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A Christmas Memory Shared

Vera Holding

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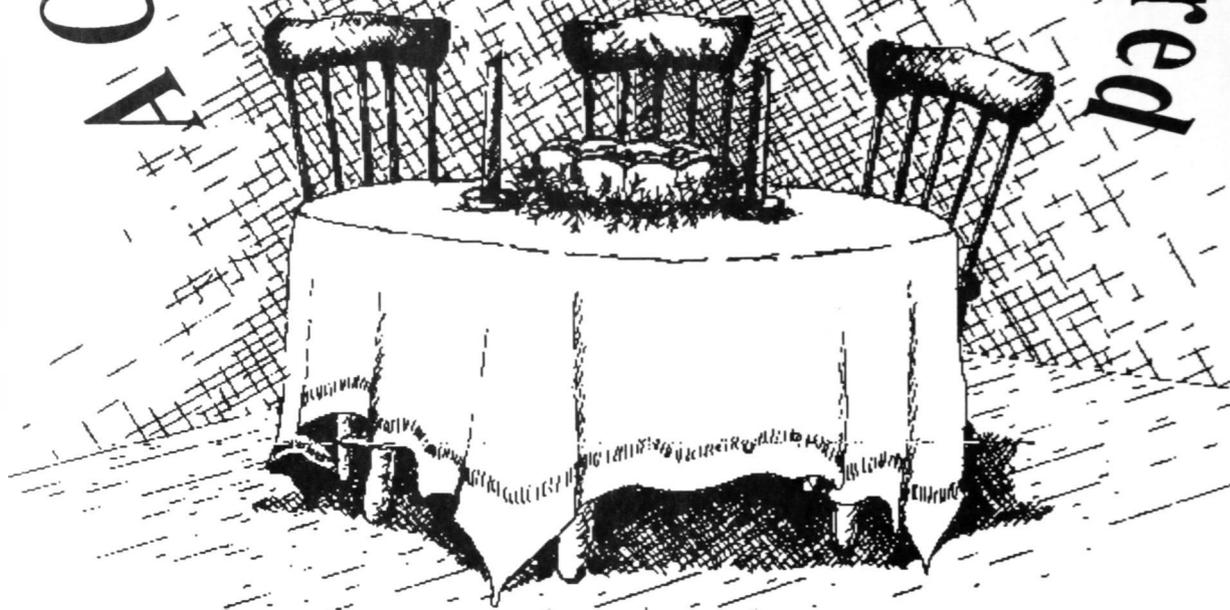
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A Christmas Memory Shared



—By Vera Holding

Designed and Illustrated by Gina Mitchell

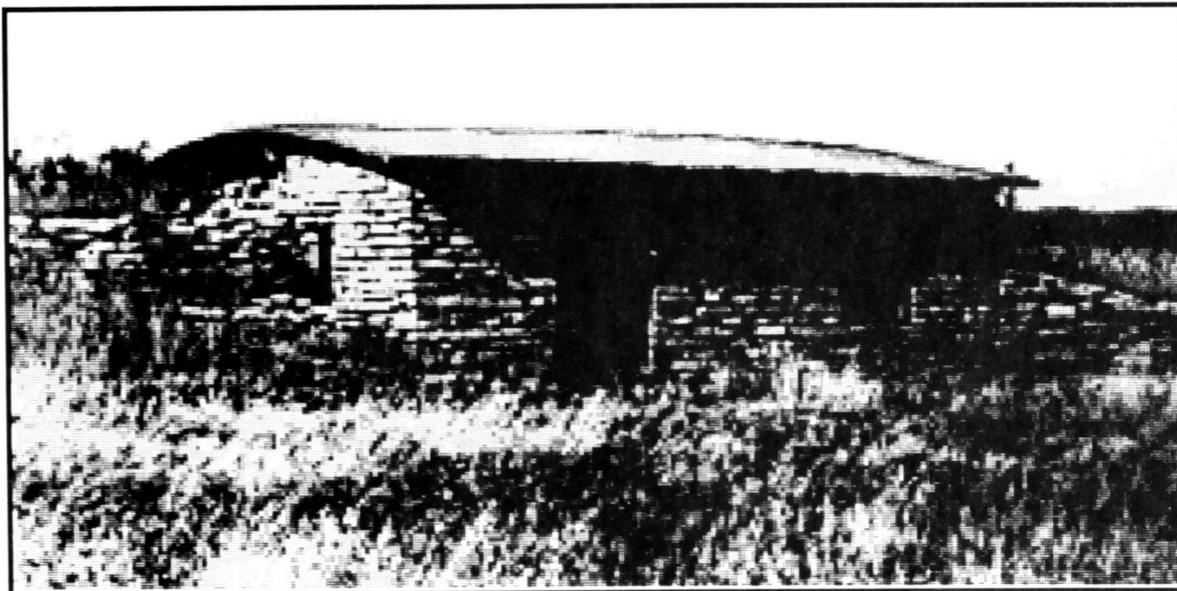
We were a large family in a raw new country—Indian Territory. There were no government handouts, no children on relief; and although we were bone poor in worldly goods, we were rich in love and family togetherness. Christmas was something particularly special.

In the corner of our large one-room dugout home there was always a cedar tree, selected and chopped down by our father who had led us children on the day before Christmas on search of the just-right tree—not too tall but tall enough to reach from floor to ceiling. It must have thick branches, which made it a thing of beauty, because of its dark green color and symmetry.

A wood fire on the hearth brought out the spicy fragrance of the tree—an unforgettable memory. From the pine-log mantel hung a row of long, black, ribbed stockings to be filled later with oranges, apples, nuts, and popcorn. Oranges were our special Christmas treat.

Two hairy coconuts squatted on the hearth and would be broken into edible pieces by Father's hammer blows. First, though, the eyes were gouged out with Father's Barlow knife, and the luscious milk poured out and shared with those who cared for it.

When the blows finally came, coconut pieces would fly, and we would scramble for them. The boys would remove the



meat from the shell on one of them and divide it with all of us. We would squat there on the sandstone hearth munching with delight.

The other coconut was given to Mother, who took the rich white meat and shredded it to make what, to us children, was the most delectable centerpiece in the world—AMBROSIA! Ambrosia included both of our most “Christmassy” specials—coconut and oranges.

Above the dining room table, hung from a rafter, was Mother’s milk-glass hanging lamp with crystal prisms. It had been one of her wedding presents and was our one note of prairie elegance. She had carried it in her lap during the long journey from Texas to our dugout prairie home. It became so much more than mere light; it was our faith, our hope; and when the firelight caught the rainbows in the crystal prisms, every hardship of a new land disappeared as we joined hands to sing the old loved

carols. I felt very sure that a kind God listened.

The centerpiece—on the table—ah, that was something else! In a large crystal bowl, thin slices of oranges were layered with the fresh coconut. It remained the centerpiece under the light from early morning until every last morsel was eaten.

Memory is a wonderful blessing. And now on our special family day—with my children, grandchildren, and great-grands gathered around it—Mother’s lamp, which picks up the gold and snow of Ambrosia in a large crystal bowl, hangs in a proud place of honor.

Through misty eyes, I see the family joining hands to send a circle of prayer Heavenward: Thank you, God, for memories. They keep all our hearts singing, regardless of time. *

(VERA HOLDING, now deceased, was the official “Sweetheart of the Oklahoma Writers’ Federation, Inc.” For several years, Mrs. Holding, of Tipton, was instrumental in the success of the OU Professional Writers’ Short Course.)