

A CHRISTMAS STORY

Contributed by Charles Edwards, Taree Station.

STORIES start in many different ways. This one began in the glory of a concert appearance and ended in the grime of a hard and dusty road. (Apologies to "Randy Stone.")

One summer, many years ago, when Joe Bungie and I were much younger than we are now, we were both working on a property near a village some forty-odd miles from Taree.

Joe is a master of melody and rhythm when he gets his old auto-harp on his lap; and, although I say it myself, I can still make good use of the voice God gave me. When we were younger we were in great demand everywhere we went when any occasion arose where music and song were required.

The people of the village, near where we were employed, soon learned of our talent and we were invited to appear at numerous concerts and dances.

Christmas was drawing near, and, like everybody else, we very much wanted to spend it with our own people at our own homes. However, the village people had other ideas. A really big concert party had been arranged for the night of 23rd December, and they badly wanted our music and song. We wanted to stay, too, but we wanted to go home even more.

The local people determined that they would hold us, by fair means, if possible; or by foul means, if necessary. They hid our swags and withheld our money. We were just as determined to get away—by fair means, if possible; or by foul means, if necessary.

Eventually, we rolled up some blankets, took our bridles, and started off towards the nearest railway siding where I had hopes of "jumping the rattler" to Taree. Joe objected to this plan because of the risk of spending Christmas in jail.

So we trudged along, hoping that some passing motorist might give us a lift. The miles of hot, dusty road passed slowly under our tired and aching feet. It was getting nearly dark when there appeared before our smarting and unbelieving eyes what seemed to us to be a gift from the gods—a heaven-sent creature, in the form of a stray horse, by the roadside.

We approached him slowly with outstretched arms. Quietly he submitted to our fond caresses. He showed no resentment when we slipped a bridle over his head. He stood patiently while we fixed a make-shift, double saddle of blankets on his back.

I mounted first, and then Joe climbed on behind with his harp held under his arm. Then, as I tapped his flanks with my heels to signal that we were ready to commence our merry journey home, all this nag's resemblance to a heaven-sent gift suddenly disappeared. Down went his head and his back arched high. Then he seemed to throw the whole of himself in every

direction at once. Joe, with his harp still held tightly under his arm, hit the road first. I followed so closely that it might be termed a photo-finish.

We picked our sore and sorry selves up and gathered up our strewn belongings. As we tramped along another thirty-odd miles of dusty road, with our added aches and pains, we sang as we felt: "I'm a-headin' for the last round-up."

The moral of this story ?

Never mount a gift-horse,

Unless you know him well.

He could be sent from Heaven,

He might be sent from . . . almost anywhere.



What a surprise! Just as these two girls looked out their window they saw old Father Christmas himself coming down the chimney.