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A CHRISTMAS MEMORY SHARED

— Vera Holding

We were a large family in a raw new country — Indian Territory. There were no government hand-outs, no children on relief and though we were bone poor in worldly goods we were rich in love and family togetherness. Christmas was something particularly special.

In the corner of our large one-room dugout home there was always a cedar tree, selected and chopped down by our father who had led us children on the search for the just-right tree the day before Christmas. Not too tall but tall enough to reach from floor to ceiling. It must have thick branches which made it a thing of beauty because of its dark green color and symmetry.

A wood fire on the hearth brought out the spicy fragrance of the tree — an unforgettable memory. From the pine log mantle hung a row of long, black, ribbed stockings to be filled later with an orange, an apple, a few nuts, and a lot of popcorn. Oranges were our special Christmas treat.

Two hairy coconuts squatted on the hearth waiting Father's hammer blows to break them into edible pieces. First, though, the eyes were gouged out with Father's Barlow knife, and the luscious milk poured out and shared for those who cared for it.

When the blows finally came, coconut pieces would fly and we would scramble for them. The boys would remove the meat from the shell on one of them and divide it with all of us. We would squat there on the sand-stone hearth munching it with delight.

The other coconut was given to Mother, who took the rich white meat and

shredded it and made what, to us children, was the most delectable centerpiece in the world — AMBROSIA!

Ambrosia included both of our most "Christmassy" specials — coconut and oranges.

Above the dining room table, hung from a rafter, was Mother's milk glass hanging lamp with crystal prisms. It had been one of Mother's wedding presents and was our one note of prairie elegance. She had carried it in her lap in the long trek from Texas to our dugout prairie home. It became so much more than a light. It was our faith, our hope, and when the firelight caught the rainbows in the crystal prisms, every hardship of a new land was forgotten as we joined hands to sing the old loved carols. I felt very sure a kind God listened.

The centerpiece — on the table. Ah that was something else. In a large crystal bowl, thin slices of oranges were layered with the fresh coconut. It remained the centerpiece under the light from early morning until every last morsel was eaten.

Memory is a wonderful blessing. And now on our special family day, with my children, grandchildren, and great grands gathered around it, the table over which in a proud place of honor, hangs Mother's lamp which picks up the gold and snow of Ambrosia in a large crystal bowl.

Through misty eyes, I see the family joining hands to send a circle of prayer Heavenward: Thank you God for memories. They keep all our hearts singing, regardless of time. ■

