

A holiday story

A 505 / 575 Christmas

By Ryan Lowery
Special to the Optic

They'd been walking for what felt like hours looking for Arlo. Connor had always wanted a dog, and his parents finally got him Arlo after they made him move again.

But somehow, Arlo had escaped from the yard of their new home and had vanished.

They turned the corner onto another long street. He'd had enough and sat down on the curb in front of Charlie's bakery, a big building with some sort of huge pastry popping out of it.

Dad sat beside him. "Giving up already, buddy?"

"We've been looking for him for hours."

Dad chuckled a little. "It's only been about 20 minutes. And c'mon, it's starting to snow. You've never seen snow before. You should try to enjoy it."

It was true. He'd never seen snow. Some of his friends back in California told him snow was awesome. Some said it was calming. Others said it was fun because you could build a snow man.

Snow was cold. That's what Connor thought of it. And it came with wind. Cold, painful wind that was smacking him in the face and freezing the hairs inside his nose.

Connor had been happy in California and didn't want to leave. Besides, they'd moved plenty already. He'd been born in Texas, but moved to California before he started the first grade. Then they moved three more times within California.

And just when he was starting to like living near the beach, his Dad came home one day and said the whole family was moving to Las Vegas. Connor had always thought Las Vegas was in Nevada, but apparently, New Mexico had one too. The Land of Enchantment, Dad called it. And when Connor told his friends he was moving, most of them had never heard of New Mexico. A couple even asked if he needed a passport to go there.

Dad patted him on the leg. "It's kind of magical, isn't it, buddy? I mean, it's Christmas Eve and it's snowing. Living here will be nice, won't it?"

Connor shrugged. "I guess."

"And when we get home, your mom will be done baking the cookies for Santa. I bet she'll let you eat a couple before bed."

Connor rolled his eyes. "Santa's not real."

"Sure he is," Dad said. "But you have to believe in him. Why would he bring presents to someone who doesn't believe?"

Some fat guy who slides down chimneys with free toys. The whole thing was stupid. Only lame little kids like his sister believed in things like that. Connor was 11 now. He'd known the truth for years. But his sister still believed in Santa and was terrified he wouldn't know where their new house was.

Dad stood up. "C'mon, buddy. We'd better keep looking."

"What if we never find him?" Connor felt tears forming in his eyes.

"He'll turn up."

Connor glanced up toward his dad. "You don't

know that."

"Sure I do," he said. "It's a small town. There's not that many places he can go."

"That doesn't mean we'll find him."

"Sometimes, you just have to believe in things and stay positive," Dad said. "Thinking the worst isn't going to help us, or Arlo. Look at it this way: he's out here looking for us too. So, let's go find him."

Connor sighed and stood up.

They wandered up one street and down the next, shouting Arlo's name and whistling for him.

Nothing. No sign of him at all.

They kept wandering, walking past Highlands University and into Old Town where a Christmas tree stood in the center of the road.

"Let's look in Plaza Park," Dad said. "He likes parks. Maybe he just really wanted to visit one."

Connor sat down on another curb. "No. He's not here."

"C'mon, buddy. Look around. The Christmas tree is lit, there are lights strung across the Plaza. It looks like a Christmas movie here."

"None of that helps us find Arlo, though."

"Then let's keep looking," Dad said. "C'mon, let's go over to the Plaza Hotel and ask if anyone's seen Arlo."

Connor took a deep breath and rose to his feet. "Fine."

They asked people inside the hotel if anyone had seen a little yellow dog with floppy ears and a fuzzy tail. No one had, though.

They circled the Plaza calling for Arlo, but he never came. They walked across the street into the park to see if Arlo was there. He wasn't. The snow began to fall faster and the wind picked up too, blowing the falling flakes sideways across the park.

Dad patted him on the head. "Well, let's head back to the house and check in with your mom. Maybe she's heard something."

Connor collapsed to the ground. "I'm not going anywhere."

Obviously Mom hadn't heard anything. If she had, she'd have called Dad to tell him.

Dad knelt beside him. "We will find him."

"How can you be so sure?"

Dad sighed and began rubbing the back of his neck. "Because I won't stop looking for him until I find him. And if we can't find him, I bet someone does. I'll check with animal shelters. We'll put up fliers with our phone numbers. We'll even offer a reward."

• • •

By the time they got to their house on Tilden, the snow had stopped falling, though their yard was coated in a thick layer of white. Inside, the heat was on, the air smelled of fresh baked cookies, and his sister was sitting on the couch watching Rudolph.

Mom met them at the door. "Any luck?"

Dad shook his head. "No. I'll warm up the truck and go drive around for a bit. Maybe Arlo made it farther than we'd imagined he could."

Connor felt tears coming again. For all of Dad's talk of hoping for the best, it was obvious he didn't believe Arlo would come home.

Not wanting anyone to see him cry, Connor turned to run to his room, but just then, he heard a thud. It sounded like something huge had hit the house.

Mom and Dad obviously heard it too. Dad rushed out to the porch while Connor peeked out his father. But there was nothing to be afraid of. It was just Arlo, standing on the porch with his fuzzy tail wagging.

Connor ran outside, dropped to his knees, and wrapped his arms around Arlo.

Mom joined them. "How'd he get here?"

Dad shook his head. "I don't know."

Mom pointed toward the steps to the porch. "What's that?"

Dad knelt down to inspect. "Foot prints."

Mom stepped closer to see them and Connor moved closer to get a look too. All of this had gotten the attention of his sister who joined them as well.

Connor looked closer. There in the snow, two boot prints. Only two though. They were bigger than the foot prints left by his father and him.

Another loud thud came from the house followed by a jingling noise. Looking up, Connor saw something streak across the night sky.

