

A Pair of Khaki Colored Mittens

By Eleanor Rich Ericson

Baltimore is a tiny hamlet nestled in the foothills of Hawks Mountain in southern Vermont. It is isolated, self-contained and fiercely independent. A speck of Appalachia, perhaps.

It was the late thirties and the country was easing out of the depression, but the world was uneasy over growing tensions in Europe. Life in Baltimore went on as it always had, minding its' own business, working hard, mostly at farming, and providing its' own entertainment.

There was always the annual Christmas party at the one room school house to look forward to. A tree was cut in somebody's woodlot and decorated with paper chains and garlands of popcorn and cranberries we students had made and maybe a strand or two of donated tinsel.

Everyone gathered one night after chores shortly before Christmas. Mother, teacher at the time, presented a program of our own making, with a lot of carol singing, allowed and expected back then.

Then the food! If we were lucky, Gladys brought her freezer of chocolate ice cream, and Alice her sponge cake made with duck eggs. There were always plenty of popcorn balls and thick, chewy molasses cookies.

Finally, it was time to explore the contents under the tree, which were usually pretty sparse, perhaps with only the modest little gifts Mother had managed for each of her students. This year though, the tree was laden with lots of extra packages...one for each child in town under high school age! And what were they? A pair of crocheted, khaki colored mittens for each of us.

It was Aunt Kate, of course, no blood kin to any of us, but a treasured "Aunt Kate" to us all, who had made them after working long days alongside Uncle George running the farm. Her son-in-law worked at the Shoddy Mill in Springfield which processed wool and dyed it khaki color to be used in making warm garments for the armed forces, to be worn during the conflict we knew was coming.

Seventy odd years later, two elderly ladies were sitting in my kitchen, remembering the past as old ladies do, and I learned the rest of the story.

One bitterly cold winter's day, those many years ago, a neighbor's boy came to Aunt Kate's on an errand and she asked him where his mittens were? He admitted he had none.

Aunt Kate, in true Aunt Kate spirit, vowed no child in Baltimore was going without mittens and got busy!

That was our Aunt Kate.

Every town should have one!