

ISL S3 E 12

Huell and Margaret Bramlett [7:38]

FF: At Christmas time, what kind of gifts did you get?

HB: We'd hang up our stockings and we'd get apples and oranges and candy and chewing gum and firecrackers. And we'd get little old toy mules.

FF: What's the one thing that you remember the most, gettin' for Christmas?

HB: Well, I was always glad to get clothes.

FF: Clothes?

HB: Yeah.

FF: For traditions, what'd you do every year?

HB: Traditions? Well, we'd have parties and we'd celebrate with pickin' the banjo, pickin' the guitar, havin' square dances in the communities.

FF: What kind of food did you have, like what do you remember eatin' every Christmas Eve?

HB: Cakes, candies, cookies, and fruits. Apples, oranges.

FF: For Christmas dinner?

HB: For Christmas dinner?

FF: Yeah.

HB: I don't remember, we'd have fresh pork.

FF: Turkey?

HB: Turkey.

FF: What kind of gifts did you get for Christmas when you were a little girl?

MB: Well, I got a tea set and dolls, candy, and a bye-lo baby doll one time.

FF: A bye-lo?

MB: Yeah, they called 'em bye-lo babies, they looked like a real baby. Just the head was china. And they call 'em bye-lo babies. And my daddy told me that they wouldn't break, they told him that they wouldn't break. And my sister had hers and he took it and hit it's head up against somethin' and it busted all to pieces. It wasn't supposed to break, he said. But it did.

FF: Where did you get it?

MB: Well, Santa Claus brought it to me.

*L.B. & Ruth Gibbs*

FF: This is Scott Cannon, Chris Nix, and Lee Cocker interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs on September 21st. Okay, do you remember anything about Old Christmas?

LBG: We never celebrated Old Christmas. We have known about it, but in the home where I grew up—and I think that was true for Mrs. Gibbs too—we celebrated Christmas on the 25th of December, but we didn't observe Old Christmas.

FF: Okay, and whenever you were little, what kind of gifts did you get?

LBG: Well, at my home, there was never a great deal of money to spare for gifts at Christmas time. We didn't know anything about the luxury that we see in Christmas gifts now, and when I was a boy, if I got an orange and a little bit of candy, and one gift, that was Christmas. I guess a pocket knife was as acceptable as anything I ever got when I was a child.

FF: How 'bout you, what kind of gifts did you get?

RG: Oh, ours were limited too. We were in a family of 13 children, that's where I grew up. And I can remember the year I got a big doll like that was the joy of my life. I probably had very small ones, but when I got a big one, that was somethin' to be written home about. But we grew up in just about the same circumstances. The little things meant a lot to us, but we didn't have many things. What we had, we did appreciate, and thought that was great.

LBG: Well, I remember years ago when we lived in Tiger—and this was back in the '30s when most of us here in Rabun County didn't have much money to spare for gifts. We were largely dependent on the Sunday schools where we tried to have something for every child in the Sunday school. We were dependent on the stronger, larger churches in Atlanta and Athens who would send us boxes of gifts with candy and some articles of clothing and so for, and so we spent hours and hours in putting those gifts in preparation for the Christmas tree. We would have a Christmas tree at each one of the churches.

RG: We had to wrap them ourselves.

LBG: We had to wrap them and put the names on them, but I still remember that I made gifts for some of our family of a Chinese checkerboard. We still have the one that we kept here among us. You know what Chinese checkers are?

FF: Yeah.

LBG: Well, I used plywood and made a little frame around a piece of plywood about so big, about 15 inches square, and laid it off in there. And I believe I painted the points of the star different colors and used a bracing bit to bore holes in it. And we still have that checkerboard, after about, well 50-some odd years.

FF: Did you get any gifts from Santa?

RG: Always, we just couldn't do without Santa Claus at our house. And we enjoyed it, and I don't think it took me many years to discover Santa Claus. But it was my joy to help be Santa Claus from then on.

FF: Okay, what's the typical morning with Santa Claus—or Christmas Eve—what did y'all do for your kids?

RG: Well, I think this was routine for us. We tried to get the children to eat breakfast before they went to the Christmas tree and their stockings. Sometimes we'd let them get their stockings before the Christmas tree. We usually had a Christmas tree where there wasn't much on it except decorations, but I'm sure we had something—not very much, but something. Didn't we make them eat breakfast before the general opening of gifts?

