Cowboy Bob’s Tall Tall Christmas Tale

Nick and Sara walked side by side down the hall leading to the gym of Hoover Elementary. Walking next to Sara was what Nick disliked about assemblies. Sara kept her eyes focused straight ahead on Mary Beth’s bobbing ponytail. She did not want Nick to think she was looking at him.

Halted at the gym door, Ms. Ryan, Nick and Sara’s teacher, index finger near to her mouth, hissed, “Girls in front, boys in the back – no talking -girls in front, boys in the back. No talking.”

Why the girls always get to sit in front, thought Nick.

Nick followed Peter into the gym where they found their class seating on the gym floor.

Jeff squirmed in next to Nick, asking in his quiet voice, “What’s this assembly about?”

Nick only shrugged an “I dunno”, not wanting to break the no talking warning from Ms. Ryan.

The gym was partially lit. Stage lights hummed to life as the softly glowing stage slowly crept to a dazzling white blast of light. The humming decreased as the lights dimmed
from the eye strangling brightness.

In the middle of the stage sat a chair, or was it a rocking chair. Nick had never seen a chair like this before now.

“It’s a glider rocker,” whispered Mary Beth to Sara, “my grandma has one just like it.”

Nick learned about the chair, as he dipped into Mary Beth and Sara’s whispered exchange in front of him.

Next to the glider rocker sat a bucket. Not an ordinary metal bucket, but a bucket made of wood complete with a rope handle.

Sara piped in, “That bucket looks like the one used to feed pigs at....”

A chorus of stern teacher issued “shhhhhhhhhhh’s” silenced Sara.

Great, thought Nick, an assembly with someone’s grandma rocking, or gliding, while feeding her pigs.

Mr. Page, Hoover Elementary Principal, strode briskly to the center of the stage. Holding up his right hand, the gym fell silent. Mr. Page smiled and looked around the gym. Mr.

Page had worked many years to command this power of silence at Hoover assemblies.
"Boys and girls of Hoover. Welcome to our annual holiday assembly," his voice echoed in the silent gym.

"Today, we have a special guest. Let’s welcome Cowboy Bob," Mr. Page stepped back, began to clap. As he turned to greet Cowboy Bob – a lasso darted out from behind the stage curtain. The lasso found its target encircling Mr. Page about his arms. Mr. Page began to squirming struggle. A sudden tug of the rope stopped his comical dance. Mr. Page tried standing still, except his stifled giggling kept his body bouncing. A gloved hand from behind the curtain grasped the rope into a taught line.

Applause, shouts and whistles rang out in the Hoover Elementary Gym.

Following the gloved hand came another gloved hand, as Mr. Page was slowly pulled gloved-hand over gloved-hand to the stage curtain.

"I give you Cowboy Bob," shouted Mr. Page, as with a final tug of the rope he disappeared.

His cowboy hat was weathered, worn and there was no telling the hat’s original color. A red bandana adorned his neck, tilted just right so as not to choke, but handy enough to pull up to cover the face during a dust storm. Dirty butter was the color of his jacket with fringes dangling in adornment on the sleeves. Hung on his right leg was a holster – empty – but tied down to his calf. Black leather chaps, scarred and stitched draped over the top of his boots.

His first step jingled, while his second step jangled as he strode to the center of the stage. Cowboy Bob had arrived at Hoover Elementary.
He slowly retrieved his rope that lassoed Mr. Page. Hand over hand the rope quickly slithered into a perfect circle. The buzz in the gym began to roar, when Cowboy Bob “whistled” startling the Hoover student body to a frozen silence.

Another, but shorter whistle from Cowboy Bob’s lips bounced around the silent gym.

A gentle set of “thuds” sounded from off stage. The “thuds” became louder and more frequent.

Something was coming thought Nick, as he rose on his crossed legs to get a better view over Sara and Mary Beth.

Bursting onto stage was a horse. Saddled, bridled and ready to ride. Not an ordinary horse in color – adorned with splotches of browns and tans resembling the seven continents, with a buckshot pattern of black freckles peppered the horse’s backside.

Hoover Elementary burst into cheers and hoots of appreciation.

Jeff nudged Nick, “My aunt has a horse – but its nothing like this!”

“Patches”, called Cowboy Bob, as the horse stretched its neck to nuzzle the cowboy’s outstretched glove.

Appropriate name for the markings on this horse smiled Sara.

