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A European Christmas

By C. Bailey-Lloyd/LadyCamelot

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With the holidays right around the corner, it's hard not to reminisce our childhood memories and holidays of yesteryear. In each culture, there are differing values and traditions which are celebrated in different ways.

During the 70's, growing up 'German' in Europe was one of the most fascinating and magical decades. Having strong German roots, our family participated in many German Christmas traditions. One of those traditions was Advent. The Advent, or Christmas calendar, is picture-box calendar decorated with wintry & Christmas scenes, biblical characters and 'St. Nicolas.' On the face of the calendar, are 24 small doors, each containing a small chocolate – one opened each day for the holiday season. The December 24th door, which is the 'Heiligabend' (Christmas Eve) is usually the largest door on the calendar and most often contains a chocolate Nativity. As children, we relished in this fun, and tasty feature of the holiday season.

But Advent wasn't simply comprised of the Holiday Calendar, we also partook in the Advent Wreath, or 'Adventskranz' which was beautifully displayed on tables throughout the house. Wreathes held 4 candles; the first candle being lit the fourth Sunday before Christmas, and another one each Sunday thereafter. Around the evergreen wreath of candles, our family would gather as each candle was meticulously lit. My mom would recite a simple, German passage each time she would light a candle:

"Advent, Advent
Ein Kerzlein Brent.
Erst Eins,
den Zwei,
den Drei,
den Vier –
den steht der Christkind vor der tur."

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Which translates into, 'Advent, Advent, a candle burns. First one, then two, then three, then four – then stands the Christ Child before the door.'

For you see, in Germany, it is the 'Christkind' (Christ Child) who brings gifts on Christmas Eve.

Another childhood pastime was St. Nikolaustag Nikolaustag (St. Nicholas Day) was a fun and lighthearted tradition whereby children everywhere anxiously awaited the arrival of December 6th when the Nikolaus, or Weihnachtsmann (Santa Claus) came. Leading up to Nikolaustag, we children would have to behave very well, because St. Nikolaus could 'see everything' we did. And the night before December 6th, we would have to clean our winter boots meticulously to put outside our doors. Why the heck would we clean our boots and place them outside our doors? Well, I'll tell you why – if we were

good, and our boots were really clean, St. Nikolaus would stuff our boots with candies, little toys and chocolates. If we were bad, we would receive a bundle of switches or lumps of coal.

Unknown to popular American custom, the 'Weinachtsmann' was conceived by German–American Illustrator, Thomas Nast, who created the Christmas image of Santa in America – which, ultimately set a precedent for the permanent, symbolic establishment of Santa Claus.

Traditionally, German Christmas is observed through 'Heilige Drei Konige Tag,' or Three Kings Day (also known as the Magi or the Wise Men). In some parts of Europe, such as Austria, Germany and Switzerland, the Letters C + M + B (Caspar, Melchor, and Balthazar – and, 'Christus mansionem benedicat,' meaning 'Christ bless this house.') are etched with chalk above doorways and home entrances on January 6th. Of course, this is the epitome of the 12 Days of Christmas

Finally, on the 'Cristkind Abend (Christ Child Eve or Christmas Eve), aside from the Weinachts Baum (Christmas Tree custom started by Martin Luther), families receive 'Bunte Teller,' or colored plates filled with oranges, candies, Marzipan (comprised of almonds and suger), Lebkuchen (gingerbread), Stollen (fruit bread) and an assortment of chocolates and other goods. Before any gifts are exchanged, Christmas Carols like Stille Nacht (Silent Night from Austrian composer Franz Gruber) are sung by the tree.

To this day, I am still amazed at the profound effects of Christmas' past have had on me. As a child, the holiday was mystical and magical, as an adult, its beautiful memories are forever etched in my heart and soul.

Wishing all a happy, memory–filled, holiday season, I am sincerely,

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What Do You Want This Year?

By Angie Dixon

Christmas is all around us, and many people are making up wish lists. Those who aren't doing that are busy setting down their New Year's Resolutions already. But this is a good time to sit down and do some serious introspection.

What do you want from the holidays this year? Do you want to rush around, spend a lot of money you don't have, and yell at the kids for not playing with all twenty of the toys they asked for—at the same time? Is that really how you want to spend Christmas?

We talk about "Christmas spirit," and mostly we mean giving. Giving of ourselves, giving to people who need it. That's great, that's Christmas spirit.

But I think there's another aspect to "Christmas spirit." I think it's spiritual. And don't close your screen on me because I said spiritual. I didn't say religious, because it's not. I think it comes from our souls.

I think deep down, each of us has a spirit that wants to be expressed. And I think at Christmas, when we're naturally thinking of others, that spirit is more easily expressed. I think if you want to, you can have a spiritual Christmas. You can feel loving, caring, generous. You can feel like a kid at Christmas, just by opening up to your spirit.

So what do you want this year?

Angie Dixon helps small business owners get their acts together. She is a personal development coach specializing in helping people integrate their home and work lives so they feel less stretched and more balanced. Get her FREE EBOOK on balance at

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to discover how coaching can change your life, contact Angie at

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What Do You Want This Year?

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