

A WHITE CHRISTMAS IN VERMONT
By Marjory Diane Lyons

It was like being in the movie, *White Christmas*. I spent ten days at the Cavendish Inn in Vermont, owned and operated by my sons, Tim and Peter Jefferson, surrounded by my family. All four of my children were there, plus four of my five grandchildren, my sister and her husband, Harold's brother and, of course, my first ex husband, Jeff, and his present woman friend and her son. Oh, and Jeff's second ex wife and HER son, and the widow of my father's first cousin who came down from Hanover, NH. All this presided over by my sons Tim and Peter, owners of the Inn; and a high school friend of the boys' drove over from Maine for one overnight.

We had 22 at the Christmas table. You can imagine how lovely that scene was in the formal dining room, fireplace crowned by an great green wreath, windows overlooking the covered porch and snow-laden grounds. The table, dressed with a heavy burgundy cloth that Tim made, was set with gleaming white china and flatware and goblets with napkins tucked in just so. Natural greens formed the centerpiece along the long table, white candles were lit, and the huge brass chandelier hung over it all. Tim served from the buffet table at the far end of the room, aromas intensifying as we approached. We all lined up one by one to be served. Peter poured the wine with a flair. R. J., Gail's son helped out when needed, and proud to be working with his uncles.

Everyone remarked that the food was outstanding, and it was. One night, tender boneless roast pork, sweet potatoes and peas; another, succulent fresh turkey, dressing, cranberry, turnips and, yes, gravy; and for Christmas Day, a luscious tenderloin done to perfection, with Brussels sprouts and mashed potatoes. Desserts were excellent as were the wines, but, of course, I, the matriarch, would have eaten oatmeal and been satisfied.

And we all slept in those graceful, historic rooms. My daughter, Gail, and her husband, Marty, had the Bride's Room, glamorous with a chaise lounge and fireplace, and a Christmas tree in the bay window matching the one downstairs in the front room. Harold's brother was in the green room; my only granddaughter, Haley, in the trundle bed room; R. J. in the twin room for a night or two until he had to switch to another to make room for Cousin Margaret who spent one night before flying off to Seattle to see her children.

My sister, Toby, and husband, Bob, were in the room at the top of the stairs with built-in bookshelves and Great Aunt Happy's chair standing by; Harold and I had our usual room, number 5, the big one at the end of the hall with fireplace and window seat and casement windows by our bed. Jeff and Norma were in Room 10 at the top of the carriage house with the high four-poster, her son Scott in the room below with twin beds and access to outside, and Colette was in Room 8 next to that, so pretty with Peter's water colors on the walls.

Son Mike and his two boys, Adam—fresh out of boot camp in Fort Knox—and Roman—the tallest of the Jefferson men and just celebrating his 17th birthday on December 21—all encamped in Room 11, the toasty downstairs rooms off the Pub.

One night R. J., 22 and in his first year med school, had to sleep in Tim's office on the couch—just like in the frat house. That same night, Paul, Colette's son slept in the library on that pullout couch. Tim and his 17-year-old cat climbed the back stairs to Room 7 above the office, and Peter made it to his own apartment a half mile away.

We had a birthday party for Roman, and the next night a surprise party for Jeff and Toby—both December 22—with a skit by Gail and Haley as cheerleaders and R. J. and Adam as football players, commemorating the Port Jefferson High School days. Tim had photos from the yearbooks enlarged and made posters of them a la Andy Warhol four on a poster.

And we had a game night, with ME rolling dice! Some watched football games in the library where, on Christmas Eve, we all gathered to watch the DVD of White Christmas. One night, with Pete's choice of music piped in, we all danced.

It snowed and the air was cold and sweet. The children went skiing at Okemo Mountain three miles away. They also moved wood from the barn to the porch, stood on the porch pillars to help tack up plastic sheeting around, and took over the Pub with DVD's and guitar-playing.

The men slipped away one afternoon to a pool hall where Scott entertained with special pool shots he uses in his work at colleges across the country. And they drove up Okemo Mountain to watch the skiers.

We all went to a charming historic Episcopal Church in Bellows Falls, Vermont on Christmas Eve where the choir members—from children to oldsters—wore little gold tinsel ringlets in their hair, and the priest, a woman, riveted us with her speaking and singing voice. The full moon moved us oldsters to recite The Night Before Christmas in the car on the way back. Who knows what the others were singing in Marty's new car!

One day Pete and I went to a book store where I discovered a new Jan Karon book and bought it for Gail, but had to quick read it before wrapping. And she gave me a book E. L. Konigsburg autographed to me, Marjory!

Can you imagine Christmas morning with 20 of us splayed out in couches and chairs and on the floor between the fireplace, ablaze, and the great tree in the bay window? The gift unwrapping started at 10 a.m., and the frenzy continued until noon. Tim selected Harold to be the one to sit in a chair in front of the great tree and distribute gifts as the teenagers brought them to him. Haley scrambled around behind the tree and on the floor, snatching up packages, to keep the action going.

I was sitting there; I was in it, but also I watched the wonderful scene, just like from a movie, no, like the one in my heart-- paper and ribbons strewn and heaped around, smiles and yells and laughter, and eyes connecting when a gift was opened, the giver and the receiver, the aroma of hot coffee swirling in the air. Most of us were in red sweaters or sweatshirts, and two wore Santa hats. Harold's brother, Milt, put on his new navy sweat shirt, smiling his thanks from across the room. Two cashmere sweaters were opened to shouts of surprise and joy. Tim modeled his new terry bathrobe. The grandchildren donned their new fleece jackets, and eagerly opened the white envelopes that had been sitting like square snowflakes on the tree, and which, as they had hoped, contained cash.

When it was all over, the younger ones cleaned up, scrambling all the papers together, filling plastic bags, gathering up their own new gifts. Snowflakes patted against the great bay window. Mellow music filtered through the sound system. We served ourselves coffee and rolls and sweet butter and jam and Tim's famous egg and cheese breakfast from the buffet, satiated, and satisfied with our first Christmas at Cavendish.

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