*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Remembering the wild feline Christmas party of 1973**

It’s the holiday season — a time for family, gifts and sentimental trips down memory lane.

There’s a reason why TV channels show nonstop holiday movies for weeks preceding Christmas, tapping into the mushy nostalgia that many equate with the season.

I’m a sucker for misty-eyed memories, so let’s go!

It’s Christmas Eve 1973. The cows are milked, the chores are done. My family — Mom, Dad and my brother Kevin — head to church. I was 10 years old and couldn’t wait to see what was inside some of those presents under the tree.

I did know the contents of two small gifts. Our Christmas shopping included presents for the two cats that shared the house with us — Pasha and Tasha. Mom had somehow convinced Dad to make house cats out of two kittens born into the barn-cat brigade.

Pasha was a gray-and-white tabby. Tasha was white with blue eyes; she was deaf, a common trait with cats of that color.

The cats were to receive cloth mice filled with dried catnip. Mom had wrapped the mice that afternoon and put them under the tree with a cat name on each package.

We returned from church to find the two felines had started their own Christmas party. Both packages had been torn open, with shreds of wrapping paper all around. The mice were partially chewed and wet with saliva.

There were several ornaments on the floor, an indication that there had been several trips up and down the tree. The tree needed to be secured to a drapery bracket with some twine after the cats kept knocking it over when it was first put up.

About three-fourths of cats are susceptible to the scent of catnip. They rub their heads, jump, roll around, salivate and vocalize. That should not be confused with similar behavior exhibited by participants in the recent impeachment hearings.

Unlike legislators, a cat’s response lasts for about 10 minutes. They then become temporarily immune to catnip for about a half-hour. We found the cats in a state of stupor. You could say they were catatonic. The cats, I mean.

Judging by the wreckage, the cats probably had a couple of drug-induced sessions with their fabric mice. It was a heck of a party.

I don’t remember what I received for Christmas that year except for two gifts — a pair of mittens and a container of Tang.

Every year our Norwegian matriarch Grandma Cecile Hardie would knit mittens for each of her 12 grandchildren. She chose colorful yarn. She would sit in her swivel rocking chair, her hands busy with knitting needles while visiting.

She always knew the right size for her grandchildren. They were a welcome replacement for the previous pair that were a little thin after a year of wear. I remember many pairs of those mittens lined up to dry in the entryway of the house after the cousins came inside from a snowball fight or a sledding adventure.

The Tang was a gift from my Aunt Sara Clair. The orange-flavored drink of astronauts was always featured in her house with a little extra flavoring. I still have some of her pitchers that she kept in the refrigerator.

Although a single 8-ounce serving of Tang contained 1 ounce of sugar, Aunt Sara always added a little — no, a lot — more sugar. Her Tang was sticky and sweet, perfect for fueling rambunctious children. It was certainly not recommended by the American Dental Association.

Even though we had our own canisters, our Tang never tasted as good as the way Aunt Sara made it.

Grandma and Aunt Sara are long gone, but I cherish their memories. They warm my heart on these cold winter days.

I wish all of you a joyful holiday season. Cherish and treasure the time with your family and loved ones.

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