

Christmas Stories

These stories were contributed by members of the
congregation of the

Blackwood Uniting Church
Advent and Christmas 2019



This booklet contains beautiful stories of Christmas experiences.
 There are stories of hope, stories of peace, stories of joy
 and stories of that tell of great love.
 We thank the authors for their willingness to share their stories
 and we hope that they will awaken within you connections with,
 and memories of, your own Christmas experiences.

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The Christmas it rained *in* the church

Jane Bassham

People who were part of Blackwood Uniting Church community back in 1988 will all have a story to tell about “the Christmas it rained *in* the church” or “the Christmas that part of the church roof wasn’t there”.

It all started when minor works to expand the old church foyer doorway were underway. On a mild Tuesday in September, we were having an afternoon cuppa at the kitchen table in the manse, just behind the church. I could hear the afternoon traffic getting busy as peak hour got closer; the “thwaks” and line calls of tennis practice on the courts; sub-contractors’ hammers chipping away in the church; when BOOOMMMMM, this thunderous noise blasted so loudly the table shook

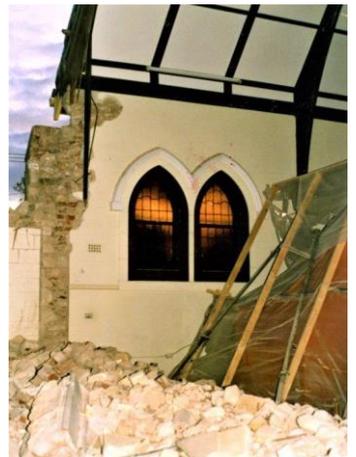
I wondered “WHAT WAS THAT????!!!!” Time slowed down. Then it sped up in freeze frames. We realised something bad had happened at the church and ran over to see if everyone was OK. The tennis players were standing, rackets hanging by their sides, looking stunned, but fine. There was this massive cloud of dust billowing out of the kitchen door, we couldn’t really see very far, and it was choking. I was training to be a registered nurse and had been learning about trauma care on placement at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, so I was worried about what injuries people might have.

Then three men absolutely *covered* in dust emerged, dazed, out of the cloud. When we went to have a look, there was no longer a back wall of the church! That’s right, it had completely collapsed into a humongous 2 metre pile of rubble. The wheelbarrows were completely crushed. The hall was thick with dust.

Miraculously, no-one was hurt. One guy had jumped back off the scaffolding into the church. The guy next to the wheelbarrow had run for his life. The other guy was nearby but hadn’t been hit.

People at the church swung into action. Contacting safety people to make the building safe. An extraordinary meeting of the church property committee was held. Scheduled weddings needing to find new locations. New building plans to be drawn. A BIG clean up.

The silver lining? Blackwood ended up with “major” works including an angled extension to the back church roof, and retractable sliding doors allowing open space for the Community Fair, or an extra 80 – 100 seats at the back of the church, that you can see today. The insurance issues took 4 years to sort through, but Synod put money up to get things underway earlier.



But in that December as Christmas got closer, there was still a 2-3 metre gap in the roof. What would the weather be like for Christmas? Would we get sunburnt where there was no roof? Wet? As it turned out, there was rain! On Christmas morning the rain started at about 7.30am right before 8am service where more than one hundred people attended, then 9.30am when even more people came. There was a frenzy of activity: mops, tarps, towels stopping the rain coming into the church and hall. What a Christmas! Most of us didn’t get too wet, but it was one to remember!

When I look back at 1988 when the church wall fell down but nobody was hurt and then Christmas, I remember miracles, the Church community pitching in and supporting each other, building for the future and renewing rain. That’s what Christmas 1988 was about. And Christmas really still is about miracles, community, planning for the future, renewal, and hope. Blessings be with you this Christmas!

The Christmas it rained *in* the Church

Russell Gear

I was still working for the CFS then. I was returning from work. We, the Church property Committee had let a contract for a builder to widen the opening to the common foyer at the back of the church in order to make a better connection with the Hall. I called in to see how far the builders had progressed. They had made a temporary support for the two side sections of back wall that remained after the opening had been widened - "accro" supports had been placed in these parts of the wall to support them while they put a steel beam through. To my surprise these "accros" were looking rather dodgy. "Mmm," I thought, "I don't like the look of this." I was concerned that the back wall was weaker anyway even before any of the widening had taken place as it had never had the support of buttresses like the front and side walls. But the workmen seemed to know what they were doing.



I went home. Ten minutes later I had a phone call from Roger Bassham. "The wall has fallen down." I then phoned and spoke to Chair of Property, Graham Footner. Both he and I arrived at the site at the same time to watch the dust settle with Roger. Fortunately no-one injured, no damage to the pipe organ, minimal damage to the roof. Just a matter of cleaning up the debris and making the roof safe.

The next few days we had builders and engineers come to work out how to make the building safe. The roof would be open for several months.

On Christmas Eve we had an indication that there may be showers on Christmas Day but we were determined to have a service in the church as "normal" despite the "air conditioning". It rained early on Christmas morning. I rounded up about 10 volunteers to help sweep up the water on the new concrete slab between the church and the hall which was now roofless. Murray McCaskill was keen to use the organ as it had not been damaged.

The fall of the back wall turned out to be a blessing in disguise as it provided us with a more flexible worship space, with better outcomes aesthetically, visually and acoustically.