LBG: I doubt if they did that very much; they were too anxious--maybe they'd explore their stocking anyway. They'd hang their stockings up by the fireplace, so Santa could come down. That is if we had a fireplace.

FF: Okay, do you remember one special gift that you got?

LBG: Well, let's see, I still remember a particular pocket knife I got when I was just a small boy. I remember when I broke one of the blades off because I was digging in some hard clay with it and I was so sorry I had broken it that I think I hid that pocketknife in my pocket for a good while before I let anybody else find out that I'd broken my Christmas knife. And I keep thinking of things as we talk, I guess it has become somewhat traditional with us that we have at least one poinsettia at Christmas. And do you know the story of the poinsettia?

FF: No.

LBG: Well, there was a very prominent man from South Carolina who was named Poinsett. And he was the ambassador to Mexico. And he didn't consider his work down there as an ambassador very much of a success. He came back after his term of service and felt that, more

or less, he had been a failure. But he brought back a flower with him that now is called a poinsettia.

*Janie P. Taylor*

FF: September 7th, Allison Bethel, Chad Daniels, Julie Dickens, and Shelly Hunnicutt. We're interviewing Janie P. Talor. What kind of gifts did you receive at Christmas time in your early childhood?

JT: As a child of the Great Depression, I didn't get extravagant gifts, but I always had Christmas presents. I was fortunate that there was always Christmas.

FF: How many children were in your family, that they had to have presents for?

JT: All the grandchildren and everything, we were a close-knit family. Under Tiger Mountain, and there were seven grandchildren that were real close.

FF: Who did you get your gifts from? Like sisters and brothers, or Santa Claus?

JT: Well, there was always Santa Claus. I don't have anybody here that still believes in Santa Claus do I? I had an experience about Santa Claus and the breaking of the myth for me, so when you want to hear about that, I can tell you.

FF: Were there any special traditions you followed on Christmas Eve?

JT: Well, one thing that we always enjoyed was going to my grandmother's house. We liked to spend Christmas Eve there and I don't know that it was a mountain tradition, but we loved to have oyster stew on Christmas Eve. And we had oyster stew and I well remember, even in the days of the Depression, we had oyster crackers. You all know the little oyster crackers? There was some goodies that we really enjoyed, I brought some recipes. Ambrosia was a food--oranges and bananas and coconut. Now remember, you really didn't have the transportation systems that you have now. You didn't have the supermarkets and bananas in the wintertime and oranges in the wintertime and the fresh grated coconut were delicacies. We didn't have them all the time, so ambrosia was somethin' that we looked forward to at Christmas, was ambrosia. And so here's the recipe for ambrosia as I remember it. And another thing we always had was coconut cake and it was the kind in which you had layers--maybe four, five, or six layers--and the coconut filling. And it's the one that required days of baking, but I brought a modified one. This is the one that uses all the, what do we say, quick foods? You use the frozen coconut and the cake mix. If you want to use that as a variation, you could. And then we always enjoyed spiced cider. And here's one that we liked with spiced grape juice. These were some things that were real special. And another thing that we all loved was old fashioned egg custard. Now, you would say it's old fashioned; I just called it egg custard. I have a recipe for that as I remember it.

FF: Did you make any kind of decorations or ornaments special for Christmas?

JT: Remember, we had a radio and it was in the '46-'47 when we had our first tv, but I cannot remember not having a radio. So there were times when you did string popcorn, but it was more of a family recreation than a necessity. I can't remember decorating with it particularly, but a lot of families did. You also made the rings of strips of paper when you cut 'em and you looped another one in, that type of thing. There is some thinking among some of our older mountain folks, and you may run into it, that we don't celebrate Christmas at the proper time. That Christmas should have been celebrated—and according to various authorities, some scriptures and whatever—I believe, I'm right, it should be January the 6th, or the 8th? And personally, I'd like to celebrate Old Christmas. You get over the rush on the 25th, but to me, we had an old lady in our community and we went through the Christmas rituals and traditions and everything, she said we're celebrating it wrong. She said it should be Old Christmas, January the 8th [*should be January 6th*]. And there are some areas which have some minor celebrations of it, they recognize it.

FF: Did your grandmother have the house decorated?

JT: Yes, and this is when we used our native greenery. Our holly—and we always had special holly trees set up, saved with all the berries. The holly and the berries and the mistletoe and a lot of times cedar, and then the galax leaves were often found on the mountain. And the galax were that which was green. How many of you have ever found a galax leaf up on the mountains? They're not as near as common as they used to be, but they were a source of green.