Silence again reigned in the gym as Cowboy Bob stepped forward.

“Boys and girls, I would like for you to meet Patches”, Cowboy Bob announced while taking a sweeping step to the side, removing his hat, and pointing the hat-in-glove to his horse.

Patches bowed his head. Kneeling, or so it looked like it to Nick, as if to acknowledge the introduction, while Cowboy Bob adjusted his hat on his head.
Cowboy Bob stepped over to the saddled Patches quickly tying down the rope. Finished with the rope, he stepped back only to be interrupted by the chair. He turned and glared at the gentle, gliding motion. Scratching his head, he lifted his booted right foot as if to kick the intruder. The cowboy-booted foot lowered as Cowboy Bob leaned over. Jerking up the chair, Cowboy Bob wrestled the chair to the stage curtains. Patches snickered as if laughing, or so it sounded to Sara, who joined Hoover Elementary in laughing. Without hesitating, Cowboy Bob dropped the chair. The loud crash silenced the gym, while the chair glided slowly to a stop. Cowboy Bob was not amused as his jingling and jangling spurs sounded his displeasure during his return to the center of the stage.

Cowboy Bob grabbing the saddle horn, foot in the stirrup and quick as a hiccup, he was seated on Patches. Cowboy Bob slung his leg up around the saddle horn. Cowboy Bob settled back in the saddle, while Patches head found the wooden bucket. Patches’ munching reminded Nick of why his mom reminded him to eat with his mouth closed.

“I guess ya’ll will want to hear about the time I met Santa Claus,” Cowboy Bob paused, looking around the silent gym.

“Did he say he met Santa Claus,” whispered Nick, as he nudged Peter. A buzz of quiet-voiced conversations arose in the gym.

“Not only did I meet Santa, but I saved his bacon,” continued Cowboy Bob, as he read the thoughts of his audience and answered the hushed buzz of conversations.

The gym quieted as Cowboy Bob leaned forward in the saddle. His right elbow resting on the saddle horn, and stroked his chin, and began to talk, “winter had come early in Montana. Patches and I had signed on with the Flying W to move cattle from the high ground to safer lowland winter pastures.”
Patches munching stopped as he raised his head. Both ears tilted forward, erect as if listening for cattle calls. Patches stared into the audience.

Cowboy Bob continued, “Snow deep as my stirrups had fallen from Turkey day nigh unto near Christmas. Me and Patches were working the low draws up by One Bank Creek, searching for any cows that got caught up in the early snow.”

Swinging his right leg from behind the saddle horn, Cowboy Bob stepped from the saddle onto the stage without so much as a jingle or jangle. His head down, Cowboy Bob spoke, in a still, quiet sad tone, “Found three mama cows, three with calves and one mama cow due to calve any minute. She was down. With the weather, we were in a bad fix. Decided best take the three cows and calves - push ‘em back to camp.” Cowboy Bob lifted his face up, “Grab a bite to eat, warm up the bones and then head back for that last cow.”

Stepping forward, Cowboy Bob chuckled, “The other cowboys in camp were celebrating Christmas Eve when Patches got us into camp. They called me crazy Bob for going back out for one cow and soon to be born calf. It began to snow as Patches and I left camp.”

Patches stepped up behind Cowboy Bob and began to nuzzle his jacket pocket.

“Oh, all right,” smiling, Cowboy Bob reached in to his jacket pocket retrieving a small candy cane, holding it up for all of Hoover to see, “here’s your dessert.” Hoover Elementary student body roared their approval as Patches chewed and chomped the treat. Rearranging Patches’ bangs under the headpiece of the bridle, Cowboy Bob lifted the reins over Patches neck, turned and knelt. Silence met the kneeling cowboy.

“We were coming over the ridge that led down to One Bank Creek.” Cowboy Bob continued, “Snow blowing all around us. I’ll never forget the barking and snarling.”
Leaping to his feet, Cowboy Bob shouted, “Wolves!”

Sara grabbed Mary Beth, while Nick strained to see the wolves on stage.

Raising his arm, pointing at the audience, Cowboy Bob continued, “I spurred Patches.”

The cowboy spurred at the air, “Didn’t want to lose the cow and new calf to the wolves.”

Suddenly, Cowboy Bob reached for his holster only to find air in his right hand. His sheepish grin turned to a smile, “Oh yea, forgot,” he chuckled, “had to check my gun with Mr. Page.”

