 Arbuckle Stories

of Belle Vue Farm

Chapter 14

Christmas is a special time for all. And everyone has a special place, time or memory of Christmas. My special memory of Christmas was having Christmas Eve dinner at Belle Vue Farm. My granddad Alex was always the life of the evening and my grandmother Carrie always out did herself with her delicious Christmas dinner. It was usually too cold to ride my horse, but my brother Davis and I always looked forward being with our cousins, Johnson, Jane and Alex Lewis on this special and holy night.

Below is a fictional story of what it was like spending Christmas Eve at Belle Vue.

Then you can check out the Video “The Christmas Sleigh,”that shows pictures that relate to this story. I dedicate this story to the Arbuckle and Cary Johnson Lewis family.

The Christmas Eve Sleigh 

By Jim Arbuckle

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*The mail had just arrived and Alex Arbuckle hated to journey back out in the cold December air. Although he told people he could not work as he once did, one could never tell as the 76 year old man walked briskly to the barn in the snow. With Christmas only a few days away, Carrie was busy planning and preparing for the annual family Christmas Eve celebration.*

*While most of the family opened their presents on Christmas morning, the family at Belle Vue opened their presents on Christmas Eve after the large family dinner. And all the family looked forward to the annual Christmas Eve dinner and then watching Alex, Carrie and Lockhart open their presents on the night that Santa loaded his sleigh.*

*It was well after dark when Alex and Lockhart finished the milking and feeding. As Lockhart was separating the milk and cream in the old separator porch, Alex was warming his cold and stiff fingers by the kitchen stove.*

*“Oh Alex!” Carrie said coming in from the dining room. “I need to talk to you.”*

*“Well talk to me quick!” Alex laughed tossing his wet gloves on the floor”*

*“Both Virginia and Louise called.” Carrie said.*

*“Why, are they looking for Santa Claus?” Alex laughed licking the icing off a spoon. “What did they want?”*

*“The children want to come down in the morning of Christmas Eve,” Carrie said. “Jane will be helping me and Jimmy will be helping you and Lockhart. But Virginia says that both Johnson and little Alex want to come early in the morning and Louise says Davis does too. They all want to spend all day, and then go home after the Christmas Eve dinner.”*

*“Well, what are you asking me for?” Alex laughed. “What do you want me to do, dress up as Santa Claus?”*

*“Oh Alex!” Carrie frowned. “I think it would be nice to have all the grandchildren here for the entire day.”*

*“Well, then we’ll have some grandkids!” Alex laughed. “Let me know what time we are going to eat dinner.”*

*The snow and wind blew all night, and when morning arrived, it was no warmer. Lockhart had built big fires in the stoves in the fireplaces. Alex’s big bedroom stove in front of the Burgess carved mantel kept he and Carrie warm all night. But morning meant several hours of feeding. Both Alex and Lockhart were wearing double layered clothing as the tractor and wagon loaded with hay left the barn and to the fields to feed the livestock.*

*Virginia arrived shortly before 8 a.m. with her children. Jane came in to greet her grandmother. Both boys, Johnson and little Alex were laughing and glad to be at grandmother’s house. They were also glad to hear that Davis would be over soon, then said good-bye and waved to their mother when she left.*

*Alex was glad to see his three grandchildren when he came in a few minutes to get warm. But his stay was short as he had to help Lockhart look for a missing cow. The certain cow was missing in the sugar hollow and Lockhart feared she may be stuck in the high drifts along the slopes.*

*Louise arrived shortly afterwards with Davis and Jimmy.*

*Alex was tired and cold when he came in an hour later, so he sent Jimmy out to help Lockhart. After Alex rested and got warm, he went back to the barn and then carried some fire wood to the kitchen.*

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*Around 10 a.m., Jane helped her grandmother bake as the Christmas Eve dinner grew closer. Lockhart came in to get warm for a minute, then back outside. Johnson and Davis went out to build a snowman.*

*“Come here, little Alex!” Alex said to his grandson who came in the kitchen. “Would you like to help me cut one of the little pine trees next to the road for a Christmas tree?”*

*“Yes!” Little Alex said smiling at his grandfather.*

*“Alright,” Alex laughed. “You go and get your coat and I’ll go and get an ax, and we’ll put it in the dining room behind my chair. Now go on and get your coat.”*

*No sooner had grandfather and grandson left than Johnson and Davis burst through the kitchen door covered with snow. “My goodness!” Carrie laughed. “You boys look like snow birds.”*

*“I’d like one of those cookies, Nana!” Davis said as he popped an oat meal cookie in his mouth.*

