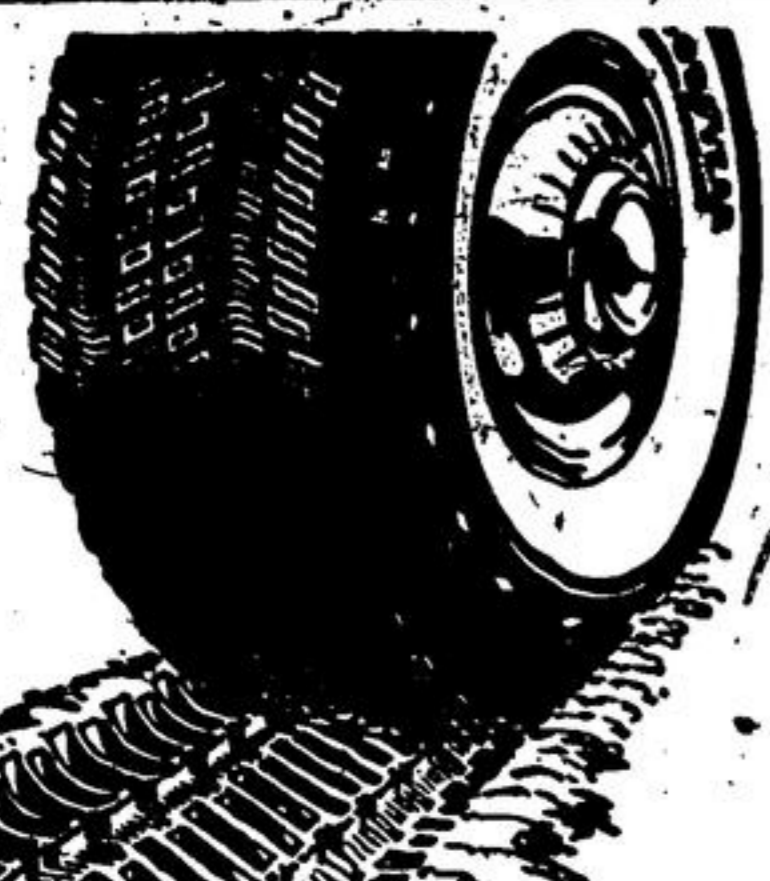


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Chatting

A. H. B.

AT THE RISK of dating myself badly may I ask if you remember the annual argument at Christmas time about whether or not you would be allowed to actually light the candles adorning the Christmas tree? A very dangerous practice I now agree out of the wisdom of added years, but after all, the tree never seemed to really come alive until the lights were lit. I might add that I usually lost the argument but shortly after that, electric "candles" became popular, so I can hardly remember when lights on the tree weren't one of the most delightful parts of Christmas.

You know, looking back, those first little strings of lights gave father something to do during the holiday season. If there was a "bad" one somewhere along the line, the whole string went out, and it was fine sport to try to find the troublemaker. At least it was fine sport for the kibitzers. And father was able to enjoy the elixir of the evergreens first hand, as their needed boughs jabbed him rudely in eyes, nose and ears, while he buried his head deep in the branches trying to find the burnt-out bulb or loose connection. Of course with TV to occupy the leisure hours of his holiday, the man of the house has no need for such extra entertainment. And needless to say he is eternally grateful to the brain that invented strings of Christmas tree lights which operate independently of each other. Now he can sit back without those maddening interruptions and enjoy the tree in all its lightsome glory.

TO GO BACK TO candles for a minute, however, I must say that I feel they help express, more than anything else, the glow of the Christmas season. Whether they be those flickering little window candles in their coloured glass tumblers, tall tapers reflecting the shine of silver and crystal on a formal table, or just candles of any shape or size, reflecting the shine of Christmas on the faces of a family assembled at dinner, replete with food and the excitement of gifts shared—candles create an air of intimacy and warmth and beauty.

Let us girls not forget the last important point. It's rather important after a busy, happy, busy day—a good part of which must be spent in the kitchen preparing the Christmas feast. After the main part of the dinner is served, try turning down the bright lights, and lighting the candles, while enjoying dessert and coffee. Candlelight does wonders for you in every way.

