

Hanalei Christmas

Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

After night decorations, festively adorned
Under the canopy of simple stars
We rode our merry surf boards away
Into the sunlight of another day.
The promises of old have been kept
I'm compelled to look anew.
Today is Christmas in Hanalei Bay
This new day is bathed by brightest sun
Blown fresh by sky blue trade winds
The sea sings and thumps the shore
Welsh voices echo in my head
The bitter scent of fresh brewing coffee
Jumped me out of my bed
And the last dreams of childhood

Then we gathered round the bangled tree
Not a Norfolk pine, but an evergreen grew
The past not new.
Nostalgia flooded my memories, where
Shadows running fell upon snow white cold
Those were the days when my parents
Had not yet grown old.

The preparations for that Holy Day
Were slower and longer then.
Rations were frugally saved,
Redeemed for sugar and real butter to make
Christmas cookies and baked cakes.

After the War years my mother
Worked at charities and the library
I remember a lot of time spent
At St Luke's Episcopal church
Singing Onward Christian Soldiers
Advent was a slow march then
Up to the great day of the Birth

But not before my grandma's own
Birthday celebration on Christmas Eve
Mom prepared her Mom her favorite ham
Spiked with spicy black cloves
For our double days of feasting.
My Grandpa Davis, a mechanical engineer,

Always came to help put up the Christmas Tree
In the corner of our living room
It was properly and rigidly held upright
By sturdy wires attached to hooks
Secured into the tree's trunk
And fastened to the walls by eyehooks.
The stately tree withstood the roughhousing
Of brother Rees and me and never was in danger
Of falling and causing the dreaded "electric fire."

He was an orderly man
And built our home improvements and repairs
With his own hands
He helped me build school projects
Plaster of Paris models
He also showed me many letters and souvenirs
Of family history he kept
In neatly labeled packets
Which he later passed on to our Mom
Who kept them in the attic.
Family members referred to them
Retelling family stories
Especially at Christmas time.

Our grandpa sat in for our Dad
For all Christmas preparations
Dad was almost never around before Christmas Day
He was somewhere scheming and dreaming
Of new Golf Course projects
Dad's Dad had immigrated from Wigan and Wales
They set sail in early spring of 1912
From Liverpool to Boston,
Their timing was good
World War I would soon fall upon Europe.

Grandfather Rees Jones and Grandmother Jane
Arrived early from East Rochester N.Y.
Grandfather smoked often, sitting in the old
White leather chair in the sun room,
Where he had been banned by the women.
He was a small wiry Welsh carpenter
With a quickness when he wasn't dozing.
Just before every Christmas
Mom would go visit
Many friends and neighbors,
Old school teachers were not forgotten

Then suddenly she packed up we boys
For a thrilling Christmas treat
Down to the Lackawanna train station
For a short trip to Hoboken
And a ferry boat crossing
To New York City, all alight, all alive.

We visited Grandma Ione Davis
Now old, lame and lean with time.
She didn't complain, but counted the cost
Of her "upkeep on the downgrade."
She often quoted Horace Greely:
"Go West, young man," eventually I did.

She lived with Aunt Alma, who had never married
Once again we viewed the grand portrait
Of a young Alma as a ballerina and Rockette
Before tuberculosis ended her dance career.
Aunt Alma took us all to where she worked
High up at 30 Rockefeller Plaza
Which overlooked the tallest Christmas Tree
I'd ever seen, all lighted up
It towered over a little square skating rink
In the middle of beautiful skyscrapers
Years later I returned to skate there
And met a Christmas date on the ice.

But back then it was off to F.A.O. Schwartz
To window shop, to openly wish for toys
Longingly laid out for all we boys
When Christmas day finally arrived
But some miracle just the right toy
Would magically lie under our tree
Oh, what joy!

There was a long Christmas dinner
Our mother and others prepared
And no business talk was allowed
By our father who was strangely quiet
And seemed a bit sad,
His big Welsh eyes were off on distant visions.

He was fascinated by gadgets
One Christmas he gave Mom and Minox camera,
Used by spies in World War II,

Which was small and long as an index finger,
She was unimpressed, in truth it was a present
For himself.
But ice-cream and homemade butterscotch sauce
Was what we boys waited for
It was the sweet signal of release
When finally we were "excused"
We raced away to play with our Lionel Train set
And other joy filled toys
While aunts and an uncle and grandparents
And even dad laughed, aloud at stories
Of their Christmas's past
Before we were even born.

A smoking candle, a turnip, a turkey, cranberries,
A cookie, all Christmas scents and tastes
Take me back into that long ago place
When I was "young and easy" and fat with time
My Pilgrim, my Mayflower forebearers'
Would not approve of the Welsh emotions
These simple treats awaken
The pure ecstasy when we snowballed
And sported to the hilt
While our Shetland Sheep dog Liannely
Barked incessantly to herd us up.

These phantoms of my dreams
Are all gone now.
I have grieved each loss one by one
Often silently in the English way
But if at Christmas I hear a Welsh boy's choir
I'm filled with sobs

I am again an acolyte
Of the altar candles
Of the midnight
Mass Of the longest night
Montclair was always and remains
The vessel of my childhood
My forever memories of home
Of school, of church, of community.

Oh now, now new joy
All the Christmases from then until now
At Woodside, Atlanta, Fort Lauderdale and Naples
From Garden State to Garden Isle

Are melded into one long journey to now

Our beautiful Claiborne has brought us all home:

Our handsome son Trent,
His intelligent lovely wife Cindy
And her Mom Sandy and Nana Nancy
Our talented artist daughter Tali
And her new Hanalei husband Simon
And friends with Aloha in their hearts,
All are here.

They have come for our grand Christmas feast
With offerings of fragrant flowered leis,
Home cooked delicacies, songs and hula
And always laughter everywhere

Most of all our home this year
Is filled with Grace

She is all alive
She is the eternal child
In us and of us

We watch, enjoy, protect and love
Little Grace
She is our Christmas
We are home in Hanalei

God has blessed us
God bless you too
Joy to the world
A child is born
Love to all

Mele Kalikimaka!

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