

"The Nativity Scene"

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Originally published 4 January 2004

The year was 1942 and our family was gathered around the nativity set in the park in Unionville, Michigan. Following a Polish custom from my dad's family who were born in Europe, we were to each tell something for which we were thankful--something we had been blessed with during the current year. The "we" consisted of my parents and siblings, Rita and Andy. Rita was five and Andy was two and a half. Brother, Bruce, was not born until March of 1943, but I am sure we thought of the new baby we would soon have in our family as we viewed the baby Jesus. I was nine years old.



It made an impact on me for a number of reasons. First, this was our first Christmas in our new home in the village of Unionville-- population just over 500. We had moved from Caro during the fall. This was my first viewing of this beautiful nativity set--all bright, shiny, and lighted with spot lights. To me, at the time, it seemed like a huge set and certainly the most beautiful I had ever seen. I don't recall how many years we joined hands to view these figurines and recited our blessings, but I do know it was more than once.

Years later, my husband and I moved back to Unionville after completing our college degrees in education from Michigan State University. We were to become members of the teaching staff at the local school. In the late 1950's, we took our sons, Steven and Christopher, to see the same nativity set and share their thanks and blessings. Since the boys were born in 1958 and 1959, I am sure they have few memories of these very early years, but they do recall later years as they grew older.

Then in the mid sixties, the Women's Club in Unionville decided to purchase life size figurines for a new nativity set in the park. The village council voted to have a sealed bid on the present figurines that would go to the highest bidder. Oh, how I wanted that set. My husband and I discussed how much we could offer and decided that \$50.00 would be stretching our budget, but we would "go for it". Then we were afraid someone else would bid that amount so we added two dollars. Steve and Christopher went to their banks and took out some change to add to the bid--a total of 57 cents. We wrote up the bid for \$52.57, put it in the envelope, sealed it, mailed it to the council, and waited.

The phone call came telling us we were now the owners of the "town nativity set" and could pick it up at our convenience. Someone else had entered a \$52.00 bid, but our extra 57 cents topped theirs. We were now the proud, pleased owners of these beautiful figurines of baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, three Wise Men, three shepherds, a camel and his caretaker, a cow, a donkey, an angel, and about twenty sheep.

Reprinted from *Down by the Berry Patch*

<http://berrypatch.info/judy/017.html>

Last updated on 25 July 2014

Photo Credit: Judy Berg

Each year, we put out the manger/nativity set. First, it was in the front yard in Unionville to be viewed by passer's by and family--but especially Steven, Christopher, and Mike (born in 1965). Then it was on our porch in Essexville and each year the boys would carry the figurines up from the basement and then carry them down again.

Finally, each Christmas season it has been on our big screened porch in Rose City at our beautiful Michriste Manor. At Michriste, it is like a huge extension of our living room--beautiful and lighted with a spot light. Sometimes we had benches where folks can sit and view it, especially when there are young children. Today, most folks just view it from the living room windows. In Rose City, grandson, Alex (born in 1988) has been able to grow up with this memory for the past 19 years we have put it up here. And he, also, had the privilege or responsibility of helping carry the figures up from the basement and then down again.

Over the years, the set has needed a "face lift". In 1993, Christopher did some touch up painting where there was chipped paint. He did such a beautiful job. When we put the set out in 1994, we had only memories of Christopher because he had died in June of that year. But it is all part of the "story" of the Nativity Set.

In 2006, I had cancer and again the figurines could use some touch up painting. There was not a lot I could do because I was pretty weak from chemotherapy treatments. But I could paint. My husband, Lorain, used a lacquer spray to finish off the new paint job and the lacquer seemed to blend the paint colors so perfectly.

Each year, more than once, I read the portion of the Bible in Luke: 1-20 that tells of the birth of the baby Jesus, born to Mary and Joseph in a manger in the town of Bethlehem. The shepherds came to see him. The wise men brought gifts. The world changed that day.

Today, is November 26, 2007. Lorain cut down evergreen branches in the woods for two purposes: Christopher's grave blanket and for a backdrop for the Nativity Set. The porch is covered with straw. Each figurine is in place. During the day today, four friends--from Essexville, Frankenmuth, and Traverse City will be here to lunch and to view the set. Tonight will be the first time we will turn on the spot light to view this wonderful "memory maker". Again, I will be in awe and have tears in my eyes and recall that first vision of the nativity set in the park in Unionville--with my family. What a blessing! What memories have been created over these past 65 years!

I wonder which of our children will want this Nativity Set to carry on the tradition.

**"Glory to God in the Highest,
and on earth, peace, good will toward men"**

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