

A Christmas Memory

by Lea Chopard Miles

Retyped by Dean Bones 2022

I believe that Christmas for the Chopard family in 1919 would have been at their farm on Blaine Road east of Beaver, Oregon, just past the 5th bridge on what is now in 2022 called Blankenship Road. db

My childhood memory of Christmas at the old homestead of my dad and mom's was about in 1919. I was about six. There were seven children in the family which I'd call a full house. I was the middle-sized bear. My brothers and sisters are all gone.,

Christmas was nearing, and we were all excited about old Santa coming and wondering what he was going to bring us.

School was out for the big event. We had a Christmas program at school, and, of course, our parents all attended. The teacher called my mom to announce that I was going to recite a poem. My Mom assured her that I was so bashful I'd never do it. After they called my name to go up on the stage my mother's heart skipped many beats. But poor little Lea came on stage scared to death. I held a little flag and hurriedly uttered "Your flag and my flag and how they fly today, in your land and my land and half the world away." I didn't lose any time getting off the stage. My mother, God bless her, was so proud of me and the whole brood of kids.

This was the beginning of our Christmas holiday.

The day before Christmas we were like a bunch of fleas here, there and everywhere. We couldn't wait to get our Christmas tree, so to defend himself and get us off his back, Dad had us all grab our raincoats and boots as it always rained and go out to the barn to get poor old Mollie and the sled.

And away we went on our way laughing and all so excited. Even Carlo, our old black and white mutt led the way. After searching a short time we found a tree to fit the size of our house.

Dad set it in a milk pail with rocks in it that kept the tree from falling over. We made paper dolls out of newspaper for decoration and we also strung long strings of popcorn and paper rings of colored tissue paper. We had no electricity then so no lights were on the tree. We did have small candles that clipped onto the branches, but we were afraid of starting a fire.

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One of the highlights of Christmas was when we walked to the mailbox about one-fourth mile. Mom always got a big box of Sampler chocolate candy from the Headlight Herald. She was a news correspondent for nearly 50 years. The candy was such a treat as we only had it for the holidays. We also had a stocking full of hard tack (candy) that the grocery man gave Dad for paying his monthly grocery bill. We were so happy with so little.

Finally, on Christmas eve we wanted to stay up and see Santa so we took our baths in the big wash tub and then on with our night clothes and down around the big black wood stove we all laid like cord wood., Dad said Santa couldn't come down the chimney on account of the big fire and smoke. We laid there watching Grandma knitting socks for us kids. The old coal oil lamp was flickering and made such a small amount of light that I don't know how she could see. We were so excited, and we had to be real quiet. I can see old Dad, God bless him, sitting by himself in the corner in an old rocking chair, his old pipe in his hand and listening to Amos & Andy on his old Edison battery radio.,

The warmth of the old wood stove finally won the battle with the sandman, so we were sent upstairs to our bedroom with the oil fairy leading us like a bunch of sheep; the oldest girl leading us with the coal oil lamp. After a lot of turning and twisting we went to sleep.

Next morning we all popped out of bed like jacks-in-box and down the stairs to see if Santa had arrived in the night. Dad explained that it was raining so hard Santa's reindeer couldn't make the trip because the mud was so deep. Dad had to help deliver a load with old Mollie; she was such a hard working old nag.

Well, we looked under the tree for our gifts. Santa didn't bring us expensive presents. as this was during the depression. Us girls got paper doll books to cut out and crocheted gloves and caps and handkerchiefs. The boys got ties and rubber balls. Mother was happy to get a comb to put in her long hair, and Dad got a can of George Washington smoking tobacco and a plug of chewing tobacco that my Mom didn't appreciate. We each received an orange and a few walnuts in our socks. We were so happy over an orange as we didn't have any except at Christmas. By the

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way, the can from the George Washington smoking tobacco ended up as our lunch box.

On Christmas day we had a nice dinner. We had mashed potatoes, green beans, squash pie and venison meat mince pie. Dad had shot a deer, and Mom made mincemeat. Last we had roasted turkey for the first time, and there was a story behind it all. A future brother of ours who was a teenager robbed a turkey house and brought it to us for Christmas. My mother, bless her, cooked the bird but let us kids know it wasn't the thing to do. It didn't hurt our appetite just because it was stolen.

After dinner we played with our gifts. Of course I wanted a big doll and didn't get it, but we were happy with so little.

As night grew near and we were ready for bed I'm sure Dad and Mother uttered a sigh of relief. But Dad remembered he always played horsyback with us before bedtime. When it was over we were plenty tired and went to bed,

It was the end of a perfect Christmas, and I could see in my Mother's eye she was thanking God for giving her the best gift of all, a wonderful family.