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December 1987 EDITORS NOTE; One of the old familiar Christmas favorites is "I'll be home for Christmas". In this month's column, John Brown reminisces about the street where he grew up—and, in the process, reminds us of familiar places with very special memories for all of us. We may never be able to "go home again" but we always can, as that Christmas song reminds us, "be home in our dreams....."

Until I left my home in Edgewood near Pittsburgh, a shady street called Maple Avenue was the most familiar street in the world. It was only three blocks long but I knew who lived in every house and most of the people knew me. I had traveled that avenue on foot, on roller skates, on a bicycle, in a horse and wagon, and of course in various automobiles since 1916.

When I was very small, I remember that the street was paved with yellow brick and was lit by gas lamps that were tended by a man in a pony cart who replaced the gas mantles and relit the gas jets by climbing a small folding ladder he carried with him. Then about 1923 the beautiful Rovback lamps were removed and "modern" electric lights were installed.

About the same time, the borough of Edgewood decided to cover the yellow bricks with tar and limestone gravel which was called "macadamizing" in memory of the canny Scotsman McAdam who first thought of that new idea in road paving. I remember the steam roller (real steam) crushing it down and the tar machine that spread hot black tar followed by men with large shovels spreading the crushed limestone. It was exciting for youngsters like me, but a headache for my mother who had to try to remove the tar from clothes, hands, and feet for the next four or five years. To make matters worse, we used to enjoy chewing the tar and getting some of it stuck in our teeth. What a mess.

Every so often when the paving had to be dug up to repair a water line, the old familiar yellow bricks were also dug up and placed in a pile to be replaced when the work was done. Of course, when July and August came some of the tar would ooze out near the curbstones and we of the fourth and fifth grade would scoop up the sticky stuff and attach them to small sticks to be catapulted in the direction of fellow classmates with white shirts, curly hair, or new Keds tennis shoes.

Then, as the years passed, my beloved Maple Avenue still resounded to the beat of horse's hooves from bread wagons, ice wagons, delivery wagons, and, to my young eye, the wonderful "Lightning Express" with the chocolate brown delivery van and the two black Morgan horses with brass lightning bolts on their collars. They probably averaged about twelve miles per hour on a trip from downtown and, I believe, that a delivery truck in 1987 would not be any quicker because of our present day traffic.

Maple Avenue holds a special place in my heart because ten of my high school graduating class lived on it. These were the kids I played games with, fought with, went

to Sunday School with, and with whom I finally became a graduate of Edgewood High School.

Very few of the families on the first block owned automobiles because there was no room between or behind the houses for garages. On the second block where I grew up, there were older, larger houses and their garages held many familiar marques such as a Franklin, Pierce- Arrow, Packard, Lafayette, Cadillac, and Lincoln. One family also owned a Rauch & Lang Electric and I had several wonderful rides in it seated between two matronly ladies who usually smelled of lavender or au de cologne.

One man near the end of our street owned a pair of beautiful gray coach horses and thrilled many of us kids as he passed by in his carriage in proper driving costume with two Dalmatians running side by side just behind the rear wheels—s scene that is stamped indelibly on my mind.

I neglected to mention that those who lived in the first block really didn't need automobiles because at the foot of the street, there was the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad which had a commuter train arriving at our station every ten or fifteen minutes to take people to downtown Pittsburgh and also the trolley car lines that could take anyone to work downtown for nine cents.

Many years have passed since I first walked along that beautiful tree-lined street holding tight to my mother's hand, but when I return every few years It appears to have changed very little. There are no new houses, the street is not any wider, the old sidewalks on which I skated and rode my first bicycle are still intact. But I hesitate to knock on the doors of those familiar houses. What could I say to the children or young housewives who opened the door? No, I will just walk by and enjoy my memories of beautiful old cars, playing hide and seek with my Maple Avenue friends, and Mother calling me to supper.

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

When Christmas comes again each year we often think of Charles Dickens and his classic "Christmas Carol". The main theme of this story is Christmas present, past, and future. If we put this story in our memories of Christmas past we might go back in memory to a time forty, fifty, or even sixty years ago.

In spite of my gray hairs and frequently aching joints, I remember quite vividly some of those annual celebrations of the Lord's birthday in the years long ago. This holiday was strictly a family day which included aunts, cousins, uncles, and my Grandmother. The things we did each Christmas became what every family calls their traditions.

