

# My Childhood Christmas

BY RUTH HOLT

Special to The Tanner

For the first 15 years of my life, my family had our Christmas dinner at my maternal grandfather's home at the south-west corner of Jameson and King - in old Parkdale - in Toronto.

When we woke on Christmas morning, we found our stockings on the ends of our beds. We opened them to find small puzzles and toys, along with an orange, hard Christmas candies, nuts and a shiny new penny. After breakfast, our gifts under the tree were opened and enjoyed.

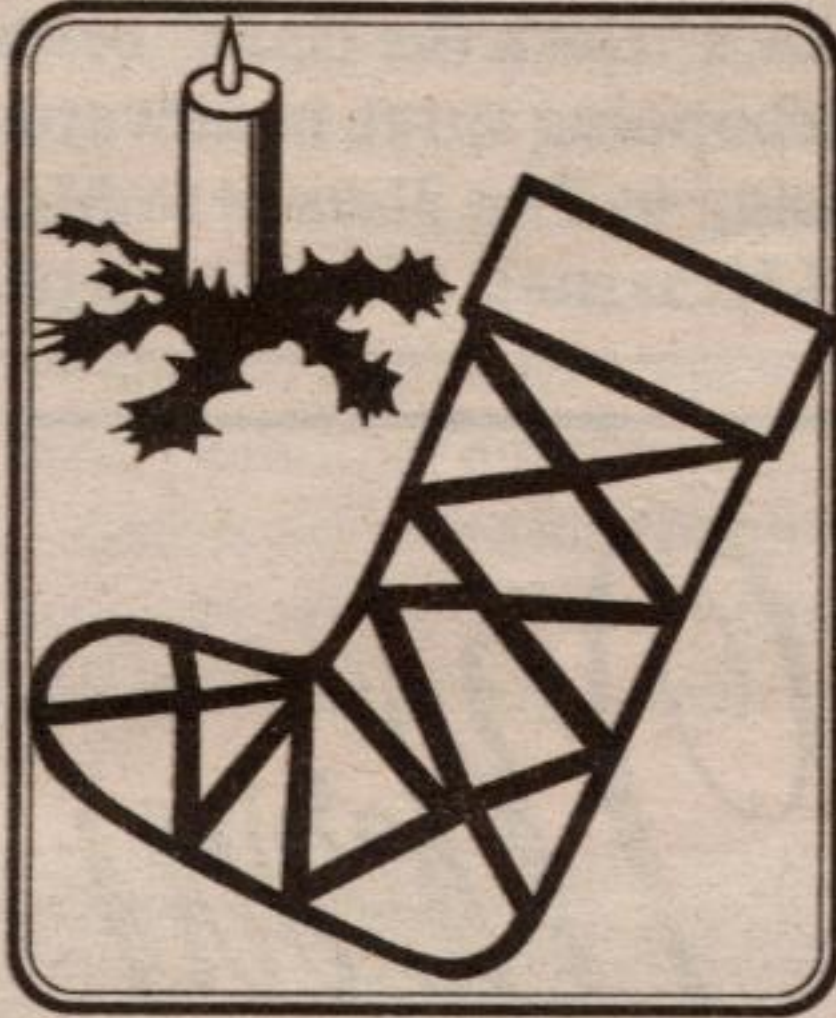
We then walked the three blocks to my grandfather's home, where we joined my mother's sister and brother and their families, along with one of my grandfather's sisters and her family, and my grandmother's nieces.

Dinner was served around 4 o'clock. There were two tables set in the large dining room. The main table seated 20 adults, and across the bay window at the end of the room was a table for 14 young people of various ages up to 16. At 17, we got to join the adults.

The tables were spread with white damask cloths and had two-inch wide red satin

ribbons crossing from corner to corner, with looped bows at each corner. In the centre on a round mirror, was a bowl of red carnations, flanked by white candles.

My grandfather sat at one end of the table and carved a turkey. My uncle sat at the other end and carved a goose. You could have your choice or have some of each. Mashed potatoes, mashed turnips,



green peas and small creamed onions were served, along with dressing, cranberry sauce and giblet gravy. There were pickled crabapples and sickle pears to complete the feast.

For dessert, there was mince pie or plum pudding along with had sauce. Shortbread, sugared dates, mints, chocolates and mixed nuts were the final touches. In all the years, I do not recall one

variance to the menu - it was just delicious and always to be remembered.

