

Christmas at Our House in the Fifties

by Bonnie MacFarlane

As a child, I thought that the holidays at our house were the best ever. My Mom loved the holidays and made a big fuss over each and everyone of them, but Christmas was the best. She decorated the house from head to toe. The Christmas tree, which was always a fresh cut balsam, sent its lovely smell throughout our small two-story, 100-year-old farmhouse in upstate New York. We decorated the tree two to three weeks before Christmas. Dad strung the large multicolored lights and Mom and the three kids decorated the rest. We had several very old German ornaments and I especially remember the angel hair one. It was flat and round with what looked like silvery angel hair around a flat paper head of an angel. Each piece of tinsel was hung very carefully from the end of each branch after the ornaments. Then, the icicles were hung and many candy canes that would be given to our visitors. I always thought we had the most beautiful tree of all!

Grandma, who lived two blocks away always made the pies: apple, pumpkin, and mince, which I disliked. My sister and I would marvel at how Grandma could peel an apple in one continuous peel. She baked the pies in a large black coal stove.

Another memory of mine was the unique green felt table top Christmas tree of my Great Aunt's. It sat atop the lace covered dining room table and had places for very small candles at the end of each branch. This tree is dated 1899 and now sits atop my table every Christmas.

Mom would start writing her 50+ cards early and our index fingers would help her as she tied the curling-type ribbons around each Christmas present and curled it with the swipe of one side of the scissors.

We kids would shop at the local hardware store for gifts to give to relatives. I remember giving my Great Aunt a styrofoam snowman that I thought was magnificent. We also made clove-studded oranges and sachets for ladies' underwear drawers.

On Christmas Eve, we'd all go to the candlelight service at church. After singing Christmas hymns and a short Christmas message, we'd light our candles and sing "Silent Night". Often, there would be a light snowfall outside the church which made this night even more magical.

Christmas morning was like no other. The presents were beautifully wrapped and all around the tree; the gifts from Santa were unwrapped. I usually received what I wished for: a globe, a doctor's kit, or an anatomical woman. Mom's rule was that we'd sit in a circle and open each gift separately—it took hours, but was much more meaningful that way.

In the early afternoon all the relatives on my Dad's side came for a buffet lunch of cold cuts, salads, and Mom's homemade cherry winks. These cookies were made of cornflakes, nuts, dates, and a cherry on top. Grace was always said before every meal. We kids would always pray for snow, but not too much snow, as we wanted our relatives to be able to drive through it. The next day, we'd get out our wooden sleighs and toboggans which were enjoyed for hours.

Every night after Christmas the family would sit around the tree enjoying its beauty. This was the best part of all! I miss the past and old-fashioned Christmases.