

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Christmas Cookies & Candies

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 6, 2013)

Of all the Christmas cookies and candies you have enjoyed over the years, which one always brings back cherished childhood memories? What assortment do you remember seeing Mom create? Or was it Dad who was the cookie maker or “monster?” Were those favorite cookies shaped into bars, cutout, uniquely decorated, no bake, cookie-press ones? And let us not forget the aroma of Grandma’s fabulous fudge. Were they recipes handed down through the family, famous from far-off lands where your parents’ ancestors originated?

During my husband’s childhood years, John’s favorite one was his Mom’s (Mary) traditional oatmeal cookies, with her gingersnaps a close second. Even though John was the oldest of three boys in his family, all three would scramble to grab as many as possible, knowing that if they didn’t one of them would take them all! We have continued Mary’s tradition each Christmas with a batch of both. One daughter, Kelly, loves the oatmeal. Our other daughter, Kimberly, always makes the gingersnaps.

For my own Mom, she really wasn’t a cookie maker. Yet, my sister and I remember her luscious lemon meringue pie and cheesecake. Don’t forget the traditional pumpkin pie which never goes out of favor! And it just wasn’t a Christmas dinner without

Mom's tangerine jello salad with a whip cream concoction in the hollow middle of the mold jello. It was more like a dessert than a salad.

Every time I make any of these memorable treats, I feel just a little younger that day. Yet, also a little sad, missing both Moms. I know if they were still here, they would do a much better job concocting those memorable cookies, candies, and other delectable Christmas treats. I know today with all the health concerns we are cautioned about most of us undoubtedly try to change the recipes just a little. Yet, our efforts at removing the "lard" or "Crisco" and the dreaded "White Flour," these memorable treats just don't seem to taste the same, do they?

Well, we may offer our own more "healthy" treats this Christmas. Yet, in addition, maybe we should "chill" a little during the holidays just a bit so the memories of those we love will make us feel they are right by our side helping us make those cookie and candy memories together. Somehow, the whole family will sense that the "whole" family is together once again.

And for those who have either never experienced the fragrance of cookie, candy, and Christmas treat making in your kitchen or just want to expand your horizons with other treat-making possibilities, here a website, Christmas Cookies, <http://www.christmas-cookies.com/>, to help with the fun. And be sure to share the fun with your kids of all ages. May it spark some ideas for some new Christmas memories for your entire family. And whether you celebrate Christmas or not, my wish for you is that your holiday memories be filled in some special way with hope and love, even faith uniquely wrapped up in Bethlehem's gift of Jesus offered to us all.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, freelance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



How to Enjoy a Nonalcoholic Christmas Celebration

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 13, 2013)

During many holidays, including Christmas, a toast is offered in celebration of the season. For many, their favorite glass of wine or martini is raised. Have you ever wondered how many people in the US don't drink alcohol of any kind during holidays or any other time of the year?

According to James W. West M.D. F.A.C.S. article, "*Are There Many Non Drinkers In US?*" (October 15th, 2010, www.bettyfordcenter.org), "It is estimated that about one third of this country's population never drink alcohol. Interestingly, 20 percent of the population consumes 80 percent of all alcohol. More significantly, 7 percent of the population consumes 50 percent of all alcoholic beverages. That 7 percent represents those people who are victims of alcohol dependence or alcohol abuse."

There is a difference between alcohol dependence and alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse refers to those who drink too much and ". . . is a pattern of drinking that leads to the failure to fulfill responsibilities at work, home or school and/or repeated drinking in situations in which it is physically hazardous." Alcohol dependence basically reflects someone who cannot quit, and ". . . may include a drinker's increase in tolerance, withdrawal syndrome, unsuccessful attempts to cut down or even quit drinking

altogether, lose control of their alcohol use and consistently drink more and for longer than intended . . . no matter what the consequences.”

Gallup 2013 Survey, “*Majority in U.S. Drink Alcohol, Averaging Four Drinks a Week*” (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/156770/Majority-Drink-Alcohol-Averaging-Four-Drinks-Week.aspx>), agrees that 2/3 drink and 1/3 don’t. Report indicates that beer for men and wine for women are predominant, with wine closing the gap in sales. “Drinking is commonplace in the U.S., with two-thirds of Americans saying they ever drink alcohol, and just over 40% reporting that they had at least one drink in the past week. . . With drinking comes overdrinking, and despite possible reluctance by some respondents to admit problems, one in five drinkers -- representing 14% of all U.S. adults -- say they sometimes drink too much. The rates are particularly high among men and younger adults, making younger men the most at risk for this behavior.”

