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**“Christmas in Brighton — My Version of “It’s A Wonderful Life”**  
By Kathy Lueker Pearson

Brighton in the 1950s was an iconic Midwestern town: small enough that most everyone knew each other, large enough that it provided everything needed to sustain a household.

Michigan’s winter climate laid the groundwork for the Christmas season; a snowy landscape was highly anticipated and cheered when it finally arrived. The Mill Pond was a favorite venue for ice skating; some even remember motorcycles racing on the ice! Any snowy slope beckoned sledding or a thrilling toboggan ride. Sometimes the hill down Main Street heading west past the old high school served as a sledding run.

As Christmas approached the family would pile into the car and drive out to one of the local family-owned Christmas tree farms to saw down that year’s tree, tie it to the roof of the car, then perfectly place it in the living room. Dad was in charge of stringing the lights, Mom hung her precious ornaments, then my brother and I would be tasked with hanging the heavy, leaded icicles, carefully placing them strand-by-strand. When the tree was taken down, the icicles were removed, one-by-one, boxed and preserved for the next year. Christmas cards were purchased and sent.

Gift shopping was easily accomplished by visiting the local merchants: toys from Ubers Drug Store or the Dime Store, winter sports equipment from Rolison’s Hardware or Western Auto, jew-



elry from Coopers. The makings for the Christmas feast from any of the handful of local grocery stores and bakeries. This was also a good time to gather up all those carefully hoarded S&H Green or Gold Bell gift stamps given at the grocery stores, and redeem them for merchandise. Stores were closed on Sundays, so shopping had to be carefully planned.

The Christmas spirit was reinforced with evening drives around town, marveling at the colorful lighted homes. Christmas Eve was celebrated at the candlelight service at church, singing traditional carols and listening to the pastor tell the Christmas Story.

Before bed, my brother and I hung our Christmas stockings. We chose the biggest ones we could find: my Dad’s hunting socks! Since we had no fireplace, the socks were pinned to the back of an upholstered chair. Christmas morning was the typical scene of gifts under the tree. Breakfast was sparse because the main meal was across town at Grandma and Grandpa’s.

Small town family time. Christmas in the 1950s. It was indeed a wonderful life!

*(The Society would like to thank Kathy for sharing these wonderful Christmas memories.)*