

Number of good Christmas stories keep on coming

**Books
for Kids**
with ESTHER CALDWELL

"Every year I worry I may not find enough children's Christmas stories to review, especially since I prefer to stick to those published in Canada. But they just keep on coming. Bobbie Kalman stays busy at Crabtree Publishing in Toronto. Ms Kalman has written 'The Early Set-

ler Life" series of books as well as "The Holidays and Festivals Series." *Early Christmas* (\$8.95) describes the many aspects of Christmas for the pioneers in the 1800s. Paintings and sketches of old-fashioned scenes are presented along with the text on buff-coloured paper. For younger

children you would want to read a little bit at a time and let them enjoy the fascinating pictures. In *We Celebrate Christmas*, Ms Kalman takes us for a tour around the world at Christmas time. She includes songs, games, crafts, recipes, quizzes, poetry and stories.

It is a great resource book. While many of us are preparing for Christmas, families of the Jewish faith are getting ready for Hanukkah, their eight-day festival of lights, which starts on Dec. 23 this year. For a greater appreciation of this special celebration, you'll want to read *We Celebrate Hanukkah* (\$9.95).

Deirdre Kessler's *Home for Christmas* (Pottersfield Press, R.R.2, Porters Lake, Nova Scotia B0J 2S0, \$7.95) tells of a long journey undertaken by a determined young orphan who runs away from her unsympathetic aunt in Boston to find her grandmother on Prince Edward Island. P. John Burden's black-and-white illustrations depict well the 1886 setting.

Matthew isn't looking forward to Christmas in Michael Pacey's *The Birds of Christmas* (Three Trees Press, distributed by Firefly Books, Toronto, \$6.95).

For some unknown reason, the birds have not arrived at Matthew's home in the country, but Matthew comes up with an idea to lure the birds to his feeders on their way south. Mary Firth's black-and-white and full-colour illustrations accompany the text on every page.

I suspect that Katie in *Christmas Snowflake* (Porcepic Books, 4252 Commerce Circle, Victoria, B.C. V8Z 4M2, \$16.95 hard cover) lives on the west coast.

For the first time, Katie's yearly wish for snow at Christmas comes true when she receives a magical glass ball that transports her to an old-fashioned and snow-filled Christmas.

The birth of a lamb reminds Katie of the first Christmas, so long ago. Author/illustrator Helen Stewart has painted beautiful, soft blue pictures with snowflakes sparkling everywhere.

Hennette Major has come up with a new merchandising line for *The Christmas Elves* (McLelland and Stewart, \$12.95). Bing and Bong, however, are having a problem with their harvest of Christmas-tree balls and coloured light bulbs. (They grow like raspberries and strawberries.)

So they hitch a ride on the back of a duck and fly to Somewhere Else, where they meet Ping and Pohg, who are growing even more brightly coloured decorations.

Enterprising elves that they are, Bing and Bong return home and run a successful business importing these decorations from Somewhere Else. Well-known Montreal artist Stephanie Poulin must have had fun creating these comical characters.

In *Mark and the Manger* (Three Trees Press, Toronto, \$5.95), Mark is finally old enough to attend the midnight service at the cathedral. He is most interested in viewing the Nativity scene.

He notices that the baby doll is lying on bare wood, so Mark rushes outside and carries it some pine boughs.

When the family returns to church the following morning, Mark takes another peek at the manger. To his surprise, the stray, tortoise-shell cat he and seen in the cathedral the night before has taken advantage of the cozy bed and given birth to a kitten. This story was written by Marybeth Otto and illustrated by Mary Firth.

Michèle Lemieux provided the beautiful illustrations, painting in the style of Italian medieval art, for Joanna Cole's *A Gift from Saint Francis: The First Creche* (Kids Can Press, Toronto, \$14.95 hardcover).

With the assistance of some of his followers dressed in costume and the use of a few animals, a wooden feeding trough and a load of hay, Saint Francis presents to the people of Greccio, Italy, a simple re-enactment of the birth of Christ.