The Christmas it rained *in* the church

Bob Potter

Towards the end of 1988 Jean visited me at home. She greeted me. "We have been going together now for four years. Are you going to marry me? If not on your bike!" What a conundrum for me. I didn't have a bike! We talked and agreed that we should wed and settled on the 3rd December 1988. Church and minister booked, Reception and all that organized. Then in mid-November a phone call from Roger Bassham saying that we could not get married in Blackwood UC. "Why not?" The back wall of the Church had collapsed. We switched to Belair UC and had a lovely wedding. We followed this up with an extended family Christmas. I'm still thankful that I didn't have a bike, and I am most grateful for my wonderful Christmas gift.



Memories of Christmas

John Whitbread

In 1984 Avis and I stayed with friends in Toronto Canada during which time they took us to an Amish settlement nearby. We finished up, as we usually did, in a craft shop situated in an old many-storied mill.

It contained a great range of beautiful and pricey items made by local craftsmen. In particular there was a nativity scene of numerous pieces carved in olive wood, which we admired, and eventually bought.

To our dismay, however, when we returned home to Australia and unwrapped the nativity there was no carved figure of Joseph and so each subsequent Christmas we missed Joseph.

Several years later our son Geoff, and his wife left for overseas and planned to visit our Toronto friends. Avis casually suggested to Sue, our daughter-in-law, that she should try and find Joseph. Being a resourceful person, when they visited the craft shop at Amish settlement she spoke of Joseph to the very ancient lady behind the counter.

The old lady asked them to wait while she went upstairs. Returning some minutes later she handed the carved figure of Joseph to Sue together with an additional camel. Joseph was wrapped in very dusty old newspaper; he had been very patient.

He was subsequently restored to his family and takes his place in the scene each Christmas.



Christmas delight and despair!

Malcolm McArthur

Lawrence, our eldest had, completed school at Blackwood High so it was time to take the family back to the Northern Indiana Town where our first two children were born.

The local congregation of the church we had attended were so welcoming: a cottage to stay in, a car to drive, familiar former youth group members now married, so many warm faces, cold snow for Christmas Eve.

Then a worry: after the Christmas Eve service we returned to our borrowed cottage and found some- one must have broken in. Oh No!!

It was Santa who had broken in and left... a tree, and under it presents, just right for a sixteen year old, a fourteen year old, an eight year old. A night to remember!

Time came to head home and drive a rent-a-wagon across the States, via Colorado's Canyon. There I managed to slip on the icy rim and crack ribs: the last hours driving to Los Angeles were painful. Our gifts remained in the back of our wagon as I struggled to the first floor motel room.

Next morning we were headed for the airport. Disaster! A break- in to our renta-a-wagon.

Duncan's only ever remote controlled car was gone, as were Naomi's snuggly neck-to toe PJ's and Lawrie's souvenir of two weeks as a New Carlisle High School member.

" Sic transit Gloria mundi."

A Christmas Story

Carys Penny

In 1985 our family had a very different Christmas from our normal gathering of relatives and eating a huge Christmas dinner.

My husband, our three children, aged 14, 11 and 6, and myself were in Arizona,USA, in a small apartment close to the Grand Canyon. We woke to find snow outside and the pine trees were covered with great clumps of snow which occasionally fell to the ground with a sudden swish.

The children were given some rather small gifts as we were travelling and had no room for presents. Then we went outside and picked up a small branch of pine tree which had fallen on the ground. We took it into our tiny apartment and decorated it with red papier-mache apples. We had bought these earlier to take home to Australia with us a week later.

We had no opportunity to go to church that day but celebrated very simply looking at the Grand Canyon as the sunlight lit various peaks. It was very moving and awe inspiring.

We still have the red apples which we have used on our Christmas trees ever since and it reminds us that Christmas can be enjoyed without any of the usual trappings but with feelings of joy and thankfulness for Jesus' birth, our beautiful world and for each other.

A very special Christmas present – Christmas 1942

Bob Lyon

My father was in the Army in Darwin and had arranged through one of his Army mates, whose family were dog breeders, for me to get a puppy for Christmas. However the litter of puppies all died and so that I would not be disappointed the breeders gave me a one- year- old pedigree fox terrier that had been trained for dog shows. We called him “Sapper” because my Dad was a Sapper in the Royal Australian Army Engineers.

Sapper nearly drove Mum mad because every time she looked at him he thought he was at a show and would walk in a two-metre diameter circle.

I had added a couple of garden stake shafts to my hand cart and when I went to the shop for Mum the flour and sugar came home in the cart.

Sapper and I were inseparable mates for many years.



My Christmas Story

Trevor Sutcliffe

The date was Christmas Eve 1965. It was a tradition at Allenby Gardens Methodist Church for the Youth Group to go carol singing on Christmas Eve. It was always great fun sitting on the back of an old truck, stopping every so often to regale unsuspecting citizens with boisterous renditions of well -known carols. That year I positioned myself on the back of the truck next to an attractive young woman who had recently moved into the district and was attending our church with her parents.

At the end of that very enjoyable evening, Elizabeth, a close friend came up to me and suggested that I may like to take the young woman whom I was sitting with, to her (Elizabeth's) boyfriend's 22nd birthday party on New Year's Eve. And so it was agreed.

Fast forward a number of years and the young woman and I will be celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary on January 1 2020.

Toronto Christmas

Bruce Marriott

It was our first Christmas in Toronto, Canada. Winter had arrived early that year with a heavy snow-fall in the middle of November. The week prior to Christmas day the whole area was covered by a thick blanket of snow.

Two of the members of the church had invited all of the members of the congregation to visit them on their Christmas tree farm located northwest of the city in an area described by the locals as the “snow belt” of Ontario. It was a fund raising event for the church and for an appropriate fee we were to share in afternoon tea and then choose and cut a suitable tree to take home for Christmas.

