



Members of Wetaskiwin Branch of AGS
mark Canada 150 by writing our stories.
In this issue, we remember the ways that we celebrated
Christmas in our parents' homes.
These events happened by and large in the 1950s,
but traditions, as they do, extend further back into our families' pasts.
We thank Mika Malloch for designing the cover of this booklet.

Wetaskiwin, Alberta
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Carole's Christmas 1953 & 1956

Carole (Jorgenson) Koop

Grandma Lewis (1890-1988), Mom's mother and a widow since 1942, lived in a big old farmhouse two miles west of Morris, Manitoba. Only one and one half miles further west was the Principal Meridian the designated centre of Canada.

Grandma had cows that needed milking twice a day and had the milk to attend to in the milk house afterwards. She had poultry that provided eggs and meat including the Christmas turkey. I hope we ate the wicked gobbler that chased me once! In summer she spent a lot of time gardening, harvesting, and preserving.

My sister, one year younger, and I loved to go to the Lewis farm. Grandma always had time for us in spite of her many chores. We built forts with her afghans and couch cushions. She was a small woman and we easily played dress-up with her clothes, purses, shoes, hats, and gloves. However, her jewelry was off limits which made us want her beads all the more!

One of my most vivid childhood memories is of Christmas Day 1953. The drive by car from my parents' farm nine miles east of Morris took about half an hour. Grandma was more dressed up than we had ever seen her. She was wearing a white shirtwaist dress and a corsage. We were more used to seeing her in house dresses and full aprons. We were to have our midday meal in the dining room not the kitchen as usual. The formidable sideboard and the tall brass candlesticks were trimmed with prickly green plants (holly). Grandma stood at the head of the table and actually carved the turkey right in front of us.

We were used to doing as we pleased so my sister and I found it very difficult to stay at the table, mind our manners, and wait for the adults to finish eating. Finally, we were relocated to the living room. We were in awe of the Christmas tree especially the bubble lights that were shaped like candles. The Christmas cards had been hung clothesline style along one wall under the stained glass piano window. Ornaments of the infamous Paul Bunyan and Babe his Blue Ox were out of our reach up on that window sill.

Gift opening didn't take long. Grandma loved to knit, sew, and quilt items for the family. The other gifts had been ordered from the Eaton's catalogue. I especially loved the doctor medical kit. I had been in hospital for several weeks in 1953 because of polio and could confidently play-act nursing patient care with our dolls and teddy bears. Grandma made my sister and me each a nurse uniform from bleached white flour sacks. A large red cross was embroidered on the bibs and a row of small blue crosses trimmed the aprons.

Before evening chores beckoned the adults outdoors we had time for a game of Chinese Checkers or Snakes 'n Ladders. I am grateful that my dad loved photography. I treasure the black-and-white photos that help record these wonderful childhood memories.

9 December 2016



Christmas Day 1953
Grandma Lewis, my uncle,
Grandma's friend/neighbour,
Mom holding my baby sister
me (Carole) & my sister



Christmas Day 1956
Dad, Mom, me (Carole) & 3 siblings
(dolls & doll clothes - gifts
from Grandma Lewis)



Carole's nurse apron

Candlesticks
came to Canada from
Ireland with the Moody
family ca 1838.
Sideboard made for
youngest Moody
daughter's marriage by
her husband-to-be James
Lewis 1878.



CHRISTMASES PAST

Leroy Koop, 2017

In the 1950's and 60's, when I was growing up, the celebration of Christmas had, I think, more religious overtones than the commercialization we find in the 21st century. After all, we were taught that Christmas was the birthday of Jesus. As I reflect on Christmases past, I can't help but wonder what percentage of Canadian children under the age of 12, have even heard of Jesus and His birthday celebration at Christmas.

It is true that I learned that "Santa knows when your naughty or nice", and that his gift to one that was naughty was 2 lumps of coal in a paper bag left outside by the back door of the house, instead of a toy one really wanted under the tree or in the stocking. I also figured out that if coal was the "present" instead of a toy gift under the Christmas tree, I had more gifts from Mom and Dad under the tree, and I still got that toy I wanted.

