

PART FIVE

HOLIDAYS

CITRUS .

One of the things we always do at family gatherings is walk around the yard and enjoy the many plants and trees that will grow in Fair Oaks.

The orange tree became the center of a delightful exchange of nostalgia. I reached into the tree to pick the first nice big orange of the year. Everyone started to recall all the things that Grandfather Vincent would have said and done as he picked the first orange. He would have taken out his large old bone handled knife and cut it in to pieces which he would have examined for juiciness, color, and thickness of skin; finally tasting it for sugar content.

The citrus industry gave Fair Oaks its birth in history. It was the idea to subdivide the colony into gentleman sized parcels and plant them to orange groves. Other citrus, fruits, and nuts were also planted at the same time, nearly 3,000 acres in Fair Oaks beginning in 1895.

Our grandfather came to Fair Oaks in 1906. He bought sixteen acres of land that was already planted and nearly established. He then bought twenty acres of land on Kenneth Avenue that was not completely planted at that time.

My father remembered as a five year old boy, playing on that land with other little children while the orchards were being planted. Our land was of soft sandy loam, worked up and water pipes put in before the orange trees were planted. John Holst and Walter Cunningham helped my grandfather. Walter Cunningham had a big steam driven tractor he had made out of an old car. It is interesting to think that in 1906 that something like a car could have been called old.

Orange trees take several years before they arrive at a stage where they will bring in a crop for their keep. My grandfather and many of the early ranchers paid to have their orchards watered and cared for in the summertime while they retreated to the mountains for cooler weather. Once an orange tree reaches a bearing stage it will usually live longer than its owner. Some of the trees that were planted while my dad played are still to be seen in the subdivision directly across from Earl Leggett School on Kenneth Avenue.

Many of the trees and the citrus industry did not survive in Fair Oaks because of killing frosts during the years. The first killing frost came during the early thirties about the time of the Great Depression when life became difficult for some. Many of the ranchers returned to the East. Our orchards did not suffer terribly from freezing because the land was carefully chosen to be in thermal belts where the temperature did not drop as low as some of the other areas. When the big freeze came many of the ranchers pulled their blackened trees up and replanted. The County Farm Advisor tried to get folks to simply let the trees set for a year until the new growth came back up from

THE MUSHROOM STORY

Many a warm fall day we drove up the old road to Loomis and stopped at cow pastures to pick wild mushrooms. We knew how to recognize the ones that were safe to eat. Often a group of family and friends would go gathering mushrooms.

When we came home we often had buckets full of them. My mother would clean them and saute them in fresh butter. She would add lots of salt and pepper and serve them on toast.

I remember one fall evening my mother had the loveliest mushrooms browned in butter, served on toast points. She acted really strange about it. My dad would never eat his share until the next day when he was sure no one had been poisoned and died. But that did not seem to be it. We all began to question the mushrooms. Where did you get these? We knew she had not been gone long enough to have gone to Loomis to visit her parents.

After much questioning we finally got her to confess. She and the dog had gone down to the Old Fair Oaks Cemetery that day. The warm, moist fall weather on the oak shaded hill had brought up the huge white mushrooms and she could not resist them!



Turkey in a Bag

Year after year we prepared a turkey in a bag. Now this is not some unusual recipe, but a wonderful childhood fool's game.

We would take a large burlap bag and stuff it with wadded up paper. Then we would put the tail feathers and feet from a turkey my parents had butchered to take to market in the end of the bag, just sticking out a little way. Under the bag we would tie a long rope. About half a dozen of us little Vincent cousins would sit in the olive trees on the high bank going down the hill from the Chicago Avenue stop sign and hold on to the concealed rope. It was never very long before a car would come along and stop. When they reached down to pick up the bag we would pull it up the bank real fast. Everyone would then have a good laugh. I suppose some folks did it just to give us kids a good time and some were genuinely tricked.

One fellow did not think it was so funny. He went home and got a high powered rifle, came back and shot at us! Our good neighbor Julia came and rescued us. She had heard the shots from over the hill. She took us home and set us up in her yard behind her privet hedge with our "turkey". There she could keep an eye on us and see to it that we were safe.

THANKSGIVING SALADS



Walter's Orange - Avocado



Slice a large navel orange that has been peeled. Top with avocado slices and chopped walnuts. Serve with mayonnaise.

Traditional Thanksgiving

Two apples cut in small pieces
Two hard sweet persimmons cut in pieces
One stalk of celery cut in small pieces
1/4 cup chopped walnuts
1/2 cup chopped dates

Miracle Whip or mayonnaise to taste.

