

RANDOM REFLECTIONS: Old Memories, New Experiences

By Kathryn Wishlow

This time of year often invokes memories of “Christmas Past” for me. After having help putting up my tree last week, with all of my favourite decorations collected over the many years, I paused to reflect. I still clearly remember my mother's delight when my father decided that since I was now three and a half years old, I should experience my first real Christmas tree.

We were living in Farmington, New Mexico at the time. Being a desert area, any pine trees had to be imported and at great expense. My father drove up with the small tree tied to the roof of our green Chevy. Mom and I watched out of the window while he untied the rope, lifted it down and gave it a good shake. It was about as tall as his shoulder, and perfect in every way. Into the house it came, and then my parents had to decide where it should go. I still have the stand he put it in with the screws to straighten the trunk, and the can for water attached. According to my Dad, it had to “fall out” for a day before we put any decorations on it. The smell was amazing!

That night, I heard my Dad tell Mom it was a “ten dollar” tree, whatever that was. He also told her

that when he was a child in Guelph, they used to go out to their grandparent's farm and just cut one down for free! Since I have used an artificial tree for over ten years, I have no idea what a tree actually costs these days. But over fifty years ago, ten dollars for a small tree was a huge extravagance.

The next day, Mom brought out six boxes of the most beautiful glass decorations, each nestled in their own separated compartment within. While Dad strung the “bubbler” lights, we attached the hooks to the ornaments. A huge variety of colours, shapes and sizes were placed randomly (or so I thought) amongst the branches. Mom taught me to look for the dark spots and add the shiny pieces to catch and reflect the light from the bubbling string of lights. The finishing touch included carefully draping the heavy, silver tinsel. Funny how the next morning, a lot of the ornaments I had placed, seemed to have moved to different spots. But it did not matter. I had helped decorate our first tree!

Those bubbling lights provided endless hours of fascination for me. Even as a nine year old in Orillia, I would lay under the tree and watch the coloured liquid inside bubble

continuously once they had heated up. Our cats always found them fascinating too! I suppose those bubbling lights are no longer available. Probably someone's child or animal ate one, so they have been pulled from retail. Maybe they have gone the way of the Venetian blinds, obsolete because of misuse of the cords.

As I aged, I felt less inclined to kill a real tree just for a few weeks of pleasure. The shedding, dry needles poking into my bare feet became more annoying. The remaining glass ornaments are still in those boxes in my attic. They have been replaced over the years with crocheted, wooden or metal decorations that could not be destroyed by curious pets. When the original heavy tinsel was replaced by the silver-coated plastic, I no longer put it on my tree. However, none of those modern changes have dampened my happiness over the years ... for having a tree. I only miss the smell of a real tree!

(Kathryn Wishlow belongs to White Pine Writers Inc., a local group of like-minded authors who encourage and support all facets of writing and publishing literary efforts. Follow them on FaceBook or www.whitepinewriters.ca)