

Submitted to The Dunnville Chronicle
Via E-mail; December 1, 2003
For Publishing; December 10, 2003
By William A. Warnick
180 Rosslyn Ave. South
HAMILTON, ON L8M 3J5
Phone 905 549-6086 E-mail wwarnick@cogeco.ca
(Word count 971)

Dad's Adventures with his Christmas Trees!

Shortly after my parents married they took an apartment in Hamilton. I only vaguely remember it as we moved to Port Maitland when I was four years old. One memory I do retain from that apartment was burning my fingers on my right hand under a hot iron and having my fingers webbed together until I was about four or five years old when doctor Fred Rigg in Dunnville separated them. But that has nothing to do with Christmas.

Dad (Maurice) was one of those hard-nose, *you don't put up the Christmas tree until Christmas Eve people* and my mother (Irene) tired of that, the very first year of marriage. By year two or three, on Christmas Eve day, after pestering him to get the tree up she went shopping, her parting words being "*Get that tree up before I get home!*" The operative word being *up!* Dad, was not against having a drink or two. . . to celebrate the holidays! He had a brother Jim, who was of similar persuasion and Jim happened to be visiting at the time. Mom knew that once she put her foot down things would get done and left comfortable in the knowledge that when she returned the tree would be up.

As expected when she returned my engineer father, - engineer as in a professional engineer, a graduate of Queens University, and my uncle Jim, also an engineer, - engineer as in with the Canadian Pacific Railway, had the tree up and completely decorated. All the lights were on it. All the balls were beautifully placed on the branches. The tinsel was neatly hung as if placed there with tender loving care. There was only one problem! The tree was up! Up on the ceiling, hanging top to bottom, or bottom to top, however you consider it! Something tells me that the red that Dad and my uncle Jim saw that Christmas Eve had little to do with Santa and his nine reindeer! Yes, nine. Don't forget Rudolph!

We seldom saw the Christmas tree before rising on Christmas morning. I recall one Christmas Eve day going to town to find a tree. Usually Dad found one in the bush, but this must have been a lazy year. One fellow had trees for sale in the Grand Union Carroll's store parking lot, now Tim Horton's and M & M Meats. It was snowing, bitterly cold, and getting dark. I do not remember the price, likely a buck or two, but Dad felt the need to barter. After all, it being now nearly Christmas Eve and the tree man was going to be stuck with the trees anyway! After a few skirmishes the fellow said to Dad, "Oh, just take one!" And then a few other things which fortunately I could not hear. This was likely my first pre-Christmas morning tree.

Another year, my sister Lallee, came home from school and told Dad that a classmate, Orval Dickhout or Jim Sharpe (she cannot remember which one) told her about a tree at Bill Vanderkooi's - on Niece's Hill, now Pine Grove Park. Orval, and Jim practically lived at Vanderkooi's being buddies with Reinder (Squirrel) Vanderkooi.

A number of Bill's trees had been vandalized and if we wanted one, it was there for the taking. Off we went in Dad's little Vauxhall sedan to retrieve our free tree. Sure enough there along the side of the lane were a number of evergreens already cut and now covered in snow. After a long search, of maybe ten seconds, in darkness and with the help of a rapidly dying flashlight we had a tree loaded on the car roof and home we went. We lived in a large old home once used by John and Henrietta Siddall as a summer boarding house. The front door was a rather large one, such as you might find on a hotel. After some pulling, struggling and cutting, we finally got the tree into the living room. This was a very large room with a Quebec stove in the centre. The chimney pipes went up from the stove then along the underside of the ceiling to a pipe in the ceiling near the outer wall. The tree was placed in the corner of the room safely away from the stove. Soon the snow began to melt and the branches began to settle. Dad realized he would have to do something with the stove as

the tree was growing ever closer to it. Out to the shed for a length of stovepipe. It was winter, and the stove was being used to heat the house. The hot stove pipes were removed, the stove moved the appropriate distance, while still ablaze and the new piece of pipe was added. Wait a minute, in the time it took to do this the tree had fanned out even more! Time for another piece of pipe and the big move was on again! That tree was not vandalized, it was put out of its misery! By the time the tree had finally settled, it took up more than half the room. It was finally time to watch Lawrence Welk, and to begin decorating. Fortunately, we had plenty of decorations, as Dad always picked large trees.

Getting the tree into the house and decorating it was one only half of the story. As I recall, when it came time to remove it after January 6th, Dad pulled, my sisters pushed, but it would not pass through that big door! It had spread its bows too far! It also would not be pulled back into the house. There in the hallway, jammed between the doors Dad pruned one branch, then another until he had removed enough of them to pull the tree through. Thus, ended for yet another year Dad's adventures with his Christmas trees!

If you have items, you wish to have written about or pictures you would be willing to lend me, please drop me a note. Let me know how you feel about these articles. William (Bill) Arthur Warnick 180 Rosslyn Ave. South HAMILTON, ON L8M 3J5 e-mail wwarnick@cogeco.ca Phone 905 549-6086.

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