*Clyde English*

FF: September the 14th, 1989. Interviewing Clyde English. Interview in class. What kind of gifts did you receive?

CE: Oh, we always got one nice something. Dolls and books and jewelry, and so on. And then our stockings, there was always a Brazil nut right in the toe of the stocking. And then we had, we always had an orange and an apple and some candy and some other kind of nuts in that stocking. And the greatest delight was to pour it all out and see what all we got. And then you would kind of ration it out. You wouldn't eat it all Christmas day, you just kept eatin' it, but that was the biggest thing in the world, to see what was in that stocking. I don't know how much it cost, I guess it was pretty expensive in those days, but there was always a Brazil nut.

FF: Did you get anything from Santa?

CE: Oh, yes, Santa Claus always—you just couldn't wait for Santa Claus to come. Christmas then was longer than ten years are now, you just couldn't wait for Christmas to come and see

what Santa would bring you. One time I got a quarter, and then, quarters were a whole lot more than they are now. Today, a quarter wouldn't mean anything. But we didn't get a lot of gifts but we always got one that we treasured.

FF: What kind of traditions do you follow every year?

CE: Well, we still have a big Christmas dinner with the family all together if we possibly can—that's one big one. And go visit kinfolks and they'd come to see us. And we always tried to have gifts, and we exchanged gifts back when Miss Taylor and my other children were little. We all gathered at my momma's and daddy's house, all the married children did. We put down pallets and the kids slept on them. Then the next morning, we would exchange gifts after Santa Clause came. It was traditional to have sweet potatoes of some kind and cornbread dressing to go with the turkey, or a fat hen, whichever you had, a turkey or a fat hen. And giblet gravy and hot biscuits and butter. And there was preserves, jellies, you know, and pickles that you had on the table. And for dessert, you had that ambrosia and pies. It might have been pumpkin pie or an apple pie or a mince pie, but a pie of some kind.

FF: Did you make any of your ornaments?

CE: Oh yes. We'd make those, as I said, those paper chains? You take paper and string popcorn and make cut outs. You know, you can fold paper and make pretty cutouts to go on trees.

*Icie Rickman*

FF: You want to go ahead and start off by anything you can remember about Christmas a long time ago when you were growing up and stuff? How was it different from today and all?

IR: I know one thing that was different, we had more big snows back then than we do now.

FF: Is there any one snow that comes to your mind, particularly?

IR: Right at Christmas time, we'd have big snows, but now we don't have snows.

FF: We sure haven't. Like decorating the tree or whatever, did y'all decorate a tree?

IR: We decorated with crepe paper and popcorn, that's all we had then.

FF: Well how'd you get the crepe paper? I mean, did you like fold it and stuff?

IR: We'd just get it and fold it into little strips, about four or five inches long, and just hang it up on your tree.

FF: And would you string popcorn and everything? Was it a big thing to get the tree? Would all the family go?

IR: Yeah, I mean all the family'd go, all the children, to get the tree.

FF: Did y'all have a real big tree?

IR: No, not too big. About like you do now.

FF: Yes ma'am. When did you all put up your tree?

IR: We put it up about two or three days before Christmas.

FF: And y'all celebrate on the 25th, don't you? They said there's somethin' about Old Christmas they've been talking about. They celebrated it from the 25th until January 6th.

IR: Oh we know, we wouldn't take our tree down until after New Year's.

FF: Did you ever know anybody that celebrated Christmas on January the 6th? On a good Christmas, like Christmas Day, I know now, kids they get so many toys and clothes and everything. On a good Christmas, what would y'all pretty much have as a present ever?

IR: Well, we didn't get too many toys, but we'd get candies and fruits and nuts and things like that. Like I said, Daddy made us that wagon.

FF: Was it like mainly one toy and the candy and stuff?

IR: Yeah.

FF: Did y'all have stockings and that too?

IR: Oh yeah, we'd have our stockings.

FF: Was that a pretty big treat?

IR: Yeah, that's a good treat. And another thing that daddy used to make us, those sleds. I know you know what a sled is.

FF: Do you remember any old Christmas songs that you still remember that y'all used to sing back then that you don't anymore?

IR: Yeah, we used to sing at school and I remember "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," and "Joy to the World." "Jingle Bells."