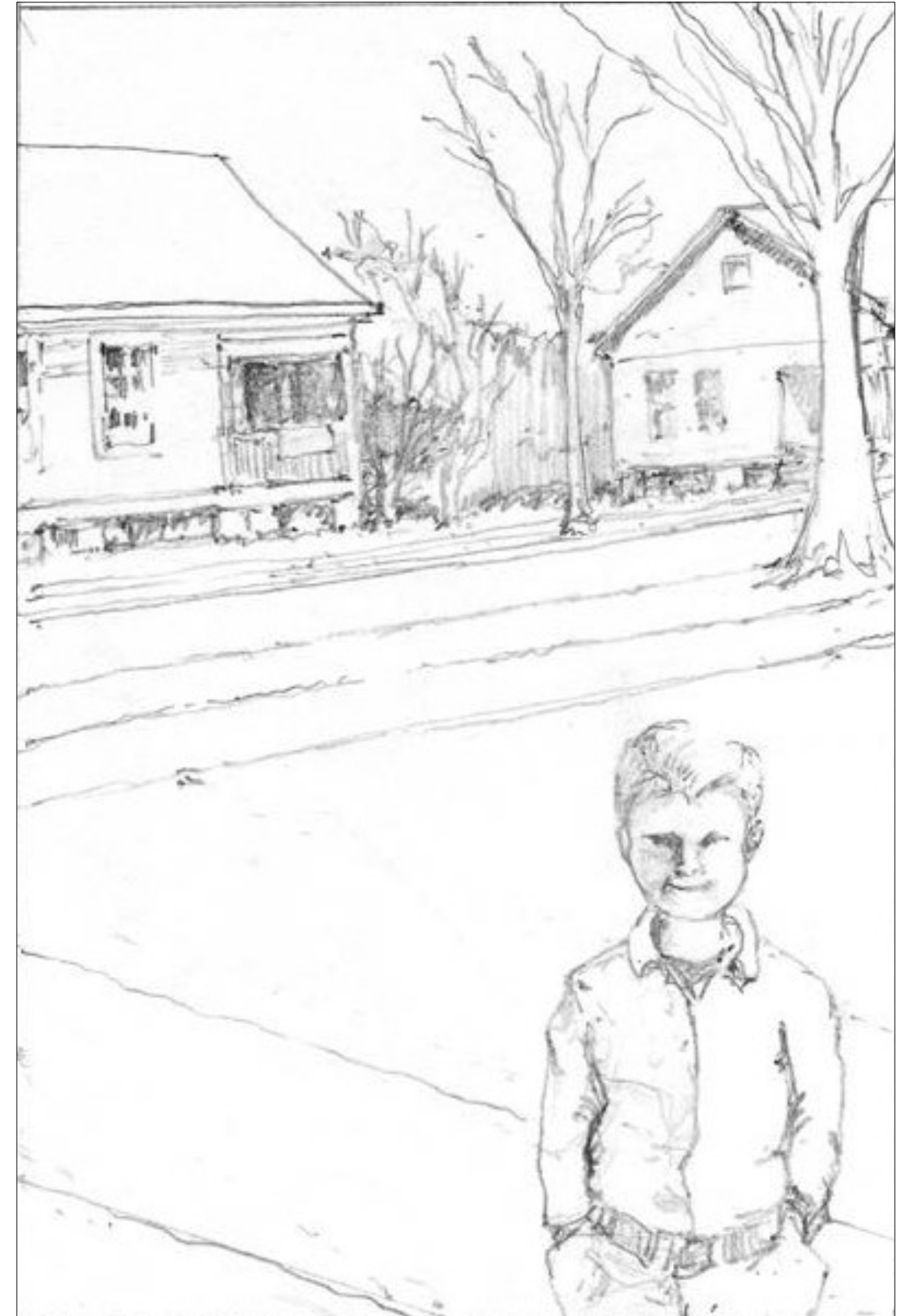
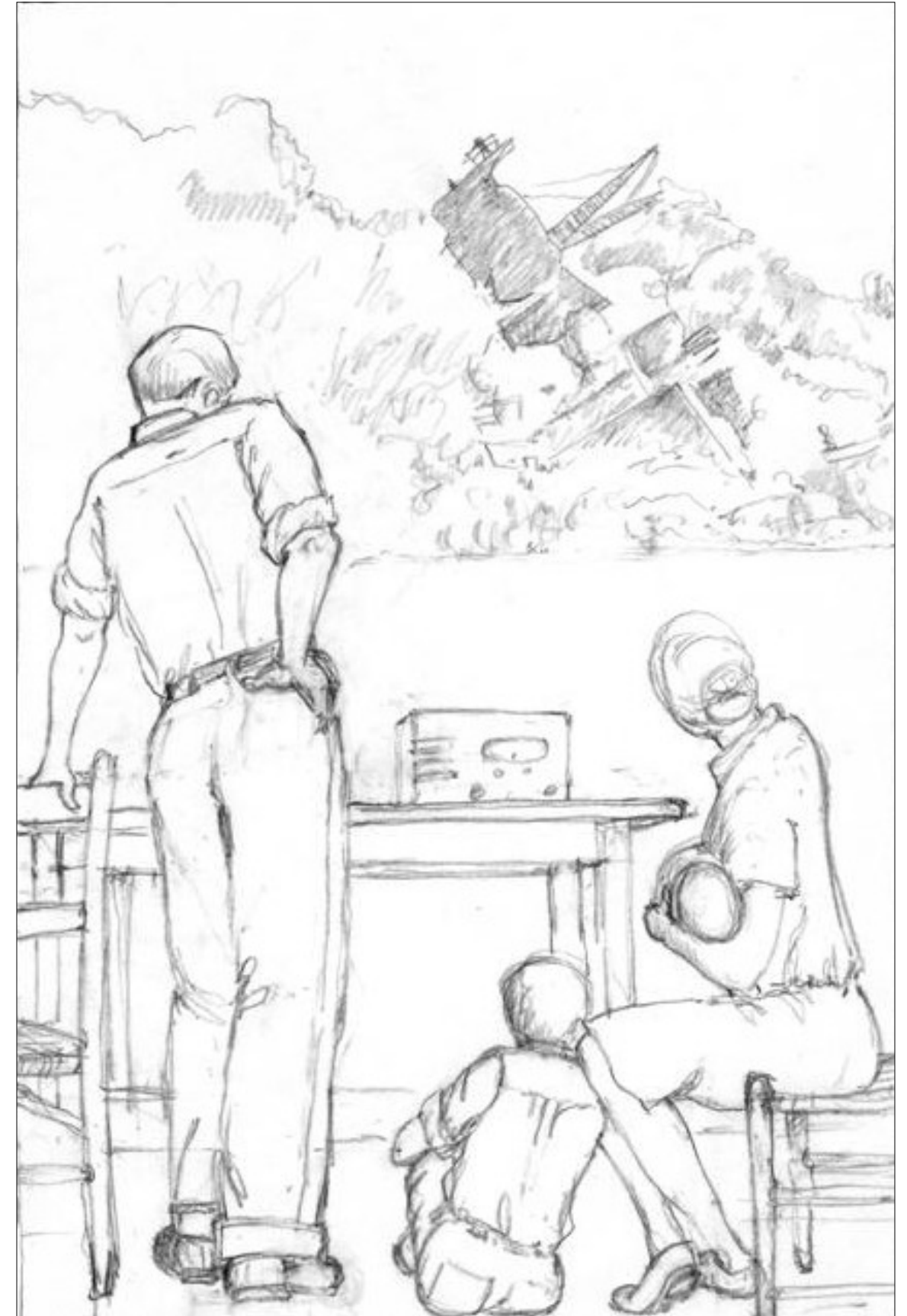