Although in the 21st century it is often difficult to get one's immediate family together to celebrate during the Christmas season, in the 50's and 60's, it was common practice for a large part of the extended family to celebrate together; uncles, aunts and many cousins. Families were larger than now, so it made for many people to feed and entertain during Christmas. I remember on many occasions where we had 3 or 4 sittings at a table seating 10 or more before everyone was fed. There were always people clearing the soiled dishes from the table, washing the dishes and resetting the table for the next batch of hungry people; the whole time talking, laughing and singing. Adult men were fed first, followed by the children and finally the women. After the noon time Christmas dinner, it was time to set the table again for "faspa" .(Mennonite low-German word for coffee break) or afternoon coffee break and all the fancy cookies and cakes.



For weeks before Christmas the smell of baking permeated the air. Fruit or Christmas cakes, both white and dark, were baked and stored for further flavour enhancement. Shortbread and sugar cookies and other cookies of various shapes and sizes were baked by the dozens and topped with colourful icing.



Homemade chocolate bars made of dark or white chocolate and Maraschino cherries and nuts, or a combination of both, were made in large casserole pans. Cherry or vanilla flavoured marshmallows rolled in either white or roasted coconut were made in the same pans. Another homemade



goodie was the popcorn ball created with either chocolate or caramel sauce.

Besides lots of turkey and ham, many cabbage rolls were made with ground beef, rice and raisins, wrapped in cabbage leaves and cooked in a tomato sauce.



Store bought candies were also plentiful, like the ever popular raspberry drops, or the red or green striped mint candies. As a young child I was infatuated with the "ribbon" candies.



Peanuts and mixed nuts in the shells were always present. With the large Christmas gatherings it was imperative to have more than just a few of the nut crackers and picks available.



Decorating a Christmas tree was always a big production and a fun event in our household. When I was a toddler, decorating the Christmas tree was part of Christmas Eve's preparation for Christmas. I believe the idea was to hold off as long as possible so that the real tree would survive past New Year's. As I grew older, and since my birthday was three days before Christmas, the tree trimming was moved to December 22, possibly in lieu of a birthday party.

A week or so before Christmas a trip to the local "Christmas Trees for Sale" lot produced a 6-7 foot spruce tree. It was transported, often, tied to the roof of the car. Once at home it was stuck in a snow bank until a day before decorating was to commence. The tree was brought into the house to thaw and for the branches to fan out into their original positions. The bottom-most branches were cut off about 4-6 inches from the trunk of the tree to about 18 inches from the floor. The tree was then placed into a 3 gallon stoneware crock pot, which was then filled with stones and sand to stabilize the tree. The tree was watered and the decorating started.

Cooking, baking and decorating weren't the only things done in our household weeks before Christmas. Our mother guided us children in memorizing and practising parts for the church Sunday School Concert on Christmas Eve. Not only did we memorize our parts for the concert pageants and performances, but mother also had us memorize long poems in the German language (not our mother tongue), for us to perform before the concert audiences and our various extended family and friend gatherings as well.

Christmas morning was always a time of gleeful shouts of joy (provided the gift of choice was received), the sound of ripping gift wrap paper and the sound of cracking nuts and peanuts. During the time that the Christmas Tree was set up on Christmas Eve day, all gifts were opened on Christmas Day morning, both Santa and family gifts. As my siblings and I became older, it seemed that we would get up earlier and earlier on Christmas morning to see what was under the tree. After a few years of creating noise as early as 2 a.m., our parents, tired of being tired from insufficient sleep, changed our family gift open to Christmas Eve after the Sunday School concert, and only Santa's gifts were left for Christmas morning.

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night".

Childhood Christmas Memories

by Rosella Plaquin

My Mom was an excellent cook, so a couple of weeks before Christmas she would begin baking. Christmas cake was her specialty, but I wasn't fussy for it. I preferred sugar cookies made with fancy cookie cutters – stars, trees and snowmen. Sometimes I'd be covered in flour while trying to help. Mom also made shortbread cookies because that was my Dad's favourite.

Christmas time at school and church was memorable also. Our community got together for Christmas concerts which I vaguely remember participating in. What all the children liked best about these concerts was that at the end we all got a goodie bag with an orange, Christmas candy and some nuts.

In anticipation of Christmas, and as a place to get ideas for gifts, I could hardly wait for the Sears "Wish Book" to arrive. I also used this catalogue to cut out paper dolls and their clothes.

From an early age Santa Claus was very important at Christmas. My brother and I were told as long as we believed Santa would bring us gifts, but if we stopped believing so would the gifts. To this day I still believe in Santa. For this reason I would like to share this poem called "Where is Santa Claus?" by an anonymous author.

