

Christmastime at School – Guyana, 1940's



I have sweet memories of Christmastime in the forties when I attended my village school. That was at Rosignol, in Guyana, formerly known as British Guiana, then the only British Colony in South America.

The Christmas spirit takes over everyone, everywhere, weeks before the great day. Grownups talked about what they would do for Christmas, what they would buy, the cakes they would bake, what picture the cinema would show, the picnic group coming from Georgetown. At school, events lined up to happen at Christmastime included: washing up day, sale of work, carol singing, and Speech Night.

Washing up day was play day for me. What is it to do with Christmas? Simple, everything must be clean, spic and span for Christmas; that includes the school desks and benches. The bigger pupils and teachers took all out into the school yard for a good scrubbing. For us children, with buckets full of water, soap and scrubbing brushes, it was sheer freedom, to play, run around, shout and scream with abandon.

Sale of work was held at the dance hall opposite. Our work for sale, included greens and vegetables from the school garden, small note books and greetings cards from our bookbinding class. These were displayed for our parents to view and buy. Bora, a favourite of the garden was always in short supply. The reason, part of the fun being in the school garden was eating raw the bora just ready to pick.

What I learnt from school gardening I still do today, only I should do more of it. It is so rewarding. What I learnt from bookbinding, also, I still do today. When I make a small booklet, I would bind the

spine using thread through three holes and a knot on the inside. I have bound larger books too, made up of several small booklets, binding the spine together with thread and gluing muslin to cover it all.

Carols lift the heart. We sang carols heartily every day, in addition to morning and evening prayers. A group of us went after school for rehearsal at the headmaster's house. We volunteered for carol singing early Christmas morning from house to house. I was also in a group learning to sing spirituals. We listened to a record of Paul Robeson's singing, the first time I heard of him. I dearly loved *Swing Low, I got a Robe, Nobody knows the trouble I've seen*. It is divine singing which touches the soul.

Christmas play, at Speech Night was a story about Christmas day in a snowbound town in England. I acted the part of a messenger. Dressed in a winter coat (my dad's jacket) and a scarf, I wrote a letter with a quill pen, and gave a 'jack in the box' to someone. I knew nothing about jack in the box, but I made something for the play, a small wooden box, with a bedspring inside and on top of it I wrapped some rags to look like a jack. Jack was pushed down into the box. When the lid opened jack sprang out.

Christmas is celebrated almost everywhere in the world. It is a time which brings out the best in people, how we greet one another, being friendly, cheerful, kind and warm hearted. It is a very nice feeling to see so much goodness all around, to see that people care, that we look out for one another.

Christmastime is the Lord's blessing on us all, a time of peace, love, goodwill, harmony and good cheer, most importantly one of hope for a better world. And I am thankful that there are lots of people whose life and deeds show us the way to that better world.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year. With best wishes and kind regards from Vidur and family.

Vidur Dindayal
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Vidur Dindayal was born in Guyana and currently resides in the UK. He published **Guyanese Achievers USA & Canada: A Celebration**, a collaboration between *Vidur Dindayal* and the Guyanese diaspora. *Guyanese Achievers, USA and Canada* celebrates the academics, actors, doctors, educators, entrepreneurs, and others who, by demonstrating inventiveness and persistence, have been recognized as exemplars of Guyanese achievement in North America.

