

The Chicago Mystery

September 23, 2018

Mom's family were all originally in Chicago. She was born in Cook County in 1925. There are many photographs and stories of the family there. Unfortunately most have been lost with time and the passing of the witnesses to them. However, even though I was born here in Los Angeles in 1944, I have some distinct memories of Chicago and living there for a short time. This is my "Chicago Mystery".

My earliest memory was of a stairway and me standing at the top of it. It was early morning I think. There was a strong golden light flooding the stairwell, probably from the amber glass windows that were common in the buildings back then. I remember falling down those stairs and landing in a baby carriage parked at the bottom. I shared this with Mom and she said it really happened but offered no other details.

There are other memories of snowball fights on the front porch, early morning in bed with mom and dad and that baby (Theresa) . I remember sitting in the kitchen with Grandpa Hilgart watching him eat his soup, while he ladled heaping spoonfuls of horseradish into it to spice it up. There were the Christmases with the family, St. Nicholas and of course Krampus,

But the most mysterious are the memories of school, a winter classroom and cloakroom, putting on snow gear, the smell of wet corduroy and bananas. Being jumped by older boys on my way home from school. Almost sounds like a scene from "Christmas Story", but I had these memories long before it was ever scripted.

So the mystery is when was I in Chicago. Working backwards from a my first day of school in California, at St. Emydius in Lynwood that would have been September 1950. I was six years old then. Dad was discharged in 1946 from the Navy and we were living with Grandma and Grandpa Blackburn in Huntington Park. Terry was born in 1947. So sometime in 1948-49 we returned to Chicago for a short time.

I have one other memory of a train ride, probably to Chicago, and walking between the cars as we passed through the Rockies. There was a stack of snow on the door sill and Dad let me touch it, my first experience with snow. I figure we were on our way to Chicago then and I would have been 4 or 5 years old.

Oh how I wished I had asked more questions of Mom and Dad about this trip. But I will take these few precious glimpses of the past.

What is your earliest memories?