So, how does 1/3 of our citizens celebrate Christmas with their non-alcohol beverages and foods of choice, particularly those who may be a recovering alcoholic? And how does a family provide their own recovering alcoholic family member with a welcoming place in the cuisine festivities? Since holiday parties and gatherings for most involve alcohol, a recovering alcoholic shouldn’t isolate themselves from life but should definitely find ways to stay committed to a life of sobriety and a welcoming homecoming cuisine as well.

Having a trusted friend alongside at these parties who supports your sobriety is invaluable, along with having already established ways to celebrate without being tempted. Just ask any nonalcoholic drinker how they celebrate. I bet you will get all kinds of healthy ideas that are even more fun than being wasted, exhausted, and a basic

pain in the _ _ _ for everyone around you! And forget about other drug substance substitutes and other unhealthy behavior that will only spiral you down further. How about simply dancing, singing karaoke or joining conversations, and telling stories that will make everyone celebrate together with laughter? What do you come up with for yourself and family?

Think about all the money you will save not buying alcohol and buy more Christmas presents for everyone! Now that is something to celebrate! You could even go to that fancy restaurant and have the money to order that expensive dish you always wanted to try but couldn't afford because of all the wine and beer you ordered in the past. Just make sure one of the ingredients in the dish doesn't have alcohol in it and keeps you committed to your healthy weight too. Believe me, great food is out there that supports both!

Now, let's get down to the many nonalcoholic drinks you can buy and even concoct yourself—such as non-alcoholic sparkling wine, lemonade, ginger beer, or order a lime-spider (non-alcoholic of course). There are a myriad of recipes out there. Check out these links for recipe ideas.

- Food.com <http://www.food.com/recipes/non-alcoholic>
- Recipe.com <http://www.recipe.com/recipes/drinks/non-alcoholic/>
- Sober Celebrations... http://www.amazon.com/Sober-Celebrations-Entertaining-Without-Spirits/dp/1596240288/ref=sr_1_5?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1375714598&sr=1-5

For more nonalcoholic beverage and food ideas here is an eye-opening, life-changing approach by an alcohol-free chef, who was an alcoholic, loved being a chef, and decided to write books on it. Liz Scott's 2003 book entitled *"The Sober Kitchen: Recipes and Advice for a Lifetime of Sobriety"* offers a wealth of basic information and dozens of recipes to benefit both people in recovery and those who take care of them.

Scott also provides advice on how to avoid being confronted with alcohol-laden dishes. Her recipes show creativity, particularly in shortcut desserts

(http://www.amazon.com/Liz-Scott/e/B001JP8G4M/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1375714589&sr=8-1). Her other 2009 book, *"Zero Proof Cocktails: Alcohol-Free Beverages for Every Occasion"* also provides a collection of recipes for nonalcoholic aperitifs, mocktails, martinis, infusions, wine alternatives, and more, plus food-pairing tips.

May this Christmas be celebrated with family, friends, and neighbors that reflects this season of Christ's love, healing, and wholeness for all. For the rest of December I would like to write about some "close to home" miracle stories shared by my readers. Would you send me your miracle story so others can be encouraged with hope and faith during this Christmas season?

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, freelance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Christmas Stories to Tell

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 20, 2013)

At the end of the last article, I asked if you would send me your “close to home” miracle story to share with my readers. For the rest of this December holiday season, each Friday you will read their stories in their own words. I hope each story offers encouragement, hope, and faith for all who read them, particularly for those who are having difficulties and struggles during this Christmas season. Each one has a special message for us all.

Paula – “Growing up with parents who weathered the Great Depression, I was taught to take very good care of any and all possessions so they would last a lifetime and, hence, became very unwilling to let go of many items we no longer needed. So, my Christmas gift to my husband was to lighten his feeling of clutter. To do so, this week I put up for sale an antique dresser. There were 5 quick responses to the ad. Four of them didn't pan out. After haggling over the posted price with the fifth inquirer, I told him to look elsewhere unwilling to let the dresser go on the cheap. Yesterday morning at the breakfast I sat looking at it sitting in the living room clearly where it didn't belong and realized I truly didn't need to keep hanging on to feelings of loss AND my husband needed his gift as much as I needed to let go of "things". I sent a message to the last inquirer letting him

know he had a Christmas present to pick up if he was still interested. An excited phone call came not 10 seconds after the text. A simple act of letting go was a blessing for another family and a deep blessing for one. Christ came to give and not to hold on to His life or possessions.”

