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*We Remember
We Celebrate
We Believe*

As I Remember Christmas **In Couillardville**



Helen A. Jelinske
1910-2001

Born in the farm house on Meadow Brook Farm in 1910

Daughter of Desire J and Zora Couillard Laduron of Brookside

Granddaughter of Thomas Edwin and Mary Ann Matravers Couillard - the 1892 owners of Meadow Brook Farm aka the Couillard Farm

Wife of Ernest Janssen and mother of Dean, Gail and Leon

Note: "As I Remember Christmas" is a story taken from her book "Stories of Life's Winding Pathways" available on www.machineshedmemories.com

As the first snowflakes swirled across the frozen creek, the folks at our farm began to plan for the holidays. In the early 1900s at the Couillard farm, most of the preparation was done at home.

As I look back over three quarters of a century of holiday celebrations, some seem to stand out in a very special way.

I have tried to think of my first remembrance of a Christmas morning. At that time it was the custom for children to hang their stockings at the fireplace or behind the wood heater on Christmas eve. They hoped to find them filled with an orange, popcorn ball and candy when they woke up in the morning. I can remember the year that I excitedly emptied my stocking and was surprised to find a tiny box in the toe. It held a small gold ring with my birthstone. It had been purchased for me by my beloved Grandpa Couillard.

I will never forget the Christmas of the great flu epidemic of War I. For the first time we were separated from our family at the farm for the holidays. Even before Christmas that year, my friend was too ill to come to our school program. She died as a result of flu before the holiday. I too became ill and soon everyone in our house was very sick. It seemed that almost every household in Brookside had members with the dread disease and many were desperately ill. We didn't want the Couillard relatives to come inside our house because the flu was so contagious. They brought food and needed supplies and left them on the porch. Thankfully, none from that household caught the flu. Grandpa had made arrangements for a doctor from Oconto to visit us and to bring a nurse who would stay with us until we were well.

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Marian was a baby just learning to walk and neither of my parents were well enough to care for her or prepare the meals. It was a lonely Christmas for us. Aunt Nell came home from Milwaukee but all any of them could do was stand out in the yard and wave to us through the window.

I really did believe in Santa Claus that year because somehow, a Christmas tree and a box of toys and gifts were placed on our porch. I'm sure my grandfather made a deal with Santa to stop at our house. We finally all recovered, but this was by far the most threatening problem ever faced by our family. My father later told me that they didn't expect my mother to live through the night of Christmas eve.

Then I can vividly recall the year when I was about six years old. I received what I believe was the most beautiful doll of any in my life. My Aunt Nell was teaching in Milwaukee at the time and she sent me a beautiful China doll for Christmas. I had never seen one of those lovely German-made dolls with a white leather body and a china head. It had naturally curly hair and sleeping glass eyes. The doll wore a dark wool dress with velvet trim and real leather

shoes. When I saw that doll on Christmas morning, I couldn't believe it was mine. All day I held her in my arms, fearful that if I put her down, she would disappear.



After writing this story, Helen received this identical replacement for the Flora Dora doll of her childhood.

When I was a child, I, like most of my friends, wore high-buttoned shoes in winter. It was a time-consuming task to put them on or remove them. One Christmas eve I decided to bypass this problem of getting dressed in the morning by going to bed wearing all my clothing and those high shoes. I carefully drew my blanket up to my chin and hoped that mother wouldn't notice when she came to tell me good night. Apparently, some unfamiliar looking lumps under the covers caused her to throw back the

quilt and discover my plan. Needless to say, I had to get up and undress properly, so I never tried it again.

Holiday seasons passed with the years and we had wonderful celebrations. My memories seem to blend into a picture of happy times for our family. We always went to the Couillard farm or they came to our house for both Thanksgiving and Christmas. During my high school and college years, vacationing students enjoyed skating and sledding parties and dances at Brookside or the Abrams Opera House. There also would be school and church programs to attend with no end of feasting on homemade candies and cookies. It was very important to have a new Christmas dress to wear to the festivities.

Roads were sometimes snow-filled and much travel was done by horse or sleigh. We didn't object though, as riding along country roads on a starry winter evening was like living on a picture post card. It seemed that every day was a celebration as all the relatives visited each other during the holidays. Their arrival was announced by the merry jingle of the sleigh bells as they drove into the farmyard.

