



❧ *To One and All a Very Happy Holiday* ❧

THE FAMILY RECOUNTS SPECIAL MEMORIES OF CHRISTMASSES PAST

THIS YEAR, 1996 I will celebrate my seventy-fifth Christmas. I was barely past five months old when I celebrated my first. I do not remember, but my mother told me I was fascinated by the baubles on the Christmas tree and tried to take a bite of one. I continued to be fascinated by the lights and sights of Christmas in my growing-up years. The trips through the streets of downtown Long Beach during Christmas season on a Lang Transportation Company bus was exciting. The light posts were decorated with tinsel and, lighted trees. With garlands strung across the streets, the downtown streets were a wondrous place. I stared up at the decorations, sometimes fluttering in the breezes, as my mother and I waited for a bus to take us home. I continued to stare at the beautiful sight from the bus window until the lights were left far behind.

As our home was tiny, there was little space so our tree was always small. The first one I remember, I must have been about three and a half, a little younger than my granddaughter Grace is now. There was a small space that would later hold a wall bed where the tree was put on the top of a library table. Christmas tree lights were a new thing and my parents indulged and bought a set of lights that included Santa Clauses and little houses. Never had I seen anything so beautiful.

Christmas Eve my mother sent me outside in the care of Ruth and Richard, my older sister and brother. Taking me for a walk along Belmont Avenue toward Tenth Street we stopped frequently and looked everywhere for the old gentleman, but he was nowhere to be found.

My sister said, "Maybe we had better go back home. Maybe we missed him." Sure enough while we were looking for him, somehow Santa Claus had found his way to my house and left me all kinds of presents.

One other memorable Christmas from my childhood was the year 1930 when my mother and I traveled to Buxton and spent the holiday with my Peterson Grandparents. The first time in my life to go out in the woods to find and cut a fresh tree. The only ones I had seen before came from Christmas tree lots or at the corner grocery store. My cousin, Roger Scofield and I brought in an about twelve-foot fir my grandfather had to trim to fit in the parlor. Trimmed with popcorn strings, small polished red apples, paper chains and and cornucopias, the effect was glorious even without

Christmas lights. Electricity had not yet come to Buxton.

As the years went by watching each of my five sons in turn as they became aware of Christmas, I noticed their fascination with Christmas lights and decorations. The lights of Christmas reflected in their eyes. As a one year old Richard stared every night at the blinking, colored lights until his eyes closed in sleep.

I have never ceased to be drawn to the lights and displays of the winter season. One year I spent Christmas in Anchorage. There was plenty of snow on the ground. Debby had a beautiful tree displaying her collection of ornaments. One evening as a treat, Leonard took us for a drive to view the displays at homes throughout Anchorage. I had never seen colored lights reflected in the snow. All the displays had a special glow. The streets were uncrowded, the evening was quiet and calm. Altogether a memorable evening.

On a Christmas morning as a teen-ager, I joined a large group of others my age. We gathered in the darkness in front of the East Long Beach Methodist Church as we made plans for caroling. The air was cold, the sky was dark and cloudless. To the east the morning star, Venus, shown with exceptional brilliance reminding all of us of the beginnings and true meaning of Christmas. The joy we shared that morning in singing the familiar carols and the following breakfast and fellowship at the Cross's is a treasured memory. The next year I moved to another town and never saw any of that group again.

Mary J. Kirk

KEEPSAKE FROM 1960

Among my keepsakes I found this short letter. Dear Sis, Martin wanted to write Auntie Ruth a letter, so we did. He knows his letters, but of course doesn't know how to spell except his name and a few words like sun, good and is, so I told him how to spell and he did the rest. Thought you would enjoy it, Love, Mary. He got the pictures at Sunday School.

Martin's letter done on a typewriter
de ar aunt ruth
My cat is ThoMas
My dog is jet
The sun is good
I am 5

I got a picture at school
Bubbles from MAMA

MARTIN

FROM ESTHER'S MEMORY

I can remember many Christmases. One of my favorites is when I was five years old, I received a blue or red velvet dress for Christmas. How I loved the material, It was so soft! At Christmas we would often drive on Skyline Boulevard and look at all the Christmas lights. The area was an expensive part of town, and had many beautiful lights. I was always asleep by the time we arrived home. (Maybe planned by my parents to put five young ones to sleep easily/)

Another thing I remember is Aunt Marian giving me a scarf for either Christmas or my birthday. I was so excited to get it. We often walked to the zoo and my ears would get so cold from the wind.