Karen – “Last month our 17 year old granddaughter wanted to earn some money for a youth conference so she asked us if we had any work for her. We told her yes, she could come help us winterize our buildings. It entailed going up on the roofs and sweeping leaves and dirt and cleaning out gutters. The stair access is in the electrical rooms. The stairs go up straight about 20 feet. We had just finished the third building and she headed down the stairs. My last words to her were, "be careful". She had only taken one or two steps down and lost her grip and fell about 15 to 18 feet down on to a concrete floor. I called 911 and told her not to move. I made my way down the stairs and asked her if anything hurt. She said her left elbow. She told me that it felt like she fell on a cushion. When the paramedics came, they were amazed she didn't have any major injuries. The emergency room doctor took ex-rays but saw nothing broken. Both the paramedics and the doctor said that people don't usually walk away from that high of a fall on to concrete. She walked out of the emergency room without a scratch. A week later she didn't have any symptoms at all and was back to her daily running. God stretched out His arms and cushioned her fall. We know that for a fact and are so thankful. We have an amazing God!”

Kimberly - At one time in my life I was a failure. I always made the wrong decisions which led me down many difficult paths. You might ask, "what was the

defining moment that changed you?" There was no moment of clarity, no life changing event. I just started to respect myself and value myself enough to do better for myself. I started to set expectations to meet and goals to conquer. Step by step, year by year, I reached those life goals for myself. Now don't misunderstand, there are still struggles, still forks in the road, but the difference now is I believe in myself and I know what path is the right one for me. Happiness and success comes from inside yourself. Love yourself into success.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, freelance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Christmas Stories to Tell, part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 27, 2013)

To finish off this month's lifeskill and year 2013, here are more Christmas stories to tell by those who want to offer comfort, hope, and even the miraculous, particularly for those who are having difficulties and struggles during this Christmas season. These stories here offer that even when the unexpected and tragic occur, there is still hope.

You will be able to get through it and even have a future life that is filled with wisdom learned, gratitude, and hope that doesn't disappoint. This kind of hope is filled with the love of those around you . . . family, neighbors, community, even that stranger who touches your heart with kind words and prayers on your behalf. Each story has a special message for us all.

Colin – "I was in the passenger seat of my friend's car, when, on the freeway, the car hit an embankment and flipped three times. I flew out of the window and landed on the curb/cement and dirt side of the freeway. It happened that an EM unit was riding right behind us when it happened. Within seconds, the paramedics were at my side and scooped me up as I lay dying. They got me to the hospital within 10 minutes time max. My life was spared and my journey to recovery began. Needless to say, this totally changed my life."

Paige – “My childhood and young adult life consisted of overeating and avoiding any exercise. In childhood, I was molested by my father, my hero in life. For thirty years, bulimia became a major part of my life. In spite of the bulimia, I am blessed with good health and have my original teeth. As an adult, I too was social but experienced intense anxiety and could barely drive anywhere. With the help of skilled trauma therapists over the years and a life coach, life is truly no longer a competition; no one else is in the contest of being me. I am no longer a victim with overwhelming problems. I am a team player enjoying the game of life.”

Kenne – “In 1994 we had just moved about 350 miles to Boerne. My wife and two boys, age three & six, joined me as I took on a new business venture. We borrowed \$450,000.00 to take over a business and purchase a home. Within three months I had my client list stolen and chose to sue the perpetrator; was thinking bankruptcy would be a good option as two employees quit and another was terminated. I was ashamed to tell my wife, as I'd promised this move was "going to be great." I had promised she could stay home with the boys and not have to go to work at the pharmacy. Three months into the business transition I had apparently made many terrible decisions. I broke down and told her. She went back to work, I prayed, "If we survive this, it's because of you(God)." Many of those decisions were pretty terrible, but God never left our side. We survived and I sold the business about six years later. After working with others for about 13 years, not being the business leader, I was able to retire. The older son is on his own. The younger is in graduate school. My wife is about to build her dream home. About 18 years later than desired, but hope existed when we couldn't see

it. I am now working for fun serving students, leading with adults, and providing some support for several ministries. Hope is there even when we're not aware.”

--

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, freelance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.