

Christmas in the Depression

By Betty Fowler

The young man had left home under somewhat strained circumstances. He didn't get along with his parents or his brothers and sisters.

Victims of his constant teasing, his sisters were glad to see him go. Why, one day that week a revengeful sister had grabbed the mirror off the wall and fitted it over his head with the frame around his neck.

His brothers missed him because he did his share of the chores without any complaints, but they too came in for their share of teasing when he'd swipe their best taws and steelies.

Rebelling against his families' "system", he found a home in a boarding house in Chinook, Montana. A job as a spinner was waiting for him at the sugar factory there.

Darkness came early those winter nights in Montana. He spent long evenings of Shirley Temple movies and window shopping at the local Model A Ford dealer's showroom. The lad spent many an hour with his hands in his pockets, feet widespread, wispfully ogling those 1934 Model A's.

I won't go home 'til I can drive up in one of those Model A's" he said to himself

He missed his little sisters and brothers but had too much pride to admit it.

As Christmas neared, the youth thought he would send a package home. He plodded his way through the knee-deep snow to the J.C. Penney's Store.

After much thought and deliberation, he selected a gift for each member of his family back in Utah.

Little beaded indian mocassins for baby sister; imitation feather aviation hats with goggles would be just right for his little brothers. Equal care and consideration was spent in choosing gifts to the others in his family.

He packed the gifts in a box, cramming oranges, nuts and hard tack in and around the corners.

After mailing his package he shoved his hands in his jacket pocket and walked back to the boarding house with a light step and a happy heart.

His brothers and sister didn't realize that Santa could not come to that house

that Christmas of '34.

His mother and father had not been able to manage one extra cent to spend on Christmas lists.

They were doing evening chores with heavy hearts. They hadn't heard from their errant son either. What a trial he'd been to them!

Logs were laid in the wood box, the cow was milked, there would be enough eggs for breakfast and for those things they were grateful.

But, as they watched the children hang up their long black stockings, happily anticipating Santa's visit, the mother and father tried to explain that the jolly old elf would not visit them that year.

The little ones in child-like faith, knew that somehow Santa would reach their little home even though it was miles away from them. They were positive they'd been good enough to rate from Santa.

The parents were at their wits ends. They thought, why did Christmas even come?

Just at dusk Dec. 24, a note came from outside. They went to check. It was snowing softly and as they glanced down the land, they saw Mr. Hadfield, the postman drive up to their house.

Here's a package from Montana, folks. We thought it might be important enough to deliver on Christmas Eve., he shouted, "Merry Christmas!"

Mom and Dad became as excited as children.

As they carried the package inside the house, the happy parent knew their most ardent prayers had been answered. They were experiencing the thrill of receiving the best gift they'd ever had.

Their son was in Montana but they knew his heart and spirit would be at home this Christmas.

This rebellious youth later became the real Santa Claus to nine children and 24 grandchildren. Believe me, I know.