During the weeks before Christmas, my father would bring home mysterious packages in large boxes or brown paper, which were ceremoniously put in the downstairs closet and were referred to as "lay-overs for meddlers." This meant no handling and no shaking of anything thus designated. My sister Adele and I carefully saved our nickels and dimes all year and usually accumulated about fifteen or twenty dollars which were earmarked for holiday spending. We spent our money very carefully and the few gifts we were able to purchase were carefully wrapped and placed under the bed in the spare bedroom.

Dad always went by himself to buy the Christmas tree—a balsam fir and as long as he lived the tree was never decorated or seen in the house until Christmas Eve. When my sister and I were young, we had to go to bed early and listened with great excitement to the sounds from downstairs—the crackling of paper, the tinkling of small bells being placed on the tree and soft conversation between our parents.

I am sure that our house was not really colder on Christmas Eve, but Adele and I shivered under our blankets all night and kept getting up to check the mantel clock, whose hands seemed to scarcely move at all. When six o'clock finally arrived, we would knock on our parent's door and get permission to rush downstairs and get our stockings, which were hanging from the living room mantelpiece. We tried to look through the French doors of the darkened dining room, but without success. Rushing back upstairs, we would plop ourselves down on Mothers and Dads beds and reach into our stockings to retrieve such things as a new toothbrush, a small toy, English walnuts, a mesh bag of chocolate coins covered with gold foil, and a dollar's worth of new pennies, nickels, and dimes. And then, of course, there was always an orange in the toe of the stocking.

After a breakfast that was never shortened even for Christmas morning, we all burst into the dining room after Dad went first and turned on the tree lights. Our gifts were placed in separate piles in the same place every year so we knew where to look for them.

Most of our gifts were books or articles of clothing, but I still remember the excitement I felt when I looked under the tree to find a gleaming oval truck and a Lionel electric train

with half a dozen cars and a locomotive. On succeeding Christmases, I often received another car or a couple of track switches.

After a brief lunch Dad would head for the garage to warm up the old 1923 Marmon touring and with rain curtains in place and a couple of warm lap robes, we would make the trip to my Grandmother's duplex she shared with my aunt, uncle, and three cousins. Gifts were exchanged during the afternoon and then we all went upstairs to Grandmother's dining room to enjoy a turkey dinner with several more aunts and uncles. After the blessing Grandmother proposed a toast for many more Christmases together (the wine my uncle obtained from a bootlegger) but Grandmother never knew that.

As the years passed the group around her table became smaller when loved ones passed away, but it was an occasion I will always remember with warmth and fondness. The final ceremony of those Christmases past was the drive home along the streets that were known for their homes displaying outdoor lighting—a practice that began in the mid nineteen-twenties. Then we arrived at home to savor our gifts and our joy of being together. When we jumped into bed, sleep came quickly to a couple of tired but happy children and even more to two exhausted, wonderful parents.

REMEMBERING TEDDY AND KING

For the past three years or so I have been writing about automobiles and my experiences while driving them or riding them, but this time I have some reminiscences about toys. Some of these toys were given to me as a child and some of them I made myself. Perhaps some of our club members had similar experiences in their childhood.

Two of the earliest toys I remember were given to me at Christmas. We were living with my Uncle Tom at the time and the Christmas tree and presents were always put in the plant conservatory behind closed doors. On that particular Christmas in 1920 I was allowed to go in first and there beside the tree was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. It was a dappled gray rocking horse with a teddy bear seated in the middle of the saddle. He had life-like brown glass eyes, a mane of real horse hair, gilded horseshoes, and a blue corduroy saddle with gilt stirrups. I remember grabbing the teddy bear and climbing into the saddle. Well, perhaps I was "helped" into the saddle but I do recall that I sat there and rocked until lunch time.

That same year we moved to California and Teddy went with me but the rocking horse had to remain in Edgewood at Uncle Tom's house. My trusted teddy bear slept next to me every night and when we left Los Angeles about a year and a half later, I kept asking my parents as we were speeding eastward on the train if they thought that "King" was still safe at Uncle Tom's. Well, he was and a few minutes after arriving home I ran upstairs and hugged my wooden steed and climbed on his back to be carried away in childish imagination to places in the west I had left a few days before.

"King" traveled with us when we moved into our own home and reposed in the basement where I shared him with my friends. As the years passed, I felt that I was too old to ride a rocking horse so I was persuaded by my mother to give him to a nearby orphanage---a move which I still regret. And what of Teddy? Teddy, whose fur is worn down to the cloth from thousands of childhood hugs and kisses? He is still resting in a safe place in our attic in Stuarts Draft to be loved, perhaps, by one of my grandchildren.

