

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



To bake or not to bake... that is the question.

Apologies to Shakespeare, but the sentiment pretty much encapsulates the holiday goodie dilemma in this farmhouse.

"Mom, are you gonna bake fruitcake this year?"

"Mom, did you bake fruitcakes yet?"

"Mom, WHEN are you going to make fruitcakes?"

How about late the afternoon of December 24? Given the disappearance rate on such appetite attractions to the Hungry Horde (a pair of teenagers), that timing might allow just a few slices of this family favorite left by Christmas Eve.

Now, I'd like to confide to you how I spend hours chopping, dicing, blending, and baking fruitcakes. But that would be a big, fat fib. My famed family fruitcake equals the simplest one-bowl applesauce cake recipe ever invented, liberally laced with additions of raisins, nuts, candied

fruits, etc. Its life expectancy is greatly enhanced by storage in the freezer, with the label "liver" marked on the outside.

Simple-to-make holiday goodies seem to be a preferred part of the times, with women busier than ever both in and outside of the home. But the tradition of holiday baking seems a firm one, just modernized with easier, up-to-date methods.

There weren't quite as many shortcut methods when I remember slipping in the door from elementary school to a kitchen warm with the heavenly smell of holiday cookies.

Such memories always lead to other, more guilt-ridden ones.

Baking supplies that weren't needed on a regular basis were sometimes stored in a sort of pantry, an unheated room off the kitchen. This nifty hideaway held all sorts of childhood food treasures near the holidays: maraschino cherries, chocolate chips, coconut. Forbidden fruits, you might say. Stuff that a mother

never had quite as much of as she thought should be there when the time came that she needed it. If you know what I mean.

It's a fact: no maraschino cherry made today tastes half as sweet as those filched from the pantry stores years ago.

Confessions reveal that such outlaw behavior existed as well on the paternal side on this farm family. Only the farmer's forbidden fruit was coconut, the long, chewy, stringy kind you can't seem to find any more. Seems that this kind of coconut, if properly located in the side on one's cheek, in proper quantities, remarkably resembled a grownup's wad of chewing tobacco. And you didn't have to spit.

Either Santa never got either of us on his list of bad kids, or took loving mercy on us, because we're still waiting for the proverbial lump of coal in our stockings for childhood misdeeds.

So perhaps our Hungry Horde has inherited this tendency to demolish baking supplies.

And where are the fabled fruitcake ingredients, I ask? Someone nibbled away all the raisins. The nuts still need chopped. A jar of maraschino cherries holds three lonely ones left in the bottom. Even the bag of chocolate chips suffers from the law of diminishing returns: each time they return the level diminishes. Candied fruit has been left in safekeeping on the supermarket shelf 'til closer to the time it's needed.

There is a bit of coconut flying around the refrigerator. It's there because the bag got misplaced, behind a container sprouting a forest of something green and fuzzy.

To bake or not to bake? I may not have to.

The eldest Hungry Horde has announced plans to "bake at least 15 kinds of cookies before Christmas."

And the youngest has cheerfully volunteered to eat 'em.

Is that what you'd call working together as a family to set up holiday traditions?

Christmas traditions

(Continued from Page B10)

day, because Christmas comes during the deer-hunting season, and it is traditional for men to go hunting that afternoon.

Recent Developments

This is not quite as radical a notion as it might sound. Samuelson found in her research that until the coming of the 20th century, Christmas was not celebrated primarily as a religious holiday in this country. In fact, among some religious groups such

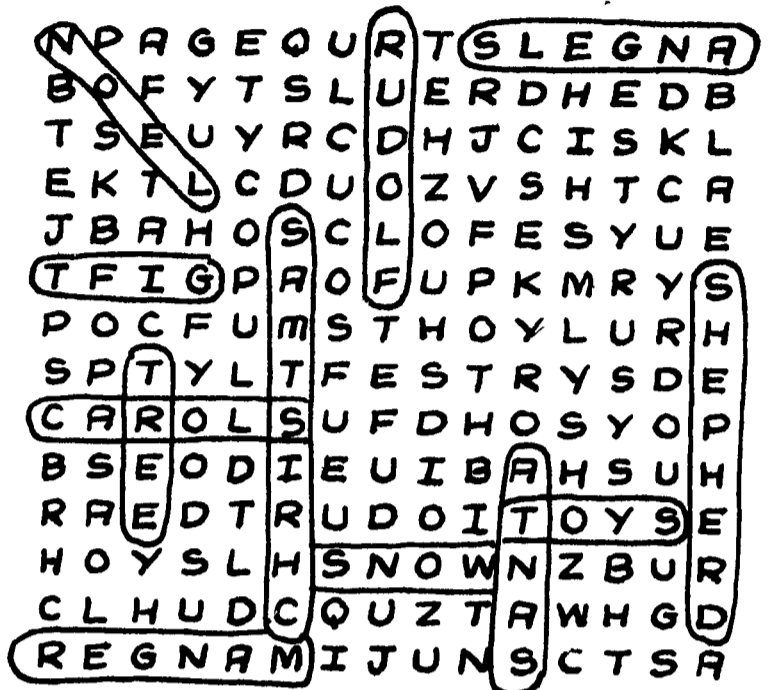
as the early Puritans, it was frowned upon to celebrate Christmas, because the holiday was thought to have a pagan history.

But as the holiday became linked with a religious theme, another tradition developed: griping of a specific kind.

"If you read the mass magazines back into the 1890s," says Samuelson, "it's interesting to see the articles complaining that Christmas is becoming too secular, too commercialized."

Traditions like that tend to linger on.

Answers



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