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ANGEL IN A DESOTO

by Harold Purinton

It was the winter of 1938-1939, while the country was still in the 'great depression.' In fact, it was soon after the flood and hurricane of 1938. I was sixteen years old.

My brother and his wife had moved to a farm my uncle owned in the area of Buel's Gore earlier in the depression, and with three small children, were having a hard struggle to make ends meet.

I had not gone back to High School that fall and was helping my brother in the woods logging. As Christmas drew nearer, it seemed there would be few gifts for the children, and little variation of food for a special meal.

I kept hoping to be able to do a little something to make the time special for my little nieces who were about five, three and one year old.

The day before Christmas, in the afternoon, I started walking to Bristol, about eleven miles. I probably got a ride at least part way, but it was dark when I got there. I went to Jack Abrams Clothing Store. I explained what I was trying to do and that I had very little money. There were few people in the store as he was about to close for the holiday.

Anyhow, Jack started looking around and figuring, he helped me, and I finally had some small, warm gift for my brother, sister-in-law, and each child. I knew what money I had shouldn't have covered everything, but Jack made it do and even put in some candy and something else special.

I knew that they had few Christmas decorations and that ours were at our house in Lincoln that was closed for the winter. I got a ride to the store in Lincoln and walked up on the hill to my sister Hattie and Fletcher's on the farm. Hattie found a few things for the girls she wanted to send over.

Early Christmas Eve, we went down to the church for the candlelight service. When we came out of the church, about nine, there was about four inches of heavy, new snow.

They left for home and with my pack I started walking toward Downingsville with the decorations. The snow had accumulated to about seven inches, and it was a little harder to walk in. My pack was a little heavier and clumsy to carry.

I had thought possibly I would get a ride, but when I got up on the flat beyond Moody's near where Clara Hallock's parents lived, I said to myself, no way would a car get through that heavy snow, that was then, ten inches or more. I would have another seven miles to walk.

It was still snowing hard and I just settled down to getting one foot ahead of the other. After another half mile I thought I saw a light glimmer on the snow and trees.

I couldn't believe it, but a real heavy older car pulled up beside me. Probably a DeSoto. Of course, cars had much higher clearance underneath that today. There were two older men in the car dressed in suits worn in about 1900 and the car had Massachusetts plates.

They asked me where I was going and I told them. They wouldn't say who they were but they had known my father, and as we passed each farmhouse, they mentioned who lived there and inquired about them. I had never seen either of the men before.

They joked about being in all that snow with no chains. The other man laughed and said, "and no brains." I wondered if the car would make it up one of the hills, but it kept moving though there was no track in the road ahead.

I remember I asked them where they would spend the night. They said probably at the Bristol Inn which was on the corner by where Cubbers and Brooks Pharmacy are now. Well they took me right down to my brother's and let me out, then turned around and I watched 'til I was sure they made it back up the hill.

When my brother saw what I had, he said, I guess we better go get a tree and decorate it. The children were already in bed much earlier. When they got up Christmas morning, they were so surprised, I was just about the happiest young man on earth.

Then they asked me, "how did you get back in all that snow?" I thought a moment and said, "I rode with Santa."

I have told this to a few people over the years, and as it took place at the last of Prohibition they said "Huh, a couple of rum-runners. Well, maybe they were a couple of rum runners, but to a sixteen-year-old boy, walking in a snowstorm on Christmas Eve they were a couple of angels."

When I was in Bristol the next time I asked if two men such as that came to the Inn Christmas Eve. The answer was no.

Sometimes, when I think of it, I wonder if the car and the men were in a dream and I was transported by the grace of God. Draw your own conclusions. God's ways are inscrutable, and we sometimes entertain angels, unawares.

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