

# OLIVE MUNNIS

I have a lot of Christmas's to remember at my age, being in my nineties. Growing up on a farm was always interesting around Christmas. As a child of the depression years, celebrating Christmas together with extended family with home grown food, we were very lucky to be living on a farm with a small orchard, vege gardens, dairy cows and chickens. The turkey that dad had fattened up for Christmas dinner wasn't so lucky. My most precious memories are going to Tiona reunion as a young woman and joining with friends who also loved music and singing. Fred Rawson would send my sister and I sheet music to our home in the country in preparation for Tiona Reunion. We would learn the songs and rehearse the parts. When we arrived at the Reunion, we would be excitedly anticipating the event we had all been waiting for, the Christmas Eve carolling. As our carolling troupe performed up and down the tree lined avenue among the many hundreds of campers the magic of Christmas truly came alive. It was a very unique experience to be with friends, family and Christian community celebrating the birth of Christ under the stars. Over the years each Christmas as I sing those Christmas carols again, I am transported back to those treasured friendships and those wonderful memories along the avenue.

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# BARBARA HAWORTH

My brain has tiny twinkling lights flashing on and off every few minutes as I reminisce about the many Christmases I have celebrated in my life. My task now is to choose one which stands out from all the others.

As I scroll backwards through the years what comes to mind? I see a picture of my mother with beads of perspiration on her face as she tends a Christmas pudding bubbling away on a gas stove in the corner of the kitchen. The recipe has been handed down from her mother and whoever was available helped in its preparation. There was no washed dried fruit in those days. Plump raisins had to be de-seeded, glace cherries, peel and angelica all had to be washed and dried in the sun, days ahead. There was no air conditioning or a fan in our kitchen just hot air coming in through the open window and door.

It was probably September when the pudding was made and after cooking for eight hours (truly) it would be stored so that it could mature. My mother's English heritage was strong and according to her the long hours of cooking resulted in the dark colour of this Christmas treat. The end result was aromatic of the rum she used and to me was delicious.

I remember a particular Christmas quite well. When I was eight years old Mum had invited her sister and family to share Christmas with us and I was lucky to have a cousin of my age with me. I recall the meal consisted of roast chicken which was a luxury for us and plenty of crispy vegetables cooked in dripping – unheard of today!

Perhaps this particular Christmas stands out because I was old enough to participate in its preparation. The table was covered with a white damask cloth and matching serviettes; no Christmassy paper ones available then, and the antique silver cutlery was brought out and had been polished for the occasion. Paper chains made from coloured streamers zigzagged across the room above our heads and as an eight-year-old I remember gluing them together with a paste made from flour and water. Christmas crackers decorated every place setting.

I can hear lots of laughter in my head and can nearly smell the herbs in the chicken stuffing. On the sideboard was a very large Christmas cake, again a family recipe from English grandparents. Covering the cake was a layer of very rich almond paste and then white icing which mum would swirl around to look like snow. The cake was decorated with tiny china snow babies about half the size of a finger. Each figure taking a different pose for playing in the snow – some tumbling, some running or sitting, some standing with hands on hips. My special treat was to arrange them on top of the cake. What an honour. These little figures were stored away and used over and over. Where are they now?

The memory I have of Christmas when I was eight could probably be transposed for every Christmas of my childhood. These English traditions repeated Down Under have become wonderful memories for me, some of which I have handed on to my family. Who will make great great grandma's pudding in the future?

