

Our Family Tree

by Anne Cospier, Editor

Mention "The Tree" at family gatherings and it is understood that you are referring to the Christmas tree that came from Spag's.

Long before big box retailers and dollar stores, there was Spag's. Located in Shrewsbury, Mass. Spag's was an institution for shoppers in the know. Merchandise piled floor to ceiling, everything from Oriental carpets to plumbing supplies, filled the four buildings that were Spag's. The no-frills environment, bring your own box or bag policy and discount prices were a part of the store's appeal. Shopping at Spag's was always an adventure.

Spag's was where my father found what became, for many years, our family Christmas tree. The Tree. With the purchase of one of the first generation artificial trees, in 1962, for \$9.00, a tradition of sorts was started.

Every season The Tree was brought out of storage and the process of assembling it would begin. The entire family was required for the job and I remember hours spent inserting pipe cleaner-like "branches" into the larger tree framework. There seemed to be hundreds, maybe thousands, of green plastic coated wires waiting to be placed in their proper slot, longer branches on

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Cookie Catastrophes

by Lisa Chernesky, Staff Writer

I'm really excited about Christmas this year. My holiday began as soon as I heard Jose Feliciano's *Feliz Navidad* on the car radio. I sang along -- a little loud and lot off key. My niece Andrea, a passenger, has ears that are probably still burning.

It's the first of December. I have plenty of time (or so I think) for holiday preparations. I have to finish three-quarters of my shopping, decorate the tree that's been delivered to my porch, and schedule time to dip chocolates. I used to bake cookies, but stopped after the great gingerbread catastrophe of '91.

I had invited my friend Shakuntala, a grad student from India, to spend the holiday with me. I thought it would be fun to bake cut-out cookies -- something she had never done. In the middle of mixing the dough, I got a call from a friend in New York. After a few minutes on the phone, I heard "Are you going to help me?" from the dining room. From the living room, I waved her off.

Ten minutes later, I stuck my head into the dining room. Thunk-thunk-thunk. "I've gotta go," I said, hanging up. Shakuntala had rolled the dough out onto the dining room table and was randomly (and angrily) striking the gingerbread man cookie cutter into the dough. Thunk.

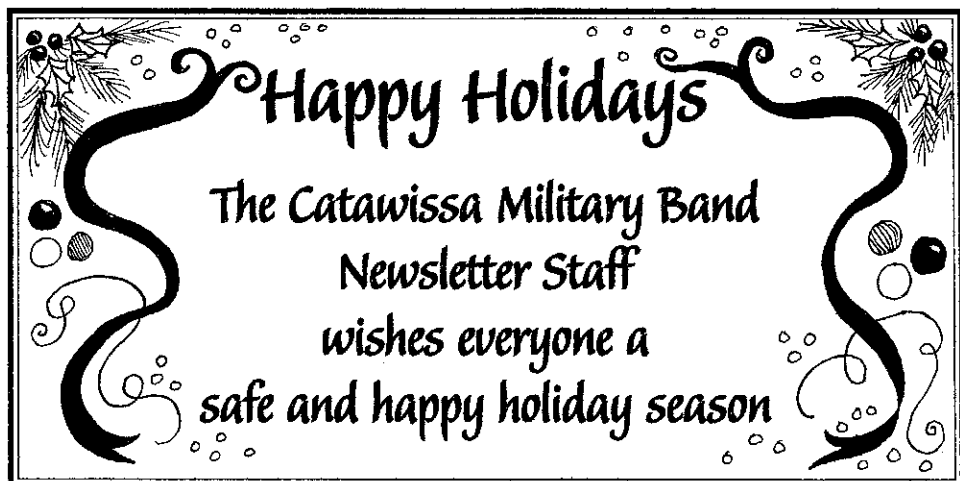
"He has no legs," I said. Thunk.

"He has an arm and a foot missing." Thunk.

"Where's his head?" Thunk!

Silently, the communications major arranged the results of her annoyance on the baking sheet. I added raisins to the mangled figures and popped them in the oven. We laughed about it later as we were finishing up. Together.

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Coming Events

Dec. 4, 7:00 p.m., Catawissa Military Band holiday concert in the central gazebo of the Columbia Mall, Columbia Mall Drive, Buckhorn.

Dec. 6, 6:30 p.m. Castle Illumination at the Bloomsburg Public Library. Children's program of holiday stories by Karen Roszel, Anne and Rebecca Cospers, music by Scott Atherton, and an appearance by a very special guest.

Dec. 16, 7:00 p.m., Touch of Brass will sponsor the 11th annual Community Carol Sing at the First United Methodist Church of Berwick. Freewill offering to benefit local charities.

Dec 18, 7:00 p.m., Christmas caroling by members of the Catawissa Military Band. Anyone wishing to sing with the band is asked to meet at the Band Hall at 7:00 p.m.

Jan. 20, 3:00 p.m., Touch of Brass concert at Wesley United Methodist Church, Market St., Bloomsburg.

