

THE BIGGEST CHRISTMAS EVER

By Robert "Bob" Rogers Chaffin
'Writer's Corner'

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN
Sunday, 15 December 2013, C-4

In 1950 we moved off the farm and although Daddy and Momma tried their hand at store keeping, mechanic work, the Steven's Pants Factory, the Carthage Grocery and Locker, and a few other odd jobs, it was not until Frank G. Clement was elected governor of Tennessee in 1953 that Daddy got a really good job "working for the public." So it must have been the Christmas of 1954 that was our first "big Christmas."



Up until that time, the economic condition of our family had been such that Christmas was a somewhat sparse affair with some stick candy, apples and oranges, a couple of wind up toys from the Ben Franklin 5 and dime and mostly a few new clothes was the extent of the Christmas plunder. Of course, there were no complaints because the eating was good and we had never had it any better, having just come through the Depression and the rationing of WWII.

But the Christmas I was 10 years old was different. Aunt Ada had moved in with our family and was a welcome addition. She was sharing expenses with Mama and Daddy and her presence was allowing Mama to work at the "Locker Plant," along with my sister who had a Saturday job there also. Uncle Denver was working at Oak Ridge on a good quasi-government job and was not yet married so he could be counted on for presents the like of which we had not even dreamed.

So our family came into the Christmas of 1954 flush with cash money as we had never been before with Daddy declaring this was going to be a big Christmas. When Donnieta and I retrieved the sizable cedar tree from a nearby pasture, Mama purchased some new ornaments and lights from the "Locker Plant" and the gifts covered a good portion of the living room of the house at 901 Dogwood, our first house with shiny hardwood floors, a wool carpet down in the living room, and inlaid linoleum on the kitchen floor. And wonder above all wonders, it had indoor plumbing – running hot and cold water right in the house. And, although we missed the ambiance provide by fireplace and Warm Morning Stove, the big old chunk coal central heat furnace down in the basement was a luxury beyond our widest imagination.

When Christmas eve came (we always opened gifts and Santa came on Christmas eve), our grandparents, Ma Ma and Pa Maberry and our Uncle Billy showed up to a living room loaded with stuff, all wrapped in brightly colored paper and set off with homemade bows. (All except Uncle Denver's whose had been wrapped by the big city department store in Oak Ridge or Knoxville.)

My parents bought Aunt Ada a Cedar chest which still graces my sister's home, and Donnieta got a Revlon make-up kit just like the movie stars used out in Hollywood. Me? Well I got a real electric Lionel Locomotive that pulled cars around a little round track and a real Daisy Air Rifle. It was beyond thinkable that any boy could ever be so blessed.

Mama had made jam cake and the world's best fudge, which was upstairs keeping cook and Aunt Ada had made her famous boiled custard. Since I was now getting 50-cents a day working for Pa Maberry on the farm, I had managed to buy Aunt Ada a tin of King Leo Pure Stick Candy and a little something for everyone. Although most of it came from Mr. Sanderson's Dime Store, I felt happy and blessed to be giving a real gift to everyone in the family.

There would be some hard times again and some Christmas' would be lean and gifts few but for this Christmas, the world was bright, the tree was beautiful, and this would forever after be referred to in our family as "The big Christmas." Conversations would often start, "Do you remember the year we had the big Christmas?" I am quite sure if I started a sentence with that phrase, my sister would still know exactly what I was talking about.

So may all your Christmas wishes come true, and regardless of how much “stuff” you have, may you be blessed with a “big Christmas.” Above all, may your heart be filled with the grace and love associated with the greatest gift of all. Be well, and be blessed.

*Read more of Robert Chaffin stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>