

When Christmas Past Melts Into Christmas Present

Each year when Christmas comes, I catch myself going back. Far back — leaving Florida behind for where I first knew Christmas with my family in Washington, D.C. I try to see it again, to feel it again ... I grow frustrated with how my memory betrays me. Then I get interrupted by the demands of the moment. I only catch snatches and snippets. But if I try hard enough, here is what I see:

I remember making a Christmas ornament or picture in school with glitter and glue and macaroni or a clothespin or construction paper. My



MARLENE FLYNN
Community Columnist
commcol@tampatrib.com

mother always loved every one of her children's little efforts in this way and

carefully saved each. We still use the star my brother made when he was little for the top of the tree. And our tree — it is always the best I've seen. Every year my mom glows when she takes her first look at the finished tree.

There are the three wise men my mom made so beautifully years before I was born. I like to think of her having been younger than I am now when she made them. They are fragile, but they've held up well. We all look forward to seeing them every year.

In my mind, Christmas and snow

are inseparable. There is the exquisite hush created when it blankets everything. It even smells cold. You can make snow ice cream with it, or pack it between your palms for a snowball. Perhaps more than anything, snow makes you slow down as you should to really feel Christmas.

I see my grandparents — they have been gone from this world for too long — and Kirkwood Drive in Bethesda, Md. Every year I ask myself, will I remember it well? Will I be able to make it real again, enough to bring them back just a little?

Then I try to forgive myself if I cannot. Instead, I am mindful of the chance I have to be with the ones I love now for another Christmas. When I am with them, I don't need to try so hard to remember what is gone.

I return to Christmas present and find every bit of warmth and magic in that.

Marlene Flynn divides her time between Tampa and Gainesville, where she is majoring in French and history at the University of Florida.