

Christmases then and now

As the days count down to Christmas, I find old memories are triggered by little things.

And at this time of year, those memories almost always take me back to when I was a kid.

One sure-fire trigger is the old Limehouse Memorial Hall, on the Fifth Line, at 22 Sideroad.

With Christmas looming on the horizon, I can't drive by that old stone building without being taken back in time, to Christmases more than 40 years ago.

I feel a bit like Ebenezer Scrooge, who, with the Ghost of Christmas Past, invisibly toured the places of his childhood.

For me, Limehouse Memorial Hall reminds me of my school Christmas concerts, when I attended SS#9 Gibraltar school, the two-room school on the Fifth Line, south of Limehouse.

You see, the school wasn't a very convenient location to hold a concert, although in my Dad's day, the parents did cram themselves into the classroom to see their kids recite Christmas poems or perform Christmas skits.

But when I went to that same old stone school, we held our concerts at the hall. There was more room, and the hall also had a stage.

Early on the day of the concert, the Grade 8 boys would go out to the bush behind the school, and cut down a Christmas tree, probably 10-12 feet in height. We'd all drag it to the hall, and set it in a makeshift tree stand (made of a wash tub with rocks and sand.) The junior kids decorated it with ornaments and decorations made in art class.

Okay, the tree was hideous, but every kid in the school thought of it as a work of art, as it stood beside the stage in the old Memorial Hall.

Jack Reid was my teacher the last year we were in the old school, and I recall that concert well, with a program consisting of the little kids taking part in Christmas recitations— "C is for the Christ Child, who lay in a manger..." holding a huge letter 'C' made of construction paper. The next kid would recite "H is for Hark the Herald, the angels

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sang..." and so on. I recall the windows in the old hall would be dripping with condensation from the body heat of all those excited little kids and their parents.

And the grand finale of the night would always be a carol sing, with all the kids in the school on stage, with Mr. Reid directing the choir, wrapping up with "We wish you a Merry Christmas..."

Every December, as I drive by the old hall, it all comes back to me, almost like a scene from the movie *A Christmas Story* (where little Ralphie yearns for a Red Ryder BB gun, but his mom keeps saying "You'll shoot your eye out...")

Those were simpler times, times when a gift was home-made or, at most, purchased at the local five cent to a dollar store.

I suppose we've come a long way from those days— Christmas today has more glitter, hype and expense than it ever did back then.

But it's no more special than it was 40 years ago. Those wide-eyed kids of my past, staring at a magical tree covered with home-made decorations and little gifts wrapped with tissue paper and yarn, were just as excited as the little ones are today.

And no matter when or where it is in time— now or 40 years ago, that's the way it's supposed to be— and hopefully, always will be.

Because 40 years or more from now, the little people of today will look back, and hopefully cherish the same thoughts I'm thinking today.

Merry Christmas to all...

(Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com)



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