go. When I was two, I made my dolls out of whatever was handy, chickens, cats, dogs, ducks, didn't matter. I also had my cloth dolls my grandmother made and loved them. But, I longed for a real doll. I now pour, fire and paint and assemble porcelain dolls and make fancy dresses for them, so at age 65, I still play dolls and still love them, and I suppose this hobby had its roots in the days long gone.

The date was December 25, 1949. The war was over, daddies were home, and manufacturing had picked up, so things were looking up. All I wanted for Christmas that year that I was 5, almost 6, was a real baby doll. I hinted broadly to every adult that I could corner that I wanted a real doll. They pretended they did not hear me. But secretly at night, they were planning a surprise. My grandmother made a silky doll mattress out of washed satin ribbons gleaned from wreaths that were thrown away. She sewed them together on her treadle machine until she had enough for a doll buggy mattress. She also had enough ribbon to make a pillow and stuffed them both with duck feathers. I guess they hid the gray doll buggy in Pa's corn crib because I never found it and I certainly hunted the house over for anything that resembled a present. However, I was too small to climb up in the corn crib and that had been the hiding place for several years. My mother had shopped until she found the doll that was popular that year. It happened to be a Lastic Plastic squalling baby doll that my husband says is the absolute most ugly, homely, scary doll that he has ever seen and my children agree. I think it looks just exactly like my children the day they were born. This doll is made to be a newborn doll. No Barbie teenage doll here. It had a very fancy, French heirloom sewn dress and slip, made of soft batiste, with small circles of lace shaped on the front of the dress, very fine sewing. It at one time had a bonnet to match and drawers to match. I remember crocheted booties. She was totally bald and her skin was a new process called Lastic Plastic and felt like real skin. Oh, I loved my doll. I slept with it until I married. I told it all my secrets, cuddled it like a real baby and, to me, it WAS a real baby. Even though people told me she was ugly, I thought she was the most gorgeous, charming doll I had ever seen. I rolled her around in her buggy to keep her quiet and kept her warm with the blanket my grandmother made. I took her in the car when we came to my grandmother's house on Sand Mountain from Bynum, and stayed the weekend. Where I went, she went. I must have left this baby at my parents' home when I married and moved away. That house, which was in Anniston, was sold and torn down, and I never found her.

Eventually, I had my own three children to baby, and then acquired four stepchildren who I also baby now, so I forgot about the doll for long stretches at a time. That's the way it is when you have real children. Life is what happens when you are changing diapers and making macaroni and cheese, you just don't realize it. Now, we also have had 13 grandchildren and I love every one of them.

Well, getting back to my FIRST baby, this doll has been missing for lo these 48 years. I could not remember the name of the doll but I searched a long time for a doll with her face and I found one exactly like her on the Internet, with the identical dress, no shoes or bonnet, though. I ordered it and my husband could not believe I actually paid \$9.00 and shipping for it.

I am attaching a picture of this doll to prove the fact that she is, indeed, beautiful and I know that anyone who sees her will agree with my opinion.



The Christmases I Remember  
By Beverly Canant McGuffey

The Christmases I remember are the ones at the theater building with a huge tree and presents for everyone. Sam Walker was Santa. Everyone had a wonderful time. Everyone was treated alike. These years were probably 1945 at least until 1954 when I graduated.

The one outstanding Christmas was in 1945 approximately. My family had a real tree. Mom had long silver icicles that we would throw on the tree. We would save them and reuse them the next year. We only had a couple of gifts each, Ray, Gary and myself.

In 1950, I remember getting 3rd hand bicycle. Dad painted it. It was a boy's bike and had a homemade leather seat. It was the most comfortable and well balanced bike I ever rode. Anne Aldrup, Joan Ellison and Judy Melton would ride with me all over the depot, to the lake, and up and down the hills in Bynum. Those were very fun times.

My life, my children and now my grandchildren are all affected by the wonderful people who helped us to develop into great individuals. We have gone all over the U.S. I am thankful for Mrs. Bright and the Scouts, for Mrs. Haight who taught me to swim and to Mrs Aldrup who worked with the kids, teaching us to do plays and to sing. God bless all of them!

### When I think of Christmas in Bynum

By Jan Barker

When I think of Christmas in Bynum, all my memories seem to wrap around me like a blanket warmed in front of a fireplace. My story will be a montage of many Christmases. I was the youngest of three children, there being a five-year difference between one child and the next. My parents evidently had decided I would be the last, and so began the "Santa Conspiracy." My older siblings readily joined in the effort to keep me believing in the jolly old elf way longer than any of my friends. This would be one of the reasons my social life got off to a rocky start. It's hard to overcome the effects of a "smother mother" aided by four co-conspirators.

As Christmas approached, there was such a feeling of anticipation, I could hardly stand it. Clement Moore was so right about visions dancing in your head. But wait! Had I been good enough to be deserving of all the wondrous toys I was dreaming of? After all, there was that fib I told last summer; and the time I ran ahead of Mama and tried to start a fire in the old wood-burning stove, so it would be warm when she got there. My intentions had been good, but on the other hand, I could have burned the place down. Did the good out-weigh the bad?

Then, closer to the big day, so close, in fact, that Santa couldn't possibly have time to forget, I pitched a tantrum that will probably make it into the history books. Right there in the middle of that dark green linoleum, I stomped around and screeched and finally fell to the floor, pushed myself around in circles till the vibrations were so strong, Mama's clock (the only one in the house) walked right off the top of that old Frigidaire and crashed to pieces on the floor. At that very minute, there was a knock on the door and Mama went to answer it. Out of range of my hearing, she quickly told the visitor what had happened, and then called to me, "Janice, there's someone here to see you." When I came face-to-face with Santa, he gently scolded me for causing the clock to break. That one incident served to re-enforce my belief and I spent the next week wondering if he would pass me by that year.

The waiting was almost unbearable, but on Christmas morning the living room was once again transformed into a fantasy. Over the years, there were dolls, the doll house with plastic furniture and people, the ever-present silver skates with the leather straps and skate key to be worn on a shoelace and hung around the neck. Around the age of four, I actually got a tiny ironing board with a real electric iron. What's up with that? I could have been seriously burned or electrocuted!

The really big Christmas came the year I was ten. My sister and I were forced by birth order to wait until we reached that age before we could have a bicycle. You see, when our older brother was eight or nine years old, he was hit by a car while riding his bike, thereby making ten the magic age. My bike was a blue and white 26" Firestone with a battery-operated horn. Oh, Glory! My first wheels brought such a feeling of freedom. That bike was, at various times, a horse, a car, a plane; wherever my imagination could take me.

There was only one draw-back. On that Christmas Eve, I had pretended to be sleeping and heard my brother look in on me and say to my parents, "yeah, she's asleep" and then close my door. I tip-toed over and peeked into the living room and saw my parents place the gifts around the tree, and was forced to admit to myself that even Santa sometimes needs a little help!