

As Christmas draws near, I always grow nostalgic. The sights, the sounds and the smells of the season conjure powerful reflections of days gone by. Through a combination of memories and a little make-believe, I can easily evoke powerful images of Christmas's past when life seemed, perhaps, less complicated. Conceivably these reflections might relate closer to imagination than reality, since I can easily edit out unpleasant memories. Living in a community for the past forty-six years that lays claim to the title of Nebraska's Christmas City certainly intensifies my memories and my emotions.

During the Christmas season when I was a child growing up in Sutton, Nebraska, I vividly recall riding with my parents to Kearney to be with our relatives. In the evening, on our return trip to Sutton, my parents would always drive through Minden, so our family could observe the beautiful Christmas lights that adorned the Kearney County Courthouse and Minden's downtown square. Later in life, when I was a student attending Kearney State Teachers College, on my journeys from Sutton to Kearney and back, I always stopped in Minden during the Christmas season to once again catch a view of the magnificent lighting. Little did I realize that I would be spending my adult life living in that very community.

As it turned out, in the spring of 1966, I accepted a teaching position with Minden Public Schools, and that summer I moved to Minden. It wasn't until a few months later, I realized I was now a part of Minden's Christmas tradition. I accepted the position as assistant pageant director of Minden's famed *Light of the World Christmas Pageant*, and a few years later I became the director for the next thirteen years. Over those years, each of my four children participated as cast members in the pageant, and together we created our own family Christmas tradition. Although our children are now grown and no longer live in Minden, I remain actively involved as a cast member in the pageant.

This past November, I was thrilled when our children and all seven grandchildren returned to Minden to celebrate Thanksgiving. I was ecstatic when they chose to remain in town long enough to attend the first pageant of the season. On that balmy, starlit evening, when I took my place on stage, I distinctly recall staring into the darkness at the shadowy silhouettes of people in attendance. Immediately I became emotional just knowing that out there in the shadows were my children and grandchildren staring back at me. Such emotions evoked feelings I know will surely become a part of my Christmas nostalgia for years to come.

Since that special night, Rita and I have completed decorating our home inside and out for Christmas. The wreaths are hung, the tree is up, the lights are aglow and the gifts are wrapped. We excitedly anticipate the arrival of Christmas.



Nearly every evening I find myself gazing out our living room window. There, only two blocks away, I readily see the thousands of beautiful shimmering Christmas lights that adorn the courthouse dome. With each sighting, my wistfulness returns.

Perhaps you, too, might get caught up in nostalgia during the Christmas season. I'm convinced there is nothing wrong with nostalgia; however, before you or I become too absorbed in it, let's not forget the true reason of the season — the birth of Jesus Christ. Here's wishing you and yours a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.