

"I could tell you the story that at grandmother's house at Christmas time was over the hill and through the woods..." "BUT!" "It was not over the hill and through the woods it was a 30 -minute travel in the summer time." "In the winter it took a little longer depending on the weather." "The northern part of Illinois was cold in the winter." "Really cold." "The snow fell those years were compared to the ice age." "Rumors of a new ice age..." "Aaaahhhh!" "There was always snow... and lots of it." "This Christmas was a time for reflection of a return to the past."

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A two- story house built inside a slant of a hill; nothing fancy. The basement entrance door was in the middle of the lower outside of the house but not the main entrance inside a warm house; the main entrance outside directly in front of the driveway. The drive-way was shoveled every time it snowed. The chill of winter was seen all around, snow piled upon the lawn all over the half acre. The sled marks in the front to the side of house, that faced the country asphalt road, were railed of a drop on run individual sled with handle bars at the top, a flat bottom circle sled, and of an elongated plastic sled. The tracks ran over the middle of the driveway on its side then on the other side of the driveway a series of large walnut trees that were dogged in the slide, but not always. Inside the house, on a weekend that school was just let out for the Christmas holiday, my family prepared for a Christmas departure in the cold that December morning.

"Are you ready to go to Grandmother's house?" my mother asked everybody that went into the kitchen that snowy morning.

"Not really," my next to my oldest brother chimed when he looked through the refrigerator and pulled out a gallon of milk.

My mother sat at the kitchen table and prepared a homemade cold apple salad, not apple pie. Apple pie was made by both my aunts that live on farms-one baked daily and made everything from scratch included baked bread wheat and whole grain white breads. Instead, when it came to baked bread products and individual Hostess pies, cookies and donuts my mother's belief and time convenience was the weekly stop at the *Wonder* bread store. Yeeha! For us kids, the cartoon metal lunch boxes with the matched cartoon plastic beverage container were enclosed with a pie instead of a piece of fruit (apple, orange or pear); sometimes we got both a piece of fruit and a pie! The open space within the lunchbox of what was left was shared with the frequently enclosed main entrée of the peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a small plastic bag of chips of some sort. A daily occurrence throughout the school days of Monday through Friday.

"Get me the red wine vinegar out of the refrigerator and the mayonnaise," my mother requested of me. She peeled another red delicious apple (she also used granny smith apples). She sliced the peeled apple into small pieces into a large plastic measuring bowl that she usually made homemade pancake or Bisquick batter enough for 12 people- seven people resided at my parents' home, all family (mother, father, older brother, next to the oldest brother, my older sister, me (the girl that was next to the youngest), and my younger sister. But, that Christmas only 6 lived under my parent's roof.

"Did you get everything in the car that needs to go to grandmother's?" was the next question my mother asked my next to my oldest brother.

"Nope," my brother chimed back while he made himself some hot chocolate with real milk on the stove. He heaped a large spoonful of Nestle chocolate into the sauce pan of hot milk and waited for his toast to pop up.

Pop!

My mother never asked him if he'd be hungry by the time we would get to my grandmother's. After all breakfast was important. It started off the day. He was a growing teenager that ate and ate without the gain of weight; where energy of food was expelled in the indoor competitive swim pool daily Monday through Friday on the swim team. All five children were on the local recreational swim team. We all learned to swim on the swim team.

"I packed a box for your brother that went to Europe." "Did you record a message like I asked you to?" "If you didn't, I sent it anyway?" "You can write him or send your own" "I wanted to get it there before or on Christmas," my mother informed him. "I packed it with homemade cookies and other homemade baked goods." "There's a plastic container over on the counter by the oven that goes to Grandmother's." "Put that on the table beside the other stuff at the other end of the table; that's got to go with us."

"You get the Airforce base address when he called." "Huh.." Jeff replied when he ate his coco and toast.

I placed the red wine vinegar on the table along with the mayonnaise. "Here's the walnuts and the celery," my older sister sat the package of shelled walnuts on the table open along with what she pulled out of the bag of celery of several branches she broke off and place them near my mother. She turned towards the refrigerator and place the rest of the celery back into the refrigerator; with a skip to her step in her departure she was on her way out of the kitchen. My mother picked up the bag of walnuts and shook them without measurement over the apple slices in the huge plastic measuring cup/bowl.

"Yes," was the reply my mother gave to my next to my oldest brother. "Thank you," was said to my older sister on the tail end of my mother's vision of my older sister's exit out of the kitchen while my mother sliced the celery for the bowl and dropped them into the measuring cup/bowl. My brother finished his breakfast, placed his dishes that needed washed by the sink and exited the kitchen.

