

Nancy's Christmas Star

By

Barbara Mooney Myers

There was one Christmas that Mrs. Nancy (Anderson) Bennett spent with us. She'd not shared a Christmas with a family in such a long time. She said she'd given up two daughters to St. Mary's in Sewanee earlier because they were hungry, and she had no money to buy milk. Times were hard, and she had no alternative.

Back to our Christmas – Dad (Bill Mooney) got the Christmas tree at the old Byers field lot that Christmas in 1948. Mom (Josephine “Feenie” Dove Mooney) set it up as always in the front of the front window. Decorations were next, so this meant looking for pretty objects for the tree. We popped corn and strung it on a thick thread that had been unraveled from the opening of the cloth flour sack. We used can lids, colorful photos of flowers, toys, and items from our Sears Roebuck catalogues we kept from year to year. Mrs. Nancy thoroughly enjoyed helping us to decorate the tree. It was always my job to decorate the tree while Mom mixed up the “goulash”, at least that's what I called it, to stick on the photos and catalogue pictures. The goulash was actually a paste made of flour, sugar and water. We took a teaspoon to spread the back of the picture with the mixture, and it worked perfectly. Through the years, I've used Mom's same idea to decorate my own trees.

We watched Mrs. Nancy as she laid cardboard out on the table with a pair of scissors, folded it, and somehow cut out the most beautiful star I had ever seen. Mom, like me, was shocked over it. “How'd you do that”? Mom asked. “Watch me.” she said. “It's simple. I've done it since I was a kid.” Mom tried it, but her star wasn't as perfect as Mrs. Nancy's star. “I need this for a quilting pattern myself,” Mom said, “so this is going to be mine.” Mrs. Nancy looked like her cheeks had been painted with rouge she was so delighted. “Anyway, let's make one for the top of the tree, and we'll call it Nancy's Star.” Mom said.

That's how things went that year, 1948. Our Christmas was like most years, all handmade items on the tree, popcorn, paper bells, picture photos, icicles, and a few things from the years before, and a gift or two under the tree for Mrs. Nancy, a handmade apron with ruffles, a handkerchief, and a head scarf Mom had bought with the change from her washing work. I really don't think that the gift mattered to Mrs. Nancy. It was the sharing with family and the food that she needed. To be with Mom and have the conversation and the pleasures of sampling the food as it was being prepared meant more to Mrs. Nancy. I still had my chores such as carrying in the firewood and keeping the chickens fed, and a thousand other things, but it was a pleasure to see Mrs. Nancy enjoy her Christmas as my life went on as usual.