*“Johnson!” Jane said frowning at her brother. “Don’t take so many cookies. You all stop eating them! Nanny and I have made them for tonight.”*

*“What do you two boys want for Christmas?” Carrie asked as Jane hid the cookie tray.*

*“I don’t know!” Johnson said as he ate his cookies.*

*“I guess just whatever Santa Claus brings me!” Davis said with a laugh.*

*“Davis still believes in Santa Claus!” Johnson laughed.*

*“Sure I do!” Davis said. “There are reindeer and a sleigh, so there must be a Santa Claus.”*

*Alex and little Alex came in the door a few minutes later dragging a small pine tree and snow all the way to the dining room. Lockhart later came in and placed the little tree up on the big bureau behind the dining room table. Carrie came in and asked Jane to help her look for the lights and decorations.*

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*After lunch, all the grandchildren went outside to work on the snow man. Later on they followed Jimmy to the barn. “Look!” Jane said pointing up in the hay mal.*

*“What?” Jimmy said looking at her. “Are you pointing to those old gates up there?”*

*“No!” Jane said. “That sleigh! That old sleigh back beside the hay.”*

*“Yeah, the old sleigh!” Jimmy said as he jumped on the inside gate and stepped up in the mal.*

*“How old is it? “Davis said as he helped Jane up in the mal.*

*“I don’t know.” Jimmy said. “But I know that it is old.”*

*“Is it Dat’s old sleigh?” little Alex asked as he pulled himself up in the loft.*

*“I think it is older than Dat,” Jimmy said. “It was probably his dads.”*

*“It’s got wood runners instead of steel,” Johnson said. “I bet it is really old.”*

*“Let’s go back to the house and find out!” Davis said. It’s getting colder!”*

*Carrie laughed as her five grandchildren came in the kitchen door laughing and stomping their feet. “Did you all get your snowman built?” Carrie said as she asked Jane to open the oven door.*

*“No, we’ve been up at the barn,” Davis said. “We climbed up to look at the old sleigh.”*

*“Oh, you mean the old wooden horse drawn sleigh?” Carrie said with a laugh.*

*“Yeah Nanny!” little Alex said. “How old is it?”*

*“Oh I really don’t know, little Alex,” Carrie laughed.*

*“I bet it was Dat’s fathers sleigh,” Johnson said.*

*“No, I think it is older than that,” Carrie replied.*

*“Why don’t we just ask Dat?” Davis said. “He’ll know!”*

*“You children come and get warm by the stove!” Carrie said. “Jane, we still have more to do before tonight.”*

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*The December 24th afternoon showed a cold 30 degrees. With the cold wind blowing, the wind chill was colder as Alex and Lockhart were still feeding. The cow that was missing, Lockhart had found on horseback. Alex put several old ewe sheep in Emily’s barn then finally took the mail in to his sister. After visiting with both his sister Emily and Mary Lynn, Alex warmed both his hands and gloves before later venturing out in the freezing winter air.*

*Alex was cold and tired when he came in the house. Lockhart continued to work as it was beginning to snow again. “Where are the kids?” Alex said as he tossed his gloves on the stove.*

*“Oh they are in the dining room, decorating the tree,” Carrie said. “Alex, they saw the old sleigh up in the barn and want to ask you about it.”*

*“Is that what they want for Christmas?” Alex laughed as he sat down on a kitchen chair.*

*“No!” Carrie replied. “They are interested about how old it is, and I told them they should ask you.”*

*“Hi Dat!” little Alex said as he ran into the kitchen. “Did Nanny tell you we saw the old sleigh?”*

*“Yeah!” Alex laughed as his grandson sat on his knee. “I hear that you want that old sleigh for Christmas.”*

*“Alex!” Carrie said walking over to the table. “Why don’t you go in the dining room and tell the grandchildren about the sleigh?”*

*“What’s going on in here?” Alex said as he walked in the dinning room.*

*“Hi Dat!” Davis said as Jane was handing Christmas balls up to Davis and Johnson.*

*“What do you all think you’re doing?” Alex laughed. “You all still decorating that tree?”*

*“Dat, can you tell us something about the old sleigh? Jimmy said as Alex sat down in his chair.*

*“Look!” Jane said as Johnson plugged in the tree lights. “Dat, look at the tree!”*

*“Oh boy!” Alex said as he turned around and saw the beautiful decorated tree. “You all sure have a lot of balls and icicles hanging on that tree. You all come over and sit by me and I’ll tell you all what I know about the old sleigh.”*

*“Nanny says it is really old!” Johnson said as all gathered around their grandfather.*