[You can buy a paperback copy of this story to support the Brown's Chapel Church at a "Tightwad Christmas".](#)

The year was 1941 and I was four years old. We lived in Pacolet Mills on a pretty street called Tightwad. I don't remember its real name. Nobody ever called it that anyway. It was always referred to as Tightwad. Nobody seemed to know why. It was the sort of neighborhood where everybody knew every body else. It was a great place to be a child.



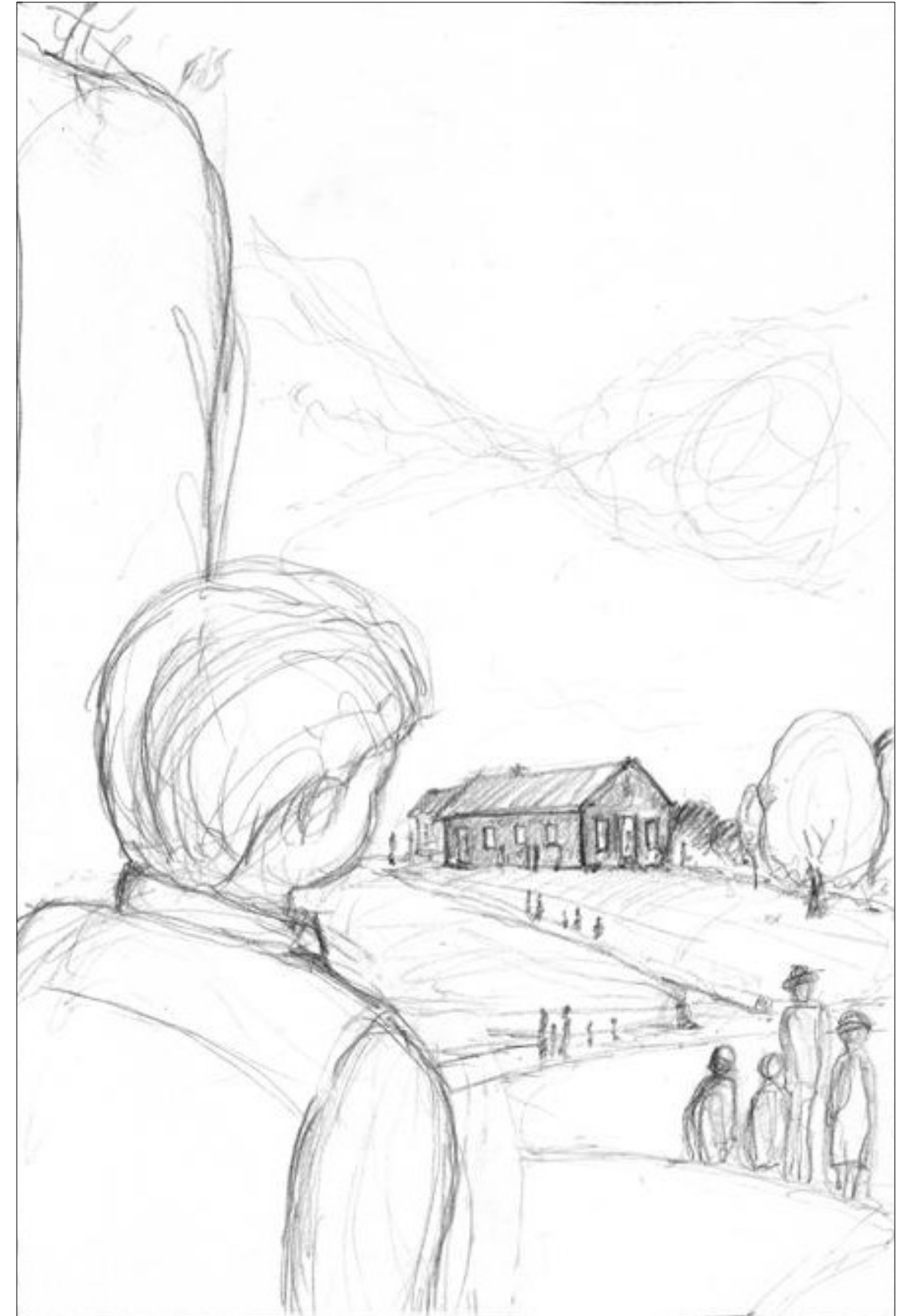
That Christmas in 1941, on Tightwad, is my earliest memory of Christmas. I did not know it then, but a great tragedy and disaster had just happened to our country. Just days before, on December 7, the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and plunged us into World War II. All over the USA, and the world, people's lives were going to be drastically changed. Many people's lives were never again going to be the same.



