

Christmas at the Carter's 1954

On Christmas Day, 1954, my family and I celebrated with my grandparents, Alfred and Maisie Carter. Mom, Dad, brother Ken and infant sister Cathy enjoyed a traditional Christmas feast.

The day had actually begun for me early in the morning when, alert for the sound of the arrival of Santa Claus, I was awakened by Dad's arrival home after working the "afternoon" shift for the Saskatoon Police. I recall his voice and Mom's quietly preparing the Christmas stockings and other presents under the tree.

I eventually went back to sleep and awoke in the morning with Ken to see what Santa had brought us. Among the gifts I remember was a red plastic submarine for Ken to take into the bath with him. There were also a couple of "frogmen". These were small plastic scuba diver figurines which had a small indentation in the sole of each foot. The idea was that you would put baking soda in the indentations, insert the caps and then submerge them under water and wait for the baking soda to get wet. As it did, the figurines would ascend to the surface again. I think it worked, sort of...

We had breakfast, played with our toys some more, had our naps and then made ready to go to the Carter's for Christmas supper. To us kids, Alfred and Maisie were "Nanny and Pa". We were really excited as we drove across town from our house on 6th Street East to 1104 Lancaster Boulevard, Montgomery Place.

When we arrived, there were more presents and tasty goodies. The big surprise was for Ken and I to share: a small kid-sized dining table and two chairs. These were made out of plywood and the table had a layer of arborite on the top. It was intended to be used for coloring, painting and other similar activities, but for tonight, it would serve as our own Christmas dinner table. It was moved into the dining area right beside the big table used by the adults.

Supper was the traditional Christmas meal, including mashed potatoes, gravy, vegetables, stuffing and plenty of cranberry sauce. The turkey breast was meticulously and surgically carved by Pa into slices of equal thickness, with a little bit of browned turkey skin on the edge of each one.

The piece de resistance arrived for desert. Nanny had made a traditional "Christmas Pudd'n" and she proceeded to show us how to eat it properly: anointed with rum and lit afire in the darkened room. Before she sliced it for us, she licked her index finger and plunged it into the burning liquor. When she raised it to her lips the blue flame danced from her finger tip.

"Nanny!" I said. "Your finger is burning!"

With that, she put her finger in her mouth and put the fire out.

In later years, I realized that my own children, along with their cousins, had never heard or seen such a thing. So, one Christmas, I recounted the story for them as I demonstrated the procedure with my own "Christmas Pudd'n."