

THE BOWL

A woman with a mixing bowl. It could be the subject of a painting or the title of a story. More homes have been kept happy by a woman with a mixing bowl than this world dreams of. It was just a picture, but the first thing I thought of was stewed cranberries and whipped cream. Every holiday table held the same beautiful, cut-glass bowl filled with the deep, red berries and covered with peaks of snow, thick cream.

As I looked at the picture, I could see Aunt Christine again. She would be standing just like that. Short, laughing and jolly, she had the bluest, most sparkling eyes I've ever seen. Her creative ability produced wonderful dinners and, for the children, table decorations of fairy tales and Christmas stories.

Snow was deep on the ground the first time I remember going to Aunt Christine's. Uncle Rufus came for us in a bob sled filled with straw. Hot stones wrapped in blankets kept our feet warm. The sleigh bells really jingled that crisp, cold, winter morning; and the road seemed endless as it wound around empty fields and snow-capped fenceposts. Runners creaked in the snow while the jingling bells played a syncopated melody against the thud of the horses' hooves.

Even before we turned into the lane, we could smell burning logs and see smoke curling up from the chimneys. When the door opened that Christmas morning, all the tantalizing odors of roast fowl and home-cured ham rushed out at us.

It seemed the house was full of uncles, aunts and cousins when Aunt Christine, with flushed face, announced that everything was ready. We all quieted as Grandma said grace with tears and memories.

Aunt Christine cooked with enjoyment. Her bowls of fluffy, puffy, mashed potatoes had pools of real butter. Vegetables grown in her garden the past summer all found their way to her holiday table. Glazed carrots, candied sweet potatoes, lima beans, golden corn and pickles of every variety filled the table to overflowing. Slices of home-cured ham, roast turkey with dressing, as well as baked chicken, were passed the length of the table. Then came the beautiful bowl, sending out prisms of light. Piled high with whipped cream over berries; nothing ever looked more beautiful to my nine-year old eyes or tasted more delicious.

Dessert came late in the afternoon just before the families were ready to leave. Again the table was filled. This time with pies, plates of candy and bowls of fruit. Pots of hot coffee and chocolate were filled and refilled.

The pattern of holiday dinners--days hurried by and soon Grandma was gone, aunts and uncles followed.

Each year as I spoon the berries into the beautiful, many-faceted bowl, I wonder if my grandchildren realize how truly "a thing of beauty is a joy forever."