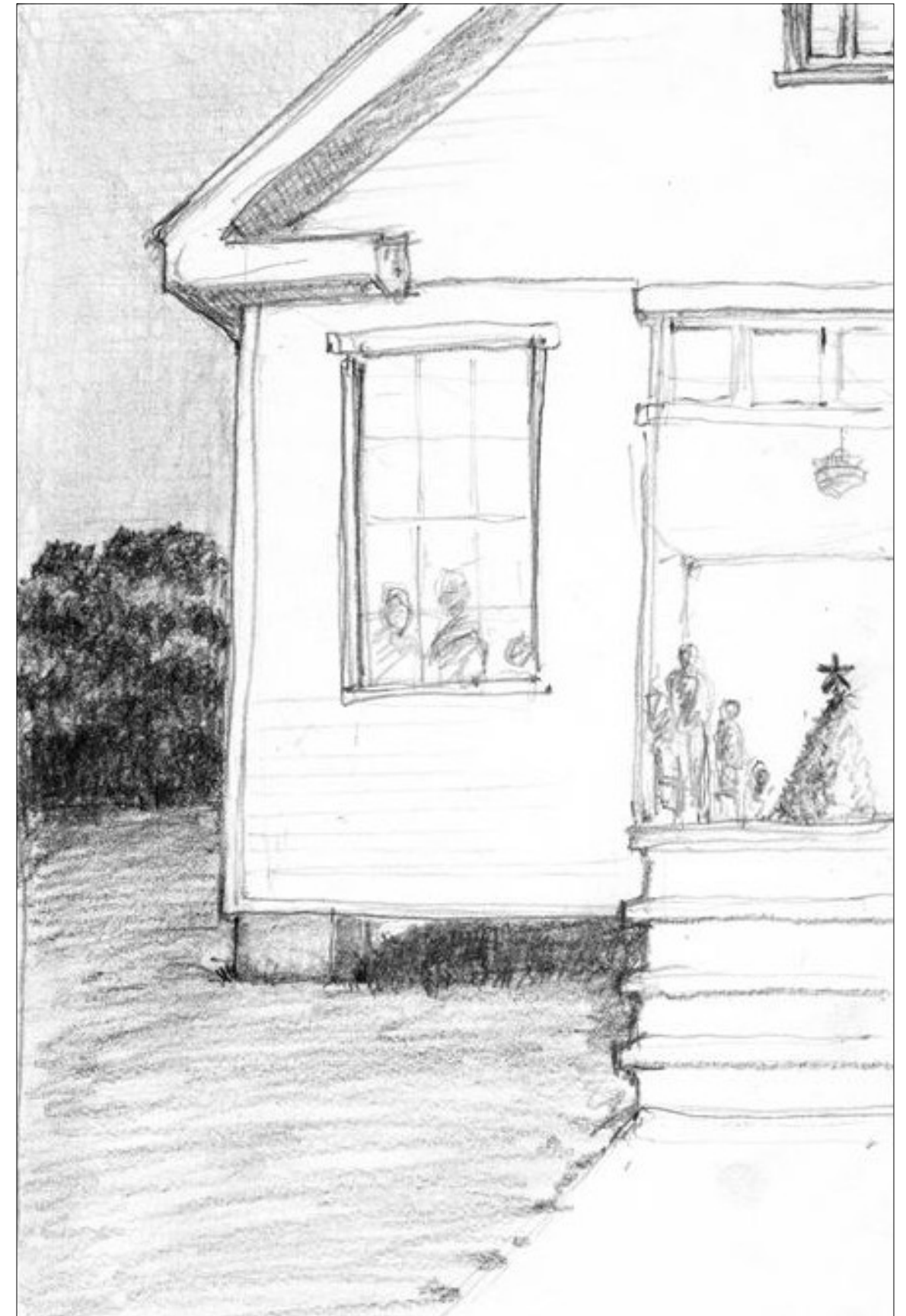
But I didn't know. I lived in a nice house with my brother Dink and my Mamma - Marie and my Daddy - Fred (Doog). We were lucky to have Dink. That was his nickname, his real name was Claude David. He was given that name because he was so small when he was born in 1939. Like almost everybody then, he was born at home under the care of Doctor Hill, our town doctor. Dink was born two months prematurely and the news was very bad. Doctor Hill at first said he was dead. He left him with my Grandma Teaster to wash him and prepare him for burial. Doctor Hill had to leave immediately to go on another call. When my Grandma put Dink in the warm pan of water to wash him he started to squirm, breath and cry. Someone went running after Doctor Hill and brought him back. Dink spent the first two months of his life in an incubator. He lived to be 58 years old and was one of the toughest and bravest people that I have ever known.



I remember the feeling of that Christmas Eve in 1941. There was an excitement in the air that I did not really understand. That afternoon, when it began to get dark, I went down to the church known as Brown's Chapel just a few hundred yards away. It was located at the end of Tightwad street. It was a different world back then with very few cars. I believed I went to church with some of our neighbors, but I'm not sure.



What I am sure of, is the overwhelming sight of the first Christmas tree that I can ever remember. We arrived at Brown's Chapel and started up the steps of the old wooden church. When I got to the top of the steps I could see inside the church. There was the most wonderful sight my young eyes had ever beheld. There was a towering cedar tree decorated with more lights, ornaments and tinsel than I knew existed. To this day, when I think about a Christmas tree that one at Brown's Chapel is the one that comes to mind.

