

HOLIDAY MAGIC ON JASMINE STREET

By Fred Hobbs

This story doesn't compare to the plot of the delightful holiday classic, "Miracle on 34th Street." Alas, try as you might, you are left to conclude that the movie was just a fanciful tale about a nice old man who claimed to be Santa Claus and was defended in court by a young lawyer who set about to prove his client's right to the title. In the unlikely circumstance that you have never seen the film, no doubt you will find it on cable TV or on Netflix.

Here's a true story, less dramatic, but one of our family's treasured memories.

For 29 years, we lived in a comfortable home on tree-shaded Jasmine Street in Denver's Park Hill neighborhood. It was there that our three children grew up. The holiday magic referenced in the title of this piece occurred in the winter of 1970.

Our three kids were at the perfect ages at that time (two, four and six) to observe the wonders of the holidays including the role of Santa Claus. They visited Claus at a J. C. Penney store. (With the chain's ongoing financial struggle, Santa probably doesn't hang out there anymore.) But that's another somewhat sad story of the continuing loss of venerable icons of the past.

Our oldest child, Chip hadn't quite yet begun to question the veracity of stories about the jolly fat man in the red suit and white whiskers who delivered toys on Christmas Eve. The younger two were firm believers, although our daughter, Jenny, did mention that Penney's Santa "smelled funny." My wife and I were hoping it wasn't bourbon or beer on the "old gentleman's" breath.

A few days before Christmas, the perfect kind of holiday snow began to fall, just enough to adorn the branches of the blue spruce in the front yard and to blanket the lawn with about two inches of the white stuff. And sufficient to allow the children to make "snow angels" and otherwise romp and roll about.

While shoveling their walks, Cottie (short for Endicott) and Emily, the nice recently married young couple next door, noticed the kids playing. They came over to our yard and took me aside for a confidential conversation. "You mentioned that all of you were going to Christmas Eve midnight mass," Emily said. "Could we help make sure that Santa came early to drop off at least a few of the presents for the kids? Cheerfully, we joined in the plot to create a bit of holiday magic for the youngsters.

We gave the neighbors a key to our house. The night before Christmas, the kids helped to lay out a plate of milk and cookies near the Christmas tree just in case Santa dropped by in our absence. While we were at church, Cottie created authentic looking boot prints in the snow complete with a sprinkle of soot from the fireplace. Emily took a bite from one of the cookies and drank half of the glass of milk to show that Santa had sampled the treats. And they spread the pre-selected presents under the tree.

Upon our return, the children were wide-eye with wonder at the visit from St. Nicholas; we joined in the delightful deception.

For years, we didn't reveal the secret of the holiday magic on Jasmine Street, until it became such a family legend we just couldn't resist.