"Almost done," my mother stirred the bowl flipped with a huge spatula the mixture of apples, mayonnaise, red wine vinegar and celery and walnuts. Then she added a little pinch of salt and pepper.

"Tell, everybody to get their coats on," my mother informed whomever was within heard distance when she added the plastic wrap over the poured salad into ceramic bowl.

That year like many years. The European gray in the sky clouded the sky and flakes fell soft into an extremely cold weather. Coats where grabbed. I bundled up in my light green coat, placed my hat on my head. My younger sister had already descended the stairwell into the basement to exit. I was right behind. We stood there and waited. My mother descending the stairs. My next to the oldest brother open the door and stomped snow from his winter boots. "Cold out; it's real cold out," he said while he shut the door. "Dad's warming the car."

A few moments in time did not pass as quickly as it does today, the basement door opened from the outside inward. "READY TO GO?" my father announced the question for the departure into the car while he stomped his boots of snow out of habit. He placed the snow shovel inside next to the basement door. My mother's ducks of four that year stood behind her and beside her. The cold apple salad she

held in her hands was given to my next to the oldest brother. My older sister carried a seven-layer salad that was made the night before and I held the two-store bought preheated oven rolls in a bag like it was in a box lunch box. My youngest sister held a bag that had presents in it for grandma. I think it held mainly the one she made for grandma. "I put the stuff and presents you told me to in the trunk," my next to the oldest brother announced.

"Ok," my mother relied.

"Let's go," my father instructed. The basement door opened and we departed to enter the car that warmed up in the driveway.

The snow started to fall outside.

The driveway was shoveled by my father and my next to my oldest brother, so we heard the crunch of the snow still underneath the tires as my father backed the car down the driveway to exit onto the country road two miles outside of the town. My cousins considered me and my rest of our family the city or town folk for both of my mother's sisters had married farmers and my cousins we considered the country folk.

The car windows fogged part way in the back and my sisters and next to my oldest brother began to decorate with a short puff of warm breath on the windows. A fist was made first and press onto the fogged window then with the touch of a finger five little dots with the first being very large was pressed above the pressed fist. "Feet," my younger sister said. And whoever was sat by the windows also made feet. "Walking to grandma's house," was a comment. My mother that did not see the pressed silhouette from the front seat commented. "Little bit to cold," she commented. Then my older sister told... "We made silhouette feet on the window." The comment from the front seat was a "Oh..." (I imaged that she said a oh while she smiled).

The journey that Christmas year to grandma's house was a little longer than usual. The snow continued to fall. A prophet that settled in Illinois, must of named the very small farm community town. We got there and we were cold even though the car was completely warmed by the vents.

The car was parked to the side of the small corner road that wrapped around going into a horizontal position. We exited. Slammed the doors and hurried to the side door of grandmother's house. The snow continued; fell lightly. Comments of not knowing how long we would stay floated into the air and into each of our ears. My next to the oldest brother went back out to grab a few additional things for my mother. On the inside just beyond the small gally kitchen into the small dining area...my grandmother spoke to my mother in a nice soft tone in front of my father and the rest of us, "You know your son's been calling me granny." "Can you please ask him not to call me granny?" "I don't want to be called granny." "Granny is not really what I wanted my grandkids to call me." "Tell the kids to call me either Grandma and Grandmother." Ok. "But, not granny." "I really don't like being called granny." My mother's response was "ok." The rest of us sat there and responded nicely. "Ok." I sat quietly in one of the small dining room chairs and smiled. The kitchen side door slammed shut and my next to my oldest brother bounced into the small gally kitchen.

"Hiya, granny!" my next to the oldest brother bounced happily into the room and looked over at my grandmother with a huge smile ready to hug her. It was the melt from a huge smile that warmed my warm-hearted grandmother's heart more. My grandmother looked over at my mother and said, "Only

he can call me granny." "The rest of them can call me grandma or grandmother." Grandmother smiled and laughed and looked around then said, "Ok." It was not a question but a confirmation that let us know that my next to my oldest brother was the only one that was to get away with a different type of Christmas present that year.

The rest of us looked at my grandmother and started to laugh. "Ok, grandma," was what we said in non-planned unison. My next to the oldest brother kept his huge smile on his face. In fact, he was the only one out of all my relatives that called my grandmother "granny". We really did laugh and thought it was funny. My next to my oldest brother called my grandmother "granny" until she passed away years later.

It was the smile that warmed her warm-heart even more. Once we entered grandma's house, all the worries, all the troubles of your life stayed outside the door. It was truly Christmas when we went to grandma's house.

One of many memories with my grandmother.

Merry Christmas 2023!