Christmas became the most fun when we had children. Christmas gains a magic when the children are old enough to get excited about the packages they see wrapped. I remember trying to keep little fingers from opening presents.

Then there was the pretending about Santa, which was a great deal of fun. The year Amos had a bright idea to write to Santa was very challenging.

"Now, what am I going to do?"

"Help, Grandma."

Thankfully, and with great insight, she came to the rescue. I saved Grandma's letter as a keepsake because it was so special

AMOS WRITES ABOUT SANTA

One Christmas when I was much younger and far more impressionable, writing to Santa Claus seemed to be a good idea. After all he is real isn't he? Or, so I thought.

I took time and care crafting my letter to Santa. Writing in everything I wanted, and not leaving a single thing out including a return address. I even included a letter for my brother and sister. because of their young age it was easier for them to have me write their requests for them.

With the letters completed, it was time to address an envelope. I wrote the mailing address as SANTA CLAUS, NORTH POLE. With my return address and a stamp, the letter would soon be on its way to the North Pole.

I was very pleased to receive a letter a short time later from the man in the red suit. It told of how he had heard how good I had been -- that I

should expect plenty of gifts and that it was very nice of me to write letters to him for my little brother and sister. The letter was written in cursive and signed in larger fancy cursive: Santa Claus. Surely, the letter must have been authored by him.

As I grew older I became skeptical of Santa. I began to think that the tale of a fat little man flying a 12 reindeer sleigh was a little far fetched, and certainly not FAA approved. Besides, even in a Lear Jet, or the X-1, Santa in no way could reach all those houses. Think of how many trips he would have to make. A single sleigh does not hold a great amount of cargo. Neither does an X-1, and a C-130 would be way too slow.

I wondered for quite a few years; WHO REALLY WROTE BACK? Was it true that Santa wrote it? Had a postal worker written back so my beliefs in Santa wouldn't soon be dispelled? Had mom intercepted the letter before the mailman, and gave it to.....GRANDMA??? She certainly did. I found this out just a few weeks before writing this story. My mom had taken the letter to grandma, and grandma had had some fun crafting a letter back to me, playing the part of Santa Claus. This left me to wonder. What about the Tooth Fairy? What about the Easter Bunny? Old Man Winter? Father Time?

A WAGON TALE FROM RUTH

"Merry Christmas everyone!" Grandma called as we stamped the snow off our soaked sneakers. Mom, Dad, Amos, Caleb and I walked into Grandma Kirk's living room. Grandpa smiled broadly as joyful little relatives gathered on the sofa. They scooted over to make room for us and I climbed up. From that higher vantage-point, I surveyed the merry scene.

That year, Santa was generous, and the Christmas tree was piled high with presents. As I sat on the couch, I swung my little legs at its ruffle, anxiously awaiting the time when we would open the brightly colored packages. My eyes fell upon one very large package.

"It is too big for me," I thought. "It must be Daddy's, it's too big to be mine."

At last my time came! There was the dolly I asked Santa for, with her beautiful flue eyes and short, curly blond hair. Mom insisted I tell Grandma "much to my childish dismay. "Thank you," I finally said. Grandma hugged me. "You're welcome," she cried. Then I returned to the couch to watch my brothers open their little treasures. Caleb found a little toy Semi with a trailer. Amos

got the gift he had asked Santa. The gifts were passed out and the new toys displayed to relatives. Grandma called Amos, Caleb, and me over for the grand finale--the big present, the one as big as me.

"Santa left this here with us because it wouldn't fit in his sleigh. He thought we might have some little grandchildren who needed it."

After my Mom counted to three, Amos, Caleb and I tore into the green, teddy-bear print paper. Dad opened the box to reveal a sturdy, bright-red, Radio Flyer wagon.

"Can I drive it, Daddy?" I asked. Dad laughed, saying, "Wait until we get home."

That wagon lasted for years carrying growing children. Summer after Summer we would fill the wagon with drying grass and wild flowers that we had raked off the freshly mowed lawn. We then covered it with a bedsheet. It was a "bed" where I took many afternoon rests while our dog, G. G. stood guard. When winter came, Caleb and I invented a way to drive it, he would push while I steered and vice-versa. The red wagon lasted well into old age.

