

Nancy's Notes of Nostalgia  
By Nancy Horrocks 12 1997

### **Christmas Past**

White Christmases are rare in this area, but, every so often, there would be one. Just by Mark and Triona Anderson's home, I remember a particularly beautiful stretch of road. It was the remnant of an old logging road maintained by David and his father before him. During a snowfall, the branches of the evergreens bent to make an arch if they were laden with snow. It was like walking in a fairy wonderland on a crisp night, with the moon casting its light on the snow clad branches, creating sparkles as brilliant as tiny diamonds.

Going after the Christmas tree was a major event. I don't mean driving to the nearest stand or Christmas tree farm. No self-respecting farm family would ever consider getting the tree anywhere but on their own acreage, especially if we were talking about a farm teeming with timber. Of course, there were the arguments about what shape of tree was needed. Some preferred a tree with thick, bushy branches. Then there were those who preferred few branches.... but symmetrically placed!

In the Horrocks household, the baking and candy making began in early November. The baking of the fruitcake was a family tradition...in those days fruitcake was in fashion! The crude, tasteless jokes about this fine delicacy had not reared their ugly heads! (Now where was I?). Oh yes, the fruitcake. First of all, a trip to the Seattle Public Market was in order. My mother-in-law insisted that this one particular shop had the best assortment of nuts and candied fruit available. I never argued, as I knew it would mean lunch out at a tiny hole-in-the-wall cafe, tucked away in one of the market's comers that served the best clam chowder in captivity and had a panoramic view of Puget Sound.

That night, out would come the cutting boards, sharp knives, aprons, and my mother-in-law's largest crockery bowl. We all would begin to cut the nuts and fruits. This accomplished, the entire blend would be set awash in a fragrant bath of white wine. In this emersion, it would marinate until the next night. Next, the batter would be blended into the wine, fruit, and nut mixture and poured gently into bread pans and baked in a slow oven, the fragrance gently permeating throughout the house. The cakes were then wrapped in towels overnight to insure a slow cooling and the next day divested of their pans and wrapped in lengths of cheesecloth, which had been dipped in brandy. At this point they were once again wrapped and stored in the fruit room. (A room where the fruits of David's mother's efforts were stored. Each year saw the shelves laden with jars and jars of canned, stewed, dried, pickled, or preserved foodstuffs.) Every few days the cakes were unwrapped and ever so gently basted with a basting brush dipped in brandy. By the first week of December they were aged, ripe, and ready. To this day, every once in a while, someone will ask me if I still have the 'recipe'. I do. You know, maybe it's time our grandchildren learned how to make fruitcake and continue the tradition.

In closing, I wish I could ask all of you to drop in and have a piece of homemade candy from one of Mom's recipes. But I can't because I never met anyone who could make candy like hers. Divinity, fudge and fondant in the shapes of fruits and berries. They were to die for!

As a matter of fact, I wish you could have known Myrtle and Dave Horrocks. They were fine, kind, trustworthy folk. Knowing them and remembering them continues to help make Christmas a very special time of year.