The main roads were well cleared and we found the farm without any difficulty. The afternoon tea was held in a long, narrow stone barn with natural timber beams and rafters supporting the gabled roof. Heat was provided by a huge pot-bellied stove containing a roaring wood fire. Every ounce of heat was extracted from the stove by a flue that rose vertically to head height and then ran horizontally as far along the centre of the shed as it could before losing its effectiveness as a fire draught and then disappeared vertically through the roof of the building. The afternoon tea was a sumptuous feast of rural Canadian proportions. Being newcomers we lingered a long while chatting to people we had just met and suddenly realised that it was almost dark outside. We rushed out to choose our Christmas tree but it was too dark to judge the varying shapes and sizes of the trees so we chose the first one we stumbled across. It was quickly cut down, lashed to the top of our car and we headed for home.

Our three young boys tumbled into the back seat and Bonnie, who was eight months pregnant, bulged into the seat beside me and struggled to do up her seat belt. By now it was a pitch black, bible black, night with little traffic on the icy snow covered road. We saw no direction signs on the roadway and with no visible stars or moon we began to doubt if we were heading in the right direction. We moved slowly to avoid sliding off the road into the banked up snow each side.

We were comforted by the appearance of a couple of lights in the distance and as we drew closer we realised the lights were those of an isolated service station. We pulled in and filled up with “gas” (petrol). The service station attendant was a stocky, middle-aged man with a wily smile on his face. The bill was paid and we were about to leave when I asked the question uppermost on my mind. “Excuse me! Could you tell me if we are on Highway 7 heading east?” The smile on the attendant’s face widened into a broad grin and he replied in a languid Canadian drawn out country drawl. “Well that sure depends on which way you’re heading.” We all burst out laughing and climbed back into the car.

We eventually found our way to our home near the heart of Toronto with three children asleep on the back seat and a Christmas tree that reached from the floor to ceiling of our living room. We had also learned the most important lesson of any Christmas. To know where you are, you really need to know where you are heading. May every Christmas provide us with a renewed sense of where we are in life because it gives us our “heading” and points us in the direction of the Light of the World.



My First Christmas Party 1965

Tony Otworowski

At the age of four this was my first Christmas party in our small semi-rural village of Blackfield in the New Forest, UK.



This photograph was taken in the Blackfield village Hall.

It was also my first encounter with Santa Claus who I never really believed in, but was pleased to meet as he gave me a present.

Sitting at the table with me ('x' marks the spot) are long-time friends of 54 years who I went to school with, played rugby and was recently reunited with on my last trip back to the UK in 2019.

Happy memories from a time when the simple things in life meant so much.

Christmas in the 1940s

Jan Rawolle

I was born at Karoonda in eastern South Australia to Marion and Bentley (Ben) Millard. My father had 2 shops there before the War, a clothing shop and a fruit and vegetables store.

When the War finished in 1945, Dad came home. With rationing the two shops were not able to make money, and Dad was offered a position in the railways in Mount Gambier, where his parents lived. We arrived in November, and my first Christmas there I spent in hospital – I had fallen and opened my knee but I was able to go home the next day.

We didn't have many gifts at Christmas. We gave our grandmother a Moffatt translation of the Bible which I now have. One year my grandmother gave Marlene, my sister, and I a teddy bear each (Bruin and Sandy) and a doll each (Jean and Judith) the next year. One very lovely gift we were given was when Uncle Glen gave us a beautiful doll's house that he had made. We didn't expect valuable or precious gifts but were thrilled with anything that was made specially for us. We also got an orange each, which was wonderful as they didn't grow in Mt Gambier (it was too cold)!

Dad was a very clever cook and usually cooked Christmas dinner.

I will always remember the fun and joy of Christmas, without huge expensive gifts but with cousins and friends to share the joy.

O Tannebaum, O Tannebaum, O Christmas Tree

Gloria McArthur

For weeks preceding Christmas Eve the double doors leading to the lounge room of our family home when I was young were closed!!! Secrecy!! No one entered, no questions asked... What was revealed early on Christmas Eve was a dazzling traditional wooden Christmas tree. It comprised of a decorated pyramidal outer frame with candleholders and a central carousel with a rotor at the top which was driven by warm air from the lit candles. The centre shelves held nativity scenes and other Christmas figures such as angels, and wise men, as well as worldly motifs such as mining folk, farm scenes, Father Christmas and his helpers. Somehow my father had managed to secrete the wooden frame from the barn into the house and my dear mother each night after we were tucked up in bed would devise the scenes for each of the circular layers, trim the candles, and insert the fans around the top which drove the rotation of the inner layers. No words can describe the amazement, the beauty, the magic, the joy and as I look back I admire the creativity of my parents who created this little bit of joy in an otherwise sedentary lifestyle.



This same tree, now over one hundred years old, handcrafted in Hahndorf is now decorated each year by our grandchildren. As they choose their objects I remind them of the story behind the object – was it part of my mother’s stories, or has its story evolved from our travels, our friends, our life. Some objects are things that they have made in previous years and I have treasured them. An immense pleasure for me now is having requests from our mostly adult grandchildren, wishing to know when we will be putting up the Christmas tree. Their creativity, sparked by their imagination and the world they know is often a far cry from what I remember of my mother’s. Not sure my mother would have had Batman swinging from the fans!!!

Christmas Story

Ros Miller

In 2007 we hosted a Japanese high school student, Naoko, for 6 months while she studied at Annesley College in Adelaide.

