



L-R: The Nativity was always the most solemn part of every Christmas concert, and students dressed in bathrobes and towels magically became the Holy Family and all the attendants. Pictured here at the Greenfield School Christmas Concert of 1961 are Left to Right - Jim Dobson (standing); Back Row - Larry Horton, Margaret Findlay, Gary Burns, Marg Dobson, Donna Moorhead, Ann Burns; Front Row - Jean Webster, Liz Webster, Tom Moorhead, Kathy Horton; and Hidden on Left - Ruth Moorhead, Lorna Webster, Doris Findlay. Rehearsals were extremely important, and everyone took them seriously – even the classroom cat (photo from 1954, Pool’s Resort)

SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT at the School Christmas Concert

By Lorraine Payette



Donna (Moorhead) Dempsey today – member of the Lansdowne Association for Revitalization, director for the Lansdowne Agricultural Society, Welcome Wagon representative, and retired Ontario school teacher. And it all started with an education in a one-room school.

Christmas has always been a special time in school, and never more so than when everyone got their chance to be in the big Christmas Concert. Not only did this mean holidays were coming and visits from Santa, but you got a chance to wear costumes, learn lines and get up in front of all the Grown-Ups in Town to show off your acting skills.

“The music teacher and the classroom teacher planned the concert with plays,

songs and recitals,” said Donna (Moorhead) Dempsey of Lansdowne. “Everyone had a part, yes, even ‘the big boys.’”

There were no guaranteed parts in the school plays back then, no A-list kids getting the good stuff while everyone else took what they could get. You had to “try out” with rehearsals starting in early December. Most afternoons were spent practicing and getting ready, making sure everything was exactly right. Mary, the Angels, the Wise Men – everyone had to know their lines and what to do. Even the Sheep and Cows had to get it exactly right.

But hard work prevailed, and pretty soon everyone was ready for the big night.

“At noon hour, on the day of the concert, all of the students walked to the barn at the farm next door, to retrieve the big planks that were set up to form benches for the audience,” said Dempsey. “The classroom desks were rearranged to hold the planks and ‘the big boys’ tested them out to make sure that they were safe for folks to sit on. Bed sheets were strung on the wire to form stage curtains, and Christmas decorations were placed on the windows, walls and chalkboards. The Christmas tree was decorated and ready for Santa. Our lines were learned, songs practiced, and costumes were ready.”

When the big night finally came, families started the chores early so that everyone

could get to the school in plenty of time. Most of them were farmers, and all of the kids knew they had to get their work done before the magic could begin.

“Butterflies danced in our stomachs as we waited for our turn on the stage,” said Dempsey. “In case you forgot your lines, the teacher was right there to give you a cue, and no one was the wiser.”

Everyone in the community attended those school concerts – little brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents, all the neighbours came out for the show.

“There was laughter for the jokes, applause for a solo and silence for the Nativity Scene,” said Dempsey. “All was good. But just as the teacher was thanking everyone for coming out on such a cold night, jingling and stomping could be heard at the front door. Santa had arrived. Miraculously, he dipped into his bag, and there was a present and a huge sack of candy for every girl and boy at the concert.”

How did Santa know they would all be there at that exact time? Santa always knows, and is always there for the good children and adults who take the time to believe.

This Christmas, take a few minutes and trust in the magic of the season. Attend a school Christmas concert if you can. Take time to love your neighbours and your family, and give yourself the gifts of peace and joy. **LH**