Although Saint Francis dies soon after this humble celebration, the idea of the Nativity scene strikes a chord in the hearts of Christians the world over and 800 years later, we are still making the creche a part of Christmas.

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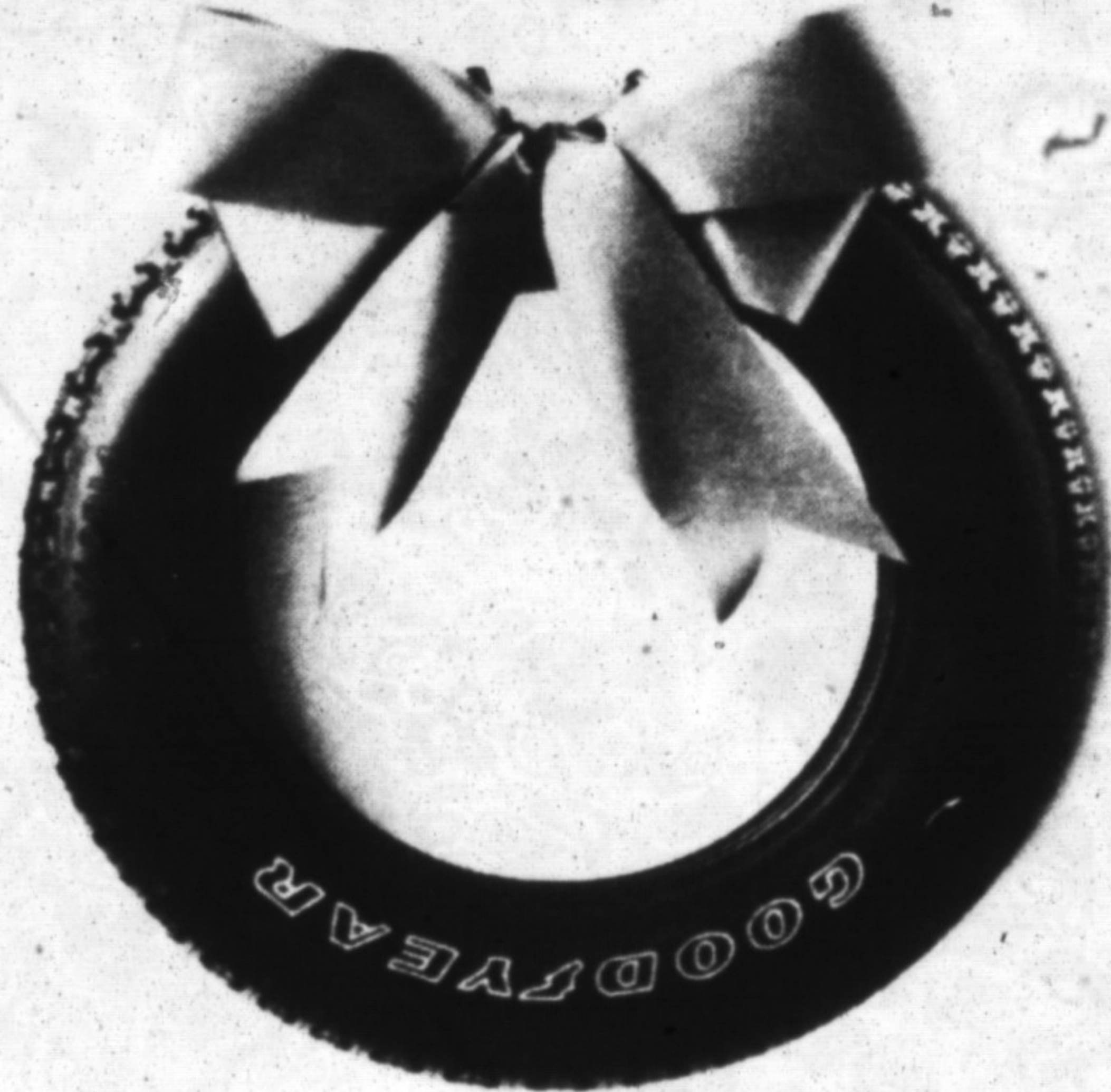
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