I thought of that wagon last summer when a similar one was purchased at a garage sale. It was slightly worn, but well worth the \$20. After carefully inspecting it, the old wagon was brought home for Sarah to play with. The paint was worn off, and there was a little surface rust in the front. I knew my brothers could paint it, and I envisioned a bright-red wagon with Radio Flyer decals on the sides. Later, when my brothers arrived home they brought up the same idea. When the wagon came home from the barn the next day, it was drastically different. It was John Deere green with John Deere decals and a shiny black handle. The wagon brings comments every time we take it out. I owe the credit to Grandma Kirk, who bought us our first big, red wagon.

CALEB'S REMEMBRANCES

I don't remember much about any Christmases in my younger years, but I do remember some things about certain Christmases. One was the year I received my first teddy bear from Grandma. We were all opening our presents and finally it was my turn. I tore open the package and inside it I found him, one of my first and definitely favorite teddy bear. Next came the task of naming him but everyone I asked said it's up to me and so I eventually decided to name him Robert later shortened to Bob. I played with Bob for years and

Another one my well remembered Christmases was when I received a whole bunch of toy cars and a mat to drive them on. I played and played with those cars for years, every year collecting more cars from Grandma. Even today I have those toy cars. I don't play with them all that much anymore except when Sarah, my four-year-old sister, really wants me to play cars with her, they are great entertainment for her so I like to keep them around.

The last Christmas that I remember at Grandma's house was the year I got the big styrofoam glider with the huge four and a half foot wide wing span. What fun did we ever have with that glider! Amos and I flew that glider everywhere we could. It was especially fun to throw it out of the oft of the barn and catch a nice wind to see how far it would go. I must admit it was fun playing with all those things, but it was getting together at Grandma's with all the family that made celebrating Christmas such a joyful event every year. Amos' memorable Christmas

KOTZEBUE 1977

Leonard's story as dictated to Debby

I was the town volunteer Santa Claus for the City of Kotzebue as a member of the Lions Club. I was all decked out in a bright red suit when Debby brought Ben, age 5, and Kiana, age 2, to see Santa. Kiana was terrified and sat on my lap and screamed reaching back to the safe arms of her Mama. Ben, however, sat reluctantly on Santa's lap, not saying a great deal to Santa, and politely left when it was someone else's turn.

When I got home that evening, Ben was excited to tell me he'd seen Santa and he said, "You know what, Dad? Santa had shoes just like yours!"

SAUCER COFFEE

Debby's story.

My favorite Christmas memory is when I was growing up in Gresham, Oregon. My father was an Oregon log truck owner/driver. I can't remember the year, but it was probably 1956 or 1957. Sometimes I would wake early and venture out to the kitchen where Mama was packing Daddy's big, black lunch box and Daddy was sitting at the table sipping his "saucer coffee." You know the coffee was too hot directly from the mug--so he would pour it in the saucer and sip it. Daddy looked at me and said, "I just might bring home a Christmas tree today!"

I waited anxiously all day and finally I heard that Kenworth coming down the hill with the Jake brake in action. I ran outside and watched as he turned into our long driveway and sure enough there was a big, full, Douglas Fir tied on the truck. And you know what---I think it was the prettiest tree ever when we got it fully decorated and turned on the lights. Certainly seems like magic when you're six or seven.

For years after my father continued to drink "saucer coffee" and when Ben and Kiana were little they called him the "Saucer-coffee Grandpa!"

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

While talking to Brian on the phone, December 7, he spoke of talking his children, Allene, 14, and Colin, 16, to Jonesboro to do some Christmas Shopping. Fifty miles from Ravenden, They had to squeeze the shopping in between Regional Band tryouts for Allene. But they did it and had a good time. When we lived in Tennant we were fifty miles from Klamath Falls, the nearest town of any size.

Our first year in Tennant, the snow came early. Forrest and Francis bought the boys sleds for Christmas which proved a perfect gift that lasted for years. Brian remembers the great time they had sledding down a small hill winding through some trees. Those sleds were the basis of many hours of brisk winter fun.