He's seen in the smiles the whole world is sharing ...
He's found where there's friendship and loving and caring ...
He's felt in warm handshakes when people are meeting ...
He's heard in the cheer of a Christmas time greeting ...
His spirit's behind all the gifts we receive ...
He's everywhere, always to those who believe.

Before heading for bed on Christmas Eve, it was important to leave milk and cookies for Santa. We always knew he had come because the treats were gone in the morning when we got up.

We always had a real tree, usually spruce, which my Dad would find on our farm, cut down and bring into the house. The tree would be decorated by the entire family, but I being the youngest would be lifted up by Dad to put the angel or star

on top. Many of the bulbs were glass and very precious. I still have some to put on our Christmas tree today.

Early Christmas morning, my brother and I were allowed to look into our stockings to see what Santa had brought. We'd climb up on my parents' bed to do this. Usually there was an orange, some candy, a book and a small toy of some kind. These things would keep us busy until my maternal Grandparents, aunts and uncles would arrive. Christmas was held at our farm house. My Grandparents lived about 2 miles away, but my aunts and uncles would come from Edmonton, which was about 100 miles away. Other gifts could not be opened until everyone arrived. Sometimes it felt like forever.

Finally we got to open our presents. My most memorable gift was "Susie". She was a doll almost as big as me and very soft. She had limbs made of rubber and even her head was of a soft material. My Mom was also an excellent seamstress so she had sewn several outfits for "Susie". I guess she knew Santa was bringing me this special doll!! That doll was kept securely for many years, until my daughter inherited it.

One Christmas that I'll never forget had to do with a gift for my Dad. We had got 2 bantam roosters for him and put them in a box under the tree. Of course they were there a long time as we had to wait for the family to arrive. This meant making lots of noise whenever the roosters would crow. No one could figure out why we were making so much noise. When Dad finally opened the box the roosters flew straight for the water bucket and everyone had a good laugh.

The afternoon on Christmas Day was a time to enjoy our gifts, socialize and play games. Soon it was time for Christmas dinner. We had the usual turkey, cranberries, mashed potatoes, gravy, carrots, turnip, fresh buns and dessert. My maternal Grandmother always brought homemade pies and of course there was Christmas cake. I do remember, when I got a bit older, we sometimes had goose instead of turkey as that was my maternal Grandfathers treat.

I have many memories of Christmas and have been able to share traditions from my childhood with my children and grandson.

MY MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD CHRISTMASES

Sharon Aney

It's a funny thing! Considering all of the commercial hype about Christmas shopping these days, I do not remember one gift that I received under Mom & Dad's Christmas tree. I am the oldest of their eight children and my memories are of traditions and experiences that were repeated year after year until I left home.



←-(this pic includes me & my sisters with our older brother

We did give careful study to the Simpson Sears and Eaton's Christmas catalogues. Several weeks in advance Dad would come home from the weekly trip to town (Lanigan, Saskatchewan) with some very large boxes. They disappeared into Mom & Dad's bedroom never to be seen again. But during our holidays we always had box games, puzzles and other toys to keep us entertained.

We all had time for card games – including Mom and Dad – at any time of day. One year (1953, I think) the snowbanks were as high as the tops of the trees. Dad & Uncle Mike helped dig caves and tunnels for us cousins to play in all during the holidays. We were amazed when summer came to look up and see the branches that we had broken while walking on top of the snow.

In December the house was full of the aromas of baking as Mom made sausage, Christmas fruitcake and other goodies. We were allowed to see Japanese oranges that came in wooden boxes, but not eat them until after Christmas Eve supper. Only a few days ahead of time Dad went out to chop down a tree...not a very big one, because the house was small and half a dozen active children could put it in peril. It was set safely in a 1 gallon crock of sand in a corner of the living room and watered periodically to keep it from drying out.

Many memories centre on the preparations for the big event: Ukrainian Christmas Eve supper. The traditional Ukrainian meal was of twelve meatless dishes. The number 12 was to commemorate the 12 apostles of Jesus, and "meatless" was to be one last bit of penance before the great celebration of the birth of Jesus.

The first course was a sweet wheat and poppy seed "soup". On the 23rd Dad brought into the house a quart or two of wheat from the granary and carefully picked the weed seeds and chaff from the good kernels (as we got older the job was passed to us) before Mom roasted them and then soaked them overnight. The roasting aroma was the first signal that we were close to the Big Day! On the 24th she boiled the wheat with honey and poppy seeds.