*“Well it’s a good deal older than I am,” Alex said with a laugh. It is a one horse sleigh, but we sometimes pulled it with a team. I’m not exactly sure of the age of the old sleigh and it was my grandfather’s sleigh. A fellow named Colonel Ford once told me it was of the early 1800’s and could have been made in the late 1700’s, but more than likely the 1800’s. The sleigh belonged to my grandfather, Alexander Welch Arbuckle and passed down to me by my father. The wooden runners are the big reason Ford thinks it is early 1800’s. He said most sleighs in the later 1800 have had steel runners. The square headed nails in the sleigh are another reason it was built in the early 1800’s.”*

*“Where did your grandfather get the sleigh?” Davis asked.*

*“My grandfather is your great, great grandfather,” Alex laughed rubbing Davis on the head. “Davis, you’ve asked a sixty four dollar question. We never knew if it was bought or homemade, but Ford believes it was not homemade. I’d take a guess and say it was purchased in a feed or hardware store in Lewisburg.”*

*“Did you put the steel under the wooden runners to make it slide better?” Johnson asked.*

*“No!” Alex laughed. “That was made with the sleigh. And if you all noticed, the bottom left wooden runner has been repaired from a break, but I don’t remember when.”*

*“Nanny said Aunt Emily used to use the sleigh,” Jane said.*

*“Yeah, Emily used the sleigh,” Alex said as little Alex jumped up on his lap. “She used to drive it over to the school house where she taught. She always used a team of horses to pull the sleigh.”*

*“Did you ever use the sleigh, Dat?” Davis asked as Carrie came in the room.*

*“Yeah I’ve used it!” Alex said. “I used to salt in it, and when I was little I rode with Papa. It’s not big enough to carry much, but we would carry a bag of salt or two.”*

*“Dat, how many miles are on the old sleigh?” Johnson asked.*

*“Johnson, if I knew that I’d be Santa Claus!” Alex laughed.*

*After the talk with their grandfather, the children all went back outside in the snow. “I wonder if Dat would let us get the sleigh down,” Davis said. “We could put it in the yard for Christmas!”*

*“Why don’t you ask him?” Johnson said. “I think Dat would get it down for us.”*

*“Let’s finish the snow man!” little Alex yelled.*

*“You all go ahead!” Davis said. “I’m going in and talk to Dat!”*

*As the other children finished up the snow man near the back yard fence, Lockhart came in and told Jimmy that he needed his help at the barn later on.*

*“Where’s Dat?” Davis said as he walked in the kitchen door.*

*“Why Alex’s taking a short afternoon nap,” Carrie said. “I’d say he is awake now. Go on back, Davis.”*

*As Carrie served Lockhart a late lunch sandwich, he told his mother all the problems he was having with the tractor and frozen water. Virginia called and said she had finished baking, and that she and Cary would be down around 5 pm, and help with the final touches for the Christmas Eve dinner.*

*“Dat, are you awake?” Davis said walking in the bedroom.*

*“What are you doing, squirt?” Alex laughed as he sat up in his recliner.*

*“Dat, can we get the old sleigh down?” Davis said. “If you could get it down, we could put it in the yard and put some Christmas lights around it.”*

*“What?” Alex said frowning at Davis. “We can’t get that old sleigh out of the mal.”*

*“Why not?” Jimmy said walking in the room. “We could use the loader. It would not take long.”*

*“We can’t get it down!” Alex said as he stood up. “Lockhart and I are too busy and the loader is not even on the tractor. And besides, that old wood could be ruined if it gets wet. That old sleigh is best left up where it is.”*

*All the other kids were still outside when Davis and Jimmy returned. “What did Dat say?” Johnson said as he and little Alex were throwing snow balls.*

*“He won’t let us!” Davis said. “Doesn’t have time, and he said it may ruin it if it gets wet!”*

*“Maybe we can get it down next year,” Johnson said.*

*“It will be the same thing next year,” Davis laughed. “Is the snowman finished?”*

*“Well Davis, you tried!” Jane said. “And Johnson’s right, maybe Dat will let us get it down next year.”*

*“It makes me mad too!” Jimmy said. “Lockhart probably would not get it down if Dat wanted him to.”*

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*Thomas Alex, Louise, Emily, Mary Lynn and Mr. Sharp arrived at 6 o’clock as Alex and Lockhart brought the last of the evening milk from the barn. Both Cary and Virginia arrived and were glad to see their children and hear about the old sleigh. All talked in the dining room as Virginia and Louise help Carrie bring the food to the table.*