Taking another step forward, Cowboy Bob’s smile melted into a stern look, “Topping the ridge, I couldn’t believe my eyes. I reined Patches to stop. Below on the bank of the creek, I could see four wolves. Snarling and barking, the hungry pack was pacing in a semi-circle. Being held at bay by what appeared to be small cows.” Cowboy Bob’s gloved hand cupped above his eyes to look into the dim gym, “I leaned forward to get a better view through the snow. I couldn’t believe what I seen,” his had dropped from his face,” it wasn’t cows, but little deer.”

Turning and stepping back to Patches, Cowboy Bob replaced the reins about Patches neck, and again found the saddle. Taking the reins in his gloved hands, Cowboy Bob stretched, saddle leather creaking, sitting tall in the saddle, continued his tale, “Counted seven deer, heads down, and their massive antlers kept the wolves away. Behind the wall of antlered deer warriors was a small wagon, or so it looked like a wagon. No, I looked closer – studying - no, not a wagon, it’s a sleigh turned on its side. Huddled down inside the sleigh was a red clad, round little man. Nestled next to the man in red was another deer that wasn’t moving.”
With his right hand, Cowboy Bob reached up and adjusted his hat a little tighter, "I spurred Patches, we plowed down the ridge, I fired," his right hand extended over Patches' neck to simulate the shot, "my first bullet, kicked up snow near the wolves. In the swirling snow and howling wind, I don't know the wolves heard my first shot. Patches exploded through the snow drifts as my second shot whizzed through the wolf pack."

Reaching for his rope, Cowboy Bob's expert hands quickly laced a perfect rope halo circling above his head, "Patches came to a stop between the deer and the wolves. The sight of Patches snorting, pawing the snow and my swinging loop was too much for the wolves as they turned tail into the snowy night." The lasso fell limp on the stage.

Bob laughed as he retrieved his rope into a tightly formed circle. Cowboy Bob hung the rope around Patches saddle horn, dismounted saying, "Sure scared those wolves. Patches swung about to face the deer. They knew we meant no harm, as they turned to the sled. The short, red-clad roly-poly man stood and walked over sticking out his mitted hand."

"Cowboy Bob," a musical voice piped, "just in time."

"Do I know you stranger" was all I could think of to ask.

"Bob, it's me Santa -- I can't thank you enough. Looks like my sleigh is banged up, and Dasher is injured. Snow was really thick...."

"Hold it", Cowboy Bob inquired, holding up his hand, "THE SANTA CLAUS?"

He let out such a laugh his eyes closed tight, mitted hands clasp his belly. He shook as if shaken by an invisible string. I knew this had to be Santa and I began to laugh, too.
Santa’s laughter was interrupted as one of the deer began to nudge him toward the sleigh.

“Right Donner, we have to get back to Christmas,” as Santa began to examine the sleigh.

“Oh no, the runner is broken,” exclaimed Santa,”not good – not good at all, especially tonight.”

Cowboy Bob knelt on stage as if he were examining the sleigh.

“I can fix it”, I told Santa. I opened my pocket knife. Cut the leather laces from my saddle bags. I found a sturdy piece of pine limb, laced it to the broken sleigh runner.

With Santa’s help, we righted the sleigh. Santa retrieved the large red bag that had spilled from the sleigh during the crash.

Turning from the sleigh, Santa knelt to attend to the injured deer.

“Dasher, ole boy, come on now. Try and get up.”, I heard Santa’s soothing, encouraging voice. Dasher made a few attempts, but struggled each time, only to settle back against Santa.

“Cowboy Bob, I’m in a bad fix,” said Santa, as he stood and walked to Patches,”think Patches can bail ole Santa and his team out?” Santa rubbed Patches behind his ear.

Santa’s hand found the inside of his wide black, shiny belt. Santa’s mittened hand opened to reveal a small candy cane. Patches slurped the candy cane from Santa’s mitten with one swipe of his tongue. Patches chomped on the candy cane.

“Bail you out – Patches? Whadda ya mean?” I asked.

“With Dasher out, I need another sleigh team member to pull my sleigh,” replied Santa.

