

Flashes of Christmas Past



Most of my memories of Christmas Past are happy ones. In actuality they were not always happy, but I choose to focus on the happy ones. That's just my way.

I can almost smell the standing rib roast in the oven. The baked potatoes and the acorn squash hollowed out and filled with butter. I can see the glittering dining room table. As I got old enough, my mother let me decorate the table. I loved that. She let me get out some of the good plates and the fancy silver too. She taught me what fork went where and I found every excuse I could come up with to use extra forks and spoons. Candles too. The table was lit with a festive romance.

I can hear the crackling fire in the living room. When they came up with those extra bits you could put in the fireplace that gave off colored flames, my parents let us put those in the fire. The Christmas tree was on the opposite side of the room from the fireplace. The tree was always surrounded with gifts. We never went without. I'll never forget the year my grandmother died as Christmas approached. My mother went all out that year with gift-buying. I think it was her way of mourning the loss of her mother. She spoiled us all rotten.

There was usually at least one cat curled up by the fire. They loved that toasty fur feel. My mother let us wrap a box of crunchy cat food each year and hide it amongst the gifts. The cats probably thought that was tantamount to torture but at least one year I remember our cat victorious in her search and she ripped the gift wrap off that box and pawed madly, trying to get at the contents. That was Christmas Eve entertainment at its best.

I was walking through a Target store the other day and had a Christmas flashback. There were footy pajamas hanging on the rack. We always wore footy pajamas on Christmas Eve. There are tons of family photos showing all the kids posing on the staircase in our pajamas. We opened our gifts after Midnight Mass so we all donned our jammies as we opened our gifts. We had to. It was off to bed for us after the maddening frenzy of gift opening. We could get back up in the morning and play with everything we opened. We'd still have our footy pajamas on then too, until Mom came down and ordered us up to our bedrooms to dress for the day.

Christmas Eve was always my favorite. To this day, it's the anticipation I adore most.