

Christmas Day at Grandpa Hubert's House About 1957

by Elvira Hubert

Our 1950 blue Chevy slipped and bumped along the icy street. My dad was driving wearing his blue Sunday suit, black overcoat, and wide-brimmed hat. Mom was sitting in the passenger seat. I, the youngest at age ten, sat between my parents. My oldest brother, Henry Arthur, sister, Lorina, and younger brother, John Edward sat in the back.

We were coming from church. My family always went to church on Christmas morning. It was assumed, taken for granted, never questioned, or even discussed. After hearing a message by Pastor David Pankratz on Luke chapter two, we headed for Grandpa's house.

When we arrived, we piled out of the car. Tante Mieche and Tante Liese were at the door welcoming us into the house. I could hear Grandpa playing the pump organ in the living room. He was playing the only hymn I ever heard him play: "I Gave My Life for Thee".

Mein Leben gab ich hin, vergoss am Kreuz mein Blut,
Zu sühnen Gottes Zorn; das tat ich dir zu gut
Mein Leben gab ich hin für dich
Und was gibst du für mich?

My aunts, uncles, and cousins arrived shortly after and we wished each other "fröhliche Weihnachten". Our winter coats were heaped high on my aunts' bed.

Soon we were served the most delicious melt-in-your-mouth ham, homemade mustard, thick slabs of white bread, and Plumi Moos. The mustard was a topic of conversation at the dining room table. Was it as good as last year? Was it hot enough? Did it burn your tongue? What was the secret recipe? I didn't much care for the mustard. It was the ham I liked. No one prepared ham like Tante Mieche.

After the meal my dad and uncles relaxed on the sagging sofa in the living room. Grandpa sat on his rocking chair. After the dishes were done the women sat stiff and proper on hard-backed chairs facing the sofa.

Then came the scary part of Christmas for me. It was time for all us

cousins to recite our Christmas poems for Grandpa. We took turns standing several feet in front of him, our knees knocking, hoping we would remember the German poems we had so painstakingly memorized.

When my turn came, Grandpa peered at me over his rimless glasses, which always rested far down his nose. He listened, sometimes cupping his ear with his hand, so as not to miss a word.

O du fröliche, o du selige,
Gnadenbringende Weihnachtszeit!
Welt ging verloren,
Christ ist geboren;
Freue, freue dich, o Christenheit!

Grandpa gave a satisfied nod as the poem concluded.

When all the poetry had been recited, Grandpa gave us our reward. He slowly pushed himself up from his rocking chair, shuffled across the living room, opened his desk drawer, and pulled out a stack of shiny quarters. With a smile he placed a silvery coin in each of our open hands. We were wide-eyed with excitement.

Next it was time to exchange gifts. On Grandpa's birthday (Oct. 20th), we had picked names. We had bought small gifts for each other from the five-and-dime stores in Lethbridge or Robinson's in Coaldale. I don't remember what I got or gave, but we had a wonderful time opening our gifts and finding out who had picked our names.

Later on in the afternoon, Grandpa went downstairs. We cousins smiled at each other. We all knew what that meant. He returned with a large cardboard box filled with brown paper bags. Each child received a bag of nuts, candy and an orange. I especially remember the racko-vo-shakie, hard striped red candy which softened and dissolved in my mouth.

Then came Faspas. I don't remember what was served except for the peppermint cookies and the drizzled with icing ammonia cookies.

Grandpa had an unusual way of drinking his coffee. Since the coffee was very hot, he poured a little from his china cup into the saucer. He let it

cool for a moment. Then he held the saucer up to his lips and drank.

We knew it was time to go home when Blacksmith Neufeldt (Smedt Nefelt) arrived after Faspas. Grandpa and Mr. Neufeldt were checkers buddies. The board was set up and the two started playing. I don't know who won on that day because, we donned our coats after untangling them on the bed and drove home to our farm, feeling happy and content. It had been a good day.