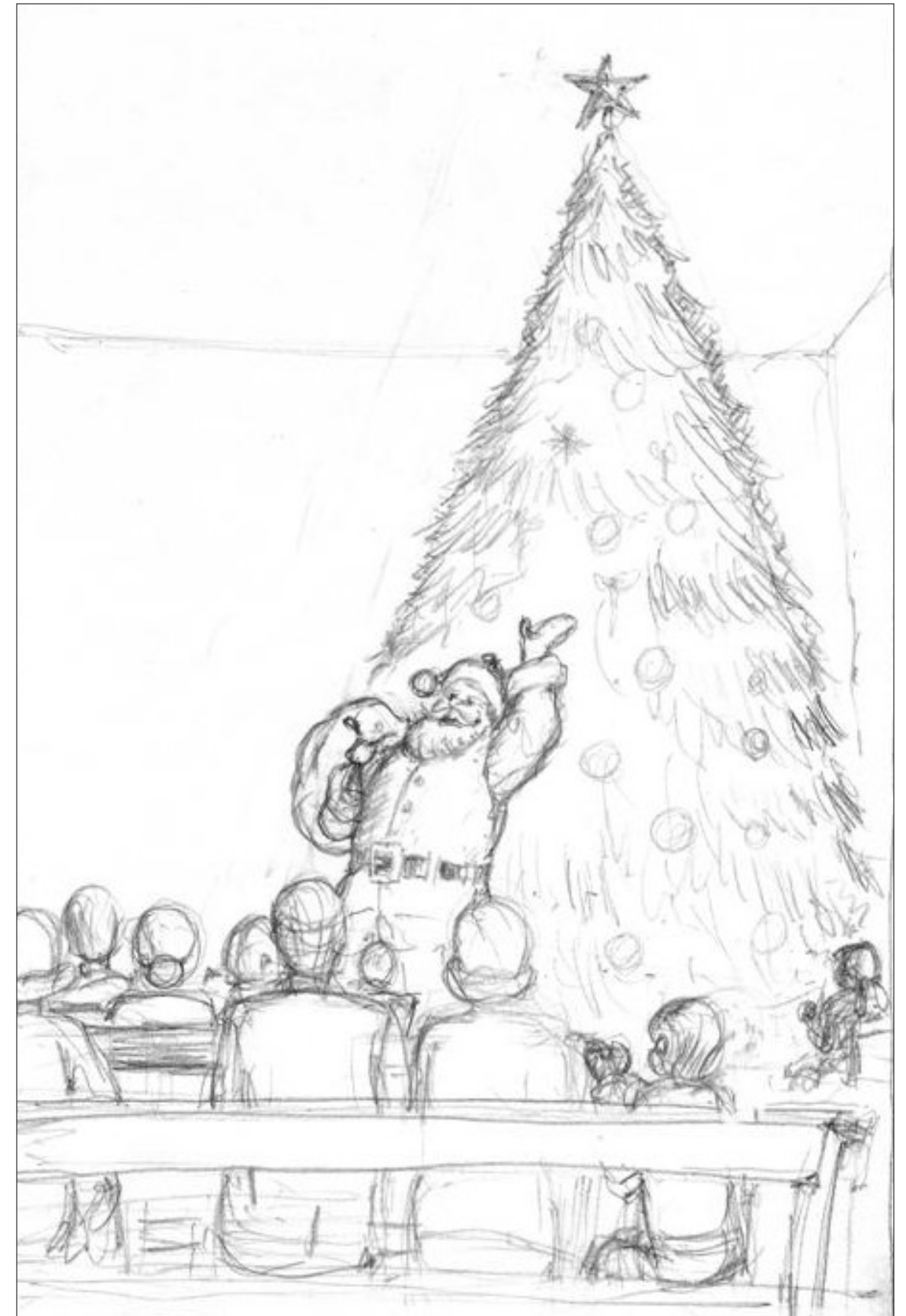




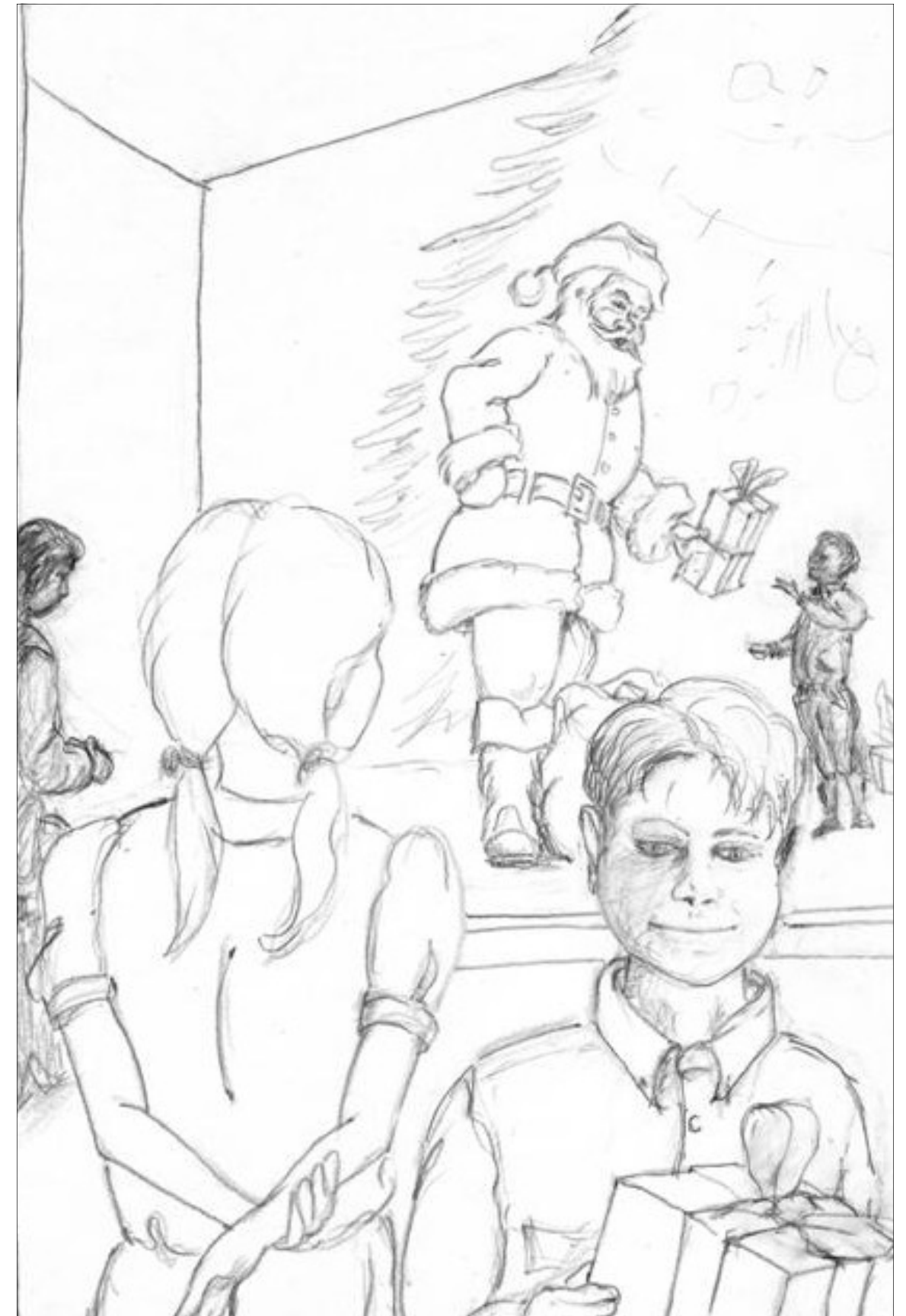
I walked on into the church. The closer I got to the tree the more magical it became. There were mountains of brightly wrapped presents under the tree. I did not understand about the presents but they were almost as beautiful as the tree.