Taking the boys Christmas shopping while we still lived in Coos County was always an adventure. Always a lot of fun watching each boy make his choices. I kept the secrets as whispers told me what they were buying and for whom.. Each boy had his own money to spend they had earned one way or another. The amount was not great, but neither was the cost of the presents they bought at Sprouse-Rietz in Coos Bay.

Brian was four, his fifth birthday a little more than a month away when taken on his first Christmas shopping spree. He carried all of his money in a jacket pocket.

Brian understood numbers and their values quite young, astonishing me at times with his calculations. As we made the rounds of the store he knew exactly what he wanted to buy. After selecting each item, he would count out the sum of money for the purchase and transfer it from his left jacket pocket to his right. He never asked me once how much money he had left or what anything cost. When it came to checkout time, he put the correct sum out on the counter.

Grace Goes To The Portland Zoo

Pouring down rain keeps the animals inside and limits photography

By Neil Kirk

A safari, hampered by a November torrent of rain, meant an excursion in Portland's West Hills. During a week off from work, I spent a vacation day at the zoo. There, with my daughter Grace, I had hoped to photograph exotic wildlife and to ride the zoo train.

Two disappointments limited and excluded a portion of my plans.

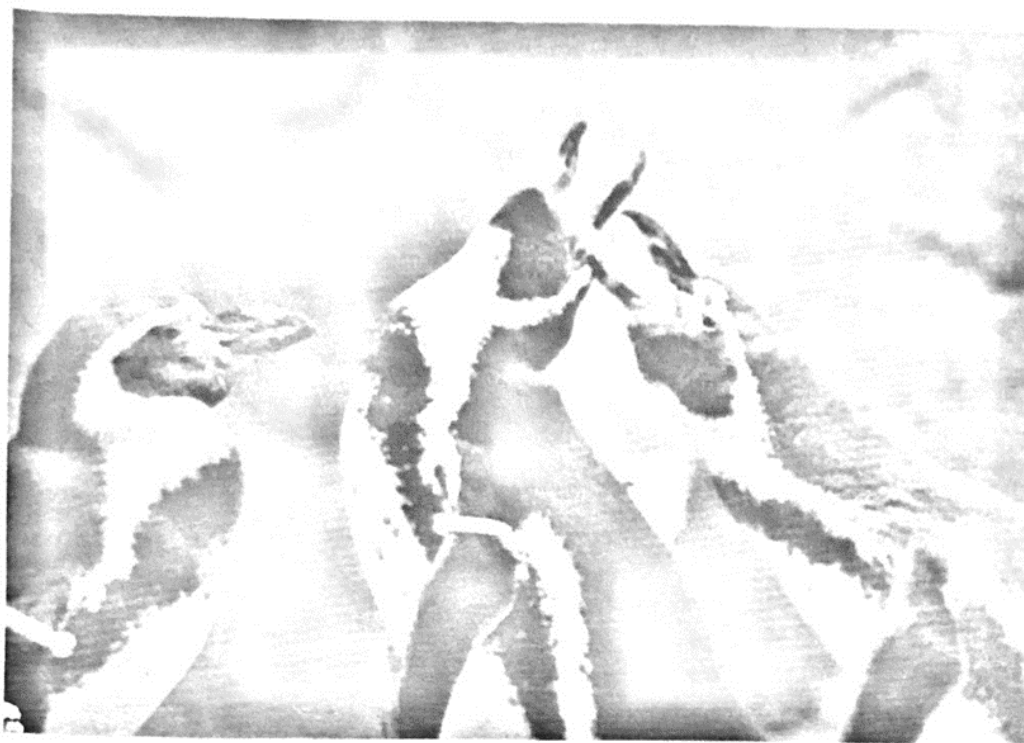
"I couldn't ride the train not at the zoo because it didn't run at the zoo," Grace told her cousin, Athena. [Actually the train does not operate during winter months.]

Second, a downpour and forgotten umbrella motivated us to seek shelter. At the zoo, in a tiny store, we purchased two throw away rain coats. Underneath I protected my camera. We strolled along the pathway where the animals were kept. But they were wiser than us, they stayed out of the rain.

Within moments my hands turned pink and cold. My glasses fogged. We walked about 100 feet when I spotted a set of double doors, which led to the polar bear exhibit. Inside Grace could watch, through glass panes, the bears swim underwater as well as stand on a cement replica of an Arctic shoreline.