THE DOLLS

Several years ago when we were cleaning my mother-in-law's cellar, down under an old jam cupboard we found a beautiful doll made in Germany in the 1800's. She was a little the worse for the wear. The metal pins that held her leather arms and legs on were rusted through. Her hair, cut and fashioned from the hair of a living child was almost gone. Her soft little eyes looked up at me and said, "Take me home." Many a little girl of German decent had a lovely doll like this.

Julia Forrest, one of our old time Fair Oaks neighbors told me an unforgettable story. I had stepped into her back porch one day, walked to the door of the kitchen and knocked. "Julia!" I called out. She came to the door acting a bit flustered and said to me, "I am not sure I want you to see what I am doing." At the same time she motioned for me to come into her front room. There on the table sat a lovely old German Doll. Julia was making her a new outfit of clothes. I had never seen such a beautiful creation. She was hand sewing her a dress of burgundy velvet and old lace. Julia, now just a mite of a lady, nearly blind, hands twisted with arthritis was almost as old as the doll.

She was born way up in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado to a German coal miner and his mail order bride from Germany. They lived several days trip from the nearest town. Her father delivered her with the help of a doctor book written in German. Within a year or so there was a little sister, Myrtle. In about 1890 Myrtle was delivered with the help of a neighbor woman across the hill.

The two little girls were such good friends as they grew up together so far from civilization. They played and there were many stories to tell.

Their father went down once a year to get supplies in the fall. At that time he purchased the Christmas gifts and they were hid in an attic loft. This particular year, the little girls left alone in the log cabin for hours at a time discovered the dolls up in the attic. Every day they would crawl up the ladder and play with the dolls when the folks went out to do chores.

They probably would never have been found out except that also up in the attic was the winter supply of honey hanging in a large container from the rafters. Each day when they went up to play with the dolls they would get themselves a big dip of the honey. Well, it seems that raw honey and little tummies do not go together so there were frequent and repeated stomach upsets. In tracking down the cause of the girls frequent illnesses it was discovered that they had been getting into the honey and that they had also found the dolls that were hidden for Christmas. Their father was very angry and told the two little girls that since they were so naughty there would be no Christmas for them this year. Sure enough, when they checked, the dolls were

gone and their father told them that he had given them back to the Christmas Saint.

There were two sad little girls that autumn from October until Christmas morning. When they woke up there were the two dolls. There were two pretty surprised and happy little girls that year.

There were many lovely childhood years of playing with their babies, as Julia called them. But then, oh my, that was not the end of the trouble for the girls and the dolls. It seems as they approached the teen years and lost interest in the dolls they heard about the practice of the Indians burning their dead on a huge pile of wood. So one day they thought it would be interesting to try this with their dolls. They went out, not beyond call, and built a fire. They then laid their dolls on top of the fire to cremate them. When the old leather bodies felt the heat they began to twist and writhe with the approaching fire. The little girls went in to screaming hysterics. Both of their parents came running. Needless to say the little girls got the worst spanking in all their lives.

And so as I sat there with her and listened to these stories, I understood the condition of the doll and the hairlessness. I left there that day and went to a doll repair shop and bought her a beautiful full head of hair with long curls.

I found an old letter from my mother-in-law telling about her doll, the Red lady. Every year she got a new dress for Christmas. That was before she got lost in the cellar. I made her a new green velvet dress with old lace on it using the same design that Julia remembered her dolls dress had been. Now I walk by my beautiful doll and say, "You sweet thing, you shall live forever."



Charlotte Whitney Kennedy's Persimmon Fruitcake

My Great Grandmother, Charlotte Whitney was the wife of William Nellis Kennedy, M.D. Dr. Kennedy retired to Fair Oaks in 1921 and practiced medicine for some time from his home on Pennsylvania Avenue.

With the coming of the holiday season many old time homes used to gather the ingredients for the fruitcake that had to be made ahead and allowed to mellow as the fall season passed.

Collecting heritage recipes has long been a hobby of mine. My favorite recipe originates right here in Fair Oaks with my Great Grandmother, Charlotte. Her own recipe for a fruitcake was a prize winner and a very coveted secret. It has been a tradition in our family to make this fruitcake which includes local fruits and nuts. It makes a wonderful Christmas gift. It mails well and it can be frozen and kept for a Christmas in July.

My mother has made this recipe for as long as I can remember, and that is about 45 years. This recipe is a particular joy to make because I always recall the story that is told of Great Grandmother, a staunch tea-totaler, who could not abide a drop of alcohol. Charlotte would gather all the ingredients together and then have someone else stir in the brandy at the last.

I can remember when I was very little an old Italian man used to bring my mom his prize homemade brandy to use in her fruitcake. It was 140 proof. I always liked the secretness of this exchange.

