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HAPPY
HOLIDAYS

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THE BRASS BUS

by Walt Sener

Rural villages in our area began celebrating the December holidays more than 200 years ago, and are firmly entrenched in local tradition. Bundled warmly against the cold winter wind, members of all religious denominations gathered on Christmas Eve at the village meeting hall. Horse and sleigh were usually tethered to the lee side of the building to provide at least some semblance of shelter for the animals. After an inspiring candlelight service, refreshments were served. No one dared to refuse at least a sample of the ladies' pastries!

Chairs were then arranged around the inside perimeter of the great hall to accommodate the crowd. Entertainment that followed included special vocal selections by talented members from each of the congregations. In the spirit of the season, there were a series of light and humorous skits, and a well rehearsed concert was presented by the local Town Band. Dancing for the young, and young at heart concluded the festivities.

It was the custom at this late hour for those having traveled a considerable distance to stay overnight with friends or relatives. This too was the magical moment when carol singers and a brass ensemble from the band would embark upon a midnight tour of the community. The group would noisily assemble wherever there was illumination, or an indication of warm liquid refreshment, spiked punch or other goodies.

The tradition continues to this day. After the children have finally been tucked into bed, Santa Claus drags many boxes from hidden places and hurriedly fills the stockings. Then he erects a platform, and spends the rest of the night trying to keep an electric train on the track! Outside in the distance, the carolers can be heard singing Yuletide greetings accompanied by the brass ensemble.

A few years ago, someone suggested using a motorhome to transport the carolers and musicians throughout our village. Ol' Glenbrook was immediately designated "The Brass Bus." In preparation for this now annual event, the propane tank

and the gas tanks have to be topped off. In addition, the recirculating toilet has to be charged due to the inevitable human emergencies resulting from cold temperatures. For the record, it isn't easy to hurriedly respond to the call of nature when layered in heavy winter attire.

The sliding windows have to remain wide open so the musicians can be heard as we drive down each street. The engine heating system operates on high blower, and the furnace runs endlessly in an effort to keep the musical instruments warm. The rear compartment is designated as the place for the tuba and other large instruments.

Meanwhile, body heat has to be employed to thaw sticking valves on the smaller brass instruments, because alcohol, regardless of innovative application, just never seems to do the job! With a wind-chill factor well below zero, the snow crisp and crunchy, and ice crystals forming on everything everywhere, it is difficult to get the guys out of the motorhome, and to play recognizable carols with freezing, malfunctioning instruments. Experience has revealed that it is possible to get both done in the first hour. The second hour is a different story. At the stroke of one in the morning, no one can be encouraged to venture outside!

When the running lights of the motorhome appear, there is a flurry of porch-light activity in the area. Townspeople emerge from warm, cozy homes to assemble and shiver in the cold while listening, for awhile, to familiar carols. The most anticipated stop of the evening is the last stop. Before each of us departs for home there is always a friendly salutation for everyone to enjoy a "Cool Yule." All the participants promise to return next year, but only if I furnish the now welcome convenience of ... The Brass Bus.

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Walt Sener has played the trumpet since 1929, had a newspaper route and was a gymnast of note. He retired after 37 years with the Department of Defense and has been writing anecdotes about the GMC Motorhome since the 1970s. ❁