

SPECIAL FEATURE

A Musical, Family Christmas Tradition

Who doesn't love the Christmas traditions of exchanging gifts, trimming trees, and eating fudge? While those traditions are wonderful, it's the music of the season I love the most. Combine that with family and you've got a recipe for pure Christmas joy! Such is the tradition of the O'Kelley family started by my Daddy when he announced he wanted to host a caroling party in our Sylacauga, Ala. neighborhood.

Parents and children arrived bundled in coats and gloves. Caroling books were passed out along with a few flashlights to inaugurate the choral caravan. Each house was serenaded with two songs and the token "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" goodbye. Occasionally we ventured outside the repetitive carols but it usually resulted in murmuring laughter or a timid solo. Nonetheless, our intentions were to bring good cheer and that we did. Once back at the house our numb lips and fingers welcomed the hot cocoa and spiced cider along with red, white, green, yellow, and blue frosted homemade sugar cookies.

As my parents' friends grew older, caroling for our neighbors transitioned into caroling for ourselves! The warmth and comfort of sitting in our living room trumped the challenges of walking outside. Another advantage was that our home organ could provide accompaniment to enhance our singing. Through the years we spiced up the choral monotony with song histories and lively entertainment. However, the spiced cider, hot chocolate, and cookies never changed.

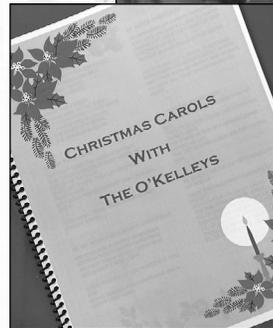
For more than twenty-five years my Daddy hosted the O'Kelley caroling party. Following his death we held a grand finale. Friends expressed how



Karen O'Kelley Allen at the organ in her parent's home in Sylacauga preparing for their family caroling tradition. Karen will be at the organ this Christmas season at Meadow Brook Baptist Church, including the December 11 Christmas program, "Sounds of Christmas." See Calendar page 28 for details.



As a part of the 25 year plus O'Kelley Christmas tradition, family and friends gather to sing from the family's songbook.



our annual tradition had become a holiday highlight. For me, it became an indelible memory. (My family has since established a new tradition of Family Fun Night.)

I no longer play our home organ; I play a church organ. But I smile as we sing the same carols we sang strolling down the mountainside of Forest Drive in Sylacauga. The church choir is more melodious than our neighborhood ensembles but I can still hear the off-key harmonies of "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Surely the simplicity of "Away in a Manager" is just as sweet to Baby Jesus as the praise and glory of "The Hallelujah Chorus." Let us echo the sentiments of Psalm 100 this Christmas and "come before His presence with singing."

— Karen O'Kelley Allen
 Author of *Confronting Cancer with Faith*
www.confrontingcancerwithfaith.com



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