The same year, Tony supervised a Chinese graduate student, XuYang, who was an intern at CSIRO where we both worked at the time. Both students spent the Christmas of 2007 with our family.

In fact Naoko’s mother, Yasuko, also decided to visit Adelaide over the Christmas period, so we ‘hosted’ her as well.

For quite a few years I had made and decorated Christmas fruit cakes and this year was no exception. I decided it would be great to decorate the cake by writing ‘Merry Christmas’ in English, Japanese and Chinese characters. Naoko and XuYang were surprised and really keen about writing on the cake. After dinner, we sang Christmas songs in English, Japanese and Chinese – in particular “Jingle Bells”. It was such a really memorable experience.



A Christmas Story

Chris Bray

As young adults my brother and I invited a few friends over on Christmas night. Like us, they'd done the "family lunch" but were on our own for the night.

Later we heard stories of lonely Christmases from many other young adults so the next two Christmases we had an "open House". Some brought leftovers, some drinks, some music, some friends from interstate.

One year we had over 30 people gathered – there was always plenty of food and drink. Lots of fun, some discussions about politics, religion and travel, arguments over music and sport.

A true "family" gathering!

Christmas Lunch 2019

David Hawkins

It's all going to be different this year.

We have always had a hot meal, usually at our place

There are bon-bons to be pulled

Coloured hats to wear,

Pathetic jokes to share and a useless plastic toy.

The food is ready, sit down and give thanks.

There is ham and turkey,

baked potatoes, pumpkin, carrots, beans, brussel sprouts

and that once a year special, cauliflower with blue cheese sauce.

Don't forget to leave room for the fruit pudding

drowning in hot custard.

What token did you get?

Was it good health, marriage, travel or wealth?

If you can fit in a second helping it may increase your chances.

It's all going to be different this year.

This year, our children are taking us to the Grand for Christmas lunch!

So spare a thought for those unknown others who have

prepared, cooked, served, cleaned up and washed the dishes

so we can have an enjoyable celebration.

Happy Christmas to all.



A Christmas Story

Anne Magarey

When I was a child, we had old fashioned big family Christmases at my grandfather Magarey's house in Walkerville. All his children, and all his children's children. Big, fairly formal, amazing Christmases. When he died, we had much smaller Christmases at home - my father, my mother, my brother and I, and my mother's father.

My father died very suddenly, at the age of 52, in November, 1969. I was 19, my brother 21. It was a huge shock. A shattering, life altering event. My grandfather, Mum's father, decided we should go out for Christmas lunch, to one of places he often took all of us to on Sundays, after Dad had been on his hospital visits. This was truly bizarre. Mum, my brother and I were all in a state of shock. Life was suspended; we didn't know how to behave. I don't remember what we ate; I just remember the sense of unreality and how we floundered around in a daze of shock and grief, and a sort of brittle 'fun'.

We'd always, always, had the cooked turkey and roast vegetables, pudding etc that was the 'normal' Australian Christmas in the 50s and 60s. Although we did have pavlova. After my father's death, we began to have a cold Christmas, when we didn't go to aunts' or uncles' houses. This is a tradition that I have retained; to me it is so much easier to spend the day before in preparation, and to be able to relax, go to church, spend time with the children and their families, than be flustered trying to cook and have everything ready at the same time.

Christmas Story

Heather Lee

A few years ago, both of our young adult children moved out of home within a few months of each other. I think it was the Christmas prior to both of them being gone: they were both looking for places and one was frequently elsewhere as well.

They both arranged to be home overnight on Christmas Eve. I had not said anything, I think, but I had a feeling that this Christmas would be the last one "like this". Christmas morning: all of us in sleepwear, sitting around Alfred the living Christmas tree in his large pot. Alfred looked lovely in old decorations gathered through gifts and crafts over the years.

We unwrapped presents to each other. Our daughter had been able to work and for the first time had some money to buy gifts that she really wanted to buy- really thoughtful loving things. I unwrapped a beautiful bracelet with a heart shaped charm that said "You and me-me and you" on the anchor point and "mother" on the heart. Darling daughter showed me her own bracelet to which she had added the matching charm that said "daughter". I wept with the love and connection declared in this gift.

It was the last Christmas like that.

The following Christmas they turned up dressed in their good clothes, at lunch time. Christmas lunch at my mum's: adults together wearing Christmas cracker hats.

All as it should be, no doubt, and life is change. I remember that "last time" around the tree in pyjamas and the effort they made to fulfil the ritual one last time.

These moments we find chances to tell each other that we matter.

MY PATCHWORK CHRISTMASES

Penny Harper

Looking back at my Christmases from the great age of 73, they seem like a patchwork. Some were bright and happy some were darker and not so.

I think most as a child they were happy enough what with making Christmas puddings, etc. However when I was an adult, a lone parent with a young daughter, Christmas Day was often, just taking her to the local chicken shop and eating alone with her at home. I did not care for myself, but was sorry for my child.

Her grandparents lived in a nearby suburb but there were never any invitations there, So I can remember taking Natasha to St Peter's Anglican church in the morning, knowing that her grandparents would be there. It was afterwards a quick "Happy Christmas" in the car park and my taking her home alone. It was a heart-wrenching ordeal for me, but I really wanted my daughter to at least see her grandparents on that day of the year.

However a few years later, Christmas was made a special event. I started going to what was then the Daw Pk Uniting church (now Col. Light Gdns). And a few weeks before Christmas, completely out of the blue, two different families from church invited us to share their Christmas day. One for lunch and one for dinner!