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In later years, I became an elementary teacher in the small rural schools in Oconto County. At that time the school Christmas program was the highlight of the winter season. We began preparation on the day after Thanksgiving and from then until Christmas we were unbelievably busy. The children studied their recitations, songs, and plays while the teachers, along with the mothers, made all the costumes. Sometimes we improvised and you might see a young wiseman wearing a wooly bathrobe of an older brother. There was a gift exchange among the students and such excitement prevailed that it was difficult to keep regular class routine.



Couillardville School Christmas

Then the Christmas vacation. What a glorious time to try out new skates or sleds on the hills or rivers nearby. Time never seems to pass slowly and finally the time came when Ernie and I had a home of our own and two little boys who dreamed of Christmas toys, as

we had many years before. There is something so special about being the parents of small children at Christmas. The lights of Christmas seem to reflect in their eyes as they sparkle in anticipation of that wonderful day. It's a magical time for children as they are taught about the birth of the Christ Child in Bethlehem.

Then there was our first Christmas in Green Bay after the great depression. Ernie had been called back to work and the two boys had started school. I had never lived in a city at Christmas time and I was fascinated by the colored lights and beautifully decorated store windows. We even had a small radio and for the first time I could hear the Christmas Carols played over and over. On Christmas eve the four of us walked to midnight mass at the Cathedral. It was a storybook evening with a light feathery snow falling softly and decorating the evergreens as we walked along. The next day we went, as usual, to spend the day at the Couillard farm where Grandma had the plum pudding, turkey and all of our traditional foods.

We had no way of knowing that day that in the next couple years some major

changes would take place in our small, closely knit family. In the autumn our dear Uncle Asa died at age 47. It was so very sad to see grandma's pain as she mourned her only son. He had been such an integral part of all the family celebrations. He was always such a joyous, generous person; it didn't seem the same without him. Then, by the following Christmas, Grandma had died and Grandpa was alone at the farm. We tried to go back there every weekend but it was a lonely time for him. He spent that Christmas at our house but in only a few months, he went to join Grandma. He had only one Christmas without her.



Thomas Edwin and Mary Ann Matravers Couillard and their children L to R; Asa, Nellie, Zora.

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It seems that God sometimes sends a special gift of love to people recovering from a loss. To our family that gift was a baby boy named Leon Paul. Such excitement and anticipation for a new baby after nearly ten years. There was such an overflowing of love from all of us as we looked forward to his first Christmas.

Then in 1942, we moved back to the Couillard farm as its owners. Finally the circle was complete as I returned to the house where I was born. It was war time again (World War II). At Christmas time that year we had installed electric lights at the farm and we had a lighted "V" for victory decoration on the front door.

The boys were attending the Couillardville School and took part in the Christmas program. Dean was in 8th grade and Gail in 6th. The years that followed in Couillardville were some of the happiest of my life. Those memories of holidays with family and friends are times I like to relive each year. There would be days of making cookies and candy from morning to night with my cousin, Pearl Glynn. The community hall was the scene

of programs and parties the whole month of December. Then by the time the two older boys had graduated from high school we were at war again in Korea. We were worried that our sons would have to go. The war caused a shortage of teachers and I was convinced to return to teaching. Victory School was not far from our farm so it was convenient for us. Again, I was back preparing the annual school Christmas programs. It was nice to see the proud parents as they watched their children portray the simple traditions of the season and sing the old familiar carols.

After our husband and father was no longer with us, the holidays lost much of their joy. The next year I returned to college. That year I came back for Christmas as a college student. My parents were a great help and friends and relatives visited us often and we attempted to adjust to this new phase of our lives.

After graduation, I became a social worker for children. There were happy times at Christmas when we could pass out gifts to the needy from generous people who offered to share. Most of those years were spent in Shawano where

Leo and I worked with social programs we both believed in.

Now I look over my shoulder to those Christmas' of the past. This is the time for me to reflect and remember—a time to tell my Christmas story to my grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

My Christmas wish at this holiday season of 1984 is that we will all move on to greater understanding, joy and fulfillment in our lives with grateful hearts for our blessings. May we never take God's gifts for granted and may the love that surrounds us today, someday be found in the hearts of all. Then we can truly say, ***"Peace on earth, good will to all mankind"***.



*Merry Christmas
and Happy New
Year 2026*