“Sure he can pull that sleigh – I will get him harnessed up,” Cowboy Bob said, as he started for the sleigh.
“No, no,” laughed Santa, as he halted Cowboy Bob, “I need Patches to fly with the rest of the team…”

Cowboy Bob interrupted, “Whoa there Santa, you must have hit your head in the crash – in case you didn’t notice, and Patches is a horse – not a flying deer. He can pull your sleigh- but Patches can’t fly.”

Patches ears perked up when Cowboy Bob said “fly”. Patches clomped over to Cowboy Bob again nuzzling the pocket of Bob’s jacket.

“Not now Patches, this is the best part of the story,” as Cowboy Bob stepped away from the horse.

“Who says Patches can’t fly was Santa’s reply.” I couldn’t believe my ears – Patches fly, and with a bunch of deer.

Santa’s lips pursed a whistle- that’s my whistle, thought Cowboy Bob, as Patches alertly faced Santa. Again and again Santa pulled small candy canes from beneath his belt, feeding them one by one to an eager candy cane eating horse.

“That ought to do it,” exclaimed Santa, as he took Patches by the bridle leading him to the front of the sleigh.

“C’mon Cowboy Bob,” called Santa, “harness Patches while I gather more candy canes.”

“Gather more candy canes?” Cowboy Bob asked in disbelief.

“If Patches is going to make tonight’s trip- we will have to refuel him after a few stops,” called Santa as he started up the hill.

“Refuel – candy canes- I don’t understand.”
"You will see – harness Patches and the rest of the team – they know where to stand. Then follow me," Santa started trudging through the snow over the small knoll behind the sleigh.

After harnessing Patches and the seven deer to the sleigh I followed Santa’s tracks. As I topped the knoll, I spied Santa walking around a tree, not much bigger than I was tall, but just as round as Santa. Gleaming, small candy canes dotted the branches.

"Hurry up, Cowboy Bob;" called Santa, “you can pick the candy canes from the top. I am getting those from the lower branches.” Santa’s hands darted in and out among the branches.

"Why don’t you just fly up to the top branches and pick the candy canes,” Cowboy Bob shouted, standing with his hands on his hips.

Santa stopped picking. He turned looking right at the cowboy on the hill, and began to laugh. He laughed so hard he began to roll around on the snowy ground, finally coming to a rest sprawled out on his back. Breathing hard, Santa shouted, "Silly Cowboy Bob, Santa can’t fly without reindeer!"

"REINDEER?" I called to Santa.

"Yes, Bob, reindeer. Not ordinary reindeer, but flying reindeer,” was Santa’s matter-of-fact reply.

Cowboy Bob marched down the snowy hill as Santa returned to retrieving candy canes. Never seen anything like it was all I could say to Santa, as I inspected the candy cane clad tree.
“Cowboy Bob, I have these planted all over the world. They only bloom candy canes on Christmas Eve,” explained Santa, as he continued picking, “at the North Pole, my greenhouse produces just enough for my reindeer to get them ready for tonight’s annual journey.”

Santa was finished explaining, while circling and picking, asking, “You going to help Cowboy?”

Plucking candy canes from the tallest branches, I began to fill my jacket pockets. Took off my hat, filled it until there was a mound of candy canes pecking out from the headband.

Santa stopped picking. Inspecting Cowboy Bob’s bulging pockets and his hands holding a hat full of candy canes; Santa said knowingly, “We’re ready."

I followed Santa over the hill trying not to spill any candy canes from my hat.

The reindeer team began to paw the snowy ground.

Santa walked to the front of the team and quickly fed another handful of candy canes to Patches. Shaking as if he had just been dunked in the creek, Patches shrugged off the snow that had settled on his coat.

“Be a pal Cowboy Bob, put Dasher under the front seat,” shouted Santa.

I lifted Dasher. Carefully, I walked the injured reindeer to the sleigh. As I leaned to place Dasher on floor of the sleigh, the reindeer’s long tongue darted out. Licked me on the cheek, felt like a new born calves tongue.

“Mount up Cowboy!” Santa exclaimed, as he returned to the sleigh.

“Mount UP?” I exclaimed, his eyes widening for the Hoover audience.

“Bob, don’t tell me – you’re afraid to fly?” Santa grinned at the cowboy.
"Santa, I darn near been to the top of the Rocky Mountains, been on the back of a horse. I have been tossed from a few bucking broncos – that’s as high as I’ll ever fly without a saddle under my backside,” was my reply.