I'm sure there was a regular church service of some sort that night but I do not remember one thing about it. What I do remember is that after we had been sitting for a long time another amazing thing happened. The lights of the church were turned down and the lighted Christmas tree seemed to fill the silent church. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, this wondrous person appeared. He was unlike anything I had ever seen. He was wearing a bright red suit and he had a long white beard. He was big and round and wearing a red hat. He was magical to me. I did not know who he was but it seemed all of the other children and adults did. "It's Santa Claus" they all whispered loudly.

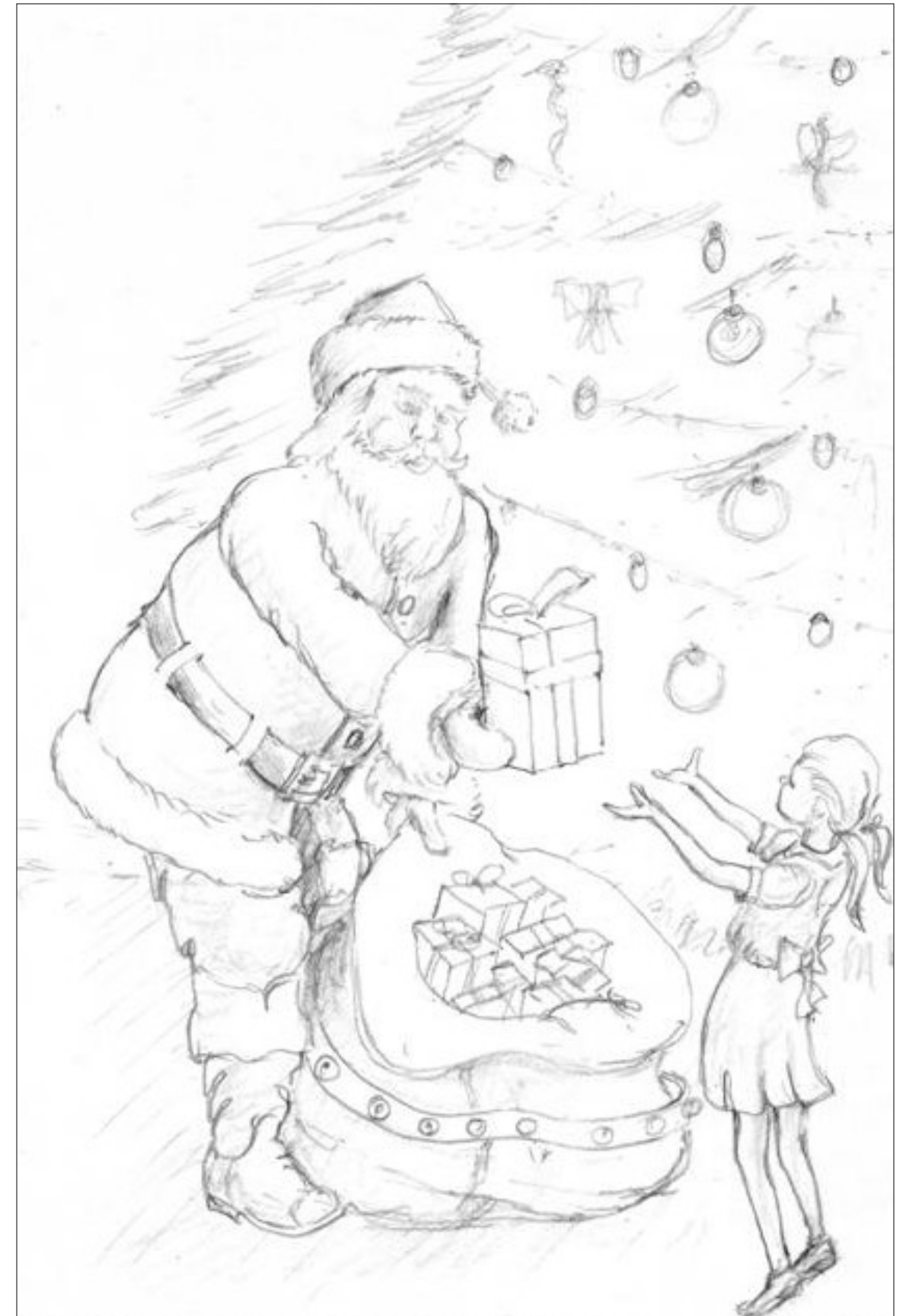


He was carrying a large sack overflowing with presents. He walked up beside the Christmas tree and put his sack down. He started taking the presents from his sack and began to call children's names. They came running down the aisles to him and he gave each their own brightly wrapped package. When he had emptied the sack, he moved to the tree and its pile of presents. He started calling out the names on those presents and adults and more children came up to receive their present directly from Santa's hand.

