

KANSAS MENSA SUNFLOWER SEEDS



NOVEMBER 2022, VOL.-50, ISSUE-11

* Planned Events *

Dec. 03	Pig-Out 12:45	Il Vicino Wood Oven Pizza 4817 E Douglas
Dec. 10	Program Meeting	Fairmount Coffee 3815 E 17 th ST N
Dec. 17	Open House 4-8 PM	Annual Christmas Party Details Enclosed
Dec. 24	No event	Go celebrate! It is after all Christmas Eve

Zoom Meetings

Every Saturday at 4:00 PM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/72081034487?>

Password: aWdKUSzbEVhNktjRzFOVEYxQTISQT09

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The small print:

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Editor: R. Klaus Trenary, editor@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org or shamanklaus@sbcglobal.net



Editors Corner: For better or for worse I have returned as editor, at least for the time being. Many thanks to Bill for carrying the torch, it was needed and is much appreciated. Our best wishes go out to you and Margarita.

Over the past couple of years, I went back to college (after four decades) to further my literary skills and formally learn how educated people put down their thoughts. My outlook on life has changed somewhat as has my writing style. Although I still abhor censorship in all its myriad guises, it is understood that different people have different Worldviews and will not always see reality in the same way that I might. With that thought in mind, an effort will be made to not be so “in your face” with the articles presented in the hope that perhaps a wider audience can be reached and satisfied.

What was true years ago is still a salient concern: We need your ideas, participation, and input to make the Seeds a working proposition. The editor greedily seeks your stories, observations, insights, humor, pictures, artwork, life experiences, etc. You no doubt get the idea.

A Christmas Story

By: Gracie Ulrich



Figure 1: An Australian Pointsettia Tree.

Lately, I’ve begun to think about Christmas, because it is just around the corner. For many people, including me, Christmas memories and feeling associations are deeply tangled up with family, especially childhood family holidays, reunions, and special events.

In my family, we had important family traditions and, customs which occurred every Christmas season. Christmas season commenced with Advent. We had an advent calendar, and over the years had many. I knew that Advent was not really Christmas but

was preparation for Christmas. A good Advent calendar had tiny gifts, such as small chocolates, for every day that a decorative door was opened on the 3-dimensional calendar. One year we had a Swedish exchange student staying with us, and so that year, we had a Santa Lucia themed Advent calendar.

It felt festive to enjoy Advent while getting in the mood for Christmas, and the huge windows in department stores downtown were all grandly decorated with moving Santa's and towns of busy elves. During Advent, we bought and hid Christmas presents for one another. We wrapped them at any time, before Christmas.



Sometime during Advent, usually in the week before Christmas, my father would buy a tree that touched the ceiling, and we would all decorate it with the precious family heirloom decorations. Strings of colored lights had to be untangled and tested for burned out bulbs. They went on first, before any decorations. There was a whole system to trying every bulb, wired in series, until finding the bulb that was burned out, and replacing it. After that, strings of small glass beads were next to adorn the tree. Then, metal icicles, additional lights that bubbled like candles, and delicate glass ornaments all went on. Then tinsel, placed on the tree one strand at a time. There was a lighted star at the very tip of the tree.

The first actual event every Christmas was attendance at the Christmas Eve service. My mother, sister and, I all sang in the adult choir, and my brother served as an acolyte for Midnight Eucharist. Because church started at 11 p.m., it worked out that Eucharist was served right about midnight, and then the church was darkened and Silent Night was sung by candlelight, before a glorious recessional processed joyfully through the holly, evergreen ropes, and poinsettias. Then we would all go home, and be in bed by around 1 or 1:30 a.m. Our parents stayed up to put everything else under the tree, and my mother started the turkey, or maybe a Christmas ham, to cook overnight.

In the morning, everyone had a stocking hanging from the fireplace mantle. Everyone was allowed to open his or her stocking immediately upon arising. Then there was a special Christmas breakfast, which we usually ate wearing our pajamas. After breakfast, my father would say, "Well, does anyone want to open a present?" And we were all excited and waiting for the present opening to begin. So, someone would be asked to choose a present, and give it to whomever was on the tag. That person would painstakingly shake and prod the present, because the rule was that they were supposed to try to guess what was inside. "Oh, it feels like a book!" And then they could open their present. After they opened it, carefully preserving the paper to use next year, then they would pick a present and give it to the recipient.



If it had their name on it, they had to pick a different present, because it wasn't fair to open two in a row. Then the whole process repeated. In this manner, it could take an hour or so to open presents.