The lunch people also invited Natasha and myself to go with them a week before to buy a Christmas tree from a Christmas tree farm. My daughter really loved this outing and I was "blown away" by their kindness and welcome.

On Christmas Day itself, the lunch family picked us up and we were brought in as members of the family. At no time did I feel a stranger or intruder. My daughter played with the many children there and we were totally accepted. We were brought home later in the afternoon with my child having one of her frequent tantrums, and I really despaired at what she would be like for the second Christmas celebration. Fortunately, though, she fell asleep and slept for a couple of hours before the dinner people picked us up.

Again, we were treated as one of the family, and my daughter behaved well. Phew!!

Over the years, there has often been some "angst" about Christmas and where it would be, etc. Some of my brother's children are interstate, as he was up until relatively recently. My daughter has "Christmas in July" with her friends and I am never sure whether she will come to the family Christmas Day.

But I will always remember the kindness of the Daw Park community.



My Christmas Story

Bev Eccleston

My memories are from Christmas 1942. I grew up in Melbourne, and with my elder brother Graeme and my parents, lived in the suburb of Gardiner. Mum's sister and her family lived about 20 minutes walk away and although the tramline was right outside our door, on that Christmas day we walked! Father Christmas had left me a wondrous two-wheeler doll's carriage and with my favourite doll tucked in, I proudly pushed this squeaky wheeled carriage to my Auntie and Uncle's house! Imagine my stunned surprise to find that Father Christmas had also left doll's carriages for my two cousins Val and Trish! They would have been five and three and I was six years old! We had the most wonderful day!

I don't remember what Graeme's Christmas present was, but as he rode a bike ahead of us all the way maybe Father Christmas left that for him!

We used to have marvellous family times together and Christmas was always special- with roast chicken, Christmas pudding and custard, Christmas cake, mince pies, shortbread etc. I remember the table being enormous and it must have been two trestles borrowed from the Spring Road, Malvern Methodist Church!

It was years later when I discovered that my Uncle Frank had made these wonderful toys for his daughters and me! Lucky little girls!

Christmas Time

Nina Murton

In the Southern Yorke Peninsula Circuit of the Methodist Church in the early 60's, my husband Jim had three services to conduct on Christmas morning.

He left home early from Stansbury where we lived to arrive at Edithburgh south of Stansbury for a 9.00am Service.

After driving north through Stansbury to Port Vincent for their Service he eventually arrived back just in time for Stansbury's Christmas Celebration.

Our three children and I would cross the road and walk up the hill to join the large congregation of locals and holidaymakers in a joyous Celebration of Christ's birth.

The two girls were both Primary School age at the time and Ian not yet at school so Christmas was eagerly awaited.

So that we were all together as a family to enjoy the opening of the many parcels that had miraculously appeared on their beds overnight we insisted that it should wait until Daddy came home!

We did however allow one present of a book each to keep them happy for the time being. No doubt having such mean parents had a profound effect on their psychological development. However they do not seem to have been scarred for life and have since become responsible members of the community.



My Christmas Memory

Robyn Dunbar (nee Eccleston)

Christmas at Blackwood Methodist/Uniting Church in my childhood will forever hold magical memories for me – not because of the carols (although I am sure they were beautiful), nor the messages preached (although I'm sure they were meaningful), nor the Nativity scenes (although I am sure they were stunning), nor the church being packed to the rafters with family and friends.

Christmas Day was always magical because wondrously, miraculously, overnight an ENORMOUS tree would appear at the front of the church on Christmas morning. It reached almost to the ceiling, and was draped in silver strands (not tinsel). But the best, most magical thing were the twinkling white lights like tiny stars, sprinkled from right down low up to the very top of the tree. I would gaze in wonder, trying to guess which ones would twinkle next.

Clearly the angels must have put it there, because it was way too big for people and it was never there on Christmas Eve.

That was Christmas for me ... the tree, the silver strands and the tiny, twinkling lights.

(Apparently it was an angel named Don Boase and his angelic friends who created the magic ...and made every Christmas special for me and for so many.)

Christmas 1936

Thelma Pike

We only ate chicken once a year, and that was our Christmas treat.
My Father walked 3 miles to a mate's house who was selling live chickens, cheap.

Arriving home with the chicken squawking in a sugar bag, he stood scratching his head, *where would he put the animal until tomorrow in an insecure yard 25 feet by 15 feet? Aha under a wash tub of course.*

Next morning he awoke early. All was quiet in the yard as he very carefully raised the tub, *wouldn't want the chook to fly away, it's damn quiet in there, must be asleep.* Slowly, slowly he lifted the tub, then he shrieked,
"No! No! It's gone, couldn't have lifted the lid itself. Some thieving rat has stolen it."

Mum came tearing out in her nightdress. "What's wrong?"
The heads of the two neighbours rose above the paling fence like two meerkats. "What's all the noise about Mike? "No Christmas dinner for us this year, Alf. Some thieving scoundrel has stolen our chook."

He then noticed that Alf's wife was trying not to laugh. Alf slowly raised the writhing chicken over the fence while the two neighbours almost cried laughing.

Another practical joke on a neighbour in a time when neighbours were friends and in a hard time had learnt to make their own fun. Many times later they enjoyed retelling the story of the stolen chook.

A Christmas Story

Peter Smith

In 1976 I spent six months cycling in Europe. We began in England and in a few days met a German cyclist who was doing the same but with the intent to improve his English language. As we parted ways after a week he invited us to visit his family and this put us in December staying with the Bosl family for Christmas.

