

## GOING HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

*by Harry Zirkelbach*

The topic makes an assumption, that is, you have been away, will return after visiting that family.

In 1941 he left his parents' home for college in a far off city, would return for some holidays, not always his choice because the attended Engineering College required all students to work in a related technical field every other four weeks, the entire year. A spin-off advantage: employment often the source for next tuition. All enrolled students were at work/school 48 weeks a year, the four weeks without school, may or may not coincide with the holiday schedule. Two exceptions, the Christmas and Easter dates, always allowed a week to be at home. Both holidays coincided with a semester ending; with that earlier term's final exams complete, the holiday, free of test qualms.

And so it went for the first year and a half. Home for those two Xmas holidays, reacquaint with family and friends, all in a carefree atmosphere with neither employment or school tasks being an impediment to casualness for this non-Michigan resident, as were that two-thirds of that Engineering School.

There were always small gifts to bring for parents and siblings. Then too, yarns of school, a city almost twenty times larger, classmates larger than life with skills, accomplishments, history, that family and friend found unusual, new. The University seemed remote. No family or friend had or would, meet a classmate, those three years required to complete Junior and Senior studies.

Visits were made by train, following the southern shore of Lake Erie, between Erie and Detroit, without transfer. Beginning in 1942 trains were increasingly crowded, millworkers joining traffic to home, military for reassignment. Full trains livened the journey, as suddenly everyone felt some closeness between one another, because of war; that news, ominous.

And so it came to be that in a visit home Christmas 1943, the same routine at home with family and friends. Differences now, for both Dad and his sister worked a minimum 48 hour week, were home fewer hours that vacation.

Male friends were less available too, as they were drafted into a military services. On occasion he would even accompany a family to see buddies off to a foreign assignment, from western Pennsylvania military installations. The family cheerful in delivering that son; difficult to rouse from concern on the return trip.

Late on this visit preparing to return to the University in a casual unguarded moment his conversation contained an unwitting comment. He simply said, "I am packed and ready to go home, Mom."

She was quick to correct him. "You *are* home."

Both realized his blunder. He apologized profusely. But that separation was difficult; for both understood, home's definition had changed forever.

In visits to mother and Dad, he always identified their home as his, for truthfully, until wed ten years later, he always had two homes.