"What is that?" Connor asked.

"Santa," his sister said. "Santa brought Doggie home."

She was being stupid again. It wasn't Santa.

"What was it, Dad?" Connor asked.

"I—I'm not sure, buddy."

"Santa," his sister said again.

Connor rolled his eyes and knelt beside Arlo, wrapping his arms around him once again. Arlo gave him a big lick on the cheek.

Petting Arlo, Connor noticed little pieces of red fuzz falling from Arlo's fur. He looked at the boot prints again.

"Santa," he whispered.

His sister nodded in agreement.

Connor hugged Arlo tightly and looked to the sky again. New Mexico really was an enchanted land, and it was going to be the best place they'd ever lived.



Tradiciones 2018



Winter Holiday Guide

A complimentary publication of the Las Vegas Optic

COVER

A Deep Tradition

Whether performed by children, set up as little figurines in a home or installed inside or outside a church, the nativity scene is a staple of the Christmas holiday.



INSIDE

3

A holiday story
A 505 / 575 Christmas.

4

Work of Art
Art Trujillo remembers the the Christmas season growing up.

7

Calendar of Events
Check out what Las Vegas has planned for the holidays.

8

Palabras Pintorescas
Optic Columnist Editha Bartley gives us timely tips from a 1917 Christmas magazine.

9

Holiday decorating
Simple strategies can make decorating easy and fun.

10

Get your home ready
Save time and money.

2 Winter 2018

Hometown Welcome

¡Bienvenidos!

As the sun slips above the horizon and bakes northern San Miguel County in wintertime warmth, decorations rest and take their place in the background as the day's activities begin. Street lamps hang their heads down low and hide their faces from that sun — waiting around until the evening time, when another holiday night comes.

The magic of the New Mexico holiday season focuses on magical nights, when we realize the true spirit and meaning of the holidays. From homecooked meals to singalongs to activities for children, there are many ways to put bitter memories into the past and to make new ones.

The celebration of the holiday season in northeastern New Mexico shows off its unique way of combining family, spiritual and community traditions, which are readily described to newcomers or visitors who arrive during the summer months.

It's exciting and heartwarming to be welcomed to a new place by lifelong residents eager to show newcomers how holiday traditions have unfolded and been preserved. With the same level of emotion that natives of a place sink their heads when talking about a multigeneration local struggle of some sort, ambassadors for American small towns smile and describe hundreds of details of the celebrations that help us forget the worries of the day.

I've heard, from Las Vegas residents and those in smaller Mora and San Miguel County villages, that it's easy to rediscover the magic that descends on the area this time of year. There are many ways these communities send an energy to their young people that transcends time and technology; the spirit of the holiday season is one of optimism and rejoicing.

Let's look forward to seeing the lights and other elements of the season.

The Las Vegas Optic has already published a few stories about holiday traditions, such as the Electric Light Parade and the 17th annual Holiday Home Tour.

City crews will be decking streetlights with festive banners.

The beautiful tree that is usually set up in the old Safeway parking lot on Douglas and Seventh is adorned with lights. While windy winter storms often wreak havoc on the tree, it stands as a natural symbol of an evergreen spirit of strength and forgiving benevolence.

Some of the towering trees around Plaza and Carnegie parks that are also draped in lights, create a festive glow.

Midwestern towns and small southern communities have a unique set of uniformity from place to place in duplicating its setup in hundreds of railroad areas and courthouse squares; a meadow/mountain confluence like San Miguel and Mora counties decorate in a much different, but still welcoming, way of lighting up streets.

Shopping in the city's main commercial districts is said to be a wonderful experience in and of itself. The oldest buildings on Bridge Street and around the Plaza, for example, are decked out in their holiday best. The unique gifts found inside those shops are nothing like what's available in expensive malls of the large cities, and are memories to travelers around the world of their trip to the Old West.

The tradition of lighting of luminarias — small brown paper bags with sand and a candle — is hardly a tradition unique to northern New Mexico, as it can be found in many places throughout the Southwest, such as southern California. However, the types of bizcochitos, tamales and enchiladas found in northeastern New Mexico are not simply holiday treats from some place else, but year-round, uniquely made offerings not found anywhere else.

Those dishes and desserts are made not simply with ingredients assembled by people, but also with the hands of history, family oral tradition and love — dishes topped with a slice of holiday spirit.

That's the sort of spirit and warm hot chocolate smell appreciated a bit more on cold December nights.

We look forward to making new friends who are anxious to spread holiday cheer and show off the local means of celebrating perhaps the most coveted holidays of the year. We hope visitors and other newcomers like myself are looking forward to celebrating the holidays here with the same enthusiasm.



— Jason W. Brooks, Editor



P.O. Box 2670
Las Vegas, NM 87701
505-425-6796
1-800-767-6796
www.lasvegasoptic.com

EDITORIAL

Editor:

Jason W. Brooks

Contributing Writers:

Ryan Lowery

Art Trujillo

Editha Bartley

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Composition Manager:

Maria Sanchez

ADVERTISING SALES

Advertising Manager:

Cynthia Fitch

Maria Sanchez

LAYOUT/COVER

Maria Sanchez

720 University Avenue
Suite B
Las Vegas, N.M. 87701

Phone: 505-425-6796
Toll Free: 1-800-767-6796
Fax: 505-425-1005
www.lasvegasoptic.com

The Las Vegas Optic is published Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

Periodical postage paid at
Las Vegas, N.M. 87701
POSTMASTER:
Please send address
corrections to:
Las Vegas OPTIC
P.O. Box 2670,
Las Vegas, New Mexico
87701
USPS 305-180



2018 Tradiciones