A shy six-year-old Bessie George anxiously awaited Christmas. She needed happy times. She sorely missed her mother, who had recently passed away. She also missed her father, her relatives and her little friends so far away in the Chinook village of Bay Center, Washington. She was slowly adjusting to life at the Cushman Indian boarding school in Tacoma, Washington. This had been difficult considering the only English words she knew when she arrived were “yeh” and “neh.” However, she felt the people were understanding, teaching the children to care for themselves and to be neat and tidy. Each girl had her own “area of responsibility” in her room and in caring for clothing.

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Bessie listened, entranced, as older children talked about the large decorated tree they would have, its branches weighed down with the presents now arriving for everyone. Well, almost everyone. There were ugly whispers that some children received only one gift, a gift from the school: a ribbon for the girls, a handkerchief for the boys.

But Bessie’s haunting doubt was changed to happy anticipation at the sight of the glorious tree with gifts enough, surely, for every child. There were so many dolls and bright, interesting toys. Her eyes took in the dolls of all sizes. Each was so pretty; which one would be hers? Did she dare dream it would be the one in red velvet? That dream turned to dust for lonely Bessie when she was presented the dreaded gift of a hair ribbon. Sensing Bessie’s agony, another girl placed one of her own dolls in Bessie’s empty arms. She then invited little Bessie to help carry her other gifts to their room.

Disappointment and loss leave lesser people bitter, and full of self-pity. Fine people become more aware of the feelings of others, and so it was with Bessie George Pickernell. Her pleasure, for the rest of her days, was to provide dolls and toys for small children.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays to All & Happy New Year
from the Chinook Indian Nation