

THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS

I love Christmas! My love of Christmas began when I was four years old and that love continues yet today. It's my favorite holiday season and includes the shopping, the decorating my home, wrapping the gifts, and planning and preparing the holiday feast. As a child, I thought of Santa Claus as a very magical being. My favorite Christmas story was, and I might add, still is, *Twas The Night Before Christmas* by Clement Clarke Moore. To me, this story signifies the way Christmas is supposed to be, even today.

Christmas in the 1940's was celebrated very differently from the way it is in 2015. Most children did not help shop for the tree, nor did they decorate it. In fact, they didn't even see the tree before Christmas morning. Santa came to the house in his sleigh with the reindeer pulling it across the sky, and landed on the roof. If there was a chimney, he climbed into it and slid down to the living room with his huge bag of toys and, of course, the tree. If there was no chimney, he magically entered through a window. The children were supposed to be fast asleep in their beds before he arrived, you know.

Once inside the house, he put up the tree, decorated it, and left the presents under it. If he had a large item, like a bike or a doll buggy, he left it beside the tree. When the children awoke—usually very early in the morning—and entered the room, they saw the tree shimmering with fairy lights and beautiful, shiny ornaments and tinsel hanging from the tips of the branches like icicles hanging from the eaves after a snowfall. And the presents, all wrapped in beautiful, colorful paper and ribbons! It was a glorious sight to behold, and took one's breath away at the amazing sight before them. It was magic! As a child, I gazed upon the scene in wide-eyed wonderment. Oh, to be a child again.

As we grew older, we went with our parents to pick out the tree, took it home and decorated it. When we asked why Santa wasn't taking care of the tree, they told us we were "helping him", as he had become very busy. Here were more children in the world this year, you see.

When I was ten years old my parents thought it was time I learned the facts of Christmas. I was devastated. My fairy tale vision was a lie. The magic was gone! I still loved the beauty of the holiday, but it just wasn't the same. Don't get me wrong; I was always aware that the reason for celebrating Christmas was the birth of Jesus Christ, and we honored it by the giving of gifts. Still, the glamour and mystery had disappeared from the pageantry.

Christmas changed again when I became a teenager. Now, instead of toys, there were gifts of clothing, records, perhaps a portable radio or record player or even a Brownie Camera. The holiday was not as exciting nor was it filled with the anticipation I had felt in my childhood.

I became an adult and married. A few years later I had three children, each one year apart. I enjoyed being a mother to these little darlings! They were a real joy to me.

And guess what happened? They brought all the wonder of Christmas back to me in a rush! I again felt the joy of the season in all of its glory! I became Santa Claus and saw the magic and anticipation shining in their eyes, as it had in mine all those years ago. They looked in awe at

the shimmering tree, and the piles of gifts under it. My husband and I told them the story of the first Christmas and its significance to the way we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, so they knew it was not just about receiving gifts. I never had the heart to tell about the “myth”. As they grew older and questioned me about Santa, I told them that he does exist. I believe that Santa Claus is the visible sign of the Spirit of Christmas, and that he lives in our hearts. They accepted that explanation and still believe it today.

Many Christmases have passed since then, but I still enjoy the season. Perhaps not with the same intensity or ardor as I once did, but it’s still there. I love having the entire family at my home for the festivities and the food, but some years I don’t have the energy to put on an elaborate dinner any longer. Sometimes. I make it a very simple get-together, but with all the elements of a feast as in previous years. This past Christmas was one of those years when I chose to “go simple”. I decided to have a prime rib roast and ask everyone to bring a side dish. I envisioned a lot less work with minimal cleanup in the kitchen. Everyone in the family thought this was a good idea.

Ten days before Christmas, I spoke to my adult granddaughter, Melissa, about who would be coming from her side of the family. She gave me a head count and told me that four people who usually came would not be there this year. I soon had a total of twelve guests. I had to order the roast for that number of people. Then I needed to find out what everyone was bringing as their side dish contribution and ended up with mashed potatoes from my son-in-law, Melissa’s father, carrots and green bean casserole from Melissa, and dessert from two other people. Sounded good to me!

Two days later, Melissa called and suggested we draw names and only buy a gift for that person. By now, I had done all my Christmas shopping, but I agreed that would be a good idea. Grandmas could buy everyone a gift if they wanted to, couldn’t they?

Two days before Christmas, Melissa called again. “Grandma, the Watsons just told me they would like to come for Christmas after all!”

“Well, I guess that’s okay, but I have already ordered the roast for twelve people. There may not be enough for two more guests. Perhaps they could bring something—like some El Pollo Loco chicken?”

“I’m sure they can,” Melissa replied. “What time do you plan on serving dinner?”

“I figure about 4:00 PM. That way we won’t be too late for Santa,” I answered.

“Oh, I’ll be late then. I have to work until 5:00.”

I had no idea anyone would have to work in a pizza place on Christmas! I sighed and said, “Well then, I’ll push dinner back to 6:00.”

Christmas day arrived. The roast was in the oven, emitting the delicious aroma that only meat cooking could emit. The table was set and things were humming along nicely. My guests started to arrive. My son-in-law carried in a large bag of potatoes and asked where my big pan was to cook them in. Melissa brought a bag of raw carrots and the fixings for green bean casserole, and the Watsons came in laden with every side dish El Pollo Loco had on their menu!

I now had a mess in my kitchen, the potatoes were boiling all over my stove, and pots and pans were strewn everywhere! The food from the chicken place needed to be reheated, but not in the styrofoam containers they came in, and—well, you get the picture! My simple, easy cleanup dinner had only been a dream and now it was a nightmare!

Eventually, Santa came and passed out the gifts. Dessert was served and then everyone decided that it had gotten late and they had to get home. My son and I finally went to bed at 3:00 AM after cleaning up the mess from my “simple, easy, no cleaning needed” party. Thank goodness, Kyle was there to help.

Despite the failure of my dream Christmas, I enjoyed the holiday. And, yes, I still love Christmas. But next year I’m serving cold cuts!

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This story was originally written for my Creative Class in 2009. It was my first attempt at writing a story. It is a true story that actually happened several years before I wrote it. I had continued to host the event for several more years, but I am happy to say that I am now a guest while others host the party. I am truly enjoying my new role and loving Christmas.

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