In making this recipe today I make the recipe in a large crock. Grandma used the milk bucket. The recipe can be halved, but if you are going to the trouble to make it and if the oven is large enough for 8 loaf pans, bake the entire thing.

Grandma's Persimmon Fruitcake

1 pint molasses
1 pint soft ripe persimmon pulp
4 teaspoons baking soda
1 quart plus 1/2 cup sugar
1 lb melted butter
1 dozen eggs, well beaten
1 quart milk
1 lb white raisins
2 lb regular raisins
1 lb currants
3 lbs shelled walnuts (not chopped)
1/2 lb citron, ground
4 oz candied lemon peel, ground
4 oz candied orange peel, ground
2 teaspoons cinnamon
2 teaspoons cloves
2 teaspoons nutmeg
1 teaspoon salt
2 quarts plus 2 cups white flour
1 pint 80 proof peach brandy

Sift all dry ingredients into a very large container. Mix together molasses, persimmon and baking soda; set aside. Beat eggs well. Melt butter. Measure milk. Make a well in the center of dry ingredients and pour in baking soda mixture, melted butter, milk and eggs. Stir until well mixed.

Next add all of the fruit and blend well. Last add the peach brandy and stir well. There will be a noticeable change in color. Divide between 8 greased and paper lined bread pans. Bake in a well ventilated house at 275° F for 3 to 4 hours.

Cool cakes in pans; remove and wrap in clear plastic wrap. Store in cool place. Cake freezes well. Before freezing, double wrap in clear plastic, then in foil.



The Fruitcake Thief

Fruitcake stories are always a favorite. Especially those about my great grandmother's fruitcake recipe. I have a favorite story of my own.

One year I made my great grandmother's Persimmon Fruitcake and entered it in a Fruitcake Contest which won first prize. I was very proud of my cake so I took one over to my elderly neighbor, Esther. She called me several days later very upset. It seemed that someone had broken into her house and all that was taken was the fruitcake. I just couldn't believe it. Who on earth would steal a fruitcake. For nearly a year Esther would dwell on it. What a strange thief.

One evening Esther called me. She was laughing so hard I could hardly understand what she was saying to me. At her kitchen door sat Freckles, her big hunting dog with that fruitcake in his drooling mouth. Apparently he had stolen it off the table. When he got outside with it he saw that it was not anything for a dog to eat, so he buried it in his dog yard. I suppose he was out looking for one of his old bones I often brought him from the meat market and thought he had better make things right with his mistress.

Like I say, "It takes the prize and it keeps well!"



The following is a poem written by my niece who grew up in Fair Oaks.
The White's Mansion was built on the hill behind our home on Sunset Avenue.

The Magic of White's Mansion

*In days of my childhood, on the hill we would see
a house that was lighted like a bright Christmas tree.*

*Each year we would ride by, around Christmas time
a room would be added, we'd joyously find!*

*The rooms would be lighted in bright reds and greens
and yellows and oranges, all colors between.*

*Each glass pane surrounded all shimmering bright,
a vision of Christmas, a childhood delight!
When I grew older, had a child of my own,
I took him to visit this Christmas dressed home...*

*I told him that surely old St. Nick lived there.
I felt his excitement, heard chimes in the air.*

*As I saw his eyes sparkle, then gazed at this sight,
an amazing thing happened, that crisp winter night.*

*For there in the window of this grand Christmas scene
there Santa stood waving...was it only a dream?*

*Now that I look back I still feel the thrill,
my child's trusting vision made it so very real.*

- by Wanda Jean Fox

MY MOTHER'S MINCEMEAT

- 1 quart chopped, tart apples
- 1 quart chopped green tomatoes
- 1/4 cup finely chopped candied citron
- 1/4 cup finely chopped candied lemon peel
- 1 pound Thompson Seedless Raisins
- 1/2 cup vinegar
- 1 large can Granny Smith Frozen Apple Juice Concentrate
(Mother used about a pint of fresh pressed apple cider)
- 3 teaspoons cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons allspice
- 2 teaspoons cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 4 cups of sugar

Combine all ingredients except sugar. Cook over low to medium heat stirring often until thick and well blended. Add sugar at last and cook just a few minutes, being careful not to scorch. (Add a little Watkins Brandy or Rum flavoring if you like when baking pie.) Process according to your canning and preserving schedules or do as our family does and put in freezer jars and freeze.

This mincemeat is a favorite of our family. You will notice it is meatless. Our favorite way to serve it is made up into turnovers. While still warm take them with a thermos of coffee and walk along the river on a November afternoon.