There were Christmas crackers to snap and paper hats to be worn. Inside each napkin was a gift of money. This was very exciting for us children, as we were usually given a nickel or a dime at the most - but this was a crisp new bill of at least \$5, and that increased along with your age.

After dinner, my mother played the piano and we all sang carols. The adults played carpet balls, which is an indoor version of lawn bowling. We children played hide and seek upstairs through the bedrooms, in the dark. I remember one of my cousins had an iron brace on one leg, and we gave him a terrible time if he moved and made a noise to give our hiding place away.

It was a happy family get-together and brings back memories of family, food and fun. We walked home through the snow, which was often piled so high I lost sight of my father's hat as he turned the corner ahead of me.

Our Christmas day was over for another year and we went to bed full of contentment.

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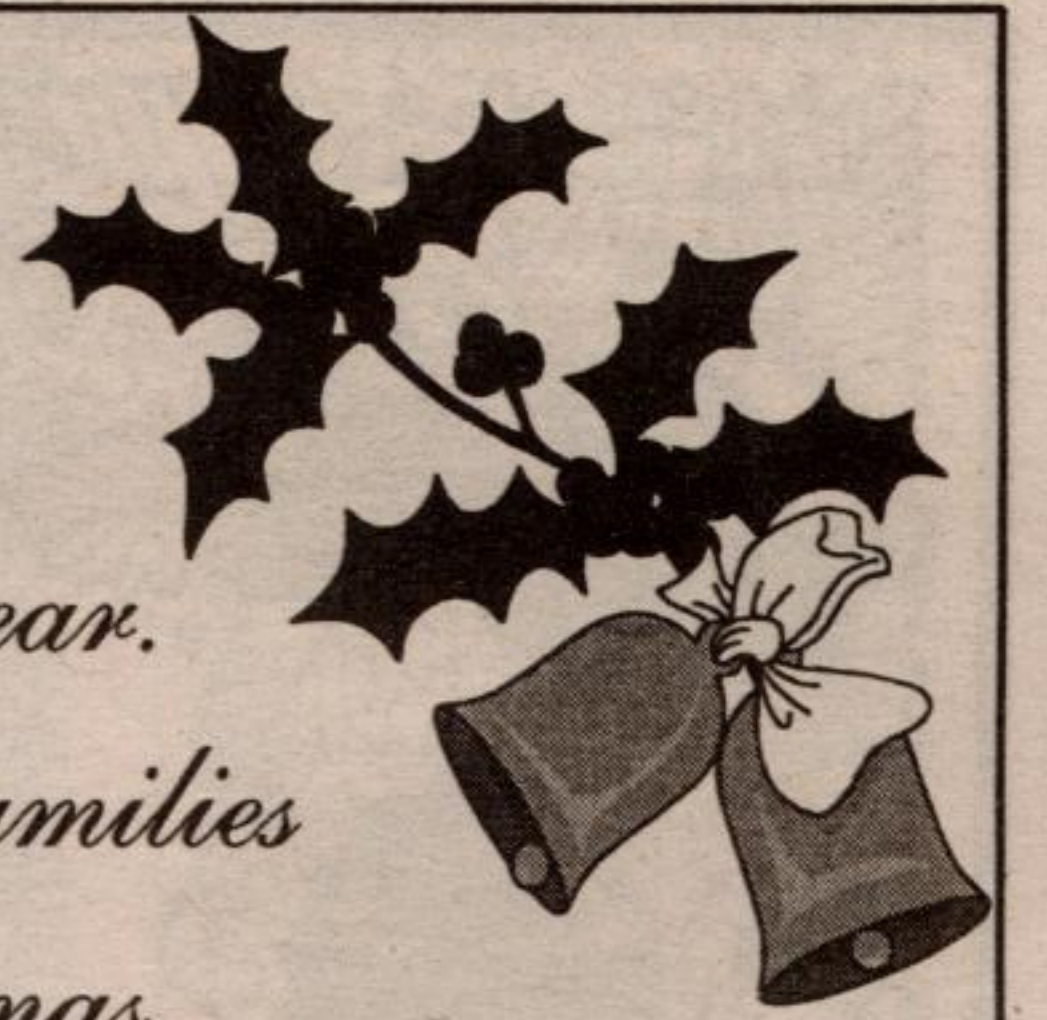
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