

## Christmas and German Russian Family Traditions

Martha Wojtowicz, Electronic mail message to Michael M. Miller from Lethbridge, Alberta

This made me think of what I remembered of past Christmases when my parents were alive.

I come from a large family with four brothers, one half-brother, three sisters and two half-sisters and I was the second youngest and so by the time I was a teenager and when I got married a few years later most of them had left home. So a lot of the early family traditions seemed to have disappeared by the time I had grown up.

The one thing I did remember was that Christmas was 'special'. All my brothers and sisters and their families came HOME on Christmas Eve as my Dad felt that the married ones would want to be together or celebrate with the 'other' side of the family on Christmas Day. So on Christmas Eve my Mom roasted the turkey and the daughters and daughters-in-law prepared and brought other foods. After the meal then the cards would be brought out and we played "Smear".

One tradition I also remember was that a couple of hours after dinner my Dad requested my Mom to get out the nuts that had been mixed together - peanuts, pecans, hazelnuts, walnuts and the Christmas candy (a wonderful mix of hard candy which included twisted-shapes and sizes and a wide range of flavours which I think is still available and called Christmas Candy). Mom also put out oranges and apples and some baking which included apple strudel and several varieties of cookies and of course, there was always the Fruit Cake that had been baked in November as we all sat around the 'big' dining table and enjoyed just being together. As the grandchildren appeared and increased soon we spread into the kitchen as we all could no longer sit at the 'big' table together.

After our parents died I started a very special tradition for our own family. We have a fondue on Christmas Eve. Last year one of my sons asked - "Why is it we only have a fondue once a year when we enjoy it so much?" We all laughed wondering why and someone said - "Because it's a lot of work to prepare for it!" and another said "Because it's always been just for Christmas and that's what makes it so very special for us!"

I would love to hear about the various traditions that our group of German-Russians have for celebrating Christmas. Do you have special food(s), special activities, family get-togethers, that are only unique to what was brought from Russia (Germany)? Did your traditions change and/or have you established your own customs now like I did? I love to hear about things that are of German-Russian origin & their traditions. Do any of you sing songs at Christmas time with all of your family together and do you sing them in German! Also it would be fun to know how many of our people speak German. I don't as German was no longer spoken when I was growing up.

So, how about it. Do you have traditions you would like to share with us all? I'd love to hear them!

Merry Christmas to you all and may you be blessed with Health, Happiness and Hope in the New Year!