

Stretchy Socks Are Best for Christmas

by Dennis Payton Knight

Christmases of our childhood in Laramie didn't involve chestnuts roasting on an open fire, yule logs or mistletoe. But at 7,200 feet altitude in December, Jack Frost certainly nipped at our noses and our Christmases were all the merrier.

Our local radio station had a live afternoon show where children could call in and speak to Santa's elves. We could see them only in our minds, but all the better for elfishness. They were a creation of a DJ playing slow records at high speed. I had that figured out, so I didn't bother dialing the phone, but it added to the season and it humored the radio guy.

The hanging of socks on Christmas eve is a special memory of mine. We had a gas stove, not a fireplace, but the couch would accommodate pins sturdy enough to hold the loot and it served quite well. How Santa Claus got in has never been explained to me, but I'm getting off the subject.

At the age of six, the challenge was to pick out a sock to hang, capacity being the goal. The best bet would be to borrow one from your brother who had bigger feet and hence bigger socks. And, being that you don't hang two socks at Christmas, he would have one to spare. But then again, you wouldn't want your sock to match his, lest in the morning he claim them both for himself. So in the end, you pick the argyle of your own that seems to stretch enough and take longest to empty.

Needless to say, our socks at Christmas were always filled, and presents for seven children were always piled under the tree. Looking back, we took that for granted, and the only disappointment I ever felt was the year that toys were no longer in the offing and from then on I would be getting only clothes. I also knew, without being told, that the Knight kids were some of the lucky ones on our block on the wrong side of the tracks. And I'm sure now it wasn't as easy for Mom and Dad as they let on.

Perhaps you can buy all the Christmas you need at Macy's Department Store, Walmart or Amazon, and it is fun to try. But the best of Christmas is not in the things we give, but in the things we share. It is in the traditions we get from parents, and the new ones we make for ourselves, for our children, and for theirs. Those are things that come truly from us, those are things with built-in love, and those are the things that last.

Christmas is a holiday on the largest of scales: deeply religious and crassly commercial, chaotic, noisy and musical, colorful and quietly beautiful. And yet it is a celebration on the most personal of levels, and it is in that stretchy argyle sock where I keep my best memories.