I owned my first automobile at age seven and the name "Dodge" was stamped into the space above the painted radiator. It was orange in color and could move at great speed if I pumped the pedals fast enough. It was crude by today's standards---having spindly wire wheels without fenders, a steering wheel, a painted on instrument panel and a small wooden seat -----but I was "king of the sidewalk" with my dependable Dodge for several years.

The vehicle was superseded by a special type of Irish Mail. This marvelous toy was made in England and featured a steering wheel which you could use to pump and steer and a nickel-plated gear shift lever which would have thrown the vehicle out of gear when a button on the handle was pressed. This put the Irish mail in neutral and made it possible to coast down hills or on level ground. The 'regular' Irish mails had a wagon handle which you held to pump and which had to be held on to---thrashing back and forth when going downhill.

A few years ago I saw one of these great toys at Hershey and wondered whether it might have been mine but my curiosity was cut short when the flea market vendor said that he couldn't take less than \$300 for it.

The only vehicle which I recall building myself was what we called a soapbox scooter. This was made by taking a four foot length of 2x4 and nailing a soapbox (try to find a wooden soapbox today) to it with the open end facing the driver. A roller skate was taken apart and one end was nailed to the front of the 2x4 and one on the rear. A small board was nailed on top of the box with the overlapping edges whittled to form handles. Two tin cans were nailed to the front of the box for headlights and, if a person wished to be exclusive, a coat of paint and a name such as Barney Oldfield or Green Dragon was added. Power was obtained by standing on the board with one foot and pushing on the sidewalk with the other.

These home-made scooters were inexpensive and easy to build and could "go like the wind" if the sidewalk was smooth.

I also remember building a close replica of a 1903 Springfield rifle, complete with a broomstick barrel, metal sights and a genuine leather shoulder strap. I was thrilled when I was told by a carpenter named Wallace Wilson that it looked almost like his. The made my day because I knew that Mr. Wilson had been a war hero in the "Big War" and that he had mowed down dozens of Germans with his rifle. Playing war was a popular boy's game when I was young but the battles never lasted long because nobody wanted to be a "Hun" and if they did agree they were soon wiped out by us Yanks.

And, finally, when I see children today playing with their sophisticated "walkie-talkies" I am reminded of the simple but exciting two-way communication sets of my childhood. All that was needed to make one of these sets was a pair of tin cans and about fifty feet of waxed string. A hole was punched in the middle of each can and the knotted end of the string was inserted in the holes. Then when the string was pulled tight, the person at one end would shout in to the can while the other person would hold the other can to his ear...Simple?, but it worked and it was especially good to talk around the corner of a building.

I suppose that children today would laugh at this crude no-cost toy but when I was a kid we had fewer toys and even the simple ones were exciting in a child's world without electronic space-age entertainment. I wouldn't trade my memories of those simple days for a wagon load of "Star Wars" gadgets.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

When I hear the word "Christmas", a myriad of thoughts flash through my mind, somewhat like the theme of the "Christmas Carol." It brings to mind Christmas present, Christmas of the future, and Christmas past. The present involves my new family and also my children and my grandchildren and our get together on Christmas Eve—with toys, food, laughter and excitement. I also think of Christmas during the years of World War II with three small children—gas rationing, paper or wood toys, and a Christmas tree brought home in the 1928 Model A Phaeton to be honored and decorated before Santa made his visit. But, as we unwrapped each ornament, I was carried back in time to Pittsburgh in the 1920's when many of these same ornaments were hung from a balsam fir by Santa Claus after my sister Adele and I were sent to bed.

Until the death of my father, we were never permitted to be a part of the Christmas tree ceremony. When we were sent to bed on Christmas Eve, there was no trace of what was to come. The large dining room was bare and no tree was in sight, although I do remember one time when I had a glimpse of a beautiful balsam sticking part way out of our 1923 Marmon touring that was usually put on jacks for the winter by the first week in December.

I doubt if my sister and I slept very much as we heard doors opening and closing, footsteps in the attic, strange thumpings in the dining room, and inaudible conversations between my mother and my father. The hours passed very slowly as recorded by the chimes of the living room clock, but when seven o'clock arrived I remember we bounded down the stairs to the big fireplace and retrieved our stockings along with those of our parents and after tapping on their bedroom door, we were told to enter and see what Santa had brought.

We filled our parents' stockings before they filled ours, but we were always thrilled with the small gifts we found such as a new toothbrush, a can of shoe polish, foil-wrapped chocolate gold coins, a pair of socks, and in the toe, a tangerine and some shiny new pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and a silver dollar.

