

# Footsteps on Christmas Day

We normally don't go for a walk on Christmas Day.

We normally sit inside by the fire sipping hot wine or mulled cider and pass the afternoon in conversation until it's time for dinner. Then we sip hot wine or mulled cider and pass the evening in conversation.

But this Christmas was different. First, Donna and Martha walked

the Hoyt Park area and the bluffs where they grew up.

They got back just as Vince and I were about to head out the other way and Martha decided to walk with us too.

We walked three abreast down to the Arboretum.

Then single-file across the frozen marshes.

I remembered all those snowy years of following in my father's footsteps and now I was following in my kids' footsteps and it seemed like I had spent my whole life bringing up the rear.

This bohunk family had produced its share of leaders, and by damn, I had followed them all.

We moved onto the frozen surface of Wingra and headed down the shoreline to the left.

The lake stretched away like a desert. The powder snow glistened in a sea of mica. We strung out and walked toward the knot of people clustered around the gaily painted boxsled.

The Magical Mystery Tour Sled! Belonging now to the One and Only, Vince Colletti.

And there he was, not actually fishing himself, but rather instructing two young men in the Art of Actual Fishing.

He took the jigging pole from one.

"Not your whole arm," Colletti snapped. "Just your wrist. See."

He held the pole like a baton. A wand. And flicked it in a fluid motion.

"Have to teach them," he said. "Or they don't catch nothin'."

Later, as we walked off the lake, young Vince asked me if old Vince was related to the young men and I told him I didn't think so, but it didn't make any difference, the whole world was Colletti's family.

Dynie Mansfield would have loved it. Dynie, who always insisted that the Good Lord watched over all The Dumb Ones.

We cut across the lagoon, paid a courtesy call on the Herbsts, where Jurgen had the Battle of Smolensk spread out on a card table, and walked west on the railroad tracks.

The kids wanted to short-cut

through the cemetery and so we did, crunching through the clean stillness, the crows lowflying and fleeing without fear, the dark living pines looking down on the bright artificial flowers.

In the Jewish section, we detoured to the grave of our great friend buried here only last Spring.

The sheltering tree was leafless, the snowfield unbroken, the silence thundering with memories.

For a moment, it was as if we were at the grave of our other great friend far to the North, the Old Man sleeping in another unbroken snowfield.

Vince brushed away the drift, read the inscription.

It doesn't make any difference, I could hear the great friends saying.

The whole world is Colletti's family.