

A blue Christmas

BY AMOS ARTHUR HOLMES



I have been sitting here before my typewriter for the last several minutes drinking in the warmth that surrounds me. The Christmas tree stands beautiful and glorious but I know that it really won't be happy until my grandchildren arrive. The walls are adorned with small sprigs of holly and the stuffed Santa Claus smiles at me from his seat upon my desk.

What a wonderful time of the year. It opens up the heart and allows us to review the blessings we have received in abundance. It's knowing that each day will be filled with fellowship and good cheer. But most of all it's knowing that I am not alone.

Let me go back over thirty years to a time my heart cried.

It was 1943 and two days before Christmas. I was a soldier and stationed in Missouri. I had just arrived at my new post and hadn't had time to make even one friend. And this would be the first time, in all of my 18 years on this earth, that I wouldn't be spending Christmas at home with my family.

I have loved Christmas since my first decorated tree. I feel, to this day, compassion for those who humbug

Christmas. To me, it is the most glorious day of the year. It is the time that God instills in us the kindness and love he meant for us to have each and every day.

Those long years ago we used to trim the tree on Christmas Eve. I was the youngest, and very small, and so I was allotted the lower branches. These branches were always the most heavily decorated and certainly the most unsightly. An overabundance of balls was more desirable than any artistic effect.

I went to bed on Christmas Eve with great apprehension. Could I possibly get to sleep before Santa came? I knew the dreaded consequences if I couldn't. Had I been a good boy? I knew, as well as any six year old could know, that I had been a monster. But I had made my bed once...and I had buried the dead butterfly...so I certainly hadn't been all bad. But there was definitely room for concern.

On Christmas morning the family lined up upstairs according to size. I was first, then my sister Ethel, my sister Mildred, my brother Carl, and my mother and father. How my parents must have loved us to give us such a

precious day.

And after a morning of rapture with our gifts we sat down to Christmas dinner. Lordy, the food on that table. We talked, and laughed, and we thanked God for this special holiday.

But here I was, in a strange place, experiencing my first Christmas away from home. And it was here that I met, and knew, and hated the tragic bitterness of loneliness.

I went into St. Louis and I took a ride on a streetcar. The Christmas spirit was manifest and joyful on that conveyance. But it was apart from me. I was not included in the smiles or the laughter, the greetings or the happiness.

Soon the streetcar had left the city and we were traveling along deserted streets in the suburbs. I got off the streetcar and started walking. It had started snowing and the air was crisp and cold. There was nobody, absolutely nobody, on the streets. It was as if everyone, and everything, had disappeared and left me alone to combat my misery.

I saw, in every house I passed, a lighted Christmas tree. And in some of

those homes I could see the family within. The father stern and quiet with his awesome responsibility, the mother frantically working to complete her Christmas decorations, and the children with happy, spirited anticipation.

I wanted to walk up to one of those doors and knock. I would say, "May I stand by your tree for a moment? It is so beautiful. You see...I have a family just like yours...but...but..."

I never did knock on anyone's door. I simply tramped through the snow and saw a million Christmas trees, a million families, and a million happy hearts.

I stood in the whirling snow. The tears fell from my eyes and I knew that I would never, if it were possible, feel loneliness again.

And so I have filled my life with wife and children, with grandchildren and neighbors. And with you good people whose friendship I have gained through this column.

Let me, in my mind, take you into my arms. Let me kiss you upon the cheek. And let me shout two words from the warmest place in my heart.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.
