

There was a time when Christmas was pure

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Author: Shawn & Laura Ehrke

As we find ourselves close to the end of this century, it is nice to reflect back on Christmases of yesteryear.

Sit back and enjoy a simpler time of holiday seasons in Barrington long ago as May Pinkerman, a longtime Barrington resident, shares with us some of her treasured memories.

Presently, if families and friends cannot be physically together at Christmas, they choose virtual options to the traditional family gatherings.

Today, people use telephones, faxes and e-mail to spread holiday cheer to loved ones. There are many different services available to us these days to ease the holiday stress, including personal shoppers, holiday dinners delivered to your front door or even holiday home decoration.

"There was a time when Christmas was less commercialized," Pinkerman said. "There were no full page ads and the advertising was much more dignified."

During the early part of this century, people who were expecting Christmas shipments would arrive at the train station to claim their parcels. It was common for people to send wires or telegraphs to family and friends during the pioneering days of "modern" communication. People typically sent telegraphs to inform, announce or make their introductions. News also was heavily communicated through telegraphs. Mail was delivered two or three times a day.

Christmas trees usually arrived frozen, and choosing the perfect tree was a much-anticipated family event. Once it was selected and transported home, it would have to thaw out for the next few days. Sometimes, family and friends would gather to decorate the tree on Christmas Eve. If left undecorated on Christmas Eve, though, the real magic happened. Children would awake from their sugar plum dreams to find the bare tree decorated from trunk to top with candles and colorful ornaments.

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Resident reflects on another chapter Christmases past

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Author: Shawn & Laura Ehrke

Editor's Note: This is Part 2 of May Pinkerman's Christmas memories, started last week in Shawn and Laura **Ehrke** 's column.

May Pinkerman's treasured memories continue with Christmas Day of yesteryear:

Children awoke to find the Christmas tree fully decorated and gifts laid out for them to enjoy. The early trees were lit with tree candles that clamped onto the tree, and "a bucket of water was kept nearby, just in case the tree caught on fire," Pinkerman said with a laugh.

"Newspapers advised people of just the goods that were available for that time, and that was about it."

Dry goods, clothing and tools were commonly advertised as gifts during those days. Children didn't write Christmas lists. Instead gifts were often made by the parents and tended to be more practical. Santa brought dolls to good girls and trains to boys.

"I still remember one of my first Christmas presents," Pinkerman recalled fondly. "I received a teddy bear stuffed with straw. It made a grunting bear sound when squeezed."

Attesting to the quality of that era's toys, Pinkerman and her 88-year-old teddy bear are celebrating another Christmas in Barrington.

For dinner, Pinkerman's family donned funny Christmas hats and opened Christmas crackers, which made a "POP!" sound when both ends were pulled. Goose was enjoyed as the main course, with the goose grease saved in a woolen sock for use in curing future sore throats.

Pinkerman and her mother made Christmas puddings and cakes in September to allow for the aging process. The cake or pudding was then ready to be enjoyed by the Christmas arrived and was the highlight of the meal. It was soaked in brandy, accented with a sprig of holly and brought to the table flaming.

Pinkerman's list to Santa this year includes "the continuation of the wonderful weather for travelers and good health for all!"

From our family to yours, have a safe and wonderful holiday season!

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