All day on Christmas Eve the kitchen was a flurry of cooking. The table was covered with several dozen perogies (their fillings included potato, sauerkraut, salmon and plum or saskatoon berries) ready to boil just before the meal. A roaster of meatless cabbage rolls was in the oven, white fish was prepared for frying, mushroom gravy bubbled in a pan, a pot of beet borscht added the aroma of onion and dill. Our mouths watered! The menu was rounded out with pickled herring, broad beans (only Dad cared for them at all), fish broth and home canned fruit for dessert.

There was a sense of approaching climax as darkness fell. Dad went out to milk cows and do the evening chores. The aromas from the kitchen became more appetizing. The dining room table was set with the best dishes. Our bachelor Uncle Fred often celebrated with us and entertained the smaller children. My grandparents had passed away while I was very small.



As soon as Dad washed and changed into his good clothes, we gathered for supper. Dad served each of us the wheat, followed by the fish soup and the borsch. For the perogies and rest of the dishes we ate family style. Everyone had a taste of every dish – even the fish soup and the beans.

←- (this pic includes us girls with our younger brother)

We girls hurried to do the dishes, while Mom and Dad and Ralph cleared away the table and set up seating for the singing of Christmas carols in Ukrainian and English. Dad led the singing for about half an hour. Then we opened our gifts. Each of us had two: one from Mom and Dad and one from the sibling who drew our name.

Only the oldest of us got to go to Midnight Mass with Dad, if weather permitted, and even for us it was a struggle to stay awake at that late hour. Up to the mid 1950s the winter roads were often not passable for autos, so horse and sleigh was the means of transportation, making for a very long trip of 12 miles each way, covered with quilts and blankets to keep warm. The church was always crowded, filled with incense and we heard again the Ukrainian Christmas carols that we had not heard since last year.

In the wee hours of Christmas morning we came home to The Lunch – Mom cooked up sausage that had been made a few weeks earlier, added toast, leftover wheat and perogies, oranges, Christmas cake, and we had another feast. We tried to stay up a bit longer to play another game, or to watch the grown-ups play Kaiser.



Christmas Day was quiet, an anti-climax to our big Christmas event. We did have a big meal, sometimes with aunts & uncles at our home, or we at theirs. In my younger days we travelled by sleigh and horses on crisp, sunny days, and back home on moonlit nights.

In my teen years I and some cousins joined Uncle Mike to go caroling from house to house. The homeowners welcomed us with treats like chocolates, Christmas cake or occasionally a shot of home brew! And they gave a cash donation to the church.

The Catholic Christmas season extends until Epiphany (coming of the Magi to the baby Jesus) on January 6. My family celebrated with a smaller version of the Christmas Eve supper. January 6 being my birthday, I thought this last feast of Christmas was the best birthday celebration possible.

CHRISTMAS LONG AGO

By Mavis Nelson

December 24th, what year ... you name the year. It was the same every year, it was December 24th and it was Christmas! It was time to make the BIG trip to the farm. We, three kids were bundled up for the long trip. I was in my white furry coat and hat.

Mom would have lots of extra blankets and goodies to snack on the way. Dad would load up the old black car with all the gifts and extra clothes if we had to stay overnight. Dad was a good packer and always seemed to have lots of room for everything. Remember this would be in the late 1940's, maybe 1948.



We were on our way to Uncle Kelly's farm. Uncle Kelly and Aunt Edna lived on my Grandma's home place. For a small girl, it seemed to take hours to get there. But, in actual fact it was maybe only 25 or so miles. The road was poor, with lots of hills and valleys to go over. One year the snow banks were higher than the car and wouldn't you know we got stuck. We had to wait for a nice farmer to come along and pull us out.

I don't know if it was the excitement of Christmas, or seeing our cousins, or the long car ride but I often got sick. What a way to start Christmas. The family, Grandma, Uncle Kelly, Aunt Edna and girls, Uncle John, Aunt Bunny (Amy) and children were all patiently waiting for our family to arrive. We had the farthest to come, as Uncle John's lived the next farm over from Uncle Kelly's. Grandma had a little house in the same yard as Aunt Edna. Grandma always seemed the same to us kids. Always joking and talking in her broken Swedish.