*After Alex and Lockhart changed their clothes, all assembled around the big dining room table. Grandchildren, little Alex, Davis, Jane, Jimmy and Johnson all ate in the kitchen.*

*“Let us bow our heads,” Aunt Emily said. “Our dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can all be together in this house on the blessed night before our Savior’s Birth. And we also pray for our family members who are not here with us tonight. We rejoice in my Brother Charlie and Sister Julia, who are now with You, and we pray for Brother Lock and Gladys in Florida. Bless this food and the hands that prepared it. Glory to God on the highest, and peace and goodwill to all. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.”*

*After Emily delivered grace, Alex carved the turkey and the big annual Christmas Eve feast began.*

*An hour later after dinner, dessert and conversation, Alex told the grandchildren to go to the bedroom as he did every year after the Christmas Eve dinner.*

*“This drawer in my dresser is full of pennies,” Alex told the children. “These are pennies that I accumulate all year. And I’m going to give each of you a penny until they’re all gone.”*

*As all five grandchildren gathered around the old 19th century dresser, Alex grabbed a handful of pennies. “Here’s one for Jimmy,” he said as he dropped a penny in his oldest grandchild’s hand. “And one for Johnson, one for Jane, one for Davis and one for the youngest grandchild, little Alex.”*

*When he had finished, each had 22 pennies in their hands. Alex laughed and said that 22 cents would not buy very much, so he reached in another drawer and placed a five dollar bill in the hand of little Alex, Davis, Jane, Jimmy and Johnson. After all the grandchildren thanked their grandfather and wished him Merry Christmas, all returned to the dining room where all the others were still talking and laughing.*

*The evening had passed too fast, and it was now time for the family at Belle Vue to open their presents. With everyone now gathered in the warm dining room, Emily stood and walked slowly toward a large box sitting by the china cabinet. “These are the oranges brother Lock sent from Florida,” Emily said with a smile. “He and Gladys send their love and ask that all take some oranges home. I was not able to get to town this year to buy gifts for you dear children, but I do have cards and money for each of you. Mr. Sharp, there is one for you too. Jimmy, will you please pass them out with the gifts, dear?”*

*“Hold on!” Alex said with a laugh. “Ever since he was big enough to walk, Davis has always been Santa Claus.”*

*Davis quickly jumped up as Aunt Emily gave him all the envelopes to pass out.*

*Only Alex, Carrie, Lockhart, Emily and Mary Lynn would open their presents on this night. As Davis passed out gifts and cards,* “O Come All Ye Faithful” *played over the radio that could be heard from the kitchen.*

“*Oh a scarf!” Carrie said, as she proudly showed everyone the burgundy scarf Alex had given her. “O Alex, how did you know what I needed?”*

*“I didn’t! Virginia told me what you needed!” Alex yelled as everyone laughed. “Now you can keep your head warm when you go to church or the farm women’s meeting. Lockhart, what do you have?”*

“*A tie!” Lockhart yelled, pulling a red tie out of the box. “Thanks Daddy! Thanks Mother! Aunt Emily, what do you have?”*

*“Would you just look at all this yarn?” Emily laughed. “I can now crochet all year long! Alex, Carrie, Lockhart, thank-you all so much. Alex, what do you have in that big box?”*

*“I don’t know!” Alex laughed as he tore open the box. “A coat!” he yelled as he pulled a new work coat from the paper. “You all didn’t have to get me anything!”*

*“I was tired of seeing you wearing that old work coat,” Carrie said as everyone laughed.*

*“What’s wrong with my old work coat?” Alex yelled as everyone laughed. “A little dirt and a few holes won’t hurt anyone. I thank you all! But you should have saved your money. All of you being here tonight is Christmas enough.”*

*Lockhart offered to help Aunt Mary Lynn open her present, but she wanted to wait until Christmas morning.*

*Everyone then looked as Virginia came in from the kitchen carrying a big tray.*

*“What do you have here, Virginia?” Alex asked.*

*“It’s homemade cookies, Daddy!” Virginia said with a laugh. “Mother and I made it this week and I want you all to have one.”*

*“Listen, everyone!” Emily said. “Before you all go, I’d like to read a chapter in the Bible. It is just whenever everyone is ready.”*

*“You all go on!” Lockhart said jumping up. “I’d better go to the barn and check a sick cow.”*

*“O no Lockhart, we will wait on you,” Carrie said. “I’ll help Virginia prepare the cider.”*

*“Merry Christmas, Dat!” Jimmy said as Alex reached out to grab him.*

*“Merry Christmas, squirt!” Alex laughed as he put his arm around Jane, Davis and little Alex.*

