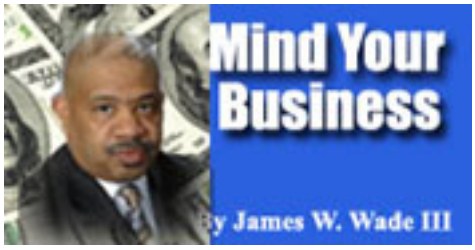

For over 35 years, I have enjoyed my close friends Bilal and Howard and others who shared many great times together with me.

My Christmas memories

No matter where you grew up, as a child, this time of the year was always a happy one for most. Me, I was amazed at how one man could come to my house and so many others in less then 12 hours… Whew!

As I continued to share my childhood memories with you, I look back and see the effort that went into making my Christmas day a good one. Not knowing how much businesses were making, I just was concerned about Santa stopping at my house (smile).

It was a joy to want to go out and play in the snow and lie down and make what was called snow angels. I can remember making a snowman and sneaking a pair of my flannel pajamas out to put on him along with a hat to make him look real.

Laughing, those where the good times.

As kids, we enjoyed the snow and playing in it was so much fun. Everyone on the street seem to have a sense of what time to come out and meet in the street to play football or have a

snowball fight.

Okay, for many who are my age or older… do you remember the red sled that could steer left or right and people would add a string on the front to pull you?

Many of my friends that I grew up on the street with are scattered around the United States and few have passed on.

In those days, everyone knew everyone on the street and almost every house had Christmas decorations even if they didn't have kids. I laughed so hard the other day while driving home, remembering those silver aluminum trees everyone started buying with the colored wheel that turned and changed colors.

If you ever came to our house, we had a white tree with red satin balls to match our red carpet. Waking up at 4 and 5 a.m. to see what Santa brought was a fond memory that will forever be etched in my mind. Making that list out each year and knowing Santa seem to deliver it was something I looked forward too.

Maybe I was around 10 or 11 when I was into James Bond 007. He was smooth and I wanted to be like him. So, that year, they had an attaché case that shot plastic bullets out the top and on the side a plastic knife. My mother and her friend looked all over Cleveland for that gift and, to this day, her friend still calls me 007.

Each year, I wanted to go downtown to Halle's seventh floor to see Mr. Jingeling (Earl Keyes) in person! That was a real treat! He was the keeper of the keys to Santa's workshop. The song went like this:

Mr. Jingle-a-ling

How you jingle-ling

Keeper of the keys

At Halle's Brothers Store

We'll be looking for

You to turn the key.

Even with going to Halle's each year, I could not wait to hit Woolworth's to get a hot dog with that tasty grilled bun that never burnt. I have many great memories walking up and down Euclid Ave., looking at each department store window.

Before all the changes to downtown, one of the great places to eat was the Forum on 9th Street and then going to either the Embassy or Hippodrome Movie Theater's that sat across the street from each other on Euclid Ave.

So, from Public Square with Higbee's, you started on a nice tour of department stores. Next were May Co., Bond's, Halle's and Sterling Linder. The main attraction at Sterling Linder was the magnificent Christmas tree that was so tall which amazed everyone who saw it.

Many other stores graced Euclid Ave. like Richmond Brothers in addition to the many jewelry shops and the smell of those fresh cooked peanuts that lit up the whole area from Morrow's. With the snow, sounds, and smells on Euclid Avenue, how could I ever forget those good old times?

As I share these memories with you, I think about me playing the school play "How the Grinch Stole Christmas…" I bet you can guess what part I played (laughing).

In elementary school, we always had plays and sung holiday songs.

For over 35 years, I have enjoyed my close friends Bilal and Howard and others who shared many great times together with me. Sitting at a good friend's mother's repast the other day, we all had a chance to be together and laugh about those old memories and the fun we had at each other houses.

You often hear me talk about the "Fly Brother's," a group of 7 men who knew how to have fun and enjoy our high school time together. Tonya (Nokes) Bankston and Donna Johnson were right there making sure we stayed out of trouble.

As I think about this joyous season and remember my special times with Mrs. Vivian Vanleer, Mrs. Matt Carter, Mrs. Drake, Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Doris Akram, I can't help but recall how all these women were like another mom for me and always treated me with kindness. We laughed all the time.

Thanks to all who had a kind word to say to me this year. You are truly appreciated. In my eyes, I look forward to the way "My Three Kings" speak. They are none other than Hilton Smith, Dr. Julian Earls and TV 5's news anchor Leon Bibb.

I give special thanks for having both my parents still in my life. There's nothing like having an ole school mom, who to this day, still set's me straight and a father who I have always looked up to. No money or gift could ever repay my parents for their love and guidance they gave me. I love you both.

Over the years, both stores and friends have changed but memories will forever linger on in my mind because those were the good ole' days.

Merry Christmas!