

TRUMPET MAN

Marjory D. Lyons

Mr. Davis pulled the rope, ringing the brass bell in the belfry of our white-shingled school building, and we knew recess was over. All twenty-three of us children burst into the little vestibule, and started hanging up our winter coats on the hooks. Mr. Davis, holding the heavy door open against the December wind, signaled Georgie Cherub and Peter Plate, who were pushing and wrestling each other, to move over to one side of the vestibule.

“Come in, children. First and second graders line up for your drink first.” Our teacher stood by the big tin basin and, using a metal dipper, ladled out a paper cup of water for each of us

“If anyone has to go to the privy, run along out back now,” he added, “boys’ privy on the right and girls’ on the left.” His tie flew in the wind flapping against his white shirt. His buckteeth stuck out as he talked and I thought the gold on his teeth sparkled like the seven dwarfs playing in the diamond mine.

The potbelly stove smoldered as I inched closer, placed my mittens on the wood floor under it, and pulled off my golashes. In my seat at the end of the row, I took out my green and black arithmetic book and went up to Mr. Davis at his heavy wooden desk.

“Mr. Davis, will you check my addition?”

“Margie, your answer is correct, ninety. But you must put the numbers directly under each other.” He smiled at me, and turned to the blackboard behind him and wrote:

50

+40

“See, the five-naught goes here and the four-naught right under it.” He gave me a piece of chalk. “You can write the answer on the board.”

Then Mr. Davis said, “Children, finish your spelling words. ‘Twill soon be time to rehearse our Christmas program.” The children whispered and giggled, settling in their seats in the six rows of desks, one for each grade.

“Take out your song sheets.” I lifted up the desktop and took out the paper with lines on it. Mr. Davis had written the notes on the top lines, the treble clef, and the words in the space at the bottom.

“First we’ll sing, ‘Oh, Come All Ye Faithful’ all together.”

Next our teacher did what we all waited for: he picked up his shining trumpet from the chalk rail behind his desk. We children gasped in anticipation. We loved to hear the sounds of the trumpet! We were thrilled when he’d play “Oh, Say Can You See” and we’d all stand erect and proud.

“Please stand.”

We stood up stretching tall, straight as could be. He put the trumpet to his lips and blared out the melody of the first line. “Ready? Now.”

“Oh, come, all ye faith-full, joy-full and try-um-funt,” we all sang.

“Who would like to sing? Margie, would you?” Mr. Davis knew that I loved to sing and act. I’d told him about the plays I acted out in the summertime, up in the crotch of an oak tree, while my parents and aunties and cousins watched from the ground below.

“Oh, come let us a door hee-um, Lo-o-ord of all.” My last tones perfectly matched the sweet tones of the trumpet. Then other children sang, Jane Davis, my sister Toby, and Freddy Bartow. I knew Chickie Paradis wouldn’t be asked because he

couldn't hit the right notes. He would pull the curtain for the Christmas skit along with Georgie Cherub. The big boys ran a clothesline across the back of the room, and we all moved chairs to face the stage.

“Now we'll rehearse the skit. Do you all have your parts memorized?”

I took my seat in the rocking chair on the cleared space.

“Do you have your shawl and eyeglasses?” Mr. Davis asked.

I nodded, yes.

“We'll start where Mrs. Claus is helping Santa pack his sleigh.”

I made my voice sound creaky. “He-eere's a ni-iice dolly for Patty. Her leeeetter asked for one with yelllllow braids like hers,” I said, putting the doll into Santa's burlap bag.

Santa climbed into the sleigh, made of four desks pushed together, and rang the sleigh bells. The boys at the back carried in the painting of the dark blue sky with Santa's tiny sleigh in the air. I waved ‘Goodbye’ and we all began to recite, “'Twas the night before Christmas, ...”

Mr. Davis coached us through that Christmas show and taught us on through the first of June. During that year, I learned to sing new songs, to add and subtract using zeros, and, especially important, I learned how to perform, in a real play-- before parents gathered at the back of the room for the Christmas program and the Spring program, too.

Later in June, my mother told me, “Mr. Davis is going to be married.” I loved imagining him dressed up in his black suit and tie with a bride on his arm. When Mother added, “They will be moving to the South Shore near Jones Beach, where Mr. Davis will teach,” I was sorry that he would not be my teacher.

Then in September, something happened that made me cry. My father read from the Long Island paper: *Due to the ravages that hit Fire Island in the Hurricane of September 23, 1938, two former residents of our village, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Davis, were lost. Police said that as Mr. Davis went out of his house to get the car and flee from the storm, a great tidal wave twenty feet high, roared in from the Atlantic Ocean, swept over him and his wife and carried them out to sea.*

All of us children cried, even the big boys, remembering our teacher, Mr. Davis, and how we loved him, and, especially, singing to the sound of that golden trumpet.

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Note: This is a true story to the best of my recollection. As requested by Jane Davis Carter, member of the Board of Directors, I sent a copy of *Trumpet Man* to the Miller Place Academy Library to be kept in the archives, along with other reminiscences of the few children who attended the little one-room school in the 1930's. Three generations of my family went to school there: my grandmother, Maude Hopkins Tooker; my mother, Marcelle Hopkins Lyons, and I, from September 1937 to December 1938.

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