

A Fresh Look At Nebraska



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By LuAnn Schindler

As a young girl, I delighted at the thought of the Christmas season.

So many things to look forward to: a much-deserved break from school, sledding down the hill at my grandparents' farm, a Swedish Christmas meal at my other grandparents' home, time with family we didn't see often enough, and plenty of sweet treats.

The holiday season meant tradition. And in some sense, that tradition provided comfort and stability. The anticipation, along with topping the previous year's celebration, mounted.

At home, we kicked off Christmas with an all-day bake-a-thon and candy-making session the second Saturday in December. You name it, we made it: fudge, divinity, sugared nuts, cherry mash bars, sugar cookies, mounds bars and my dad's famous cashew clusters. I imagine I missed a few delicacies.

It wasn't about the food. It was about family spending time together. A delicious, yearly ritual.

When my girls were younger, we continued the tradition, except we spread it across several days after school was dismissed. But as they grew older and time constraints interfered, the Christmas candy custom concluded.

I miss it.

Another practice involving our family was opening presents a few days before Christmas. My sister and I would even get a gift for our cats. We'd carefully wrap the present and place it under the tree.

I still pick up something special for my parents' Snowshoe Siamese, Nash. I have to. He controls the household.

We rarely spent Christmas at home. In fact, I can only remember one time that we weren't at a family gathering on Christmas Day. A snow-storm kept us immobilized, but later that day, we were able to escape the boredom of a home-bound Christmas and follow the Christmas star to our northeast Nebraska destination.

One set of grandparents set up an artificial white tree, a color wheel shining on it, mesmerizing me, especially when red glowed against the innocent branches. My cousins and I begged Grandpa to leave the color wheel on during the night while we snuggled in sleeping bags close to the tree, waiting for Santa – or an elf – to deliver the goods.

The other grandparents decorated their tree with a string of lights resembling candles, a modern adaptation of a German tradition, according to my grandmother. The liquid inside would bubble, and at night, when only the glow of the tree lights flooded the room, it radiated a unique effect against the living room walls.

As I've grown older, I marvel at my parents and grandparents for keeping the holiday spirit alive for so many years. My parents live in my grandparents' home in Tilden, and my mom's family still gathers there for Christmas every year.

Fifty people. Fifty varying schedules.

We're family. We make holidays happen.

Establishing holiday traditions shouldn't be taken for granted. It keeps families communicating, sharing, and appreciating the times we are able to celebrate as a family.

And that's not just a Nebraska trait.

Should be happening worldwide.

From the Schindler ranch, happy holidays.