

Christmas memories on the Wolf farm between Linton and Wishek, North Dakota

by Keney Wolf Foster

We had a neighborhood Kristkindl . That all the neighbors shared and a Belsnickl was our dad but we did not know that it was our dad who would clang the chain against the house and we also had a donkey. Cristkindl was made with every kind of colorful ribbon. A 12-year-old person would be wearing this outfit so nobody ever saw who was underneath the costume. Kristkindl would have gloves on and have a thin wooden reed in its hand to give each child a light tap as they went to pick up their basket for having been naughty at some time during the year. This was directed by the mother of the house. The donkey was made out of a broom handle that had a donkey like head attached and also beautiful ribbons with a person standing the And a person standing behind it to hold the broom handle over the head of the person undersneat.

We had this believe until we turned 12. And we never did see the Belznickl, but he would clank a chain against the house for at least two hours before Kristkindl would arrive. So, we sat quietly and prayed during this time, this gave our mother and older siblings a chance to get all the baskets out of the attic and fill them.

We also believed that Kristkindl came down from heaven from a ladder at the church. It was also a custom to get a bag of goodies from all the aunts and uncles for Christmas, usually shortly after Christmas. Also, we would get a bag of goodies from our Godparents.

For New Year's morning, we would get up early and walk to my two uncles who lived on farms next to each other. Since most of the goodies from Christmas were already gone, we would recite our German with a New Year's wish to our aunts and uncles. They were usually still in bed so we would stand by their bed to recite the wishes. The aunts would have a bad ready for us that contained mostly homemade popcorn balls for everyone in the family.

About two weeks before Christmas, our mother would say, "I think I saw to the Belznickl go look see if he picked up your baskets and Christmas list, and might have dropped off some kind of goodies, and see if he took your Christmas list". We'd go on a hunt until we found the sack with just a taste of some type of candy for each one in the family. We had this belief until the person who turned 12 that year, would be allowed to go along from house to house to give presents to the children.

Each year a father of the group who had this custom would take his turn driving the sleigh from farm to farm with Kristkl. These were all relatives so the drive would start around 5pm and end after each one had been visited. Next we got ready for midnight mass. We would wear our best clothes, and we would enjoy standing on the heat register to get warm after the drive to church on the sleigh with the horse.

Our Uncle Joe Vetter lived close to St. Joseph's Catholic Church and would provide a gas lantern for light for midnight mass. He would go to the church and start the coal furnace so the church would be warm for midnight mass but with only one priest for both St. Michael's and St. Joseph's church they had to take turns having midnight mass each year. The other church would just do whatever they could without a mass, but prayers and songs were lead by our uncle Joseph Vetter and Adam Baumstarck since the churches were seven miles apart.

Then on Christmas day one church had early mass and the other one had late mass to give the priest time to get there.

By the way the Christmas tree in church was artificial and actually had candles attached to it. The ushers actually lit the real wax candles. How it never burned down was a miracle in itself. Did you have the same customs as you grew up? Since you were also German.