A white glow overhead and a steady drone of a cold Arctic wind were all simulations of the bears native homeland. For the longest period, Grace stared at the polar bears. Her gaze was constant. Her eyes appeared not to move and her face was reflected in the window pane.

"When me and daddy went to the zoo we saw all the animals," Grace told Athena. Polar bears, elephants, penguins and giraffes were some we observed.



Penguins Lift Their Beaks In The Air During Feeding

Eventually, I was able to pursue Grace to go outside to see the other animals. But in a few minutes my hands again turned cold. My feet soaked we went inside a restaurant to escape the weather and watch birds fly under a glass enclosed case. We drank sodas and ate cookies while using space and soaking the heat.

We left to visit the elephants and in moments Grace was surrendering to the elements. "I want to go home," she told me. But on the way to the car, I noticed the place where the penguins were housed. We went inside and Grace was again captivated by the zoo creatures. Some dove underwater as if they were looking for fish of their native place. The time of our arrival must have been feeding time. The penguins came up with fish and each were diving after the fresh food. Some stood on concrete that could resemble the shifting ice flows and rocky outcrops of the Antarctic. Some birds pointed their beaks in the air as if performers on a stage -- a dance.

Again Grace negotiated a longer stay, but she soon agreed to go, knowing she could return on a warmer day to see more animals and ride the zoo train.

Outdoor Christmas Lights Reflecting On New-Fallen Snow

By Laura Kirk

Evergreen trees, boughs heavy with snow; long icicles hanging from the eaves; outdoor Christmas lights reflecting on the new-fallen snow; the smell of freshly cut trees; and from outdoor speakers Christmas carols floating in the air. In an instant these memories can take me back to Christmas in Fort Jones.

The first sign of the Christmas season was when Dad went out to get the tree. He would get a permit from the Forest Service; we would bundle up to go up into the mountains to find the perfect tree. We almost always got a silver-tipped fir. When Dad trimmed the bottom of the tree and secured it to the base, we would gather around ready to start trimming the tree. Mom would laugh, cause if Dad didn't pick out a crooked tree, he would manage to get it crooked in the base. I always anticipated the placement of the angel on the top of the tree. She was the most beautiful angel I had ever imagined, she sat on the cloud of real angel hair. The back of this tree topper had a jolly St. Nick face on it. As the other ornaments were placed on the tree it seemed

to take on a surreal quality. The last ornaments Mom would put on herself, these were very delicate, beautifully hand painted birds. Each was different, but my favorite was the hummingbird. Mom and I would decorate the rest of the livingroom with the Christmas candles that she made from whipped wax. They looked like pale green or pink snowballs with sparkles on them. We always used fresh greenery from the tree trimmings to decorate the top of the piano. I thought everything was quite festive.

Gifts slowly appeared around the tree each day, with most of them being brought by Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. Christmas morning was fun with my brother and I up early and tearing into the presents with eager anticipation. After the presents we would gather in the kitchen for a pancake and egg breakfast with hot chocolate to keep us warm the rest of the day.

Those arriving for Christmas dinner included my Grandma, Aunt Beanie, Uncle Willie and their three kids. We had a house-full and I'm sure we drove my Mom nuts with all our noise. We usually were successful talking Grandma into playing the piano. My personal favorite was a song about monkeys. If Grandma were feeling really good, she could make that piano literally rock.

How to Decorate a Tree

by Tony Kirk

The family Christmas tree provides many memories for me. I can remember decorating various trees with an assortment from many sources. The home made decorations included red and green craft paper chains and popcorn strings. Others were gifts from family and friends and of course the commercial decorations.

The high points of the decorating process were the lights and the tinsel. The tinsel was the most fun as we carefully pulled the tinsel out of the box and placed it on the tree branches.

The placing of the tinsel quickly became boring for us youngsters so we began flinging the tinsel at the tree. What fun! And it always looked beautiful to me.

I think I will buy more tinsel this year and teach my granddaughter the proper way to put the tinsel on the tree. Yep, you guessed it. Pull it out of the box and fling it at the tree when Grandma isn't looking.

Merry Christmas to All, and have fun.

