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Christmas Eve Gift



When I was a little girl, I believed in Santa. I was the last of my classmates to find out that Santa was really my mom and dad. I can still feel how defensive I became when my friends told me that there was no Santa. After all, I had been to Santa's Village and actually seen the reindeer in Hope Valley, California!

I remember finding my "Santa" Christmas gifts hidden away at my house. Tears flowed freely. How embarrassing to defend Santa to my friends and then find out that he didn't exist! It actually took me several years to forgive my parents for "lying" to me. How could they set me up for such a painful fall?

It seemed to me that Christmas was never the same afterwards. The magic was gone. I adamantly refused to teach my own children that there was a Santa. It wasn't for the religious reasons that many of my friends espoused although I believed that Christmas was about Jesus. It was because I **WOULD NOT** lie to my kids.

One time my mother-in-law had my daughter's picture made in Santa's lap. Oh my goodness, my husband and I just about had a "come-a-loose", each of us for our own reasons. Some twenty-three years later, I think I probably overreacted just a little.

I think my kids have survived my anti-Santa regimen. They seem fairly well-adjusted. Of the two of them that are married, one is sticking to the anti-Santa/Jesus is the reason for the season/ program and one is probably going to go the Santa route when her children arrive. My younger two seem happy enough because there are gifts under the tree, and as for me, I still struggle with Christmas.

I love the family times. I love the wonderful food. I love the Christmas decorations.

I do have the important things. My family is all tucked into our warm house. My daughter and son-in-law are here, too, and even my mother is here.

The menu just keeps getting yummiier. We are starting today with pumpkin cream cheese spread and bagels, donated by my vegan daughter. Later, Paula Deen's Rigatoni and Sausage Bake will simmer in the oven. Spinach dip, cookies galore, cheese balls, and more await us and it's only Christmas Eve. Tomorrow will be the

real kicker.

Christmas music fills the air. Karen Carpenter sings Merry Christmas Darling, and Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra add their songs.

Snow is forecasted for Christmas Day, a rarity for those of us in North Alabama.

I literally stuffed everyone's stockings to the top last night.

So everything is ready. Well, maybe my heart needs a little work.

I have a few bad Christmas memories to release, and I'm working on that. After all, Christmas and the ability to dream are inextricably joined together. From the very first Christmas, dreams were a part of the magic, from Joseph to the Wise Men, God showed up and gave hope and direction in their dreams.

I will work through my Christmas ambivalence. I will cry a little if I need to, mourning those who aren't here and the loss of Santa and some of my grown-up Christmas dreams, but when it's all said and done, I expect that it's gonna be a wonderful holiday.

My dad had one particular Christmas tradition that I have held onto. He loved to be the first in the family to say, "Christmas Eve gift". Whoever remembered to say it first, got a big kiss. It's the one tradition that has endured for me. I'm about to go give some kisses to my family and celebrate the simplicity of love and life and Christmas dreams.

And Christmas Eve gift to all of you. I send my Christmas kisses and wishes of love and joy and peace for you all today. May your holiday be all you dream of.

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