

HAWARDEN....HOW IT ALL BEGAN

HOLIDAYS

Chapter 47

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Can there be a happier or sadder time of the year than the Holiday Season?

Thanksgiving arrives with children home from college and families reunited. Often an empty spot at the table signifies a loss of a loved one in the past, or all too often, just recently. The gatherings that will never be the same without Grandpa's hearty laugh and Grandma's special apple salad or pumpkin pie; memories that are so vivid and precious that they fill the occasion with the presence of our loved ones to the point you can almost feel them in the room.

If the loss of a loved one is current, there are bound to be tears, but as time passes, the memories bring forth smiles and laughter. Scenes of Thanksgivings past, games of touch football when weather permitted; family traditions that continue from one generation to another. Laughter and happy tears signifying love and respect remain a part of each family long after the loved one is gone. Life goes on: new babies are born, new members join the family, new memories are made; someone else makes the turkey this year, lives change and for all we give Thanks.

The dishes are hardly done from Thanksgiving before the newspaper arrives on the scene with its' plentiful supply of Black Friday ads; visions of unbelievable bargains and unyielding crowds dance through our heads. Not always happy, but rapidly becoming a tradition.

The Christmas decorating has become an art form. For those who are really serious about "lighting up the holiday", every warm day from Halloween to Thanksgiving is an opportunity to hang lights, put up the star, and generally turn yards and homes into the "Griswold Family Christmas," or a calmer less overdone version. If you happened to pass up those warm days, you are now faced with the choice of freezing while decorating outside, or hoping that the weekend provides at least one warm day to bring Joseph, Mary and the Baby from their resting spot for the last 11 months.

Decorating inside the home is a labor of love; not always approached with enthusiasm, but none the less always done in spite of the frequent promises that "I will not go overboard this year."

Once the decorating starts, my home becomes a plethora of rubber maid containers; each container contains objects that I just am not quite ready for; thus the original idea of doing a box at a time flies out the window. No; every box needs to be out to decide what goes where. I must confess, in the last few years I have started to cheat; I take pictures and refer to them when my feeble memory fails me. Of course, some years I decide that I have a better idea and the pictures are no help at all.

If you have a "traditional" or "diverse" tree like mine, the decorating becomes a stroll through memory lane. Each decoration that is taken from the box has a significance known only to you and your loved ones. The Hawaiian angel sent from a childhood friend now living thousands of miles away in Hawaii; but as close as a telephone call when I need to hear her voice. Sleds made from popsicle sticks and proudly brought home from school by three little girls. A gas station ornament given to me by a former employee because I gave her girls a ride to dance lessons a couple of times. A fire engine for my husband, and airplane for my dad. A duck hunter for all my grand sons and a Hallmark rocking horse Collection that dates back to the early '70s. Pink plastic balls that were purchased when our oldest daughter was eleven months old; her first Christmas. They had to be unbreakable; six grandchildren later they have always been placed on the lower branches so they could be handled and explored; none broken yet 50+ years later.

We still have our first Christmas tree, an aluminum one purchased in 1957. It was just the right size for our single wide trailer house at Forest View Trailer Park in Iowa City, Iowa. Charcoal and grey were the "in" colors, so we had a string of pink lights with a pink cord and of course the pink balls. The lights had to lay around the base of the tree as

they could not be put on the aluminum branches. Hardly traditional but very stylish for the times and certainly unforgettable.

Fifty five years have passed since that first tree decorated our trailer house. Fifty plus Christmas' filled with memories and love that could not have been happier. Three daughters with great husbands, six wonderful grandchildren and this year we will celebrate with our first great grandchild. A little boy born a few days before Thanksgiving to fill spots in our hearts that we never knew were empty.

This is how it all began; so many years ago. A star in the sky, a baby in the manger, shepherds watching their sheep and kings bringing gifts. A story of love and sacrifice told and lived through the ages, magnifying itself in the lives of humble people who realize that life is a gift; a gift from our ancestors who showed us the importance of honor, respect and especially love for one another. A gift so powerful that it found its way to places like Calliope and Hawarden over a century ago and continues today in the hearts of our friends and neighbors. A gift that preceded us and will follow us into the next generation. Merry Christmas and may 2013 bring love and happiness to all as Hawarden continues its journey toward it's 150th Birthday.