A TOY TO REMEMBER

There is not a son who does not remember Mr. Machine, the mechanical wonder bought for Martin in the early sixties. Richard and Leonard went to Klamath Falls from Tennant to do their own Christmas shopping and came home with a toy they found at a bargain price. Time proved it to be the best of all toys. The gears and other pieces were made in bright primary colors encased in clear plastic allowing the mechanical action to be seen. When wound, it walked and squawked across the floor much to the delight of all. The original Mr. Machine could be dismantled and put back together time and again, increasing the fun. The boys quickly learned, the more parts removed, the faster Mr. Machine would go.

Eventually Mr. Machine was put in the basement of the home in Barton where other toys no longer used were stored.

As time went on, the grandchildren began to arrive on the scene. One Christmas, Richard started talking about Mr. Machine and I went down to the basement and brought up the pieces. The sons might have been grown men, but they didn't act like it as they played on the floor with Mr. Machine, removing all but the most essential parts. Then "stripped down for racing" they wound it up and let it propel itself across the floor. The sight of her Dad and Martin playing like small boys is one of Deanna's favorite memories.

Only a few pieces of Mr. Machine still exist, the key and a few arm pieces, but the very thought of him still brings laughter to all.

Christmas Of Anticipation

By Neil Kirk

A long time ago inside humble quarters, a young boy was anticipating Christmas morning.

There, in the setting surrounded by Myrtlewood trees on a hillside, a plume of wood smoke rose above the chimney. Here, at Route 3, Box 649, Coos Bay, Oregon, he remembers the water logged hillside where sometimes the sea breeze could be felt and remembers stories of gales toppling trees.

But this was Christmas eve, and the sounds and effects of the coastal weather were silent on this night. The coming morning was on his mind and what he might receive for Christmas. He no

longer believed that Santa would arrive in his sleigh nor would the white bearded man slide down the chimney. Instead he was convinced that his older brother, Richard, was the real Santa who put up Christmas stockings and filled them with small presents. They were priceless to such a young child.

As memory has that December, the house was very clean and everything in its place. That night he went over to The Christmas tree. With all its glittering tinsel and neatly wrapped packages, he grabbed a present. He raised one with a tag addressed to Neil from Aunt Ruth. He listened to the sound trying to determine what was locked inside those colorful wrappings. He had tried this same technique the week before, but of course he had no affirmation of what could be inside. Of course the hardest ones to guess where those presents that made no sound at all. The famed Lincoln Logs were always a likely guess but never was he sure until morning.

When those methods failed he pressed the paper tightly against the box hoping to get a glimpse of the words or a picture of the present showing through the paper.

He thought he would stay awake all night, but some time in the silence he fell asleep. The anticipation remained in his consciousness. He awoke at 5 a.m. the next morning. All was silent until Mother awoke to begin cooking breakfast for the five boys. Soon Papa would get up and sit in his recliner. From the window I could look across the mill pond where the sawmill cut lumber. Behind the mill, a heavily forested hill stood in the background.

Sometime since leaving the Coos Bay area, the mill was torn down and the pond drained.

Much like the disappearance of the mill, the time of unwrapping the presents was not a moment that could be remembered. But the anticipation of coming events always has been a time of anxiety whether welcomed or not and a time period that is never forgotten.

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To all of our Friends and Relatives who have read our efforts through this past year, we say a big thank you for all of your encouraging words.

When Neil and I conceived the idea last January as a way of sharing family news, our first effort was a two-pager. This special Christmas edition with

contributions from many members of the family is our largest one so far.

Neil has developed the technical skill to produce half-tones of the family portraits he takes. He is using an enlarger that has been in the family since the early sixties.

Putting *Relatively Speaking* together each month has been a creative process we have enjoyed doing. We look forward to beginning Volume 2 in January.

With that will put the paper to bed for the last time this year and send all of you best wishes from the Kirks residing in Barton, Oregon.

Neil, Judy and Grace, and Mary aka as Granny, Mom and Great Grandma.

RELATIVELY SPEAKING

CHRISTMAS EDITION 1996

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Front Cover: Cousins Sarah and Grace Kirk -- **Back Cover:** Esther and Martin Kirk

Old Photos: Bathing Beauty, Grace Hill, Richard Hill and Ruth Hill, pictures taken by Irene Aldrich, 1921,

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