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## Two Christmastime Memories from North Carolina



Posted by [Dave Tabler](#)

*Please welcome guest author Derek Piotr. Derek is a performer, folklorist and author based in New England, whose work focuses primarily on the human voice. His work covers genres as diverse as electronic, classical, and folk, and is primarily concerned with tenderness, fragility, beauty and brutality. He has collaborated with artists including Maja Ratkje, Don't DJ, and Thomas Brinkmann across various disciplines. His work was nominated by the jury for Prix Ars Electronica in 2012, and has featured on UbuWeb and BBC.*

I have already written extensively about my research concerning Lena Bare Turbyfill, of Elk Park, North Carolina, and my experience meeting her extended family this summer, [here](#).



Marshall Ward

Since my trip to Avery County, I have remained in touch with Lena's granddaughter-in-law, Dianne Ward Hicks, and Lena's grandniece, Jacquelyn Hedstrom. Dianne is also the daughter of famed Jack Tales teller, Marshall Ward. Jackie is Sabra Bare Hampton's grandchild; recently the singer Bobby McMillon presented me with files of Sabra singing for Herbert Halpert in 1939; one of these recordings included a unique version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas". This prompted me to ask both Dianne and Jacquelyn to share their memories of Christmastime. I present below memories from Dianne and Jackie, largely unedited.

From Dianne:



*Derek Piotr and Dianne Ward Hicks*

My Dad, Marshall Ward, and my Mom, Thelma Chappell Ward, grew up in the early 1900s in western part of Watauga county in North Carolina.

They had told us about hanging one of their old socks on the mantle of fireplace in hopes of getting some hard candy or peppermint stick – or maybe an apple or orange.

If they ever got a toy, it was made by one of their parents or older siblings – a wooden wagon, whistle, or rag roll. They had a family meal. Klds played outside if warm enough. They sang songs and told stories like [Jack Tales](#) (on my dad's side).

My name is Dianne Ward Hicks. I was born in April of 1950. We always had a live tree to decorate which my Dad always cut in the woods around our house. When my brother, sister and I were big enough, we would go out and cut and drag back a tree and get it up and decorate, with Mom's supervision.

When we were old enough to eat candy, we were given a small red plastic Santa boot. It was put on top of the television for Santa to leave us a piece of candy each night for 2 weeks before Christmas. The first thing we did each morning was run to see what he had left us, and enjoy the candy.

The last toy I remember getting from Santa was a 30-inch doll, when I was in the fourth grade. Mom later made some extra clothes for it, so I could change outfits. We would always have a big family meal.

Dad and Mom gave us a present too, but these were always practical items. Sometimes, we would have family over to share the holiday with us, but it was typically us kids, and our parents. As we got older and made some money doing jobs like grading tobacco, we started drawing names in our family to buy gifts.

We were a small bunch, only five of us, but we always had fun doing this. My parents always taught us about the true meaning of Christmas being about the birth of Jesus Christ, and that it was more blessed to give to others than to receive from others. I always remember that Christmas was a joyous time of celebrating and family.

From Jacquelyn:



*Jacquelyn Hedstrom*

I was asked for a family Christmas story. The most memorable Christmas for me was the Christmas that I gave my brothers and myself food poisoning.

My brother Jerry and I were around nine, and Joe was four. We had all three been promised bicycles from Santa that year, but Mama had been in a car wreck not long before that, and we were told that Santa couldn't afford the bikes after all, and that we would all be surprised at what we got.

I don't know why I decided that was the year that I was going to prove there wasn't a Santa, but it was. Jerry had a kinder nature and didn't want to ruin Santa for Joe, but both of them were more than happy to go along with my plan to unveil Santa.

First, we set a trap. We put out a plate of cookies and an apple. We had threaded a string through the core of the apple, and ran the string around the corner to the top of the stairs that went down into the kitchen.

Jerry couldn't stay awake past 9:00, so we tied the string around his toe, so that he would wake up if "Santa" took the apple.

Next, I fixed us cold instant coffee that tasted like tar, it was so strong, and since I wasn't allowed to use the stove, I served us all unheated hot dogs, with mayonnaise.

So, there we sat on those cold drafty stairs, and we all started feeling poorly. Now Christmas Eve was the only night that our parents allowed all three of us to share a bed at that point in our childhood. Jerry and I being

twins had often slept together when we were younger, but we were getting older, so it was a Christmas treat for us to be able to run downstairs together Christmas morning.

By 10 o'clock both Jerry and Joe were down for the count. Me, being the night owl that I was, surprised Mom by going to bed not long afterwards, but not before I saw her grab the apple we had booby trapped for Santa.

She was reading and just pulled out the string without really noticing or questioning why it was there. I fussed at her for messing up our trap, but she just hurried me off to bed.

It must have been around 3 a.m. when all three of us kids realized we were not in the best shape. Our parents were really upset that we had to go to the bathroom which would take us right by the Christmas tree. They made us all swear that we wouldn't look under the tree.

Truth was, I was just desperate to get to the bathroom, I couldn't care less what was under that tree.

The next morning, instead of enjoying the new bicycles which Santa was able to bring after all, we were sick with food poisoning and not very happy.

Mama took us to the doctor the following day, and we got some terrible pink stuff that tasted like rotten chewing gum. It wasn't until I was an adult that I confessed to Mama why we were so sick that Christmas. She was so mad at me, even after all those years.

She explained that they had ordered the bikes from Sears, but when she had the wreck they had tried to cancel the order, but it was too late and there were no returns allowed.

Both my parents, although concerned about where the money to fix the car would come from, were secretly pleased to be able to give their children bicycles for Christmas. It was going to be just as big a gift for them to see our joy. After Mom told me that, I felt worse than I already did about making Jerry and Joe sick. I didn't look under the tree, but I always wondered if my brothers did or not.