

president's message

"MY MOST MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS EVER"

We bring you our holiday wishes from the pen of Lindsey Nelson, the noted broadcaster, who, as you will see, wrote a pretty fair column himself. Lindsey was a 1943 graduate of the University of Tennessee and was a fixture around the athletic offices at UT after he retired. The UT baseball stadium is named in his honor and memory. We hope you enjoy it with our best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Bob

It is the night before Christmas.

And I am given to thoughts of another night before Christmas a long time ago.

This was when I was in high school and I worked around the newspaper of the small town, running errands and doing odd jobs. And it was nearly evening and most of the chores had been done. The man who worked at the paper also did a lot of community work. And in the back seat of the car he had some bags filled with toys and candy.

"Wanna take a ride with me?" he said. "We won't be gone long."

I guessed that I did, since I was not expected at home yet, and a little ride around the countryside on Christmas Eve might be just what I needed.

He had an address written on a slip of paper, with directions on how to get there. Soon we were out of town and onto a dirt road. Wherever we were headed, it was off the beaten track. We would not be confused in the traffic because there wasn't any. But there was a half moon that helped to light our way as we turned off the dirt road and proceeded up a narrow lane that ran close by the rail fence. There in the far corner of the field was a darkened and quiet farm shack.

We stopped the car and went to the door, and my friend knocked. There was no sound, and he knocked again.

This time, we heard the door being unlatched carefully from the inside and then, as the door slowly opened, we could see the head of a man, eyes blinking as he peered out into the soft moonlight.

As he opened the door a little wider, it was plain to see he hadn't expected company and that he was frightened.

My friend said, "Don't be afraid. Merry Christmas! We've come to bring you presents."

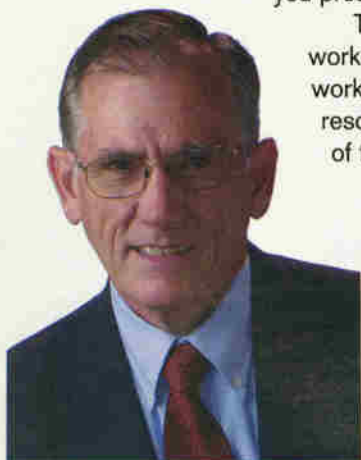
This was in the era before we had welfare departments and case-workers. Obviously, one of the organizations for which my friend had worked had known here was a needy family. There were not resources enough to take care of all the needy people, not even most of them. But there was enough for this one family.

We heard a stirring inside and the dim figure of a woman was visible as she struggled to light a kerosene lamp.

"Come in," said the fellow in the door. And so we did.

This man and his wife had been huddled beneath an old quilt in the corner of the shack. There was no bed. And they slept in their clothes, she in a long dress and he in overalls. Now they slipped on their shoes.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 45)



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president's message (cont'd)

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7) "We have some things for you," said my friend as he went to the car and started bringing in the brown grocer's bags and packages. I helped him.

The man and his wife were absolutely speechless. They stood motionless and still a little cautious as they strained to understand what was happening here in this quiet little shack in the far corner of a field.

And then my friend said, "Where are the girls?"

With that, the woman went to the far side of the room and pushed open a make-shift door that was already ajar. "Girls," she said softly, "wake up, girls. Wake up. Santa Claus has been here!"

When the woman moved the lamp, now we could see two tiny figures huddled beneath another quilt in a little crib made of two-by-fours and scrap plywood.

Slowly, two curly heads popped out. There were twin girls about three or four years old. They had kept warm by sleeping in their dresses and long stockings. Now they smiled as they climbed out of the crib and stood up.

My friend had filled the small table with groceries, fruit and bread. He had a dress for the woman, a shirt and work slacks for the man. He

handed candy and toys to the twins, a doll for each of them. And they squealed with delight.

The man and his wife had now recovered from the shock. They were so pleased and happy. And they had questions. Who sent these? And why?

My friend explained they were gifts from the people in town. They were Christmas gifts. The man had explained they had gone to bed totally defeated because they could provide nothing for Christmas.

The curly-headed girls had filled their mouths with candy, and they were tearing into the cardboard boxes that contained their toys. Affectionately they fondled the dolls.

The woman searched for some way to reciprocate. She looked around the room and it was bare. There was nothing to offer. And she said, "Girls, sing 'Silent Night.'"

And those tiny girls stood there in that shack, and with the moonlight shedding beams across their faces, they sang the sweetest rendition of that Christmas hymn I have ever heard.

They all waved from the door as we drove away, heading back to town, and our homes and Christmas. They had given me the most memorable Christmas of my lifetime.

Merry Christmas!

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