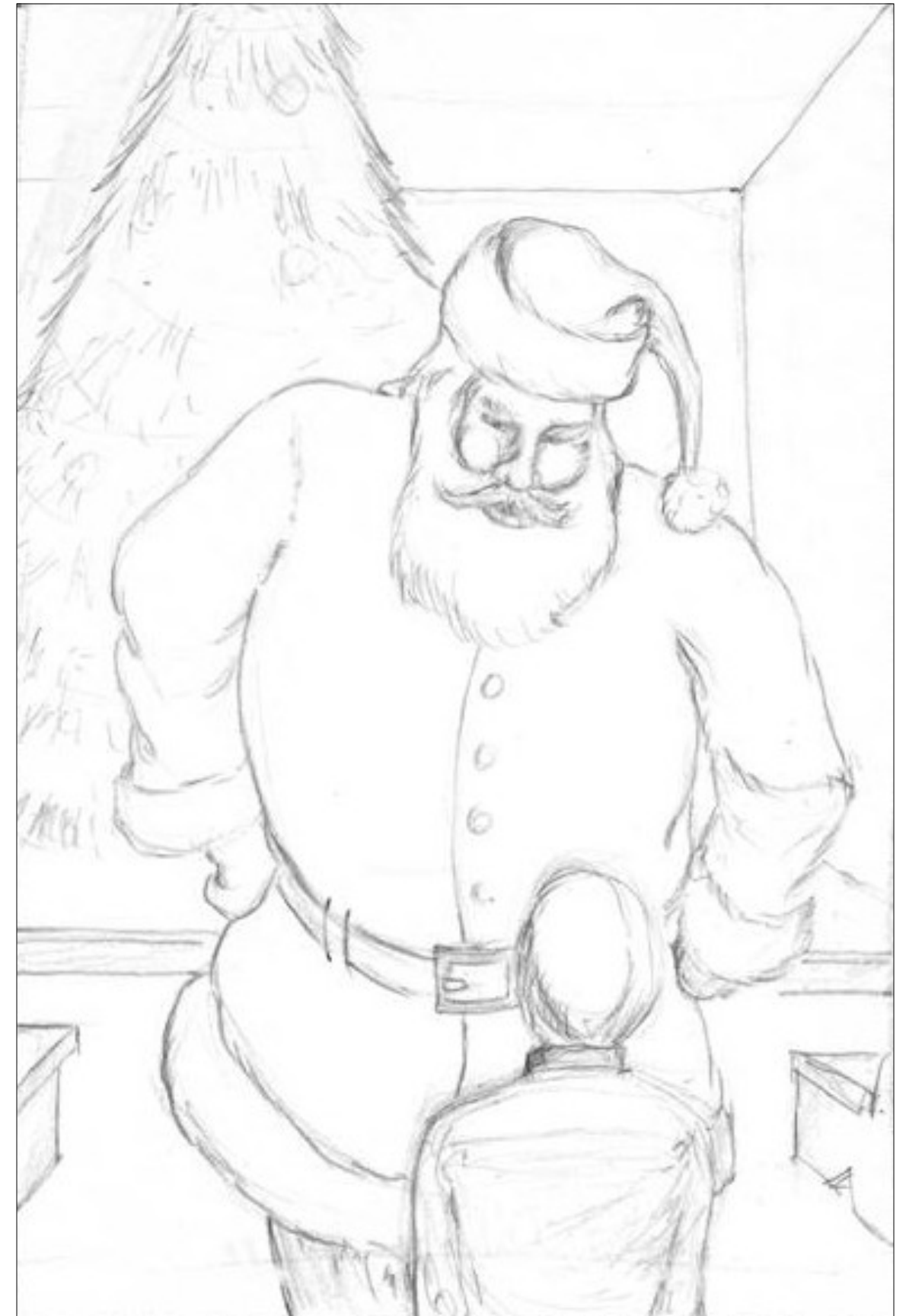




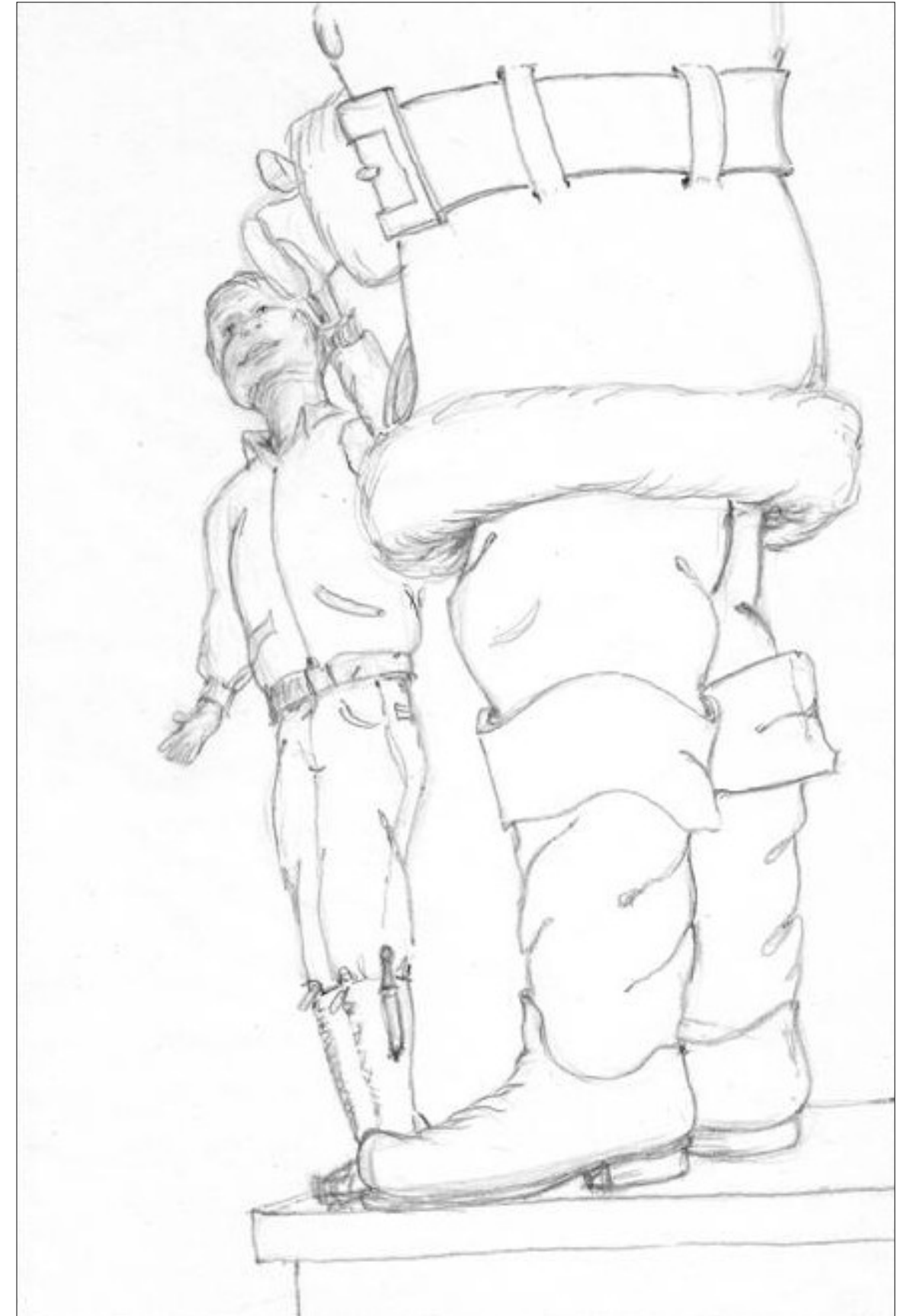
I was still somewhat confused by the whole thing but it did seem like everyone was having a wonderful time. Suddenly, Santa was calling my name and looking directly at me. I ran up to the magic tree and got my present. I don't remember the present but I surely do the event. Santa kept on passing out presents until every boy and girl in the church had one. Then, with the help of other adults he started handing