The evening of December we gathered together, 3 Australian boys in a traditional German festivity. The pine tree in the lounge had actual candles burning on the branches as we ate roast venison and all of the trimmings and compared stories of our Summer Christmas traditions – some similar and most so different.

At 11.30 we donned our coats and made the 15 minute walk to midnight mass. Lo and behold it started to snow as we entered the church and engrossed ourselves in the German Service. I still keep in contact with the Bosl family and they have visited us in Australia but I truly treasure my time with them and one and only “White Christmas”.

Christmas in the Kosciuszko National Park

Jan and Milton Turner

It was 1998, we were living in Canberra and it was near to Christmas. Our two children had left home and were living interstate. We had been in Adelaide in November for the birth of our grandson and our son in Western Australia had a sudden change of work plans for the holiday period and was unable to join us for Christmas. So what would we do about Christmas Day?

Friends had invited us to be with them but since we were bushwalkers we decided to backpack into the Kosciuszko National Park south of Canberra for a few days and to camp in the Kiandra area. Our intention was to spend three or four days walking in the wilderness area and with the promise of good weather we set off on 24th December and made our first camp near Four Mile Hut. The next day we continued along the track to the Nine Mile Diggings and then Tabletop Mountain.

We had packed a few treats for Christmas Dinner but there was no turkey, ham or pudding! The weather was quite warm on the 26th and we did not anticipate that the weather might change, there were no storm clouds around and no strong winds during the night.

After a restful night in our warm sleeping bags we woke early feeling a bit cold in the tent. When we flung back the tent flap, lo and behold we were in a snowfield! Yes, snow everywhere and what a great experience that was! It was so beautifully pristine and peaceful! Packing up our camp was a challenge but we walked out to the car with a real spring in our step along a track covered with a light dusting of snow. The sun was shining but we had our gortex jackets, beanies, gloves and scarves on!

As we drove home we heard news on the car radio of all the difficulties experienced in the Sydney/Hobart yacht race. We had experienced that same cold front but in a totally different way.

Almost a White Christmas in Australia!!

A Christmas Story

Una Robertson

Our son emigrated to Australia in December 2017 so George and I decided to visit December 2018. We had never been to Australia before so no idea what to expect. I don't think we really thought much apart from being anxious to see our family.

We flew to Singapore and cruised down to Sydney arriving there on 20th December. It was hot and sunny. Always the pictures you get in the UK of Australia. In order to see Opera House we had booked to go to a Christmas concert while we were staying in Sydney. We got the shock of our lives. There was snow on the stage. They sung all the songs we sang in the UK. Jingle Bells, I am dreaming of a White Christmas. We found this unbelievable with the temperatures outside!!

We have never forgotten our first visit to Australia.

Christmas Story

Mark Williams

In the 1990's the church had an active Kids Club group, for late primary school aged children. We meet in the coffee lounge for a couple of hours on a Friday night.

As a leader, one year we decided to tell the Christmas story from the shepherd's perspective. To enhance the story, we walked down to the then vacant paddocks on Coromandel Parade, south of Cummins Street, sat in the grass and watched the sun setting. It was very open, quiet and peaceful and the paddock offered a panoramic view down to the gully. We talked about all sorts of things, as kids do, including shepherds and their sheep. We tried to imagine the sky filled with Angels singing.

After a while we went across Coromandel Parade to a house with out buildings that may have once been stables but were recently used for other animals. It was dark and close, a bit smelly and everyone was careful not to touch too much for fear of dirt, spiders or other unknowns. We finished the story about the birth of Jesus and then stood quietly for a while. Then we walked back to the Church.

I often think about that night. Was it special because of the opportunity for peaceful reflection in an open paddock after a long week at work? Was it the contrast between the broad open quiet paddock with a great sun set and the cramped smelly confines of the chook shed? Was it just a moment to realise how insignificant we are in nature and wonder why God came to be human and speak directly to us?

Christmas Time

Rod Pike

In 1961 our children were attending a multicultural Sunday School in Kuching in the home of an Indian family from Kerala. At Christmas time it was suggested that each child could bring a present instead of receiving a gift. On Christmas Day the children, with their families, went together to the Leper Settlement in a remote area out of town.

It was a delight to see the children handing their gifts to those of similar age whose lives were confined to the small isolated community. At the time there was little hope that they, or their disfigured parents would ever leave the settlement. Thankfully, things are different today.

Christmas Poem

Liz Waters

Reflecting on Christmas I was prompted to revisit a poem I have always loved, T.S. Eliot's *Journey of the Magi*, where one of the travellers recounts not only the physical challenges of their journey by camel to Bethlehem and the doubts that beset them, but their spiritual journey culminating in their life-changing encounter with the birth of Jesus. Each time I read it, I seem to discover new insights and layers of meaning.

Journey of the Magi

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
and running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Aroona Valley's Heysen Quilt

Julie Haddrick



Set on the northern boundary of the Flinders Ranges National Park SA, artist Sir Hans Heysen made famous the many views of the Aroona Valley. From 1926, Heysen visited nine times, making numerous drawings and paintings of this much loved region. The Aroona valley is about 25 km north of Wilpena Pound and the name Aroona is derived from an Aboriginal word meaning running water or place of frogs.

Julie referenced photos by her husband; taken whilst he was trekking the Heysen Trail. She collaged images to create the vast panoramic view, set in the impressionistic colours of late afternoon. Aroona Valley captures the heart of many travellers and holds for us, the place of many happy family Easter camps.

