

Twas the Weekend Before Christmas...

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

This has been a very different December. First of all, Thanksgiving was as late as it can be. This compressed that Thanksgiving to Christmas time frame by about a week. For various reasons, including a little vacation time, I was gone more than usual in early December. I was beginning to think I wasn't even going to get a chance to get into the Christmas spirit. I was playing Christmas songs but it just didn't seem to be helping. But then we finally got our Christmas tree and got it put up Wednesday night. Jaye decorated it right away and things are finally starting to feel a little more like Christmas.

We all grew up with family traditions surrounding holidays, especially around Christmas. As we grow up and grow older we often find ourselves drifting away from those old traditions and developing new ones, and this is okay. As we go through life our lives blend with others and the resulting future is an amalgam of what we all bring in to the relationships. But I think it is important that we do have some traditions to hang on to.

Traditions are what make memories. Memories are what we treasure sometimes after family members are gone. Memories are what can make us feel warm and contented inside as we share them and pass them on to future generations. Most cultures that survive, do so because of those traditions and the memories that they hold.

I'm looking forward to not doing very much traveling in the next couple of weeks. I'm looking forward to Christmas Eve with my wife's family. The tradition is a little something old, a little something new. I'll cook a favorite Scandinavian food of mine called potato sausage. But instead of the lutefisk that I grew up with (trust me, it really is an acquired taste!) we'll boil some shrimp instead. If I can get organized enough I'll also fix some Swedish rye bread (limpa) and maybe even some ostkaka, a very good Swedish custard/cheese cake like dessert. If I dig deep enough in my pantry I think I even have a jar of lingonberries to go over the top of it.

Writing this just now it brings back memories of my youth and Christmas Eve meals. Christmas Eve at my house, growing up, was much less about the presents and far more about family and people and food. I may not remember very many of the presents I received, well, other than that really cool Spirograph I received one year, but I can remember the Christmases we spent on the farm, or in Colorado or California with family. They are special memories and they include family that's now gone, which makes them even more special.

So this year I'll cook just like my mother did. The house will be filled with wonderful aromas and more than just a few snacks and treats. There'll be laughter and talking, excited children waiting to open presents and long naps while a chilly wind and maybe a little snow drift by outside. The presents I receive will make far fewer memories for me than the people I spend the holidays with. The food I eat will taste better than ever because of the hands that make it. And after new year's rolls around, the memories will still keep me warm as winter grinds on.

I hope you make some special memories this Christmas too. Memories of family and friends and of shared traditions. The fun of introducing kids to your family's history and the pure excitement in the eyes of a child as they unwrap presents large or small. And in those moments I hope you find your own peace and happiness for now and Christmases yet to come. Merry Christmas everyone.