

## **A Light in the Darkness**

The children of Cecil and Mary Dobecka shared many Coppell Christmases through the 1960s and 1970s. For the most part, they were filled with the little joys that make up Christmas. They recall stringing popcorn garlands for decoration, attending midnight mass at Mary Immaculate Catholic Church, stockings full of fruits and nuts, and family gatherings on Christmas Day. They even recall the peculiar odor of a Coppell Christmas, a mix of smells that wafted from the Ottinger family pig farm and the Eby's chicken farm.

The most memorable of these Christmases came in 1967. In October, a short two months before the holiday, Cecil Dobecka, Sr. was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Mary was a stay-at-home mother and the medical expenses began to take their toll on family finances.

Coppell was still a small town, with a population of just over one thousand residents. Cecil was well known. As a carpenter, he built many homes in the community. As a city councilman and volunteer firefighter, he offered his time and safety to his neighbors. This life of service was, in part, repaid that Christmas. The Dobeckas recall that both friends and neighbors came together, donating money to cover Cecil's medical expenses.

Doctors allowed Cecil to spend Christmas at home. He passed away four days later. Nearly five decades have gone by, but Shirley, Pamela, Paula, and Cecil Dobecka Jr. still remember how the Coppell community lived out the spirit of Christmas, acting as a light in the darkness for their family.

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