After all the hugs and greetings, we entered the big farm kitchen. There was Aunt Edna with her apron on, her hair rolled up in a roll at the nape of her neck. The big table was opened wide and all set beautifully for the adults and older children. The small ones that included me, my sister and three other cousins, all sat at a small child's table in the corner of the room.

The kitchen was hot from the old wood cook stove and the closeness of people. The aromas of the supper filled the room. Things never seemed to change from year to year. There was the big pot of boiled potatoes, the homemade potato sausage, lute fish with the white sauce and the coffee was brewing. (Lutefisk is dried cod fish that is prepared in lye and water, a very Swedish dish.) Of course the hardtack and brown bread were on the table. Some years if we were lucky we had homemade root beer.





The rice pudding, for dessert would be simmering on the back of the stove. All the special cookies and breads would be saved for after the gifts were opened.

But for now the Christmas tree and the gifts would have to wait, much to the dislike of all the children. Even the meal had to wait, for more important

things. Out came the big Family Bible and all had to sit still while Uncle Kelly read the Christmas story from Luke. Then grandma prayed in Swedish which we kids didn't understand. And Uncle Kelly finished by praying for the past year, the relatives that lived far away in Sweden and the U.S.A. and for the meal. We could understand him because that was in English.

The presents still couldn't be opened until all the dishes were washed and there were no dish washers back then. The men would go to another room. Grandma and the younger children got to go to the living room by the Christmas Tree.



As kids we loved to shake some of the gifts to see if we knew what we were getting. The Christmas tree always fascinated me, with the bubbly, dancing lights that moved up and down. We never had them at our home.

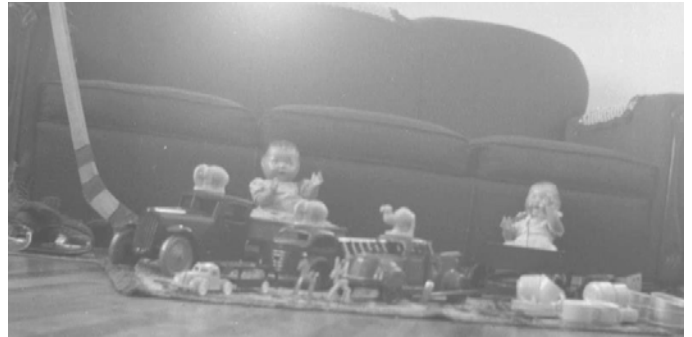
Some years the younger children got to recite our Christmas poems from our Sunday school program or we sang some Christmas carols. I don't remember how seventeen people fit into that small living room with the tree and all the gifts. But Grandma always got the best chair and we kids sat on the floor.

Finally we could open the gifts. Our mothers tried to have some order in how we did it but that was hard with so many people. There would be dolls, trucks, hankies, soap, books and games



for the children. And always something from the Aunt's in the States. When the gifts were all opened the kids would go to different rooms to play with their new toys. While the mothers cleaned up the mess and tried to figure out who the gifts were from because in the weeks ahead we had to write a hand written Thank you to everyone that gave us a gifts. Hugs and thanks that night but then we had to do more. After everyone was in order again we had coffee and special baking, before the long trip home.

In the years that the weather and roads were bad, we got to sleep over night and go home in the morning. We would open our gifts from our family at home on Christmas morning after a special breakfast.



Over the years things have changed some, our families are all bigger and Grandma has passed away, so each of the three sister's families celebrate Christ's birth with their own families. And due to families living all over the world not everyone can be home each year. But for the most part traditions have remained the same for our family.

The grandsons now make the potato sausage, we buy prepared lutefisk. Oh, we have added a few salads and vegetables for the new young people being added to our family. But the same Bible story is read by someone each year and a prayer of thanksgiving for our heritage and family members passed on and those not able to come home. And the gifts still have to wait until the dishes are done, except the year Emily Rose Nelson was nine months old. We got to open our gifts before she fell asleep and then we had to do the dishes. Oh, yes we all have dish washers now so that helps. I think I like it better the old way.

Our Christmas Traditions

Claudia (Gahan) Malloch



**The Gahan Family in living room:
Fred, Gail, Claudia, Jerry, Dorothy**

Christmas was a magical time for me when my family lived in a small farming community in rural Nova Scotia. A major forerunner of Christmas was the arrival of the mail order Christmas catalogue; it was dog-eared from constant use by three children. Shortly before Christmas we would all go to Truro, the nearest town, for shopping and for us to see the jolly, round mechanical Santa in the window of Bentley's store.

