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Spirited Mystery in the Hay Loft

I found the "Memories of Glencoe Distillery" story interesting (September issue, page 52), especially the photos of the Fiddle and Fortuna Bourbon bottles. The latter held special interest, as the photo suggests.

This bottle's link to our family began about 1960, when my father bought a neighboring piece of property in western Shelby County that contained an old house and a barn with a dirt floor, three stalls and a hayloft. **Dad** tore down the house to build a modern new house, and after we moved in, he nailed a basketball goal on the front of the barn for my brother and me.

My brother, **Jerry**, and I lived in the house until we finished college, and our mother lived there until her death in 2002.

After our father died in 2006, Jerry and I sold the property. Before the sale, we cleaned up the barn, and in the loft behind an old wooden chest, we found a vintage Falls City Beer poster. Next to the chest in a pile of straw, Jerry found the empty Fortuna bottle. None of us drank alcohol during our years in the house that Dad built, so it's an enduring mystery who left the bottle in the loft. The old barn is gone now, but the Fortuna bottle sits in a curio cabinet in my home as a valuable piece of our Kentucky heritage.

Jim Miller, Diamondhead, Mississippi

Live Nativity

Our little Methodist church in rural Calloway County was one of the center points of our family. In the 1960s and '70s, I usually was part of the church Christmas pageant.

For the pageant, the pulpit and choir were moved to the side, so the altar area could be made into a stage. White sheets were strung up with safety pins, serving as curtains to be closed after each act. This formality was intended to add to the dramatic effect but likely became part of the show at times.

We worked for weeks before the event to create our costumes. Mothers made white angel frocks with tinsel-edged wings, while boys and dads searched for the perfect substance to create big, bushy beards.

If memory serves, there were some incredibly audacious fabrics back in the 1960s that led to some colorful bathrobes. Those fabulous finds were used for the royalty making their way from the East. All three were appointed with paper mâché crowns of gold, studded with plastic rubies and emeralds.

The shepherds were outfitted with a rope tied at the waist of their modest brown clothing. **Mary** always wore some kind of blue wrap—perhaps from a curtain or a well-worn tablecloth. **Joseph** and the shepherds wore towels tied around their heads. If there was a newborn in the congregation that year, baby **Jesus** was real. We did our best to honor the pictures of the memorable scene found in our Bibles.

I don't know whose idea it was, but there were a few years when the congregation decided it would be fun to produce a live nativity for those who did not attend our church. It was to be held outside, in front of the church. Parents were just as enthusiastic as we youngsters were, and the entire church got behind the idea.

For the stable, the men came together and used various-sized boards for a frame, which was overlayed with hickory slabs left over from firing tobacco. Those slabs were flat from the saw cut on one side with bark on the other. The bark provided the perfect rustic look we imagined might be found in Bethlehem.

In deciding who would play which characters, I guess we probably swapped roles so everyone got a chance to stand inside the stable for a little while. There might be a female king one year, and occasionally, one of the fellows was an angel. I don't recall any live animals, but we had life-size wooden cutouts of sheep and a donkey placed in our midst. Someone even had the presence of mind to illuminate the scene with spotlights.

Typically, the live events were held on the Friday and Saturday evenings the weekend before the big day. There were shifts for each night, so Sunday School class members signed up for a specific time. As teenagers, we didn't stand perfectly still and quiet, but when someone saw car lights, they said, "car from afar," so we could straighten up and get back in character. Many cars sped right on by, but some slowed down, and a few even parked and walked out to us.

It was a fun time to be with our friends, except for one thing. Apparently, no one had thought about how cold it might be in the weeks leading up to Christmas. When the weekend arrived, the temperature always took a decided dip into teeth-chattering territory.

Fortunately, the parents who had to drive their children, along with several church elders, provided a warming station in the fellowship hall. The laughter and discussion during those breaks indicated they had as much fun as those who were manning the manger scene out front. There were warm cups of hot chocolate for what felt like frostbit hands, along with snacks and a few baked goodies for special treats.

Bobbie Bryant, Jefferson County

Previously published in the Murray Ledger & Times.

Latonia Race Track (now Turfway Park) was the first track in Kentucky to offer Sunday races.