After that, everyone went to their rooms to get dressed and put away their stuff. My mother went to the kitchen and began making Christmas dinner. We girls were supposed to show up, put on aprons, and help her peel potatoes, make the salad, get the rolls ready to warm in the oven, and so forth. We had to set the table with the good china and do the breakfast dishes and get ready for a fancy proper Christmas dinner. We often had guests, people who had no family nearby, or sometimes a couple whose children were grown and gone, so they came to our house. There was always a present for them, too.

After dinner, where everyone always ate too much, we would all visit for a while, and then go for an after-dinner walk. Most Christmas weather was mild, because it didn't get very cold and icy until January, most years. Once in a while it would have snowed, and then we enjoyed a white Christmas. If weather was inclement, we would not go for a walk, but might build a snowman.

Then everyone was really tired, and we all snacked on leftovers, everyone for himself, the rest of the day and evening. We would read our new books or investigate new toys or tools or science experiments individually. We usually didn't fight, except over chores, or if someone touched someone else's stuff. Then there could be conflict and even tears.

After that, we tried to leave decorations up for the Twelve Days of Christmas, with Christmas Day being Day 1, but the tree would get too dry, and become a fire hazard, and my mother would decide one day to take it all down. Then we put everything away in its original factory box and keep it safe in the attic for next year. The tree went out next to the 55-gallon oil drum where we used to burn the trash every week, but it is illegal to burn household trash in that location now.

By the time the new year came, we were getting sick and tired of one another, and it was great to finally get back to school.

That's how we celebrated Christmas during my childhood and youth.



Christmas Party & Covered Dish Open House



Saturday December 17, 4-8 p.m.
Hosted by Gracie Ulrich at her home:
238 W. 63rd St. South
Wichita, KS 67217
Phone is 316-285-5008

This is 1/4 mile west of Broadway and 63rd St. South, or 3/4 miles east of Seneca and 63rd St., on the north side of the road.

GUESTS ARE WELCOME!

Gracie will provide the place, plenty of red and white wine, and a main meat dish, plus bottled water. Bill Barnett will bring disposable plates, cups, plastic ware, and napkins.

Suggested foods: scalloped potatoes, rolls, croissants or other suitable bread, green salad, green vegetables, desserts, cheese and raw vegetable/ dip plate, or other favorite festive dishes you might like to share

Please bring a wrapped gift. Gift exchange will be 6 p.m., via a game, where you will get a chance to end up with a present you might really like! Re-gifting is perfectly acceptable, as are nice items, funny things, pretty or useful items that you don't especially want or need yourself, booze, etc. So just bring one wrapped gift for everyone who comes in your party. You are entirely welcome even if you don't bring a gift.

It would be a help to message the hostess to RSVP and let her know what you intend to bring. Text message to 316-285-5008.

The Owl and the Pussycat

Our mother was the Pussycat, our father was the Owl,
And so, we're partly little beasts and partly little fowl.
The brothers of our family have feathers and they hoot,
While all the sisters dress in fur and have long tails to boot.
We all believe that little mice for food are singularly nice.
Our mother died long years ago; she was a lovely cat.
Her tail was five feet long and grey; what do you think of that?
In Sila Forest on the East of fair Calabria's shore,
She tumbled from a lofty tree----none ever saw her more.
Our owly father long was ill from sorrow and surprise,
But with the feathers of his tail, he wiped his weeping eyes.
And in the hollow of a tree in Sila's inmost maze,
We made a happy home for him, and there we pass our days.



From Reggian Cosenza many owls about us flit
And bring us worldly news for which we never care a bit.
We watch the sun each morning rise, beyond Tarento's strait.
We go outside for picnics before it gets too late.
And when the evening shades begin to lengthen from the trees,
We roam so slowly, hand in hand, as sure as bees are bees.

We wander up and down the shore; we do not keep a score,
Or tumble overhead and heels—no, never, never more.
We can see the far Gromboolian plains, though we don't feel so keen,
Nor weep as we could once have wept o'er many a vanished scene.
This is the way our father moans---he is so very green.

Our father still preserves his voice, and when he sees a star,
He often sings a lullaby to that original guitar.
We love our parents dearly, though our mother is no more,
And through the years, we'll shed some tears for those that we adore.

We have the pot which once did hold the honey on their boat,
But all the money has been spent, besides the 5-pound note.
The owls who come and bring us news are often keen for pay,
Because we take no interest in the politics of the day.
We pay them not, but we smile and offer them our hand,
For after all, they are the best; we know they understand.

Slightly Rewritten and Completed by Saralyn McAfee Smith, age 78
Dodge City, Kansas

As I entered the office party with my homely Uncle Lou, who perspires a lot, I realized that I had misunderstood what they meant by “Bring an ugly sweater”.

Q: What do you get when you cross a vampire and a snowman?