One of my favourite Christmas activities was the annual Christmas concert. It was produced and directed by the long suffering teacher of our one room school which had classes ranging from Primer (equivalent to kindergarten) to grade 9 or 10. We did skits, musical numbers and the traditional Christmas pageant. Most of the preparation was done at the school but, for our final dress rehearsal, our teacher, with approximately 20 students, walked the 1.5 miles from our school to the community hall. Here we would present the concert on the stage to an appreciative audience of family and friends. The highlight, at the end of the concert, was the arrival of Santa Claus with a sack full of candy for all the community children.

Our Mother always did the decorating. She was very particular about the Christmas tree which, went into the living room. This didn't bode well for Dad who wasn't nearly so picky. Somehow an evergreen tree tends to look better in the forest than it does in the living room; however, when it came to trees, Mum could transform a bit of a frog into a handsome prince with coloured balls, tinsel, icicles and angel hair.

The first trees I remember didn't have lights because we had no electricity. She hung the Christmas balls and myriads of tinsel icicles. We always had an angel on top, first unlighted and,

later, a lighted one. When we had lights on the tree, Mum would spin angel hair in front of the lights so they gave off a muted, fairyland kind of glow. Later on, she got some metal icicles that changed colours as they moved.

There were bells covered in silver foil hanging from a foil coloured wreath on either side of the mantle where we hung our stockings. Years before there had been a fireplace but it smoked so much that it was covered over. There were small green trees with snow on them sitting on the mantle. Mum used cotton batting under them for snow.



In the old farm house where we grew up, there were red crepe paper streamers strung from each corner of the ceiling, meeting in the middle of the room where a large red tissue paper bell or three smaller red and green bells hung where the streamers intersected.

Santa in a fuzzy red suit with his sleigh and reindeer led by Rudolph was attached to the stairway. When I was little, Santa didn't have Rudolph. He came into being after I started school.

We didn't spend much time in the room with the tree in the early years. My Grandmother, who lived with us while she was bedridden with arthritis, used the living room as a bedroom which she shared with the tree at Christmas time.

We never had gifts under the tree before Christmas. On Christmas morning, we'd come downstairs, after Dad had the wood furnace and stove going to warm the house up. Then the living room door was opened and the tree lights were turned on. There we got our first exciting look at the filled stockings and the gifts under the tree. In the earlier years, the wrappings were layers of white, red or green tissue paper. It was very exciting.

One year there were a few wrapped gifts but mostly there was a large area covered with a blanket; under the blanket was a doll house, a doll carriage and a doll for me as well as a garage for my brother. Someone was busy putting toys together that year.

Skates were the highlight gifts another Christmas. I got white figure skates and my brother had tube skates and my sister had bob skates. We skated on the little pond in the interval (meadow) caused when we had the fall freshet (our word for flooding). I can't recommend starting a skating career on figure skates on a tiny pond. Needless to say, I didn't make it to the Ice Capades. My brother and sister were more successful and used their talents to play hockey with friends on rustic rinks Gordon Creelman created with his bulldozer in a field across the road from our house.

At the age of six my brother learned to tell time, which was pretty good for his age. That year Grandma kept telling him she was getting him shoe laces for Christmas. When he was handed his gift from Grandma, it was in a very small box: He yelled, "It's my shoe laces" and threw it across the room. There was an audible gasp from all the adults in the room. Someone rescued the gift and suggested it might be a good idea for him to open it. It turned out to be a wristwatch!

I was very excited when my gift from Grandma was also in a small package because I knew she treated us the same. It was a little gold heart shaped watch which I used for many years. It no longer runs but I still have it.

Mum was a great cook and we usually had family join us. Christmas dinner was chicken when we were young and turkey later on. Mum preferred chicken as she considered turkey to be dry. There were mashed potatoes, carrots, peas, cranberries and plum pudding.

One of those guests was our great Uncle Lambert who would come to visit and bring us a box of Pot of Gold chocolates...a very special treat. His wife, Aunt Leona, was the contributor of the pudding sauce recipe that Mum used at Christmas dinner almost as long as I can remember.

In the early years, the Christmas pudding was made by placing the batter in a cloth bag which was then suspended from the warming oven on the wood stove over a pot of boiling water to steam. Along with the pudding, Christmas baking always included fruit cake, pound cake and cookies. Normally Mum would try a new recipe or two every year.