“Cowboy Bob, I need you to tend to Patches during tonight’s stops. Feed him candy canes and tend to Dasher. Santa needs your help,” pleaded Santa as his eyes met mine, “after all; I will be doing the driving.”

Cowboy Bob looked around the Hoover Elementary gym. Not a whisper, not even a cough.

“What could I do? Santa needed my help. I climbed in that sleigh with a thousand butterflies churning butter in my stomach.”

“Hang on,” advised Santa, as I climbed into the sleigh.

I no sooner had clutched the rail on the sleigh’s dashboard than we were off. Clutched between my legs was my candy cane filled hat. I saw the lights blur below in glowing streaks, as we sped away. As suddenly as the sleigh had started on this wild ride, it settled gently on a roof top. I turned to speak to Santa, but he was gone, as was the sack. And so it went throughout the night as the sleigh crow hopped and danced from rooftop to rooftop.

From time to time Santa would pause long enough for me to feed candy canes to Patches. I even tossed a few to the reindeer on some of the stops.

I had emptied my hat of candy canes, as well as both pockets. Santa had handed over all the red-striped canes he had picked.
As the sleigh came to rest, Santa turned to me saying with a smile, “Almost done. Give Patches another cane or two – I’ll be right back.”

I jumped from the sleigh because when Santa said he would be right back, he meant no longer than a five to ten blinks of an eye.

Cowboy Bob dug both hands into his fringed jacket pockets. Both pockets emptied inside out as if his jacket had sprouted ears. Raising both hands over his head, Cowboy Bob opened both to reveal no candy canes to Hoover Elementary.

Cowboy Bob dropped his hands to his side as his head drooped to his chest.

“What was I to do? No more candy canes meant that Patches was grounded. Santa was grounded. Christmas was grounded,” lamented the sad cowboy.

Nick sat back, lowered his head, as his chin found his fists. No Christmas! Santa grounded! No candy canes!

“I sat down next to the sleigh”, continued Cowboy Bob,”feeling lower than a rock on the bottom of the One Bank Creek.”

“Why so sad cowboy?” as Santa’s mitten lifted my chin.

I couldn’t look Santa in the eyes. I had let him down, should have never given candy canes to the reindeer.

“Out of candy canes?” Santa inquired.

I could only mumble “Yes”.

“Let me think,” Santa’s mitten clad hand stroked his chin, as he turned in two tight circles.
“Merry Christmas and Merry Christmas!” exclaimed Santa, “I’ve got it! All the boys and girls leave candy canes under their Christmas trees for me. Of course, myself, I’m a milk and cookie man. I will just dash about pick up enough candy canes to get that horse flying!”

With that Santa began to laugh a belly laugh, ”Get it – horses fly! I am so funny sometimes.”

In instant Santa was gone, though, not for long, maybe ten blinks of an eye. Santa was back with his red cap, cradled between his mittens, brimming with candy canes.

Cowboy Bob lifted his hat, turning it over for the candy cane filling.

Santa hesitated and his chin dropped.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“These candy canes are not from one of my trees,” Santa sadly reported.

Cowboy Bob’s gloved hand stretched out as he lifted Santa’s imaginary chin.

“Santa, these candy canes are from boys and girls who believe in you. Earlier tonight, I thought you were some kind of nutty old mountain man dressed in red.”

Santa looked deep in my eyes. His cheeks began to glow, while his eyes shimmered.

“You believe in Santa, Cowboy Bob?”

“Yes, Santa, I believe!”

Santa leapt in the air, spun about twice. Pouring candy canes from his cap into my cowboy hat, Santa smiled as if he had just eaten a hot biscuit right out of the oven with honey butter.
I turned with my hat full of candy canes, walking to the front of the sleigh; I whispered over and over to myself, “I believe, I believe”. Reaching Patches, I began to feed him the candy canes.

“Hurry up Cowboy Bob,” Santa called from the sleigh,” we’re running out of Christmas time.”

I stuffed the last handful of candy canes into Patches’ mouth before hurrying back to the sleigh. I pulled my hat down tight for takeoff.

Cowboy Bob replaced his hat pushing it down extra tight.

Gripping the dashboard rail, I nodded at Santa as I had done the gate man in the bronc riding event at the Sandy Springs rodeo.

Cowboy Bob stood motionless on the Hoover Elementary stage. Stage lights hummed as the students waited silently for the story’s ending.

“What happened Cowboy Bob?” blurted out Sara.

