***Comprised of comments from past Christmas Letters.***

Well brother, another Christmas season is upon us and my thoughts trailed to some old letters and old memories. These letters and memories made me realize how lucky we really were. Things always change, and life never stands still but when you are lucky enough to have tradition and great memories, it allows us to enjoy the treasures of days gone by as well as create new memories with the foundations that were put in place.

Looking back on our childhood, it’s funny, but I don’t remember one gift I ever received. I often hear people talking about the great gift they got when they were thirteen or the expensive gift they got when they were sixteen. But I don’t remember one thing I ever got for Christmas.

I remember that it was a season for the preparation of the birth of Christ. There wasn’t just one event. It was the series of events that made it special. It started right after Thanksgiving with trip to W.T. Grants to get the money books to start shopping. The coupon books were store dollars and it would take mom and dad an entire year to pay them off then mom could start over for the next year. Pop would work a week through his vacation so he would get double time to have extra Christmas money. We would always stop at the popcorn place and get a bag of caramel corn for us and a bag of plain popcorn to feed the pigeons on the New Haven Green.

Decorating the house was a family gathering. I remember one year my Godmother and her fiancee surprised us with a visit on the night we were preparing. They were embarrassed and tried to leave but Mom would not hear of “such nonsense”. She put out whatever she had to go with the coffee and we had so much fun that for a while it became a tradition for them to visit on decoration night.

The tree was never the centerpiece of the decorations. Although it was the most time consuming. It always had to be a live tree. I remember dad on his belly (no easy task) making sure the fifty cent stand was centered enough to hold a tree bigger than its allotted capacity. Sometimes he even had to tie crab line string to the windows to hold it up. Mom would then hang what seemed like hundreds of Christmas cards on the line to show the importance of family and friends. Back then, everyone sent Christmas cards.

The main event was putting out the Manger. Mom would give us cloths to polish the pieces. There would be cotton, a white linen, straw for the house and the baby never went in until the 25th. It had to be perfect. “After all, this represents the birth place of Baby Jesus,” mom would demand.

We would spend a great amount of time at Church, helping the nuns with the gifts for the children. We didn’t have much but we felt rich. “There were always those less fortunate than ourselves,” mom would say. “It’s our job to take care of them”.

Before and after the holidays, we would spend the week visiting dad’s older brothers and sisters. With dad being the second youngest of thirteen, mom made sure we showed respect and visited everyone of them as it was the right thing to do. There wasn’t an exchange of gifts. There were cookies and baked goods exchanges, but conversation and talk about family was the main event. Being the youngest, I never found these visit too exciting as there were no kids to play with. I always laughed when daddy’s sisters would force us to eat all kinds of food and then admonish mommy not to feed us so much because we were getting chunky.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were more up my alley as we would see Uncle Albert & Aunt Marge and Uncle Rudy and Aunt Tess. There were plenty of kids to play with and we never wanted the two days to end.

There was Christmas caroling at senior housing and also the neighborhood where uncle Rudy knew some of the older people with no families.

So we are luckier than most as we continue with these ways. The visits are fewer as televisions in the bedroom are curtailing the making of the big families. But we still do it right thanks to the foundation our parents set. We still get together with everyone and share the meaning of Christmas.

So this holiday season, we pray for those who weren’t as lucky as we were. We remind our children how lucky they are and we remember the good times as we create new ones***.***

***Love you and give my best to the family.***

***I’ll see you soon.***