Holiday Film Fact

When *It's a Wonderful Life* was released in 1946, not everyone considered it the holiday classic it has now become. Some critics took issue with the film's portrayal of post-WWII America. The negative characterization of businessman-banker Potter was called a "common trick used by Communists" according to the FBI, who labeled the film "subversive."

Submissions or comments may be sent to the Editor at delta2@ptd.net or Stevan Galbreath at sagalbreath@hotmail.com.

Written material may be given to Stevan Galbreath.

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White Christmas

By Jef Eichner

Like *Silent Night*, the story of *White Christmas* would fill a whole book, but again, in the interest of brevity, here is the short version. Written in one weekend in January of 1940, it was pronounced by composer Irving Berlin as not only the best song he ever wrote, but the best song anyone ever wrote. However, it wasn't until April of 1941, when the filming of *Holiday Inn* began, that Berlin found a vehicle for his new song. When *Holiday Inn* premiered on August 4, 1942, the song was hardly mentioned by reviewers and went largely unnoticed. However, soon after the premiere, without any promotion, the song slowly grew in popularity and ultimately became a hit. In 1954, the movie was remade and the title changed to *White Christmas*. Here are some interesting facts about the song:

1. Its first performance (by Berlin) left listeners scratching their heads and impressed no one.
2. Bing Crosby thought the song was a flop and disliked it. It was only in the last years of his life that he finally came to appreciate it. He never said whether he had learned to like it.
3. The producers of *Holiday Inn* were sure the movie's real hit song would be *Be Careful It's My Heart*.
4. It was Bing Crosby's most requested song year round.
5. *White Christmas* has been recorded by over 150 performers.

White Christmas is still the best selling single of all time according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*. The 1997 release of Elton John's tribute to Princess Diana, *Candle in the Wind*, supposedly outsold it, however, this claim was made based on sales figures taken since 1952, the year the charts began. If you include all sales since 1942 (the year *White Christmas* was released), *White Christmas* is still the leader by a considerable margin. Here are the sales figures according to Guinness:

Candle in the Wind 33 million

White Christmas 50 - 100 million.

DID YOU KNOW

Several Christmas carols that are generally thought to be of Medieval or Renaissance origin were really the work of two English hymnologists, John Neale (1818-66) and Thomas Helmore (1811-90). John Neale had been given a 16th century Swedish songbook that would become the source of many of his tunes. Lyricist Thomas Helmore was his principal collaborator. Together they published a series of eleven carols -- most of which were soon forgotten. However, three have gained a lasting place in the holiday repertoire: *Good King Wenceslas* (Wenceslas the Good was actually a Duke), *In Dulci Jubilo* and *O Come, O Come Immanuel*. Despite the dubious nature of their work, the pair is credited with reviving interest in the performance of Christmas carols in Victorian England.

Stevan Galbreath

Tree Cont.

the bottom, shorter ones on top. My siblings and I found this tedious and anything but festive.

Childhood memories of Christmas are tempered by the waiting. For a kid anxious to begin the fun of decorating the tree, the wait seemed interminable. Would they ever get it finished?

Almost done, then I could start to put the non-breakables on the tree. Elves, plastic reindeer and golden globes that looked like disco balls -- those were the decorations entrusted to my care. As the youngest member of the family, it was my lot to deal with the more durable ornaments.

Things change, children grow up and new traditions are started. But The Tree remained, for 35 Christmases it was always there. Every year it seemed that more of The Tree's greenery was shedding onto our clothing and the carpet.

I didn't understand Dad's attachment to The Tree. Although there were many offers from well-intentioned people -- the family friends who had a Christmas tree farm, the neighbor who was moving and wondered if we wanted her newer artificial tree -- the answer was always the same. The Tree may have become shabby, but it was "our tree."

The Tree was forced into retirement several years ago and a newer model now stands in my parents' living room. I miss that tree. Dad misses it too, he saved the green broomstick that was The Tree's center post. He says, "It could be useful" but, I suspect his reasons are more sentimental than practical. Not bad for a Spag's tree.

Cookies Cont.

I tried cookies one more time with Andrea, when she was five (ten years ago). Some tough, baked on cookies and half a spatula flying across the room ended my cookie baking career -- forever. I now dip chocolates. It's a lot safer -- and people seem to like the white chocolate dipped Oreos just as well.

Merry Christmas everyone!

International Christmas Quiz

1. In what country does Christmas begin with a rice pudding that contains a magic almond?
2. In what country is St. Nicholas called Svaty Mikalas and is said to descend to earth from heaven on a golden rope?
3. In what country are clay figures of local dignitaries and townspeople included in the nativity scene?
4. In what country during Advent is beeswax poured on water and fortunes told from the shapes?
5. Hogmanay is the name of the New Year's Day celebrations in what country?
6. In what country does a person draped in white carry a horse's skull on a long pole around town?
7. What country begins the Christmas season with the Saint Lucia ceremony?
8. In what country do children fill their shoes with straw for the Wise Men's camels?
9. In what country is it tradition to leave mince pies and a bottle of Guinness for Santa?
10. A kind, ugly witch flies on a broomstick to deliver presents to children on January 6th in what country?

