

## A 1960's CHRISTMAS

It didn't ever seem like it was really Christmas time when I was a youngster until I smelled that special aroma. But it wasn't that pitchy smell of those freshly severed Douglas fir Christmas trees, cut down and murdered before their time at a premature age, awaiting their internment, being displayed in living rooms across the western hemisphere, garnished with man made trinkets, glittering tinsel reflecting the colors of flashing and twinkling incandescent lighting. Christmas to me wasn't the sound of fire alarm dinging of the Salvation Army bell, benevolent giving of coins clanking as they were being deposited into the red kettle at storefronts. That pulsing and shaking of the bell was like an exited heart beat, ding ding, ding ding at a healthy 60 pumps per minute. Neither was Christmas the huge undertaking of untangling miles and miles of outdoor lighting, knotted up better than any sailor or boy scout tying their knots could make it purposely, untangling the mess was similar to a child's first fishing expedition when the line comes off the reel, hopelessly knotted and tangled, but these things were not Christmas in my mind.

I remember the footsteps of a seven year old lad crunched down step by step, walking across the frosty frozen grass to eagerly seek the warm and cozy shelter of home, the turf he walked on was faded from those autumn torrential rains and lack of sunshine we see in the Willamette valley, turning the grass from a deep forest green color to almost yellow on that crisp arctic December morning of 1963. The boy's feet could almost be supported by the stiff icy grass, but under his full weight the not quite so rigid grass would give way, crackling and pivoting his red rubber boots forward, onward anxiously to the rear door of the cottage called home where mom was laboring in the kitchen just inside the back door.

Oh that smell which announced "Christmas is at hand". The warm humidity of kitchen activities felt good on the cold rosy red cheeks of the boy who was playing outside in 20 degree frigid weather as he entered the culinary domain. In the moist kitchen air that distant familiar aroma welcomed in the season, yes, of pastry flour, sweet slippery butter, farm fresh eggs and piles of refined white sugar topped off with a hint of vanilla extract. When these ingredients were forced into companionship, then baked for 14 minutes they produce the announcement that "Christmas is near" Yes, baked cookie doe was Christmas for me.

The vintage 1950's white electric range was gigantic; it took up half of our kitchen space. The control knobs and clocks similar to a 1955 Buick dashboard. That stove was reminiscent of the cars of that era, chrome and plastic lighting adorning the cook stove like hood ornaments and automobile side trim on vintage cars. A round top refrigerator was parked beside the stove so nostalgic, it also boasted of ornamentations of chrome, Chevrolet must have got the idea for the Nomad from those numerous chrome strips. The oven door would creek open on the stove revealing Mom's handy work cooked to a golden brown at 375 degrees, that blast of baked doe aroma from the oven door popping open would tickle my expectations of the sweet sugary treat that I coveted, the "Christmas cookie". Images had been stamped out of the raw dough. Figures of bells, stars, Santa's, trees and reindeer had been cut out of the sweet dough with the tools of the trade, cookie cutters of aluminum or red and green plastic. The dough was now baked to perfection and ready to lay on racks to cool. The kitchen's faded white porcelain sink had built in drain board countertops on each side, it was the only place available in our little galley kitchen to place the metal racks mom used to cool down the treats for the next labor of yuletide activity.

Then the grinding sound of the electric mixer spinning around and around with confectioners sugar mixing containing pounds of creamery butter, this produced a product of varied colors of

the sweet frosting for the cookies. How amazing, one drop of red #10 food coloring could turn the pale drab confection with a sudden burst of color as it was being agitated in the mixer, is this where our generation coined the slang term: “phsycodealic”?

My executive position as bakers assistant was to spread the frosting on the product and then sprinkle the cookies with colored sugary chips. Next was the adorning where proper with little chrome colored BB like candies, just smaller than a baby pea. Every one of those little silver jewels were strategically placed as a cookie garnishment while the frosting was still wet to glue it in place, like the tip of Santa’s long hat resembling a bell or one at the end of Rudolf’s nose hoping to be recognized as a light, others were buttons on the snow man and lastly a ringer on the holiday bell, a parking place for those tasty little crunchy glittering balls. Those chrome bb’s were very expensive mom said, maybe they contained platinum, and they cost more than any other ingredient in Christmas cookie. I shutter to think what heavy metal was in those metallic candy bb balls that were gobbled down and into the digestive tract, and then synthesized into the blood stream.

After the frosting was cured, the cookies were stacked up upon one another on the countertops. The neatly stacked piles appeared to reach higher and higher up to the ceiling, no, clean up to the tree tops and reaching to the sky, at least in my little brains imagination. Little crunchy cookies stacked up to the sky. All the broken cookies fell under my jurisdiction as baker’s assistant and were fair game for my consumption, some broken from purposeful rough handling by the baker’s assistant. Neighbors, friends and relatives were only getting the prime specimens but the broken cookies tasted mighty fine to me. I never got tired of eating up every broken cookie, my childhood addiction to sugar, sugar and sugar.

I never really understood what the season was truly all about until I was a late teenager and gave my life to Jesus when I accepted him as my savior, but I remembered lying under the Christmas tree late at night as a small boy, my sugar craving well satisfied from all those consumed broken Christmas cookies. I would sit under the tree and imagine what was in the colorful wrapped up boxes with bows that had my name tag on them but something about the manger scene under that tree really intrigued me, I felt a sort of peace thinking about the drama of Mary, Joseph, shepherds and livestock. I sensed in my inner being that this child lying in the feeding trough was something to be reckoned with, perhaps he, the best gift of all. My true need was to understand the true meaning of the Christmas holiday, but the most important question anyone, including you or me will ever answer is this, “Who is this Child of the nativity?” Let’s remember that this Child lying in the hay, whose birthday we celebrate is the child who became a man with a passion to serve and give up his life, hanging on an ugly tree of the cross, crucified to take our place. The true gift of God is eternal life we receive by believing this good news that Jesus died and rose again for us, the greatest gift offered by this risen savior. He is still calling out to our hearts to draw us close, offering forgiveness, acceptance and peace to those who will put their trust in him. What do believe and think of when you see baby Jesus? These are the wonderful memories of the good old days of Christmas time to that boy, tired and prostrate at the base of the tree in 1963.