After the stockings were opened we children were required to get fully dressed and report to the kitchen for breakfast. There was no way we could peek behind the French doors of the dining room until after breakfast. I recalled that Dad was always very slow in arriving for breakfast. He had to shower, shave, and dress completely before he would have his breakfast of juice, scrambled eggs, toast, and coffee. We would watch the agonizing slowness with which he finished his eggs, buttered his toast, and sipped his coffee. As I think back today as an adult, I am sure that was part of the scheme to make Christmas morning even more exciting. If that was part of the plan, I am sure that it was a complete success. Added to that---all dishes had to be washed, dried, and put away in the cupboard.

At last breakfast was finished and we rushed to the dining room to find the Christmas tree festooned with all of the familiar ornaments. Some of them were a part of our family

history—paper mache hansom crabs, race horses, a tiny wee baby in a wire gazebo, cotton Santa Clauses from Japan, wooden and ceramic figurines from Holland, beautiful balls, bells, and blown-glass animals from Germany which delighted my mother when she was our age. There were even a few holders for wax candles and early electric bulbs that we lit to enjoy for many Christmases to come.

After briefly enjoying the lighted tree, we turned to the beautifully wrapped gifts on small tables situated around the room. My sister and I waited with anticipation as Mother and Dad opened their presents from us—purchased with money we had saved all year for this occasion. I still remember the Japanese sugar bowl for Mother and the box of Pittsburgh stogies for Dad that I had purchased after much deliberation. I don't remember what my sister's presents were but I know they were much appreciated.

When we turned to find our presents, we nearly always found what we had asked for—mostly books to read over the holidays and a few items of clothing. I believe that I was about age thirteen before I gave up hoping to find a Shetland pony hitched to the back porch railing.

Lastly, I remember we loaded up the old Jordan and headed toward Grandma's for a Christmas dinner with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Time marches on, times have changed, but the spirit of Christmas will go on forever.

TOYS FROM THE 1920S

Just recently I saw a brief TV story on the new children's toys that will hit the market around Thanksgiving. These space vehicles will be activated by signals from the cartoon show commercials and will make the wheeled vehicles move around and the spaceships will be activated to emit rays that will "destroy" people and enemy ships shown on the screen. Isn't that exciting? And just think, these great new toys will cost ONLY \$250. How lucky can this new generation get? How LUCKY! How lucky.....I begin to think back to earlier days1940, 1930, 1920. Were there any great toys in those days? Yes, there were and I remember them.

The first toys I remember that were actually mine were a cast-iron horse-drawn fire wagon pulled by a pair of black horses and guided by red coated, gold helmeted fireman who could be removed from his high seat by twisting him to one side to release the small hook on the seat of his pants. I put out many an imaginary fire with that trusty vehicle and I cleared the way with the tinkling of its tiny bell and the siren, which I supplied with my own childhood treble. As I recall, I was pretty good with the choo-choos and the whistle on my cast iron train which consisted of an engine, the tender, a passenger car, and a red caboose. A caboose on a passenger train? Not realistic but who cared? That train didn't need a track. It ran swiftly on the floor, in my sandbox, or on the sidewalk. When it wrecked, the cast iron cars didn't break. It didn't need batteries and it went where I wanted it to go. Yes, that was railroading at its best.

A year or two later, perhaps about 1924, I was given a heavy sheet metal racer that was really exciting. You skimmed the wheels sharply on the floor several times and then let go of the vehicle. Wow! It zoomed forward all by itself! The secret was a heavy fifth wheel that was hidden under the racer's body and it spun like a gyroscope. It moved forward without being pushed. All I had to do was supply the sound of the engine.

Then there was a collection of Schoenhut circus animals that belonged to my sister and me. These wooden animals had elastic inside the joints of their limbs and deep slots on the ends of their hooves of their feet. This enabled us to place them on tight ropes and ladders and to put hoops and other small objects in their grasp. What exciting circuses we had! We were the directors and the audience and thus had few complaints about the quality of the show. I recently saw photos of those Schoenhut animals which sold at a toy auction for about \$150 each! This says to me that they were very well made, they had great child appeal sixty years ago, and will never lose their glamour to plastic space age creations of the 1980's.

One of my fondest toy memories concerns a long cardboard box that was a gift to me from a grandfather who died when I was about one year old. On my sixth birthday my mother presented me the box which contained a breathtaking collection of toy soldiers. These soldiers consisted of a flag bearer and an honor guard, which consisted of an officer with a sword and a soldier with a gun on shoulder. Each group was correctly uniformed for the country it represented. I remember some from Japan, France, England, Poland, Italy, Germany, and the United States.

