

## Christmas season celebrations spur sentimentality



*From my study I see in the lamplight,  
Descending the broad hall stair,  
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,  
And Edith with golden hair.*  
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**By Patricia Villers**

Sitting at my computer on a rainy Monday at the end of 2019 and feeling sentimental.

Yesterday was my birthday. I share the day with our daughter, Allegra, who arrived exactly one week late so she could take over the date.

Just kidding! It was the best birthday present a mother could ever receive - a beautiful baby girl on her own special day.

We didn't know ahead of time if our firstborn would be a boy or a girl. I was sure I was having a boy. But I was wrong. Our son Cameron waited until the second time around!

Ever since I was 9 the name Allegra was special to me. It was - and is - my favorite girl's name.

That's because when I was in fourth grade I memorized Henry

Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, *The Children's Hour*, with my father.

A line from the poem Longfellow wrote about his three daughters always stayed with me: "Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra, and Edith with golden hair."

On Thanksgiving weekend Allegra and I visited the beautifully decorated Osborne Homestead Museum in Derby. Her name came up in conversation and a woman who was working there asked me how she got the name Allegra.



"It's a long story," I said, not wanting to delay our tour with another docent.

She said she had never met anyone with the name and told us her mother was named Allegra after the Longfellow poem! Allegra and I were shocked.

We also had never met anyone with the name - although I've seen the name here and there - and to think her mother was named for the same reason was such a coincidence!

I only wish my father could have been alive to enjoy being a grandfather to our own Allegra! But that was not to be. He had passed more than a decade before she was born.

Today would have been his birthday, adding to the sentimentality of the holiday season for me.



Happy New Year 2020!





# Memories of being alone on a long-ago New Year's Eve

By Robert C. Pollack

Today – six days before New Year’s Eve – I think of the loneliest night of my life.

It was in 1958 and I showed up for a New Year’s Eve date at a midtown brownstone building in Manhattan armed with an orchid bouquet and a box of chocolates. My date was bright and beautiful and I had looked forward to this special evening for a long time.

I stood at the top of the stone stairs, my heart pounding, and began ringing the doorbell. I kept ringing and ringing but no one answered.

My supposed date was not home. She had stood me up for another.

I have never felt so abandoned.



But it got worse.

I decided to go to a movie alone -- I didn’t know what else to do since all my friends and acquaintances were clearly busy – and after ditching the orchid and chocolates in a garbage bin, walked into the Times Square area – which was 12 blocks or so away – and bought a ticket to a movie at the Paramount Theater, which no longer exists.

All these years later I remember the film – “A Tale of Two Cities” with Dirk Bogarde – and how I buried myself in its engrossing twists and turns amidst the French Revolution, which was its setting. With nowhere else to go, I stayed to see it twice. Yes, I had to pay twice – an expensive \$2.50 back then.

I had made reservations for two at a fancy restaurant -- which I cancelled before seeing the movie -- but I wasn’t hungry. Then, shortly before midnight, I finally left the theater, totally unaware of the time.

I stepped outside at 42<sup>nd</sup> and Broadway and was stunned to find myself literally picked up and swept along by a huge crowd, numbering almost one million people. They were there to watch the famous ball drop signifying the start of 1959.

I had forgotten all about that wild scene and now there was nothing I could do. I was virtually carried to a spot almost directly underneath the ball, my body crushed among many, standing in the freezing cold and waiting for it to drop.

People were cheering and hugging and using all kinds of noise makers, but I could scarcely breathe. I was virtually being hugged by everyone surrounding me in one of the world’s most famous places amidst a million people and yet had never felt so totally alone.

Then the ball started dropping – the crowd surging and whooping, television cameras rolling – triggering a mighty roar and people were kissing and hugging and laughing all around me.

"Happy New Year!" strangers shouted, "Happy New Year!"

"Happy New Year," I responded softly again and again.

It took me 45 minutes to fight my way out of that joyous crowd. I got into a subway and went home, determined never to be alone on New Year’s Eve again.

I never have. And as I wander around the Valley and see the holiday lights and store displays 60 years later, I realize that that night, while still alive in my memories, is merely a signpost that makes me grateful for the fact that I have found relationships since that have put me in a different, far happier place.



There is a Harry Chapin song called “A Better Place to Be” that defines loneliness for me almost as well as that searing night. But as I see the faces full of holiday cheer and gift giving, I realize how lucky most of us are not to have that empty, alone feeling inside us this time of year and resolve to go to a shelter, hospice, soup kitchen or hospital and say hello to someone who is not so fortunate – which, I guess, makes me a bleeding heart.

And so, my fellow bleeding hearts, here in Connecticut – where beauty beckons to us all – let us drink to anyone alone this holiday season. And let us all understand that we are no better than even the loneliest among us – just a lot luckier.