A buzz of quiet voices rose but the buzzing silenced as shhhhhhhhh’s came hissing from the Hoover Elementary student body.

“Well, that sleigh lifted off, but something was wrong,” Cowboy Bob swayed and bobbed, first left, then right, ”she bucked and pawed the air! Santa did all he could to hold her.”

Collapsing on stage, Cowboy Bob slowly picked himself up, dusting off his chaps and jacket sleeves.

“We went down, but not on a roof, smack dab in the middle of somebody’s lawn.”
While I tried to get my bearings, Santa inspected the sleigh.

“No damage,” reported Santa. Walking around the team, Santa checked the harness finally reached Patches.

Staring into Patches’ eyes, Santa let out a low whistle, ”here’s our trouble!”

“What is it,” I asked.

“Ole Patches is short one candy cane,” replied Santa.

On stage, Cowboy Bob began to search his jeans and shirt pockets. Taking off his hat he peered inside then turned it over shaking hoping to find one last candy cane. A small dust cloud from the hat was picked up by the stage lights.

Patches stepped up behind Cowboy Bob nibbling at the hat.

“Patches, let me finish the story” the cowboy gently nudged the horse’s head away from the hat.

As I stood up in the sleigh to call to Santa, I noticed the door to the house, whose lawn we had landed, was open. Standing in the doorway was a boy. About this high – Cowboy Bob’s hand measured up the boy’s height next to his chaps.

Before I could warn Santa, the door swung wide open with a crash. Santa turned from Patches, as the boy, along with a little girl with bouncing curls, raced down the steps. Clutching Santa’s leg with all her strength was a curly-headed little girl.

“Allison,” cried the boy, “let me hug Santa.”

“Bryan,” Santa called to the boy, laughing, “there’s room on this leg.”
Bryan froze, as I knew the same feeling you get when Santa calls you by your name. The boy awoke to join his sister in hugging Santa’s leg.

Santa stood patting the children’s shoulders as they clung to his legs.

What about the candy canes? What about Christmas? I mouthed to Santa as he smiled and winked at me.

Santa bent over and whispered in the children’s ears. Quick as any calf out of the chute, those two young ‘uns raced back up the steps into the house. Wondering what he said, I hopped out of the sleigh starting toward Santa, when both children, Bryan leading the way, nearly bowled me over.

Standing quietly in front of Santa, Bryan and Allison held up one candy cane in each outstretched hand. Santa knelt giving each a hug. Leading the children to Patches, Santa instructed them to feed the candy canes to the horse. Patches obliged, quickly munching and crunching the canes.

Santa walked Bryan and Allison to the front door. He leaned over, again whispered to the children. Their eyes got wide, as their mouth flew open. Both were gone in an instant, as Santa shut the door.

Cowboy Bob walked to a waiting Patches. Turning, he led Patches back to center stage.

With no effort, Cowboy Bob was seated back in the saddle again.

“Those candy canes did the trick that night as the sleigh lifted off. Aaaah, the sights we saw. Paris, Big Ben that clock in London, the Eiffel Tower and I finally got to see New
York City!, exclaimed Cowboy Bob as his outstretched arm waved as if pointing to each vision from his Christmas ride.

"Fingers of Christmas morning light were clawing at the dark when Santa set the sleigh down."

"Last stop for cowboys and horses," Santa called in a most monotone voice.

We were back at One Bank Creek. There was the mama cow, Patches and I had set out for earlier in the evening. New born calf standing at her side.

"Christmas was not grounded by a shortage of candy canes," Cowboy Bob smiled, "No, Christmas was saved by all of the boys and girls who believe in Santa, along with this old cowboy, and the candy canes that you set out on Christmas Eve."

Bob clicked his tongue, which was Patches cue to walk to the edge of the stage. Reining Patches to a gentle stop, Cowboy Bob turned to Hoover Elementary, "Just remember, ole Santa is a milk and cookies man, while Patches is a candy cane eating flying horse."

Cowboy Bob removed his hat in a sweeping motion, gently tugged on the reins. Patches bowed his head, again seemed to kneel, as the Hoover Elementary Gym exploded with clapping, hooting and hollering.
Nick tapped Sara on the shoulder, "No way am I forgetting to put out candy canes on Christmas Eve!"

Sara nodded, replying, "I'm putting out a whole box of candy canes!"

Girls- no wonder they get to sit in front, thought Nick.