

CHRISTMAS WITH GRANDDAD MY SSE

My confusion about the “Holidays” came early in life when my Granddad Mysse told me that all Holidays were “Holy Days”. I thought I understood the Christmas Holidays when I was younger dealing with the birth of Christ, but looking back and reflecting about what I know now... I guess I really did not understand. But what do you really know at five years of age? What confused me was the number of ways each family chose to celebrate the holiday whether it was Christmas or any one of the other family holidays such as Easter, Fourth of July or Halloween.

Granddad Mysse liked to celebrate the “Twelve Days of Christmas”! The Christmas Season for Granddad Mysse started on December 25th and continued each day until January 5th on the New Year. On January 6th the Christmas tree was out the door and every decoration was put carefully away and readied for the next year’s Christmas season. Each and every Christmas season in Ingomar with Granddad Mysse was an incredible time full of people, food, smiles, and laughter. A time where everyone reflected on how lucky each was to have their health and where one and all were grateful for the people, friends and the blessing that filled their lives. Granddad Mysse would say, “Everyday is a holiday if you treat it that way!”

It was like the everyone in the town of Ingomar started thinking about the Christmas season the moment the dishes from Thanksgiving table were washed and put away. The occasional snow storm would mean that the newest Sears and Roebuck Catalog would be paged through by everyone in the household in hope of finding that perfect present. Presents that needed to be ordered as early as possible. Of course everyone hoped that the present would arrive before December 25th. Hints would be circled. Sometimes present ideas were posted with a thumb tack on the kitchen wall. Even the very old Sears and Roebuck Catalogs, which could be found in the two seater outhouse, would still

be a valuable source of new ideas for Christmas gifts and useful if someone forgot to put toilet paper back in the outhouse after using the last square.

Before the holiday season started Granddad Mysse would look through the house and find “items and things” that were no longer useful or meaningful to him. On his journeys to Forsyth and Billings he was always looking for that “perfect inexpensive small item” for a present to someone he kept in the back of his mind. His goal was to gift these items to people less fortunate than his self during the 12 day Christmas Season. That included friends who helped him and always the people that worked for him as shepherders and as ranch hands. His goal was to have enough special gifts for each of the Twelve Days of Christmas. I watched Granddad Mysse give away his old winter jacket, a rocking chair, enough oats and feed for some horses to last a month, a roll of Copenhagen, and items I never saw or probably would never remember because of my age. There were always at least twelve special presents. One special present for someone each day so Granddad could act like Santa Claus for his 12 days of Christmas. Each present represented an act of kindness my Grandfather would give to some unsuspecting individual that crossed paths with him during the prior year. I do remember the smiles he brought to his friends and neighbors faces with these acts of kindness. Maybe that is why the Christmas Season is so special to me.

My new, red bike disappeared just after Thanksgiving in 1955. My Granddad Mysse gave it to me for my fifth birthday because I kept trying to ride Marie’s and Bernice’s (my Mother) bike. It was way too big for me and the handle bar was very hard for me to reach. After multiple crash and burns on that “Girl’s” bike on the hard Gumbo ruts I think my Grandfather decided that I was not going to ever give up trying to learn how to ride a bike... no matter what happened to my body. Believe me I had scrapped and bruised every inch of my body. Granddad Mysse went to Billings to get supplies for the sheep herders on one bright, sunny day just before Thanksgiving. After getting back to

Ingomar he gave me my first new bike. All I knew was it was red, the perfect size for me, and I was in love with it. Who wouldn't be? It had a bell which I could not stop ringing. I drove anyone near me crazy with this bell. It took only three or four days of constant falls and crashes but I finally mastered riding my hot "little red bike". I proudly rode my red bike on every road that existed in the little town of Ingomar. I rode my bike until I collapse at the end of everyday.