out large paper sacks filled with oranges and apples and hard candy and nuts.



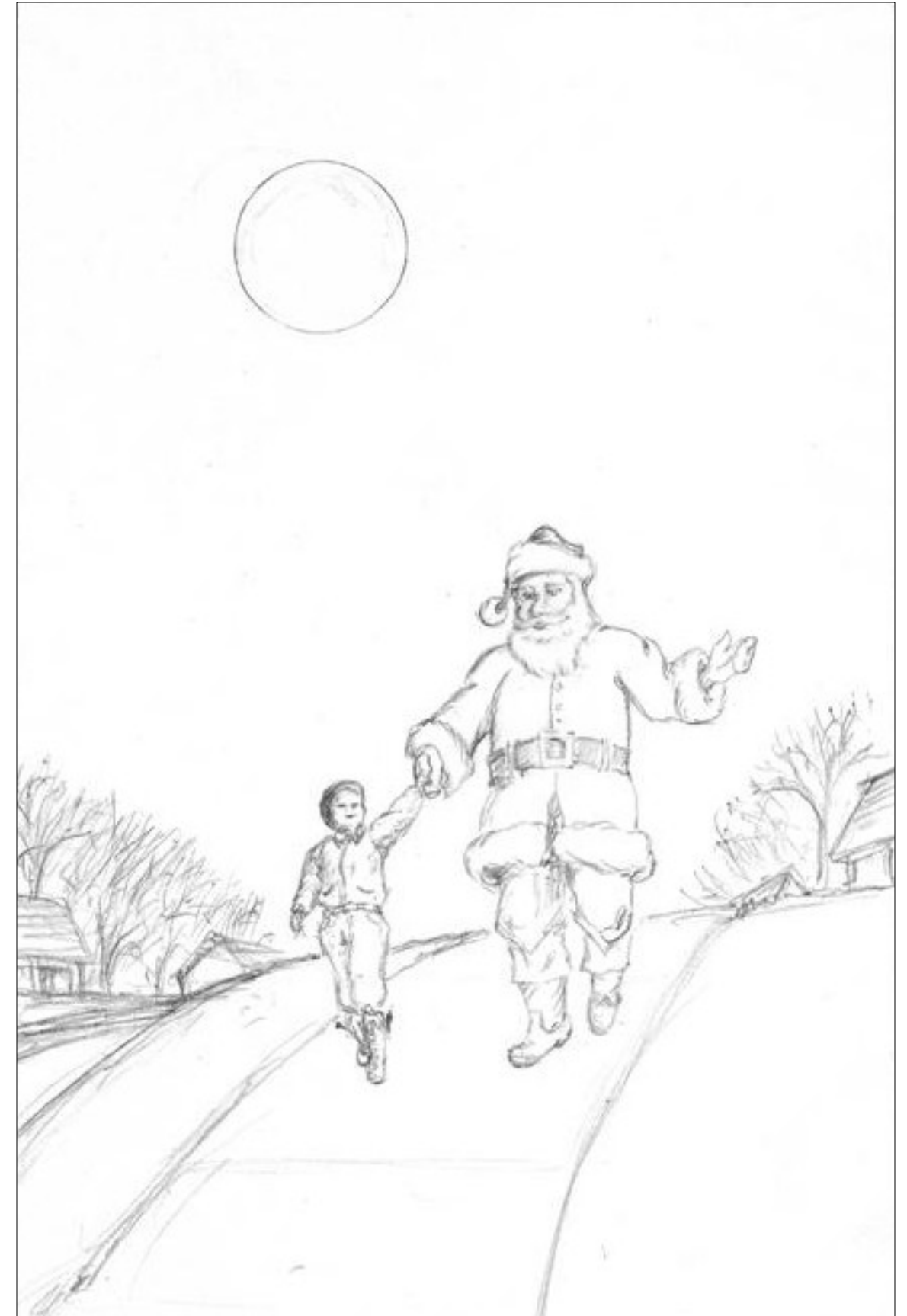
Then it was over, the lights of the church were turned up and everybody started to leave. It was dark and cold outside. Before I could get to the door I heard someone call my name. It was Santa Claus! He walked up to me and said “I will walk you home.” Now, I could see him closely - the beard, the high, shiny black boots, the fur trim, the red suit, the friendly eyes.