A bachelor uncle, was in regular attendance at Christmas dinner. He had diabetes so couldn't eat our regular dessert but there was always an orange sectioned in a dish for him.

Dad provided the Christmas candy, a role he really enjoyed. The two standouts were ribbon candy and animal (barley) candy, my favourite. As the years went by, there were chocolates and always mixed nuts. Mum's contribution to the candy selection was both brown sugar and chocolate fudge.

We stayed home for Christmas after Grandma moved in with us. After her death there were exceptions but we preferred to be at home where it always felt like Christmas to us.

MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS FROM MY CHILDHOOD DAYS

Alice (Larson) Hoyle

Thinking back to Christmas when I was a child, the one over-riding thing that comes to mind is “family gatherings.”

Prior to Christmas, my Mom would be busy making her daughters new Christmas dresses. If I close my eyes and think back to those days, I can vividly recall the sound of her scissors cutting fabric on our old farm-style wooden kitchen table. To this day, when I am cutting out fabric prior to sewing a piece of clothing, the sound of the scissors on a wooden table reminds me of my Mom.

Our new dresses would be worn for the school Christmas concert, which was always a big event. Everyone in the farm community attended; a chance to visit with friends and neighbours and catch up on their news while at the same time enjoying the talents of the school children.

Besides being busy sewing and baking before Christmas, my Mom was very good at the art of making chocolates, and she used to make these as a special treat for our family and visitors who joined us during the holiday season. Her family liked them so much as a matter of fact, that she eventually had to resort to hiding them in order that some would be left by the time Christmas rolled around. My younger sister reminded me that one year, Mom did such a good job of hiding the chocolates that she forgot where she had hidden them! She was quite upset with herself and didn't rest until the missing chocolates were found.

The first ten years of my life were spent on a farm east of Gwynne: we did not have electricity, running water or indoor bathrooms. This, of course, meant we also did not have strings of lights on our Christmas tree! The week before Christmas, we would all trek out to my Grandfather's farm south of Westrose and search for the perfect tree. Once we decided on the tree that we just knew would look beautiful in our living room on the farm, Dad would cut it down, tie it to the top of our car and we would transport it home. After the tree sat in our porch for a day, drying off all the snow and ice that might be on the branches, it would be brought inside the house and placed in the living room. We were quite often surprised to see that the “perfect tree” we had seen in the woods and chosen for its beauty, was quite different when all the snow and ice was melted off! Never mind – it was the tree we had chosen and it always had the place of honour in our living room.

My Mom had some traditional candle holders and candles that were placed on our tree. These were carefully placed on the outside branches of the tree, and the lighting of the candles was a very special event. My parents were very careful about this: we all had to stand a few feet from the tree and were not allowed to touch the tree once the candles were lit. It was a beautiful moment, and due to the fact that we did not have electricity, the room was quite dark when the candles were lit. The candle lighting event only lasted a few minutes: we admired the beauty of the tree and the glow of the candles and then the candles were extinguished. My parents were very wary about fire: my Father's Mother had died in a fire; our neighbours had their home burn to the ground due to a lightning strike.

In our neighbourhood, one family always invited family and friends over on Christmas Eve for a traditional family gathering: they served special treats like pickled herring, sausage, fruitcake, and the big event of the evening was the arrival of Santa Claus! Everyone would be sitting in the living room; the adults playing music and singing, the kids just enjoying the celebration: suddenly there would be a loud banging on the outside wall of the living room and we would hear “Ho-Ho-Ho” from outside – then Santa would appear from the back door of the house. Some of the kids, who seemed to know that Santa Claus wasn’t a ‘real person’, told the rest of us that they knew who was wearing the Santa Claus suit. There were three men from the neighbourhood who had the same body type, my Dad being one of them. Well, unknown to us, the three men took turns wearing the suit: just when the kids had decided that ‘Santa’ was really Uncle Dick, there was Uncle Dick sitting in his chair when Santa arrived! Then the guessing would begin: who was in the suit? The next year, the kids were sure it was Uncle George, but then he would be sitting in his chair when Santa arrived. Just when we were sure that the person inside the suit was Uncle Dick or Uncle Elmer or Uncle George, we were proven wrong. Inside our minds, we each wondered “maybe this really is Santa Claus”! It wasn’t until years after these gatherings stopped, that we “kids” learned that there were several men who kept rotating the Santa Claus role. What fun for us though: Santa arrived and he always gave out candy canes to the kids and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

