



Straight Talk

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Christmas Family Fun

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Greetings, Gentle Reader,

Let's go back to a time when Christmas was both openly religious and great fun. Back then, a member of our family always guessed his presents, depriving us of the fun of his anticipation and excitement, so I decided to fix the problem.

You know how it works. You ask sneaky questions. You watch expressions when gifts are advertised on T.V. You figure out what a loved one really wants. You get it, wrap it, and put it under the tree.

They check the name tags, see their name, pick it up, rattle it, shake it. Then the brat tells you what it is! As my mother always said, "It's enough to make a preacher cuss." Soooooo, that year I decided to play dirty.

The perfect gift came in a small box, which I put in a large box. Then I put an ancient flat iron in the large box. (Ask your grandmother what that is.) Then I put some peanuts with the shells on in the box with the flat iron and the gift. I left enough room for the flat iron to slide back and forth. Next, I put little metal things, hooks and eyes, bolts and washers, etc., in the big box. Then I wrapped it up and put it under the tree. I was careful to do all this in private, because it was common for the youngest child proudly to announce that she was not going to tell him that he was getting a (and she would name his gift). It was always extremely funny, but I was determined it would not happen this time.

He came home. He looked at the gifts, saw his name on the big box, picked it up and shook it. The peanuts rustled. The metal things rattled. He tipped it back and forth. The flat iron slid from one end of the big box to the other. He shook it slowly. He shook it rapidly. He tipped it to the left. Slide, slide, clunk, clunk, rattle, rattle, rustle, rustle, tinkle, tinkle. He tipped it to the right. Slide, slide, clunk, clunk, etc. He even smelled it. By now the rest of the family were rolling on the floor, practically in hysterics. They too wanted to trick the champion gift-guesser, who had bragged no one could fool him. Maybe not, but we were

having great fun trying, and it looked as though we might succeed. He was struggling to retain his title, after all, his reputation was at stake. But, so far, he wasn't doing too well.

The scene was repeated every evening when the family got together, the shakes, the rattles, the rustles, and especially the delighted giggles.

Christmas Eve. We have a generations old tradition of opening one gift on Christmas Eve. We usually choose a small gift – especially if it smells like candy – leaving the rest for Christmas Day, but his suffering had become too much. On that Christmas Eve, as the rest of us happily munched candy, he excitedly made his way through a flat iron, handfuls of peanuts and various and sundry pieces of metal, until he finally opened the magic box. It contained an old fashioned Roy Rogers type pistol, which he had wanted very badly for a long time. Best of all, the secret had been kept to the end.

The pistol, the flat iron, the pieces of metal and the peanuts have gone the way of all the earth, but the memory is still bright and brings us a giggle or two to this day. It was a Christmas to remember, because of the abundance of fun we had shared. May you build many memories this Christmas, bringing your family happy laughter for years to come. And may you remember that, though the sacredness deliberately is being taken out of Christmas, because of Christianity's open condemnation of evil behavior, without the miraculous birth of the Son of God, we would have nothing to celebrate. We would not even have a country, because as our unrevised history openly and proudly proclaims, America was formed as a Christian nation.

Merry Christmas.