Coldly the night winds winging

Neville Pope

Many years ago, when Jill and I worshipped at the small church in Rostrevor (eventually amalgamated into Morialta), we ran a small choir each Advent. Searching for material I found many new carols, but the one that has stayed with us is one that we found in the AHB and was retained in the selections for TiS at 321 *Coldly the night winds winging* also known as *The Workers' Carol*.

We always felt that this was a carol that spoke more to the age in which we live than many others.

Christmas Memories

Ian Penny

My earliest memories of Christmas are mixed between- pushing my feet down in bed in the early morning to feel if Father Christmas had left me presents in the pillow case set there the previous evening and the Christmas Morning service which followed some hours after. It took me some time to work out that there was a link between the two that we received presents in celebration of God's gift to us of Jesus as a baby who lived to spread God's message of not only peace and goodwill to all but how our relationship with God was there for us to use to build, inspire and shape our lives purposefully to spread Christ's message to others. Presents sometimes get in the way of realising the meaning of Christmas that it is more than just celebrating Jesus' birth but is a way of inspiring and directing our thoughts towards furthering God's purpose in this world we live.

As I grew older I participated in Christmas worship through Choirs, plays, readings held on Christmas Eve, Christmas day or even at midnight on Christmas Eve. The messages given and holiness experienced profoundly impressed me and helped impress themselves upon me especially those times we heard stories of how people experienced Christmas in war torn countries, as refugees or how those in poverty and hardship still lived their lives in support of others by sharing food, giving shelter and giving up comforts to enable others to live. One other early experience was when I was about 10 or 11 years old, I think the "Christmas Bowl" encouraged church members to set a place for the unseen guest at their tables for Christmas dinner. This had a profound effect on me as I kept looking at the empty place and imagining who it represented – Jesus? A disadvantaged person? Or someone in need etc? It captured my attention and made me think. We should never underestimate the power of symbolism especially for children.

Symbolism is a very important part of Christmas, the nativity scene, a darkened Church with a choir singing bringing candles to light the way, gradually filling the church with light expelling the darkness. Significant passages from the Bible being read with beautiful music in between, all glorifying God and Jesus his son. The ambience of these experiences enabled me to experience "awe" and how it enabled you to feel humble and closer to God, inspiring us to live better lives by loving others unconditionally.

There are many significant memories of Christmas all of which make the expectation of presents to fade into lesser significance.

I love these memories and the people, with whom, and places, in which, I have experienced them and hope they have made me a better person to participate in spreading God's message.



Little Drummer Boy

Bec English

The Christmas song *Little Drummer Boy* is special to our family. When my sisters and I were younger Christmas was usually spent at home, either with just us, or with extended family and friends. One of my favourite memories of childhood Christmases is listening to my two elder sisters play *Little Drummer Boy* as a duet on the piano and the clarinet- I think it started when we had extended family over one year and a Christmas concert was put on by the cousins in the afternoon. The little drummer boy played by my sisters was a favourite of Dads and he would request they play it year after year. "Hey how about *Little Drummer Boy*" he would say after lunch.

As we moved into adulthood, I discovered a version of *Little Drummer Boy* that became a favourite of mine by Pentatonix. I shared it with the family one Christmas Day and Dad, who didn't usually like my taste in music, enjoyed it very much, as did the whole family. This became a new way to enjoy the song together. More recently our love of this song has been shared with the next generation in our family - my daughter found a book at church one day and borrowed it - it happened to be *Little Drummer Boy*. It stayed at our house for far longer than it was supposed to as she just loved it. When Nanna and Pa were over, She, Nanna and Pa would sit down and sing *Little Drummer Boy* together. She loved it so much Nanna had the buy her own copy of the book that Christmas. Pa was so chuffed to sing it with her, and the Pentatonix version was often requested in the car on a Saturday morning on the way to shopping for them to sing together, not even at Christmas time. *Little Drummer Boy* will forever be a special song for our family at Christmas - a song that we've shared with much love and joy.

Little Drummer Boy Pentatonix: https://youtu.be/qJ_MGWio-vc

Christmas Story

Ros Miller

My mum and dad, Lily and Les Willetts, migrated from England in 1947. Mum often sent letters to her sister Stella back in England, some of them mentioning how hot it was each Christmas Day. So one year Stella decided to visit Adelaide over the Christmas period to experience a hot Australian Christmas instead of a cold Christmas with snow. She told mum that she wanted to go to the beach on Christmas day to have lunch on the beach and a swim. Christmas Day dawned - it was drizzly and cold (but at least not in the minus degrees!). Stella insisted on going to the beach anyway. She and mum took a packed lunch (mum usually hated eating at the beach, especially if it was windy, because she always ended up eating sand with her food!) and their bathers and set off for the beach. Even though it wasn't very hot, Stella still experienced a Christmas day where she could have a swim and lunch on the beach!



Another Christmas Story

Carys Penny

When I was a child, about 1950, I had three sisters and my parents had established a special tradition about Christmas Day, which I remember.

The door to the lounge room, which was speckled glass, was locked and the key hidden. We were told that we could not see if Father Christmas had been until after we had eaten breakfast and been to church, which luckily was held at 8.00am.

After church we would tug at Mum and Dad wanting them not to talk to friends but go home very quickly. When home we would wait by the door and magically Dad would find the key and open it. What a sight greeted we excited children. The tree which was beautifully decorated and lit by lights stood in the corner and under it was a mountain of presents, all prettily wrapped. We each received one, which had "love from Father Christmas" on the card, but the rest we knew were from Mum and Dad and other relatives.

Our parents enjoyed our excitement and after the initial rush we settled down to exclaim over our sisters' toys and play with our own. As we grew older we loved giving gifts to our parents and our sisters too.

