



## Byrd's Kitchen

by Vivian Byrd

### And 'something under the tree'

I am part of a large family: the usual Mom and Dad, four daughters (I am the oldest), two sons, five spouses and six beautiful grandchildren.

A few years ago, when about half this brood had married, a "major holidays plan" was worked out. Odd years meant we would all spend Thanksgiving together, Christmas with respective in-laws. Even years would reverse. Thanksgiving with the in-laws and all of us back together in South Carolina for Christmas.

And even though the two sons live nearby, during Christmas week mother's house bulges with children and grandchildren, plus all the paraphernalia necessary to traveling with young children.

The temperature is usually in the high 60s there, luring the kids out to explore around the farm, leaving the grown-ups free to indulge in long "catching up" conversations with siblings they only see once or twice a year.

Sometime during the week, the kids can one or two uncles into a fireworks buying expedition to South of the Border, the famous fireworks store. It is an easy 40-minute drive away and fireworks are part of our Christmas tradition. A favorite part for the kids.

As soon as it gets dark on Christmas Eve, the same uncles supervise the fireworks display. Everyone else is called outside to watch, ooh, aah and compliment the kids on their choice purchases.

Chris, the oldest grandchild, nearly always wakes up first on the big day. He makes a brief inspection tour of the living room, then wakes his cohorts, Jon and Mike.

Their excited discoveries wake parents who did all that shopping to participate in this moment. Sleepy-eyed adults drift into the living room, tying bathrobes and brushing back tousled hair. Someone lights a fire

in the fireplace while mothers of the youngest grandchildren get their little ones out of bed to "come see what Santa brought."

Each of them approaches Santa's bounty differently. Brad looks at each toy briefly then moves to the next. Matthew establishes a territory, sits among his toys and quietly and thoroughly inspects each, demanding explanations from his parents on how each operates. Four-year-old Brian has booming conversations on each item with everybody.

My father takes charge of passing out presents. It is his favorite part of the holiday and he makes it last as long as possible. Each brightly-wrapped gift is examined, shaken and its possible contents discussed. He is a champ at fanning anticipation.

After opening, the present must be held up to be admired before the next one is passed out. His rule is that each person have one present before anyone gets a second.

My sister-in-law loves trains and some-

one usually puts a small one under the tree for her.

When my brother was about 4 years old, he desperately wanted a dump truck from Santa, but neglected to mention that fact to anyone. He was up at 3 a.m. that year and, disappointed, cried all day. Every two or three years since we were teenagers, someone has given him a dump truck.

Mother invariably, dutifully, says "You shouldn't have spent so much money," but she is pleased and flattered that we did. She would probably be hurt if we didn't, a chance none of us wants to take.

The family has grown so in the last few years that mother has turned to writing checks for everyone. However, opening a check envelope does not fulfill her image of opening a present so she chooses small items for everyone "so they will have something under the tree." Mothers are like that.

Our family's best present this year is due Jan. 10, the date our baby sister expects her first child. So far, all the grandchildren are boys; we would really like a girl this time.

Happy holidays

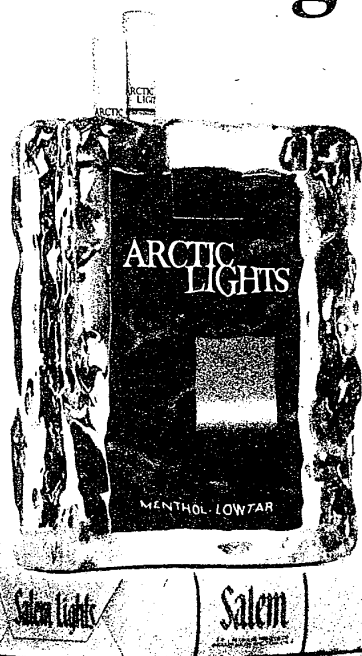
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