The CMB Newsletter is available on a subscription basis to non-band members who make a donation to the band. The donation will be used to cover printing and mailing costs. Contact Stevan Galbreath, manager, for information at sagalbreath@hotmail.com.

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Catawissa Military Band

115 S. Berger Ave.

Catawissa, PA 17820

Thank you for your continued support.

Answers to Christmas Quiz

1. Denmark. The finder of the almond receives a prize.
2. Czech Republic.
3. France.
4. Poland.
5. Scotland.
6. Wales. Townspeople "bitten" by the horse are required to pay a fine.
7. Sweden.
8. Spain. Gifts replace the straw.
9. Ireland.
10. Italy. She is called Befana.

WINGS OVER THE SOUTH PACIFIC II

by Charles Webb

Note: This is the second installment of Charlie Webb's account of his service as a navigator with the Army Air Corps aboard the C-46 transport "Baby Shoes" during the stand-down period of World War II.

Some of our pilots were good, others less skilled. Col. Forrest J. Coons was an excellent pilot. We were returning to Nichols Field (Manila) and had been cleared by the control tower to make a straight-in approach. We were first to land as there were no other aircraft in the airspace over the field. The flaps were down, and Col. Coons was cutting power for touch-down when, suddenly, we noticed an AT-6 (a single-engine advanced trainer) taking off toward us on the same runway. Fortunately, the Colonel advanced the throttle to full power and pulled up, just as the AT-6 passed closely beneath us. I could clearly see the faces of the pilots in the AT-6. The Colonel ordered them to land immediately -- in language that can not be repeated. It was a pleasure to hear our pilot reprimand the AT-6 pilot. He had not contacted the control tower prior to take-off. You can imagine the consequences of a mid-air collision under those circumstances. No parachute or life raft would have been necessary.

Landing Problems

A second lieutenant, who had often flown with us as co-pilot, was scheduled to fly us to Okinawa as pilot. He had never landed "Baby Shoes" before. I had doubts about the flight. There is normally a very strong cross wind at the Naha airstrip on Okinawa that caught us as we were about to land. We hit the runway as an angle and I heard a loud repeated thumping noise as we rolled down the runway. I expected a tire to have blown out. The impact, on landing, had torn a strip out of the center of a tire about 6 inches wide and two feet long. We jacked "Baby Shoes" and

replaced the tire on the spot.

At that time, "Baby Shoes" was scheduled for an overhaul and, in the interim, I was assigned to a flight with the 404th Troop Carrier Wing in Okinawa. The C-46 has three fuel tanks in each wing. A small red wheel, located on the side of the cockpit, controls which tank is in use. We were near the northern tip of Luzon, when the co-pilot turned the wheel to change tanks. Both engines stopped cold. I was ready to send an SOS if ordered. The co-pilot kept adjusting the wheel and the engines finally started up. I had hoped we would return to Manila, but we went on to Okinawa without incident. It certainly becomes very quiet when the engines stop. If he engines hadn't started, I don't know if we could have made it to Luzon or had to ditch in the South China sea.

I was on a B-25 Mitchell bomber enroute to Okinawa. The waist position machine guns had been removed and the plane had been modified to carry personnel. We were over the South China Sea when the plane went into a bank to starboard (right).



Photo of the cockpit of the C-46 showing the baby shoes for which the plane was named.

The pilot called me on the intercom and said the controls were jammed. I checked the control cables that were exposed along the inside of the fuselage. I found that parachute shrouds had been stuffed along the control cables, encircling and constricting them. Evidently, the flight engineer and crew chief had been selling the parachutes in Manila for the silk, discarding the shrouds among the cables. They were reprimanded and grounded.

Stuck on the Ground

Early one morning, the pilot of another C-46D from the 404th Troop Carrier Wing was going through the pre-flight check list for a flight to Tokyo. He locked the brakes and revved up the engines. The backfiring was unbelievable. My thought was "we will never make it off the end of the runway." The pilot was of the same opinion. He shut the engines down and said "Charlie, we are not taking this plane anywhere." Thank heavens! The flight engineer for this plane was not doing his job.

A Col. Harvin was our pilot when we left Australia and were climbing over the Owen-Stanley Mountains in New Guinea. These mountains were about 15,000 ft. high in some areas. The flight engineer suggested that the superchargers be engaged. A supercharger is used at high altitudes to provide more power. The pilot said it wasn't necessary. Shortly thereafter, the engines misfired and began losing altitude. Fortunately, there was a depression in the mountains which we were able to slip through and, after dropping in altitude, the engines functioned correctly. I recall looking down on a huge waterfall as we passed through the mountains. If the gap had not been there, we probably would have had to bail out (if we had the time) or get splattered on the mountain.

To be continued. Next issue typhoons and transporting POWs.