

# A Special Christmas Story





Naomi Brown

## MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS

It is the holiday season in the Panhandle. WT has been a place of change and excitement this past year. The construction of the downtown WTAMU Amarillo Center and the recreation of the Devil's Kitchen photograph has led us all to reflect on not only 2017, but the last hundred years as a whole. What better time than the beginning of a New Year to do so.

Celebrating WT's 100th year of service to the Texas Panhandle led me to make a connection to 1917, 100 years ago, back when the school was West Texas Normal College (WTNC) "The World Remembered on Christmas Eve," written by Naomi Brown, was published in WTNC's *Le Mirage*, 1917 yearbook.

The story proves that some lessons and human values transcend time and will continue to speak to us infinitely, even as our physical landscape changes. What unites us all as humans—family, community, charity—stays the same. I am inclined to believe that these values are strongest in the Panhandle.

As you read the story, I hope it leads you to reflect on your own year, and all the joy and love within. Mary and I wish you a very Merry Christmas, a blessed New Year and happy holidays for you and your family. God bless.



Walter and Mary Waudler

# The World Remembered on Christmas Eve

by Naomi Brown



The slim figure of a boy huddled, shivering upon a park bench on Christmas Eve. A shabby, forlorn creature, he took no notice of the gay passers-by, but sat with his thin cap pulled low over a sneering, bitter face.

“What yer moonin’ here fur, Joe, when ye got a honest livin’ to make? These fools stacked up with Christmas things is mighty easy pickin.’ A short, evil-faced man slunk on the bench beside the boy.

“I ain’t been sleepin’ all day, Jim. They’re too easy to make it even interestin.’” Joe thrust his numb hands disgustedly into his pockets.

“Everybody’s grinnin’ about something. Look at that kid there, happy as can be, me a freezin’,” grumbled the man addressed as Jim.

“See my pretty doll!” The child stopped beside them, thrusting a beautifully dressed doll into Jim’s astonished hands.

“Now, ain’t that purty! What’s its name?” Jim held the doll awkwardly before him while he gingerly felt its hair with grimy fingers.

“I call her Mary, and she’s most a year old now, ’cause Santa left her on the tree last time. Mother’s been telling me a story. Did you know there was a little Christ child born in a—a—I forgot what it was! Do you know?” The child looked eagerly from one face to the other.

Jim was saved the embarrassment of answering by the arrival of a breathless nurse who snatched the doll from Jim, and grasping the child’s hand she ran toward the park entrance where an elegantly dressed lady waited in a car.

“Some folks ain’t got no better sense than to put trinkets on a kid.” Joe’s red hand opened, disclosing a diminutive wrist watch.

“Where did you get that?” Jim asked roughly.

“Didn’t I tell you it was easy? I got it while you played dolls with that kid.”

“So that’s your way! You may have nerve enough to take things from a baby, but you’d fail at a bigger game.” Jim’s voice was cutting.

“You’ve no call to say that, Jim,” Joe’s face went white. “Just because I was a soft kid when I come out of that reformatory last fall and hadn’t learned all the tricks of you old hands when you wanted me

to help in your rascality. I refused to do the actual work in that bank robbery two years ago, but they sent me up just the same. Name a job you want done; I'm no piker, and I'll prove it."

That night when the city was quietest, a stealthy figure entered Judge Lang's home on Madison Avenue. Peering cautiously into one richly furnished room after another, carefully turning now and then to listen, he stopped and stood rigid just inside the door of a large room. Dimly outlined against the light from a curtained window, a gaily decorated Christmas tree met the startled gaze of the intruder.

"I'm nervous, my eyes are tricking me again," he muttered, going toward the tree until his groping hands touched the branches. Slowly feeling about, his fingers closed upon a toy popgun.

"Ha, dad knew I wanted one, and here's a doll for Baby Eugenie," and with a sob he sank upon the floor.

"Fool, to think myself a boy again. I, who even tonight pushed deeper into sin, to dream myself an innocent child at home. What is that?" He started up, only to be held fast by two soft arms.