A: Frostbite



Good King Wenceslas phoned Pizza Hut to place an order. The salesgirl asked, “What kind of pizza would you like?” King Wenceslas answered, “Your special-- deep pan, crisp and even.”

It was Christmas Eve at the meat counter, and a woman was anxiously picking over the last few remaining turkeys in the hope of finding a large one. In desperation, she called over a shop assistant and enquired, “Excuse me, do these turkeys get any bigger?” “No, madam,” he replied, “They’re all dead.”

Inclement Weather

One Christmas Eve, Pete and Jane were driving their Russian friend Rudolf back to his house. The weather outside was frightful.

Jane asked Pete, “Do you think that’s sleet or rain out there?”

“It’s rain, Jane.”

“I think it’s sleet, Pete.”

Rudolf chimed in, “It’s definitely rain, Jane.”

“No, I really think it’s sleet, Rudolf,” said Jane.

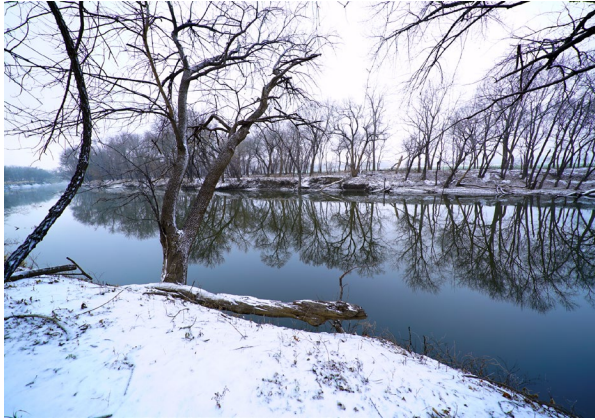
“Don’t argue with the expert, Jane,” said Pete.

“What do you mean, Pete?” asked Jane.

Pete replied, “Rudolf the Red knows rain, Dear.”



Vashti and Rosa



It was Christmas break from college. Vashti was in her first year of attending college in person but had a couple of years of online study while she was in high school. The 18th birthday experience was still burned deeply into her mind, the decadent car, the creepy people, the giant lonely house, and the creep her adopted father wanted her to marry. A quick look in the mirror and she still had the Aztec nose, the thing Joan, the adopted mother, hated. She loved it. It was the only thing that showed her Mexican heritage. She had applied for a tourist visa for her birth parents, Rosa and Manuel, to come visit her. She even put

up a cash bond that they wouldn't overstay. They had been granted the visa and then immigration called back at the last minute to say it was cancelled. She knew immigration well and now it seemed she was a target. They had said her bond was being taken through civil forfeiture because they believed the money came from drug smuggling. Mr. Rubinstein was working on her case. He was a Jewish attorney she met after the immigration officer damaged the ancient Jewish books her great aunt had given her. It seemed he now had four cases for her. She was feeling sad that she didn't get to visit with her parents. It would have been easier to just go visit them herself. Now she had to visit the lawyer for Christmas and didn't know what to do with Christmas. She was part Jewish, part unbeliever, part Christian, and part prophet, or so people said.

While everyone else was with family and partying, she was traveling alone to another city to see the attorney. Chris offered to go with her so she wouldn't be alone. He said he was just being a friend. He was a good friend, but she didn't want to get involved, life was too crazy, and she knew he did want to get involved.

Four days before Christmas she was in Mr. Rubinstein's office. She felt at home where everyone was Jewish. It was a new experience.

"You're becoming one of our best clients," Mr. Rubinstein said. "Four cases in less than a year. Almost a record. You got paid for the books. Rabbi Michael said they were transcribing them. They have lost writings. That's wonderful. We filed the case for your parents. They're issuing delays. We filed a case for your detention time. That may go on forever. It may never get settled. Now the civil forfeiture, they made an offer, but you might not like it. They said they would give you half back if you did a deferment. They expect a counteroffer. I can't recommend a deferment. It says you did something wrong and would go on your record even if it was a hidden record. It could be expunged, but it wouldn't really be gone.

"Hell no!" Vashti said. "I'm not doing a deferment. I want all the money back."

"It could take a long time." Mr. Rubinstein said.

"That means I can't travel, and my parents can't travel," Vashti said. "The 'never let them in fanatics' are after me. Sometimes people ask, 'Where are you from?'" and I say here. Sometimes they tell me to go back to where I came from. Now they even say things about me being Jewish. It's crazy."

"It could be worse," the attorney said in a calming manner. "Didn't you talk to a senator once?"

“I could talk to him again. He said I could visit him again,” Vashti said. “Keep working on my cases.”

“We will,” Mr. Rubinstein said. “My secretary will be in touch when something happens.”

