



A Dickens of a brother-in-law



When I first began telling editorial associates I'd acquired "a Dickens of a brother-in-law" after my sister Charlene tied the knot in 2007, some wrongly assumed I had fingered her beloved Rodger as a Fagin or at the very least an Artful Dodger.

While his first name does rhyme with the latter, earning him the affectionate nickname Rodger Dodger, the truth is that Rodger is more of a Pip who shares nothing more in common with the Dodger of *Oliver Twist* than a mischievous grin.

Like Pip (short for Phillip Pirrip in *Great Expectations*), our family's Rodger Dodger is a living, breathing creation of brilliant complexity.

The truth (which is stranger than fiction) is that Rodger Dodger is "a Dickens of a brother-in-law" because each December, the former US Marine, Rotary District Governor and furniture store proprietor, brings scenes reminiscent of a Dickens' Christmas village to life in his upstate New York home.

This is accomplished via a magnificently displayed collection of miniature shops, taverns, churches and other landmarks one would associate with *A Christmas Carol*. Victorian streetlights illuminate figurines in period costume engaged in a diversity of seasonal activities.

So lifelike are the characters one can almost hear the carolers singing. Those lacking such imagination are aided by the traditional carols Rodger pipes into the room by way of modern electronic miracles.

A strong believer in the adage that a picture is worth 1,000 words, I'm delighted to present this collage of photographs that showcase scenes from the miniature village created by my Dickens of a brother-in-law.

Something tells me the first words out of the mouths of Tiny Tim, his father Bob Cratchitt and Post-Ghost Ebenezer Scrooge upon seeing the images would be a jolly good chorus of "Merry Christmas! And God bless us every one."

And God bless every one who has been fortunate enough over the decades – long before Rodger Dodger won my sister's heart – to enjoy the magic of Christmas Past through his snow-covered Dickens-era village and Christmas Present through the gift of his uplifting (and occasionally mischievous) presence. I'm looking forward to many a Christmas Future in settings that include this Dickens of a brother-in-law who is truly a character, in the finest sense of the word. - Ann Hauprich





**A DICKENS OF
A PHOTO ESSAY**
BY ANN HAUPRICH



What began with a few charming miniature replicas of Dickens-era structures in 1985 has since evolved into a vast collection that includes just over 70 buildings where nearly 200 characters clad in period attire go about their holiday business.

Among the many familiar faces found in Rodger's Dickens Village -- where bright stars illuminate the night sky -- are none other than Scrooge, Fezziwig, Tiny Tim and Bob Cratchett.

Others on the snowcovered grounds range from enchanting Christmas carolers and street vendors (some selling warm gingerbread and molasses!) to skaters and sledders. If you look closely, you'll even find a chimney sweep.

And while some children are dressed for church or bringing home Yule logs, other kids are engaged in snowball fights or are receiving pocket-picking lessons from Fagin. "Everyone has a story to tell, and I enjoy using my imagination to tell it," beams Rodger.



*Stars fill the heavens
above the miniature
village created by Rodger.*





Christmas Past comes to life in Dickens Village where one can almost hear the joyful sounds of laughter and an early Salvation Army band.





Meticulous attention to historic detail has been a cornerstone of Rodger's collection for three decades. A prime example is seen in the close-up of the train tunnel at bottom left -- which was hand-crafted using hundreds of tiny pebbles.





God Bless Us, Every One!