"Now, I've caught you, Santa," a childish voice whispered in his ear. "I've waited so long, but I knew you'd come tonight, cause you love us too well to forget, don't you? Do you get to see everybody you love in one night? You must think of everyone, even the rag man ...

Oh, my rag man! I was telling him today about the Christ child and forgot, he was born in a manger—It's such a long word. If you see my raggedy man, tell him we're all so glad, and love each other more 'cause it's the Christ Child's birthday."

The boy had sat as if turned to stone. The touch of the loving little arm filled him with awe, and the memory of his own baby sister. What was all the money he had come to get compared to the trust of this prattling child? What was all his sinful life worth?

I must go now and see the other people I love, and the rag man." Impulsively Joe covered the baby face with kisses, then hastily left the house, his heart filled with determination and courage.



# A 100 Year-Old Link



*Naomi Brown is the fifth person from the left in the fourth row*

Naomi C. Brown was born on May 7th, 1895. In 1917, as a junior at West Texas State Normal College, she penned “The World Remembered on Christmas Eve.”

She had taught in her hometown of Truscott for a few years upon before deciding to attend what is now West Texas A&M University to pursue a teaching degree. In those days, you only needed a piece of paper from the county to teach in public schools. Naomi, despite having that piece of paper and running a very successful classroom at Truscott School from

approximately 1913 to 1915, wanted more for her students. She desired more knowledge for her small communities of Truscott and Knox County.

Naomi graduated from West Texas State Normal College, Class of 1918. With her degree secured, where did she go but right back to Truscott, Antelope Flat, and Dixon Schools. She could have easily sought employment elsewhere, trading her small community for the opportunities in a big city; yet she returned home and worked for many years within one room school houses, occasionally upgrading to an entire building when schools merged.

As attendance fell, the schools merged often. Antelope Flat students were transferred to Truscott Independent School District in the 1930s. Around the same time, Dixon School saw their student body split between Truscott and Gilliland ISDs, due in large part to the falling populations of these areas.

Despite all the change, Naomi Brown kept teaching. Unfortunately, no further record could be found of Naomi until her passing on July 31, 1976 in Edith, Coke County, Texas, 173 miles south of Truscott. It is believed she never married and continued to teach for many years, valuing her students as her own children. In Edith’s Paint Creek Cemetery, her headstone reads “She lived to serve”, a fitting and humbling reminder of Naomi Brown’s selfless, servant-leader heart that embodied the core value of the Texas Panhandle. 2017 marks West Texas A&M University’s Centennial. As we approach a new year in the Panhandle, it seems a fitting time to look back on a graduate from 100 years ago. Despite the

passage of time, there are many similarities to glean from both *The World Remembered on Christmas Eve* and Naomi's personal history.



*Naomi Brown, teacher, center in the top row.*

One hundred years ago, the population of Knox County, Naomi's home, was approximately 9,625. As of 2016, the population was 3,806. This population decrease is not a new trend. For years we have seen that the smaller communities of the Panhandle struggle and fight for their place in this land. They struggled 100 years ago, and as the pattern continues, there may not be anyone left to struggle in another 100 years if someone doesn't step forward to defend these towns.

The best defenders will be the Naomi Browns of this world; those who venture out in the interest of their community, then return with the great ideas that will promote growth and change. The students who hone their craft for the good of their land. The educators, innovators, farmers and academics who know that changing the world begins at home.

The students of the Panhandle will be those defenders. They are their own breed, with firsthand knowledge of both their small communities and the modern world. In them is the key for linking the Panhandle of Texas to a national and global stage. These small communities are not meant to be forgotten. They are meant to be brought into the future, their values preserved and purpose strengthened. Through education, through the students, this can and will happen.



*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served  
but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

—Mark 10:45

*On the eve of this New Year, in this sacred time of remembrance,  
consider not only the message of Naomi Brown's story, but the message  
of her life: service, knowledge and community. She believed that the  
future of the Panhandle could be preserved through her students.  
That belief still rings true at her alma mater, and this coming year  
promises exciting, revolutionary things for WT and the Panhandle;  
its communities and its students are in good hands.*

***From all the staff, students and faculty at  
West Texas A&M University, have a blessed Christmas,  
happy holidays and a prosperous New Year.***



