

CHRISTMAS, IN A CEMETERY

Christmas was the happiest season of the year for my mother. It was a time for family and friends, some from afar, to come together, share their love for one another – and eat!

Food during the holidays – for us, as with most families – is a big deal, and so it was for Momma. She was a wonderful cook, as anyone who had ever sat at her dining room table or experienced her dishes at potluck suppers would enthusiastically attest.



In addition to the turkey and dressing and all the trimmings, she delighted in serving country ham, pot roast and Southern-fried chicken, just to give her guests choices, she said. Desserts – and there were always several selections – featured blackberry and peach cobblers, apple stack cake, pecan pie and a refrigerator fruit cake that was out of this world.

Standards for Christmas, for those who dropped by anytime for a visit and a cup of coffee or tea, were homemade gingerbread and peanut brittle. The smell of gingerbread today automatically carries me back to my mother's kitchen.

My mother died in 1999.

A while back, on a cold December day, Lola and I returned to Cookeville, Tennessee, the community where we both were born, for a business meeting.

We arrived in town early. It was the Christmas season, and we wanted to spend a little time at Shipley Cemetery, adjacent to a small, country, white-frame church, about 5 miles out of downtown Cookeville. It's where my mother and father are buried.

The temperature hovered in the 40s. Thick clouds blotted out the sun. It was a gray day, and a chill wind of about 10 miles per hour blew through rows of gray tombstones.

There, nestled up to the grave marker midway between the names Rebecca S. Hunter and W. Waymon Hunter, was a little green Christmas tree, about 16 inches high and decorated in red ribbons. Its colors stood out in the dreary surroundings.

The tree had been placed there as a memorial to my mother's love of Christmas. And it was the 19th year in a row that a tree like this had shown up in that spot, put in place by Debbie Maberry, a longtime friend of the family and confidante.

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As I bowed my head before that touching emblem of Debbie's love and my parents' remains, in a lonely and forsaken place, the message before me was clear. That tree is a symbol of the love and hope that is Christmas.

Because of His amazing love for us, God sent His only begotten Son into a world dark with sin, a place where death reigned, desperate and without hope. The good news that the angels brought to shepherds on a hillside that night in Bethlehem was that we have a Savior, and through faith in Christ the grave cannot keep us; we can live forever in heaven with Him.



I can meet Momma and Daddy there, and that reunion will be better than any Christmas gathering we ever enjoyed.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men! (Luke 2:14 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter

