

Simply Christmas

by Marcia Jacobsen Comer, Ester Moe Lodge #39, Daughters of Norway, Whidbey Island, WA

One of my sweetest memories of my Norwegian Grandma “Jake” is the tissue-paper wrapped gifts with crinkled ribbon we would receive from her at Christmas. Whether a pair of socks, a scarf, or whatever it was, it was always a small, simple and simply-wrapped gift. In the Scandinavian tradition, it was always something useful.

My dad, her son, had the same style. His life’s work was building wooden boats - simple, functional and no frills. If you were a fisherman, you understood - seaworthy, stable and safe for all who were aboard.

One of my favorite gifts received from dad was a compass, not wrapped at all, but slipped into my hand in his shy understated manner. In later years, although I was a hiker and camper at the time, I always thought there were likely various layers of meaning to that compass.

As my brothers and sister and I grew older and had families of our own, my dad started a tradition true to his Scandinavian values of simplicity and practicality. Knowing that funds were often more scarce than we would have liked as young families, dad would start collecting items very early for our Christmas gift. He set aside a medium-sized cardboard box for each family. He would save coupons and look for sales and in each box would create his shopping “story” for that season. On Christmas Eve, we would gather for a hearty soup and bread dinner, and each family would be presented their Christmas box. My mom would smile and smile as dad was having so much fun!

In the box would be all of dad’s “good deals” for the season. Always a big bag of peanuts in the shell, candy canes and hard candies, a bag of popcorn to be popped, a large can of ground coffee (whichever had the best coupon), some tangerines or oranges, and whatever other good deals dad had happened upon in his search. The most fun, as we rummaged through our boxes with delight, was listening as dad related the stories of the items. How he had teased the grocery checker into not only giving him the sale item while also using the coupon, but then attempting to get a senior discount on top of it! He would giggle all the while telling the stories of his wonderful purchases and my mom would chime in with little side stories of how the clerk had blushed pink and gotten flustered over dad’s teasing and requests for discounts.

Dad was true to every Norwegian joke he had ever told...he laughed more in the telling than the listeners in the listening. We laughed because he was having so much fun! How I miss those cardboard boxes!