



Christmas Past Through The Eyes Of A Child

By: Rodney Sumler

Seeing the gleam in the eyes of children as they await Christmas, it seems like yesterday that we were youngsters.

Just as the children of today get excited about Christmas, so were we. The whole world seems to be filled with enthusiasm as the calendar moves forward to that very special time of year.

But my, how the times have changed. Perhaps as children we were too caught up in the season to understand what was going on elsewhere. In the neighborhoods I remember, there was more unity among black people.

Christmas was a time for giving. Not of gifts, but of giving ourselves. Maybe our economic condition forced us to be that way. There were no elaborate gifts to parents, siblings and friends. But what was given, was given with love.

The tradition that first comes to mind, in thinking back, is roller skating. Every black child in Winston-Salem, it seems, looked forward to opening a box of Union's, Kingston's, Fly-Away's or some of the other popular brands of skates.

Skating then, was never an individual activity. It was almost always done with a group. From the time a five or six year-old learned to skate, there was always the thought of becoming proficient enough to join the "older" kids. Their conquests included barrelling down some of the more notable "skate freeways" in Winston-Salem.

Among the most notable places to strut your stuff was Foster Street in Happy Hill Gardens. Another was Derry Street and Glenn Avenue in

Kimberly Park Project. Those with loftier goals set their sight on "The Lawn," which was in front of the old Union Train Station.

There probably will never be another place like "The Lawn." Teenage blacks were forced to congregate there for a number of socio-economic factors. First of all, blacks weren't allowed to go to the city's indoor skating rinks. Secondly, skating on the lawn was free. The only thing needed was a pair of skates and the courage to speed down the steep incline.

From sunup to sundown, blacks would challenge the hill. A wide assortment of different styles would be seen. From the eagle-spread to skating backwards and everything in between.

Skating, however, wasn't all that happened on "The Lawn." From Christmas day until after New Year's, black kids gathered to meet friends, old and new. In between skating sessions was time to grab something to eat. There were several black-owned spots to check out, depending on your taste. There was Pronto Grill, Mom and Pop Cason's Cafe and - for the more daring or more mature - College Grill, which was across the street from Winston-Salem Teachers College, or T.C. as it was called.

When you think about it, the naivete of our youth probably has very little to do with how pleasant it seemed at Christmas forty four years ago. There could be some lessons that can be learned. It has often been said that you have to know where you came from to know where you're going.

Forty four years ago, there was a central place where hundreds of kids gathered at Christmas for wholesome, clean fun. Today, is there a similar place? Forty four years ago, there were viable, thriving black business districts throughout the city. How many can you think of today? Forty four years ago, black parents didn't worry about buying their kids the hundreds of toys that are pushed at them today and then have to wonder whether their kids would be playing with it a week or a month after Christmas.

My, how times have changed!

Mount Zion Baptist Church
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Dr. Serenus T. Churn, Sr., Pastor

Youth Ensemble's 19th Anniversary
Morning Worship @ 11:00 a.m.
Anniversary Homecoming Gala @ 4:00 p.m.

"O Come, let us sing a new song unto the Lord. . ."

Photo: R. Bailey