SANTA WORE MY FATHER'S SHOES

Christmas at my grandparent's house has to be one of my most cherished childhood memories. My first memory of Santa was at their home. We heard a commotion out on their long driveway and ran to the window. In the darkness we saw tiny red lights and heard the bells of a sleigh. At the same time Santa burst through the door. He was big and loud. I was just a little scared. He knew us all by name and also if we had been good or bad that year. He had a sack as big as he could carry with gifts in it for everyone. This was the first of about five years of lovely believing Christmases with Santa arriving in various spectacular ways.

The Christmas I remember most, though, was the year I was eight. My grandparents had moved to the gold country of California. They had a six hundred acre parcel of land that would raise a few cows, a garden, and a small orchard. In the middle stood a ramshackle old house.

This particular Christmas, I remember so well, they had all of us little grandchildren stay with them during the holidays. Those of us who were older were to help prepare for Christmas Eve when all of the family would gather. We were sent out around the hills of the ranch to pick wild Toyon berries, Mistletoe, and to find the very best Christmas tree. We were so proud of our tree; a fat open limbed long needled sugar pine. We dragged it back over the hills and Grandfather helped us make a stand for it out of some old two by fours. It was a busy day decorating it with the few nice ornaments, making strings of popcorn, and gluing endless chains of various colored papers. It was a glorious tree.

When we were all done Grandmother brought out a box of tiny pieces of foil that came from a nearby airbase. We covered the whole tree with tiny needle like bits of foil. I understood they were used to keep planes from being picked up on radar. I surely did hope it did not interfere with Santa finding his way from the North Pole.

My grandparents had two sons who were in the war in the South Pacific and Atlantic. There was never a hint of the anxiety they must have been feeling. Grandmother listened to war news on the old wooden radio as she kneaded a batch of fondant on the kitchen table. She kneaded it with a hand that shook the old house into a chorus of unwashed dishes and cherished heirlooms alike singing of the fear of war and the joy of Christmas.

Grandmother cared more about playing with her grandchildren than she did housework. The messes we had made for days were strewn everywhere and she sent us out to do the most important thing, and that was to gather a bundle of switches for the kid who been the naughtiest that year. With all the diversions a group of little kids can find it was dark by the time we got back

with the switches. By the time we passed over the bridge the aunts and uncles were coming up the long driveway in their cars. It was like magic, the little house was glistening with lights, and was clean as a whistle. There was a big kettle of chicken soup with fat noodles bubbling on the stove and trays of handmade candies everywhere. It was so wonderful!

We had hardly started to eat when Santa arrived. He was making a terrible amount of noise. We opened the door and there he was with a stack of wooden lawn chairs as high as the house. There was one for everyone with their name painted on it. As Santa stepped through the front door with his bag of toys my stomach grabbed me. He had on my father's old wedding shoes. There was no mistaking. Santa wore boots and these...these were my father's only pair of dress shoes, scuffed and turned up at the toes. I had stepped through the door into the grown up world of Christmas.

Years passedSanta wore just about everyone's shoes. Our men came home from the war. Our family grew in number. There were great-great grandparents, great grandparents, grandparents, parents, children and their children's children gathered with grandmother that last Christmas. When Santa came that night his gauze mask was wrinkled and missing some of the pink from his cheeks, his hair was almost gone, and his wispy beard hung limp and sparse....

He must have gone to ever-ever land with Grandmother that winter for I have never seen him since.



Aunt Monie's Sugared Walnuts

1 1/2 cups sugar
1/2 cup milk
1 teaspoon corn syrup
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 1/2 cups walnut halves

Combine all ingredients, except nuts in saucepan. Cook gently until it reaches medium to hard ball stage. Remove from heat and stir in nuts. (I sometimes use nuts directly from freezer or ice box and they coat and cool more quickly.) After they set a little, spread out on waxed paper to cool.

Some people add a tiny bit of cinnamon.

Wanda Vincent's Persimmon Pudding

Walter and Wanda Vincent raised and sold many varieties of persimmons. Some were sweet and ready to eat when still hard like an apple. Two of the apple varieties were called chocolate and cinnamon because the orange fruit was flecked inside with dark spice like markings. The big persimmons that had to be ripened before they were eaten were often served at a meal as a desert just cut and arranged on a dish like an open flower.

1 cup soft ripe Persimmon pulp
1 cup sugar
2 tablespoons melted butter
1 egg beaten
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1 cup flour
1 1/2 teaspoons soda
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup walnuts
1/2 cup raisins

Combine and pour into well greased tube pan. Bake in a slow oven 300° until done. About 1 hour.

Serve warm with hot lemon sauce.