IT'S EVEN FUN making candles. I've always been going to try it "next year"—but probably would never have got round to it without an impending bazaar to spur me into action. At first I was really ambitious. Our candles would be of all shapes and sizes, frosted of course, and decorated. That was before I read all the directions for making same. With each complicated-sounding directive, my ornate dream candles became simpler and simpler.

MOULDING CANDLES is an art, I discovered. To do it properly, that is, the trick is the wick. None of the instructions got me successfully over that hurdle. A wick in its natural state looks just like a limp piece of string. And most of the time that is just exactly what it is too—proper wicks being hard to come by. And the thought of standing perfectly still, holding onto a piece of string which so far I hadn't figured out how to anchor to the bottom of the mold any way, until the wax became solid enough to hold it upright without my assistance—stymied me. For a while it looked as tho making candles would fall by the wayside this year again.

But just at the crucial moment, a talented friend came to our rescue with a very simple version for making those delightful frosted stubby Xmas candles. Big slabs of paraffin made the candle base and all we had to gather up were the wherewithals for decorating the frothy frosting. Bits of glitter, sequins and beads do the trick. These we procured so we gathered up a group of enthusiastic would-be candlemakers, and the bee was on.

THE STEPS LEADING up to the "frosting" were simple and calm. The frosting is where the fun begins. Take half a dozen gals who have never done the like before and excitement to say nothing of confusion, reigns supreme. The first thing we did was to cover all flat surfaces in the kitchen within range of the wax, with newspapers. For the idea is to whip the melted paraffin like mercury.

That phrase "melted paraffin" is deceptively simple. You have to be extremely careful during this operation or wax will burst into flames and explode. Thus it is not recommended as a project for too-busy housewives attempting to sandwich the wax-melting between half a dozen other household duties. I know one little boy, whose mother had had a couple of flaming misfortunes of this type, who told a friend that his mummy had been busy making "bombs" for a bazaar all afternoon.

OUR MISFORTUNES did not go that far, but we did get the wax too hot, and the volunteer "beater," our only experienced candle maker, had to stand and beat and beat with a handbeater, while the paraffin remained stubbornly liquid, and disbelief in the miracle of the froth ever appearing began to secretly disturb the rest of us frosting department volunteers. The wax took its own sweet time to cool enough to

whip up, however, but I will say that when it began to whip it really whup. All over the place and anybody standing within range... Knowing how rapidly wax solidifies, we rallied around like bees around a honey-pot, dipping out the hot frothy mass and slapping it onto the smooth sides and tops of the candle with hasty abandon. Being too hot, the froth slipped and slid over the slippery paraffin like too-thin icing on a cake. With three of us to a candle, slathering, scooping, and patting all at once, to say nothing of the decorating crew throwing on the glitter and gems in between the flailing arms of the "frosters"—pandemonium reigned supreme in that all-too-brief interlude during which the soft fluffy wax remained pliable. It took only a few minutes to cool into the very solid frosting which makes a glamorous creation out of a simple candle. This performance we repeated eight times, with variations in the colour of each. Each creation, to our prejudiced and proud eyes, seemed prettier than

the last. Our enthusiasm lasted even into the clean-up chores, which were considerable, involving the scraping and scouring of wax from sink, pots pans and beaters—and floor—and yes, dresses, skirts, and blouses... All I hope is that everyone likes Christmas candles as well as I do, and that they sell well at the bazaar... It was fun making them and as I said earlier—Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without candles. Only thing wrong with the ones we made—they're so big they will last for years, I'm sure.

Next year perhaps we'll make smaller ones, and having more know-how, will produce them with less trouble—but maybe with less fun too.

I HAVE JUST one more nice thing to say about candles. If you happen to try burning them at both ends—and who doesn't once in a while at this time of year—and you find your living room pretty smoky after the guests have departed—try lighting a candle or two and relax for five or ten minutes as the tiny flames clear and freshen the air in the room for you... candles wonderful, aren't they?

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