“Thank you so much,” Vashti said.

“Thank you,” the attorney said.

Vashti went back home to her dorm room, the only place she could call home. The dorm was empty except for her. She had nowhere else to go. The college town was empty. A few restaurants were open for locals, and she went there just to get out.

“Hello, Professor Abrams,” Vashti said. “How are you?” Professor Abrams was a gray-haired Jewish man who taught speech and debate. He was as alert as any twenty-year-old and no one dared to argue with him. He could politely show all their logical errors and tear apart almost any argument.

“Doing well,” he said. “And you? Why aren’t you at home?”

“This is home,” she said. “My parents can’t come. I invited them and the visa was canceled. It was too late to travel to see them.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you were an international student,” he said. “Where are you from? Latin America?”

“No, here,” she replied. “People always ask that. Born in the USA, like the song. My parents are retired teachers. They live in Mexico. They used to teach here. Long story, good for another time. What do Jewish people do for Christmas?”

“I just go with the flow,” the professor said. “It’s what Mom always did. We did all the holidays. I think we missed Buda’s birthday. There were no Buddhists where we live. Are you Jewish?”

“Yes, but I grew up Christian, part of a long story. I’ll tell you the story another time,” she said. “I learned about it when I went to see my real parents and great Aunt Rebecca. She was very old and a prophet. She was a five times great aunt.

“Very interesting,” the professor said. “You’re alone?”

“Yes, alone, that’s why I came here, just to get out,” she said.

“Why don’t you come to our house for Christmas dinner. My wife would be happy to see you,” he said.

“That would be lovely,” she said. They talked through dinner. She was happy to have a new friend.

A few days later Vashti arrived at the professor’s house for Christmas dinner. The party looked like an international diversity party. The professor and his wife invited all the students who had nowhere to go for Christmas. She sat beside a girl from Iran. “Hi, I’m Vashti,” she said. “I’m Aşti,” the girl said. The girl told her all about Iran and her Persian culture. She explained that most people do not support the government. She refused to wear a scarf. Her father was Kurdish and a university professor. They had fled the county to escape persecution. Vashti told her all about her great aunt. The girl said she wished she had had the opportunity to meet Rebecca. Vashti looked around the table and it seemed that someone from every culture there was. The professor and his wife even had gifts for everyone. When Vashti went home, she thought, *Now I have some new friends.*

The day after Christmas she called the senator’s office. He was gone but someone answered the phone and made an appointment for her to see the senator. It would be in two weeks. That was after school started.

Aşti’s parents came for the New Year celebration, and they invited Vashti to spend the holiday with them. Aşti’s mom explained that they celebrate two new years’, the Gregorian calendar new year and the Persian new year, which is on the spring equinox.

She told how they had escaped the revolution. As a minority and as intellectuals' things were dangerous for them. Vashti told them the whole story of her parents and Aunt Rebecca. From then on Vashti had a new friend. The girls did everything together. Vashti took Aṣṭî to see the ancient books from Rebecca. It was as if Aṣṭî was learning the ancient Hebrew as she looked at the books. She was trying to sound out the words and channel their meanings. Ruth, the secretary at the synagogue was helping her.

The day to go see the attorney was getting close and the attorney, Mr. Rubinstein, called. "They dropped the immigration visa case against your parents and the civil forfeiture case. They sent me the money and I can transfer it into your bank account."

"Wonderful, my parents can come visit now!" Vashti exclaimed. "What about the other cases?"

"We're working on those," Mr. Rubinstein said. "They may take some time."

"How do you do that?" Vashti asked. "Do you know someone?"

"It's just legal work; we have a good team here," he said. "I know lots of people, but it's just good legal teamwork. I'm blessed with an excellent staff."

Vashti made arrangements for her parents to come at spring break. Life was beginning to be in good order.

Recipe

This year, trying a new take: Twice baked, loaded sweet potatoes.

Bake medium size sweet potatoes.

After cooling, split lengthways scooping out most of the pulp & setting aside shells. Small dice, not puree, pulp.

Add, to taste: salt, cayenne pepper, butter, or ghee. Then add crushed pecans maple syrup & flaked coconut. Stuff the half shells. Keeps covered for several days in fridge.

Bake 20 minutes.

This recipe begs for personal modifications, it is very forgiving. Also good for pie filling, possibly with cream cheese-marshmallow creme from the jar as a mousse above, topped with shaved dark chocolate or butterscotch.

When you find good modifications, let us know. Enjoy!

--Mike Dickson



A bit of beauty to end this issue courtesy of William Barnett:



Figure 2: An autumn forest scene.



Figure 3: Lake shore at dusk.