Then one day my beautiful red bike disappeared. It was taken from the the back porch where I had parked it. I was crushed. Being the town of Ingomar was so small it was easy for Granddad Mysse to hunt down the culprit who stole my red bike. It was a boy who did live in Ingomar and it was his parents that ratted the poor boy out. As the story goes all the boy wanted "was a present of his own for Christmas!" I was really mad that someone had taken my red bike. My birthday gift from my Granddad. Granddad picked up and returned my bike to me. What I didn't expect was what my Granddad Mysse's reaction and response to the theft would be.

A few days after I had gotten my bike back Granddad Mysse went to Billings again. Usually he would only go monthly, but as Granddad Mysse put it, "Something important came up!"... so off he went early one morning. That afternoon when he got back from Billings he had me get into his pickup. Granddad said we were going to deliver some Christmas joy to someone in Ingomar. I was excited because I love trips like that... even if there were many days remaining until Christmas Day. When Granddad Mysse finally parked his pickup we both got out. I was not happy. Not happy at all! We were at the house of the boy that stole my beautiful red bike... what was going on? Granddad Mysse went up to the front door of the house and knocked loudly. First the boy's parents came out. As they stood on the porch stairs staring at the two of us; Granddad Mysse walked back to his pickup. Then with a show of his hand waved them to his side next to the pickup bed. Granddad Mysse started to take things out of the back of the pickup bed. First giving them a huge ham, then huge bag of flour, a sack of potatoes, and other grocery items. When the "bad boy"

and his sister came out of the house Granddad pulled the tarp back all the way from the back of the bed of his pickup. I could see a new blue, boy's bicycle. Granddad lifted the bike out of the back of the pickup bed and wheeled it up to the boy standing by his front door. The boy was crying, his parents were crying, and the boy's sister stood there with her mouth wide open when Granddad stated this was a Christmas gift from his family to theirs. The boy's parents tried to say they couldn't accept the bike, but both their son and daughter were trying to figure out who was going to ride it first. After the boy rode off on his new blue bike with his sister running after him Granddad Mysse reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. Smiling Granddad Mysse gave the parents a one hundred dollar bill (Keep in mind this was in the 1955 so one hundred dollars was an incredibly large gift) to help with food and other things... then finally Granddad made an offer of employment on his ranch through the winter months or until they could get their "feet back on the ground."

I have to admit I was totally confused by my Grandfather's actions. When we were finally alone I asked my Granddad Mysse why was he giving gifts to the family with the boy that stole my red bike... shouldn't they be punished. Shouldn't they all be put in jail? Granddad Mysse simply smiled, looked at me, and said, "CR... The family has been punished enough. Poverty is one of the cruelest punishments anyone can face in life. They are poor which is not a crime, but it feels like a punishment to those who are poor. When I came to America from Norway I had nothing so I know how it feels to have nothing and to be poor. The quickest way to stop bad behavior it by showing love and kindness. When we are "drowning in life" each of us would like someone to save us. Throw us a life preserver. It is only right!" Granddad Mysse paused a bit and followed up by saying, "I think acts of kindness change the worlds of people and families... the only reason I know this is because acts of kindness like this changed my life!"

I was not sure if Granddad Mysse meant his acts of kindness to others or the acts of kindness from others to him changed his life. I guess it didn't matter. Any act of kindness can make anyone's day and lives better. I guess celebrating the holidays can be celebrated any day of the year whether its labeled on a calendar or holy due to religious obligations or simply where one person's kindness is given in hopes that that simple act of kindness will be remembered and have a positive impact on our world. That is a Holy Day!

The influence of my Granddad Mysse upon my life can not be measured. His acts of honesty, temperance, politeness, being generous with his belongs, his love of any holiday, and his true acts of kindness will be with me forever.

Thank You Granddad Mysse! As long as I am alive I will think of you! I miss your special love and your magical smile. Love you forever! You will always be my "Gran Pappy" and I will always be your "CR". I hope I will always be a special Papi to my Big W... and now my Little L.

XYZ – Craig - December 15, 2012