This tradition went on until the youngest was about 6 and the oldest sister 16. The older ones had to keep the secret about the locked door but we all knew where the key was kept by then. Strangely we never peeked or opened the door until the whole family were together on Christmas morning.

I loved the game and the excitement of anticipation and later we did the same with our own three children for a number of years. Such lovely memories become more precious as the years go by.

Christmas Story

Rod Pike

In 1960 Thelma and I with two young children were able to spend our Christmas holiday at a place called Azamgarh on the Ganges plain in India. We were visiting my brother and his wife and family. Geoff was the Doctor-in-Charge of a mission hospital.

On Christmas Day we had the privilege of worshipping with the local Christian community. The service was conducted in Hindi and we didn't understand a word but that didn't matter. The joy of shared celebration of our faith was beautiful.

Knowing my interest in craft, Geoff took me to the local carpentry workshop. There the men sitting on the ground under a rough shelter, using the most basic of tools, were crafting good standard items of furniture. While admiring their skill, I noticed a piece of wood and asked if I could buy it. It is called shesham in Hindi and blackwood in English. That piece of wood is now set into the top of our church lectern.



Thelma and Rod Pike

Living in Asia for five years we spent Christmas without family. Here are two stories.

Christmas 1961

The Kuching population consisted of about one third Indigenous, one third Chinese and one sixth each of Malay and other mixed races. Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikhs all got on well. During Hari Raya at the end of the Malay fasting we would visit Malay friends, who dressed in new clothes would entertain us with orange juice and a range of very sweet cakes. At Christmas time the Malays would visit us and we would host them in a similar manner. So the day was special in a different way to that at home. Friends became family and after many years we still write and visit where possible.

Christmas 1969

When our daughter came to Sabah for Christmas after a year in boarding school in Adelaide we decided to take our family to Hong Kong and had Christmas lunch with a Chinese friend, Wu Hi Tech and his wife.

Mrs Wu rose early in the morning to go to the local market. I have forgotten most of what we eat, which our kind and generous host provided, except the large bowl of freshly cooked prawns. Not many people in Adelaide during the sixties were enjoying this feast of prawns on Christmas day. (This may be why Thelma has since suffered from gout!)

Memories of Christmas

John Whitbread

1963 saw me and my family in Waikerie where I had charge of the police station.

Communications to the outside world were mainly by telephone in a house or business premises or a red public phone box. Mobiles and computers were things of the future.

On Christmas Day we had arranged a family Christmas dinner. My parents were to visit us from Berri and my brother and his family from Adelaide, in all twelve people.

Around mid-morning however, I received a call from Police HQ. A convicted murderer had escaped from Pentridge Prison near Melbourne. Because he knew the Mallee very well it was believed that he could very well use the Mallee roads to bypass the highways. I was instructed to stop and search all traffic using the Allawoona- Pinnaroo Road near its junction with the Sturt Highway about two miles out of Waikerie.

Arrangements were made for messages to be relayed through the roadhouse.

Armed with my police pistol and a borrowed semi automatic 12 gauge shot gun I promptly took up my position.

From about 11am until 7 pm I stopped a whole twenty-seven vehicles on this little used road. The day was very hot, I had no shade and I felt thoroughly exhausted so I returned home. The family had been and gone, having enjoyed themselves very much. I phoned headquarters and the Operations sergeant was most apologetic in telling me that the escapee had been caught about noon. He had simply forgotten to ring the roadhouse to advise me. "Sorry Sergeant, but you know how it is."

The Christmas Sewing Machine

Alison Sutcliffe

Let me introduce myself. I am the beautiful blue sewing machine in this photograph.

I might be showing my age, but in the early 1950s I was made in England then placed in the box in the picture ready for sale. Somehow, I am not sure how, I ended up in Father Christmas's sack on his **Australian** run.

He delivered me to a house, a school-house in fact, in a tiny fishing village in the Southeast of South Australia. Come Christmas morning I was gleefully unwrapped by a girl of about 9 or 10 years of age. Now this girl, I was told, had developed a keen interest in sewing by watching her mother expertly make all kinds of clothes for the family on her old Singer treadle machine. She herself hand-made clothes for her dolls and had been hoping to have a sewing machine to make the garments look a bit more professional.

I am a bit emotional as I tell you this, but right from that Christmas morning I never worked! I was kind of seized up inside. So I was carefully placed back in my box. I languished in that box for many years. This may explain my mint condition blue paint. I was aware that on a number of occasions I was packed up and moved to different houses. But nobody ever looked at me. It was a lonely time. Squished in my box I felt useless, rejected.

Years passed, then one day I heard the girl, well now a grown woman with children of her own, say, "There it is, my old toy sewing machine. **That's exactly what I need!**"

Those words! How they heartened me!

Well it turned out that she had become a Junior Primary teacher. She had designed an inquiry for her students based on the topic of toys. The children were to make a soft toy, package it and create advertising for it. They compared my packaging with the packaging of modern toys. Wow there were a few differences there! And they compared my design with the designs of modern toys. They could hardly believe that I didn't have any plastic parts! I was pushed and poked, my hand wheel furiously turned in order to see my needle dance up and down but you know I didn't mind. I felt useful, I felt proud.

You know the girl did this unit with successive classes, well I reckon for the best part of ten years. I am pretty much retired now, just an occasional airing for the grandchildren, but I look back on those ten years with great affection. I was really a Christmas gift to remember and I'm still around and you are hearing my story!



Your Christmas Memories

