

# The spirit of Christmas past.....

Christmases change as the years go on, but the spirit remains constant. Children look for something special at this magical time and around the world, parents try to make this happen – in many different circumstances. Years on, some of these children recall their most memorable Christmas and the best present they received. eLocal spoke to some of our senior citizens about their most prominent Christmas memories.

Elizabeth Barnett of Tuakua was an eight year old living in London when she was evacuated to Devon during the war. "It was so different, coming from London to the country. I was billeted on a farm, and the family cut down a big tree and decorated it – it was so new to me. We had no toys because it was wartime and had to make our own. I remember making a golliwog at school out of a black stocking. One year my mother made an outfit for my teddy bear, which was second hand when I got it and is now about 80 years old. My bear stands out as my most precious present from my childhood – when I married and came to New Zealand, my bear came too."



## Elizabeth's best ever present

**Gordon Barnett** (87) recalls Christmases in England before the war: "We always put up decorations and I remember the greatest pleasure I had from any present was from a bicycle. When I was 12 I would take a bivouac and cycle 90 miles to the sea for the weekend, cooking up sausages over a fire. I also cycled from Canterbury in Kent to my aunts' at Aldershot in Hampshire. When I was working, I still went everywhere on my bike, carrying equipment under my arm."



**Ken Bliss** (85) was raised by three much older sisters after his mother died when he was a baby. "I think my sisters spoiled me and at Christmas, instead of the usual Christmas stocking, I had a big pillowcase to put everything in. I never ever had a birthday party, but always got nice presents. At Christmas my sister Ada made a nice meal and a special cake. The best Christmas present I remember getting was a red metal fire engine when I was about 9. I made a garage and ramp for it from building blocks and played with it for three or four years."



**Allan Sarginson** (70) of Pukekohe lived with his grandparents while his father was at war - he was also evacuated from London, to Worksop. "We never used to get any presents, just an apple or an orange, it depended who children were put with. One Christmas a wooden horse and cart, all painted and with a bridle arrived in the mail at my billet. It was beautiful and I fell in love with it. But, it was given to the children of my host family, so I never got it. When I returned home after the war, my grandfather told me he had made it and sent it for me."



**Val Davies** had a similar experience during the war, when she was evacuated to a convent in Wales at the age of four. "My mother came to see me and I happened to look in her case and saw a Christmas present she had brought for me – a beautiful white horse with a saddle and a bridle. But the nuns took it away and it broke my heart. Eventually, it was given back to me for my birthday. It was my absolute treasure. I called it Star and kept it until I was about 15, when it fell apart. We had a happy time at the convent, which was on a beautiful estate and the nuns were very good to the 24 little girls there, so I don't know why I almost didn't get my special Christmas present."