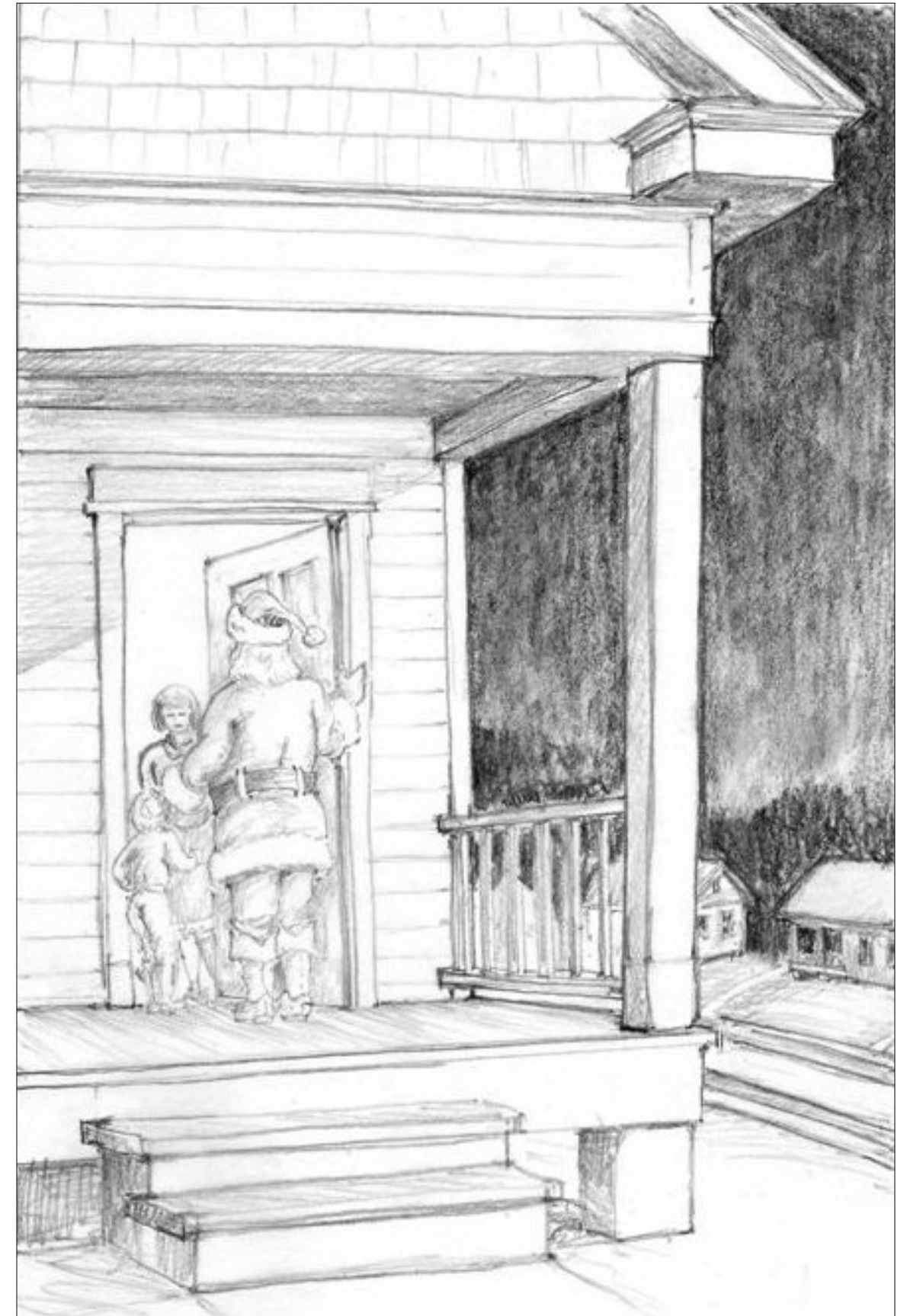
He took me by the hand and we went down the steps out into the cold, dark night. I can still vividly remember the walk home. Santa Claus held my hand and talked to me all the way home. He talked about what I might get for Christmas and what my Mamma and Daddy might get - and he called them by their name! A passerby would have seen a very excited small boy holding the hand of Santa and looking up at him in awe.



Santa Claus walked me all the way to my house. He knocked on my front door and delivered me right into my Mamma's hands. It was a magic, magic night.



I'm sure that I got a lot more presents later that night. But I was an adult before I realized what the real presents were that cold night. The real presents were a loving family and neighbors, and a small church where the real spirit of Christmas and giving was very much alive. The best present of all was the bright memory that still warms my soul after more than one half a century.





As I got older, my friends gradually lost their faith in Santa Claus. But I believed. I believe to this day. Because, long, long ago Santa Claus held my hand and we shared a magical walk on a wonderful Christmas Eve.