We always opened our gifts on Christmas Eve (which I later found out was a Norwegian tradition). The only gift we opened on Christmas day was our stocking and gift from Santa Claus. Our family was not financially well-off, so our gifts were small in numbers and usually handmade. There is one gift that I recall to this day: my younger sister and I played Monopoly at the home of our neighbour. This was when the Monopoly game became popular (in the 1950’s). We loved the game and for weeks before Christmas one year we hounded our Dad with requests for a Monopoly game! Naturally, the expense of buying something as a gift was a deterrent and as Christmas got closer, we were sure that our hopes for this game would be dashed. Imagine our surprise and excitement when we jointly got a Monopoly game for our Christmas gift. I think of this today: this was one gift for the two of us to share and we were so thrilled with this gift. When I think of all the gifts children of today get at Christmas, Birthdays, etc., I know they would be shocked to know how gratified my sister and I were to get this one present to be shared.

The Monopoly game proved to be a welcome addition to our family that winter. It seemed that we were snowed in quite a lot and couldn’t get to school. Our farm was situated one half mile from the highway and the pickup spot for the school bus, so if it snowed a lot and our road drifted in, then we were stuck at home. Many days were spent surrounding a small table in front of the pot-bellied wood and coal stove in our living room, with my Dad, my sister and I playing Monopoly. My Mom would be in the kitchen cooking, baking, etc. and she would have to call us for lunch and dinner several times before we would grudgingly stop the game to eat. Then it was back to the game until bed time. ☺

Until the time my Grandpa died in 1963, we always went to his house for Christmas Day. My Grandma had died in the 1940’s and Grandpa lived by himself in a home without electricity, running water, or even a telephone. We always went to visit him every Sunday and of course on all the holidays. Grandpa would have a special Christmas dinner planned and usually in the oven

when we arrived. We would spend the day visiting, playing cards (Cribbage), and quite often going for walks in the snowy forests around his home.

After my Grandfather died, Christmas was spent at our house. By this time, my three older sisters were married and had children of their own; everyone would flock to our house for Christmas dinner, visiting, laughter, music making and singing. The table was always overflowing with food, and the laughter and good cheer were abundant. My Dad was a great storyteller, and he passed that trait to his children – there would be wonderful stories from his childhood and we all treasured the time we spent together.

My Grandmother and Step-Grandfather (my Mom's parents) lived in Vancouver: every Christmas my Grandmother would send a parcel to us prior to Christmas. We all looked forward to, and anticipated this parcel because of one of the things she always included in the parcel: a few sprigs of holly that she had cut from her own tree. It was one of those little 'treasures' that we didn't see here in Alberta and it was a signal to us that Christmas was near when the parcel with the holly arrived. ☺

Also inside the parcel from Vancouver, were gifts for all of us – wrapped up and waiting for us to open on Christmas Eve. Oddly, the gifts inside the parcel always smelled like moth balls. We could only assume that Granny stored things in a trunk that had mothballs in it. There was a bit of humour in these gifts: every year Granny would send my Mom and her daughters the same gift – panties. We never knew why she thought we needed this gift because we weren't lacking this item of underwear. We also never knew why she always sent panties that were much larger than the body she had sent them to! ☺ On Christmas Eve, we would each open our gift, saying "Gee, I wonder what's inside this gift.....and I wonder who it will fit." Usually the gift for my sister and I would actually fit our Mom. My Mom's gift was always much too big for her – so one year she held up the gift and said "these look like they could fit you, George (my Dad)" – and my Dad, being the humorous person that he was, decided that he would try them on! On they went; over top of the trousers he was wearing and sure enough....even with his trousers on, the panties were able to be worn by him. We all started laughing and it was the family joke from that point on. My Mom got her camera and took a picture of this, and the photo is in the Larson Family Archives to this day.

As our family grew to include my parents' grandchildren and great-grandchildren, our house became filled with laughter and joy at Christmas time. My oldest sister and her husband extended the celebrations by hosting a Boxing Day dinner for all their joint families; then another older sister started inviting family for a New Year's Day family gathering.

At all these events, music playing, singing, storytelling, and just the family being together at Christmas are memories that will always be dear to me.