*“Merry Christmas, Johnson!” Jimmy said teasing Johnson.”*

*: Merry Christmas!” Johnson laughed as the two began to scuffle.*

*“Davis!” Jane whispered. “Do you think we should tell them about the sleigh?”*

*“I don’t know,” Davis said. “What do you think?”*

*“Everybody!” Jane said as all looked. “Today, Johnson, little Alex, Davis, Jimmy and I saw the old wooden sleigh up in the mal.”*

*“Oh, you mean the old wooden horse drawn sleigh,” Thomas Alex laughed. “I did not know where it was now.”*

*“I think they are wilder about that old sleigh than Christmas,” Alex said as all laughed. “That crazy Davis wanted to get it down and put it in the yard. With the way it is snowing, the old wood would have been ruined for sure.”*

*“It would have been nice to sit it in the yard,” Cary said, as Virginia agreed.*

*“Let’s have the cookies and cider,” Alex said, as Carrie and Virginia began serving everyone.*

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*All was quiet as Lockhart walked through the snow to the barn. The wind had stopped blowing, but the temperature was still freezing. The full moon lit up the field as both cattle and sheep lay resting on the white snow. Inside the barn all was quiet. A cow and a horse stood peaceful in their stalls. The tools and equipment that worked all year lay still and quiet on this holy night. All was so quiet and peaceful, just like the words of the music playing on the radio in the house.* “Silent Night, Holy Night, All is calm, all is bright.”

*Lockhart later reported that it was snowing again as he returned from the barn. Carrie was trying to convince Virginia that they should spend the night and go home in the morning. Virginia however told both her mother and her children that she needed to get home or Santa Claus would not visit their Savannah Lane home.*

*Finally as everyone settled down, Emily asked Jane to come and sit beside her on the sofa.*

*“I can remember sitting in this very room on Christmas Eve,” Emily said as all listened. “I was about Jane’s age, and I can remember Papa reading out of the old Creigh Bible that was passed down to Mama. He read us this passage every Christmas Eve, sometimes in the parlor and sometimes in this dining room before we went to bed. Let us all listen to God’s Holy word.*

*And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And Joseph went up from Galilee to be taxed with his wife who was great with child. And she brought her first born child and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there was in the same country shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. And the angel of the Lord came upon them and the Glory of the Lord shone about them, and they were so afraid. And the angel said to them, fear not for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”*

*Emily suddenly stopped reading and asked Jane to take the Bible. As Jane took the old Bible on her lap, Emily pointed to where she wanted her to read and Jane said, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”*

**The End**

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This was just one of many Christmas Eve’s that we shared with our grandparents and family at Belle Vue farm.

Before his death, my granddad willed me the old sleigh which I now keep in the mal of my horse barn. And someday I will pass it down to a younger generation Arbuckle. Before that, the old sleigh was stored in the garage of Emily Sydenstricker. My cousin Alex Lewis (little Alex) now owns Aunt Emily’s house and property. In the early 1980’s, I repainted the old sleigh with a brighter green with red trim. Some years I place it on my front porch and outline it with lights. My cousin Alex Lewis (little Alex) received the old dresser where our granddad kept his pennies.

I hope you enjoyed this old story.

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**ARBUCKLE FAMILY MEMBERS**

**Grandfather Alex W. Arbuckle – 1887-1990**

**Grandmother Carrie Arbuckle – 1894-1975**

**Thomas Alex Arbuckle – 1921-2013 Wife Louise Arbuckle – 1925-1998**

**Virginia Arbuckle Lewis – 1924-1986 Husband Cary Lewis – 1919-1991**

**Lockhart Francis Arbuckle – 1932-2017**

**James Alexander Arbuckle- 1951- Robert Davis Arbuckle- 1957-**

**Cary Johnson Lewis- 1954- Jane Bell Lewis- 1956-**

**Alexander Arbuckle Lewis- 1958-**

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***THE CHRISTMAS SLEIGH***

**Written by Jim Arbuckle in 1988**

**Photo Development Sandy Beasley**

**Written in 1988**

**Note: Due to a copyright, my beautiful background music of “Silent Night” was disabled and removed from the slide show. I apologize for this, but you can still see pictures from Christmas Eve’s past, plus the old sleigh - from the directions below.**

**To see pictures of some Christmas Eve dinners at Belle Vue and the old sleigh, click on “Videos” and click on *The Christmas Sleigh.* Or you can go directly to YOU TUBE, type in Arbuckle Belle Vue and scroll down to “The Christmas Sleigh.”**

**From all the Arbuckle and Lewis families- Merry Christmas and goodnight!**