I was permitted to take them from their elastic restraints and line them up for an exciting parade. Music was supplied by yours truly. It was an interesting way to learn the different flags of the world. As time passed, the elastic wore out and each of my tiny warriors was individually wrapped in tissue paper between parades and forced marches.

It must have been about 1924 that our family went to see the first full-length classic western entitled "The Covered Wagon". It was, as I recall, full of Indian attacks on the circled wagons, sandstorms, running out of water, treacherous white men, a fire arrow attack on a wooden fort, and some damsels in distress. The result of seeing this movie was a change in the actions of my leaden troops. Large wooden flat blocks with a curve of white paper glued to each side became covered wagons. Wheels and horse power were not needed. My sister and I placed the troops inside the "wagons" and the cross-country trek was accomplished by moving them one at a time up the steps in my Uncle Tom's front hall stairway. Encampments and wagon circling occurred on the two landings.

A recent conference with my sister Adele failed to uncover the reason for selecting the Swiss troops to lead the expedition, but we recall that the Swiss officer became one armed when his sword-bearing arm became lost and he was known forever afterward as "Captain Switzer".

When my family moved into our own house in 1925 alas, the troops were scattered and the wagon trains never moved again. The block "wagons" became fortress walls in which German troops cowered while my male chums and I bombed and strafed them from home-made wooden Spuds, Camel, and Newport. We could make machine gun and bomb sounds that would have brought a nod of approval from the late Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker himself. It didn't matter that the cowardly Huns were not uniformed in German green grey. They were actually ole miniature dolls, lead soldiers with missing limbs and even heads but in our youthful imaginations they made a good enemy.

We didn't have creatures that could be turned into trucks or tanks. We made our tanks out of a large spool, a button, a couple of carpet tacks, a lollipop stick and a rubber band. They were fast, almost unstoppable, and a lot of fun.

I just learned today that this Christmas little girls can have dolls that talk to EACH OTHER. I wonder if they were able to THINK they might just long for the good old days when their little mother picked them up and did all the talking. Yes, years ago we moved the vehicles, the soldiers, and the planes. That's why the old toys were best and always remain that way.

A KID AT HEART – RECALLING OLD TOYS

I know that my subject for this column should have been discussed in the Christmas issue since my thoughts are mostly about toys and children which seem to go together, although there are a large number of adults who are interested in toys of all kinds but mostly as collectors and most of the toys are classified as antiques. These toys are usually of the period of time that the collector was a child and often the very same toy or toys he or she once owned. I find that when I have attended the AACA meets in February through the years, I always make sure I attend the seminar on antique toys; and when I see a slide of an early "Buddy L" truck or an early Lionel train, I am thrilled as my thoughts flash back to the very early 1920's.

Recently I read an article in the magazine I receive from time to time that is all about life in Colonial Williamsburg and I found that some toys seem to be ageless in their appeal to children. They may change in appearance and perhaps material of manufacture, but children still want balls, tops, pull toys, dolls, and board games. These toys are shown in pictures painted in the 18th century and some of them such as girl and baby dolls, wooden horses on wheels, and rocking horses are closely replicated and are good selling items at our colonial capital. I was also interested to learn that even the wealthy children had just a few toys and that if confined to indoors because of weather, that they amused one another by putting on charades, short plays, or reading poetry or literary classics aloud. Try to picture that in the average household today! No, dear friends, such educational pleasures have succumbed to the "boob tube" and battery powered games of all sorts that do not stimulate the imagination or the intellect and we are all poorer for that.

I am so thankful that no one who made toys when I was a child thought of making trucks that turned into robots, dolls that engage in conversation with their owners and had to have their diapers changed, or cars and animals that stopped moving because their batteries were worn out. Yes, I'm glad that we made our own voices become auto horns, sirens, machine guns in our home-made airplanes as they engaged in battles with the Red Baron's Flying Circus or even became squeaky when conversing with our teddy bears.

I'm also glad no one thought of sweatshirts with kooky comments, off-color slogans, fake college names, and advertisements for some brand of beer or soft drinks. I'm also thankful that we did not know about artificial Christmas trees with blinking lights and objects to hang on our rear view mirrors or to occupy the space behind the rear seats known as the shelf.

If anyone who takes the time to read these ramblings of mine happens to know where I can find a "Buddy L" steam shovel, a wind-up Toonerville Trolley, or a Tootsie Toy bulldog Mack Truck, please give me a call...I'm still a kid at heart.