

A Colorado Christmas
by Marilyn Reeves

My second husband Gil and I had no sooner gotten hitched back in May of 1976, than he was notified that he was being promoted by Sullair Air Compressor Company to Assistant Sales Manager of their Dallas office.

So that fall, after selling my little two-bedroom house in Lakewood, we moved to Texas. While Dallas was a nice enough town, I couldn't get used to the climate – suffocating heat in the summer, and freezing cold ice storms in winter. I missed the dry air. I missed the mountains. I was homesick for Colorado!

Luckily, Gil had hung onto his mountain house above Rollinsville, so we still had a place to stay when we came home on vacations. To get there you turned off 119 onto a dirt road past the old red farmhouse, then started climbing, taking one switchback and then another into the deep, dark woods until finally you arrived.

The first thing that hit you when you opened the car door was the smell of the pine trees. My little dog Cindy would leap out of the car and run pell-mell up and down the hill, rolling in the snow. There ain't no joy like puppy dog joy!

You could get out at the lower level and then climb the inside wrought iron spiral staircase to the main floor, or drive on up to the second level to the main entrance on the outside balcony. Inside, there was another spiral staircase to the third level with an open balcony overlooking the living room.

The main living area was covered in thick, rich Teddy Bear brown carpeting, and one wall was paneled in a similar shade of brown. The most prominent feature, however, was the massive stone fireplace with its heavy oak mantel.

It was the perfect place to celebrate Christmas. We went up the hill behind the house and cut down a six foot spruce and placed it in the living room. We decorated it mostly with strings of popcorn and homemade ornaments, but it looked lovely, sitting there in the bay window, alongside the fireplace with natural garland gracing the mantel.

Gil was a big, barrel-chested, red faced man with silver sideburns. He dug out an old red suit from one of the closets, a cap and a white cotton beard, and was good to go – he didn't need a lot of padding to play Santa.

The whole family managed to find their way up the mountain that year, and a delightful Colorado Christmas was had by all.

But the day after didn't go so well. I had gathered up all the papers and ribbons and stuffed them into grocery bags and put them in the fireplace to burn. Now I knew better than to stick the top end of the Christmas tree into the fire – every year homes are lost by people thinking that the fire will somehow stay within the confines of the fireplace, but – funny thing – the fire tends to

follow the length of the tree out into the living room and the whole place can go up in flames. What I *didn't* think about, however, is that paper sacks can tip over and next thing you know the flames are creeping up toward the mantle, greedily seeking the pine boughs lying on top! Luckily I had a pitcher of water close by, and after a few frantic moments of dousing and poking, managed to get the burning bags back into the interior of the fireplace where they belonged.

And I was fortunate that my husband had a sense of humor. "Always did like that scorched wood effect," he said, as he eyed his newly altered wood mantle. So the Christmas of 1976 was literally burned into memory, but had a happy ending after all.