

Mountain Lines

Winters in Cragsmoor

by Lucy Muller, Lu@warwick.net

(I would like to send my best wishes to Dianne Turner, who was recently badly hurt in a car accident. Dianne will recover, but her dear little dog Kisses was killed in the accident. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to her.)

A friend of mine at *St. John's Episcopal Church* asked me the other day if I had any memories of the holidays in Cragsmoor over the years.

I have spent 59 summers in Cragsmoor, but it wasn't until 1958 that I spent a winter here. My mother decided to stay all year round so I could go to high school in Ellenville. That was the best decision she ever made. It was truly the best time of my life; the best friends and the best education.

I remember how exciting it was when autumn came in at the end of September. The bus ride down the mountain was so pretty. I met Kate Van Kleeck then and we had many a rollicking time on that bus.

I also met Pete Williams, Mark Levitas, Letty Spadaro, Pat Peters, and so many great kids including Peter Wright. It was in October that Peter died in a car accident. We missed him so, and it was our first experience with death. But being kids, we soon began to enjoy our lives again and my first winter was so much fun. Sometimes we were snowed in for three days, and days when we had to walk through deep snow from the post office, where the school bus dropped us off, to our homes a half-mile away. It took us an hour.

Sometimes it would be raining in Ellenville and, about half way up the mountain, the precip would turn to snow. Every day was more beautiful than the next. When the ice formed on the branches of all the trees, and the sun came out, it was as if you were inside a crystal palace.

My friends in Cragsmoor taught me to cross-country ski and we would literally ski out the back door and visit all the places we had roamed in the summer.

In those days, the *Cragsmoor Inn* was still there, and it had the best wide-open sledding hills anywhere. We had toboggans too, and that was hilarious to climb on, go shooting down the hill, and end up in a pile of laughing kids. I loved ice skating, too, and we once went over to a big tennis court that was ice covered, built a huge bonfire and skated around in the light of the fire. Then we walked home to my house and my mother had hot chocolate for us.

In those days, every Wednesday was religious education day. After lunch four of us, Bruce Bowler, Nelson Loucks, Sara Winterburger, and I, would walk to *St. John's* for our class. That was a trip and the discussions are confidential. The **Stone Church** in Cragsmoor didn't have heat in it then, so the chapel was not used.

Ellenville looked so adorable decorated for Christmas, but I spent the actual day with relatives in another state. I always spent New Year's Eve in Cragsmoor and we had some memorable parties. One was at the home of Henry Munson. It was not really a party, but an event with music and the living room turned into a ballroom. We waltzed around in our fancy clothes like something in "War & Peace." The food was spectacular, as Mrs. Munson was a great cook. Then out into the cold, starry night and the enchantment of the snow-covered mountain. I will never forget the night I saw the Northern Lights. It was January, and colder than anything I felt before, but the sky was pulsating with red, green, and white lights. We felt so humble and tiny.

Since I returned to the mountain in 2002, I've enjoyed the caroling, lights and mounds of snow again. But I am a grown-up now (sort of) and although most of my Christmas memories are from elsewhere, nothing can compare with living here all through the winter when I was young. 

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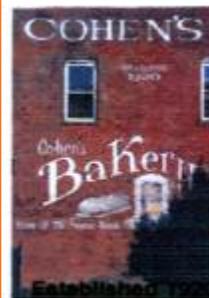
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