



12-15-1991

A Light At Christmas

Elva Howard Deeds

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

Recommended Citation

Deeds, Elva Howard (1991) "A Light At Christmas," *Westview*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 2 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol11/iss2/10>

This Nonfiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



A Light At CHRISTMAS

by *Elva Howard Deeds*



illustration by *Brad Snow*

She blew gently on the tiny flame to ignite the kindling under the coal in the huge pot-bellied heater. The simple task of getting a fire going in the frigid morning air of December added to her feeling of happy well-being as the glow of the fire spread its warmth about her in the little one-room school in Northwestern Oklahoma. It was Miss Howard's first year as a teacher on her own, at Fairview, about seven miles from Forgan in Beaver County near the mouth of the Oklahoma Panhandle.

The room was becoming pleasantly warm when she heard the lively chatter of the children approaching the door, and she moved toward the doorway to welcome them in. The entire school had arrived together. Only five children, but a rewarding challenge to Miss Howard, spanning five grades in one day's lessons. Six-year-old Ben Mullinax was first in the room. Leaning down to greet him, she was bothered by a niggling worry that touched her mind. Her lack of experience with beginners hadn't been apparent so far,

MEMORIES

but a day must seem long and boring for him as the other classes were reciting. However, many concepts could be shared among the grades, and a student could learn merely by listening to another pupil from a higher grade-level.

Little Ben had three older brothers ranging upward to grade eight. Martha Pfeiffer was 12 and in Seventh Grade. There would be two of Miss Howard's pupils to take county tests in the spring when the county superintendent came to visit Fairview. Martha had one sibling, Carl, who was an older teen-ager out of school. He was industrious and intelligent, and he helped his aging parents run their small farm. The family made the farm prosper when the droughty winds discouraged many farmers during the "Dustbowl Days." They owned a new 1935 Ford sedan, kept shiny clean despite the blowing dust. One day on the slick frozen road, Carl was bringing Martha to school when the car flipped over on its top with its wheels still spinning. He got out and helped the shaken Martha to her feet; then he managed to get the car upright again and calmly drove on to school.

It was that time in the term to begin on the Christmas program—a new experience for the children, and they were very excited. Of course the plans included a nativity scene. (It didn't enter Miss Howard's mind that there might be a different belief in the community.) Her concern was centered on adequate lighting—at least enough light so the children in the play could be identified. There was no electricity in the little school, so they would rely on kerosene lanterns.

The stage was an area at the rear of the classroom with a slight incline above the floor for separate instruction or more private recitation. Carl had rigged up an adequate curtain over the exit door and arranged for a small space for behind-the-scenes props and changes. Lanterns were hung on wires suspended from the ceiling.

At last the TIME was upon them. The parents had chosen to have the program on Christmas Eve to make it more meaningful to the children. The people of the little district began arriving at dusk. Nobody stayed away that night. The children were aquiver with excitement. They proudly showed parents their handmade decorations and ornaments

on the big tree and stole peeps at presents brought by parents, but kept concealed in a big Santa-Bag.

The play had been planned for a minimum of scenery and changes. Christmas carols began to emerge from the handwound Victrola, making Buster Mullinax busy keeping it going and changing records. Then the greetings of welcome and recitations over, the scene was set for the "Christmas Story." The curtain was removed from the nativity props; a reverent quiet hushed everyone—and Miss Howard began the narration while the infant (doll) lay in the manger and Martha Pfeiffer sat beautifully serene as "Mary" robed in a sheet and blue towel. Carl, playing Joseph, stayed in the background.

The three older Mullinax boys dressed in robes appeared in the subdued light as shepherds, then slipped away and reappeared as wise men carrying gifts of shiny foil and wearing colorful turbans. Miss Howard carefully maneuvered the action as she continued the story.

Now the moment for little Ben was at hand, but Ben stepped close to his teacher and whispered worriedly, "It's too dark! I

can't see the Baby Jesus' face and Mother Mary." As he moved closer to get a better view, SUDDENLY A BRIGHT LIGHT SHONE ON THE MANGER, and Ben's mouth opened in awed astonishment. He swallowed deeply and began to sing softly...

"AWAY IN A MANGER, NO CRIB FOR A BED..."

And a lovely light shone out on everyone, as Carl Pfeiffer held up the big electric bulb attached to a large battery, powered by a windcharger that he had provided for his family's farm.▲



ELVA HOWARD DEEDS is a retired public-school teacher who enjoys free-lance writing; she lives on a farm near Sentinel with her husband, Eldred .