

Down Home: She fell out of a Christmas tree

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What's the best Christmas present anyone in your family ever received?

I know, I know: The "Sunday school answer" is Jesus. And Jesus is the true answer. Jesus is "the reason for the season." Jesus is why all humanity for all time has been offered the gift of salvation.

But in our family, the secondary answer—behind Jesus—is simple and unanimous: My mother.

Margaret Moore Knox celebrates her birthday on Christmas. So, years before she met my father; long before she gave birth to Martha, Martin and me; and ages before the rest of the family came along, she was God's gift to all of us.

When she was growing up, Mother's family always made sure her birthday didn't get lost amid the Christmas celebration. Daddy took up that cause with gusto, and we marked her birthday separately, with cake and presents and singing "Happy Birthday" on Christmas Eve. (As a kid, I probably was jealous because she got to sneak her party up one day ahead of her actual birthday.)

For as long as I can remember, we reserved one aspect of Mother's birthday celebration for Christmas Day. Mother and Daddy owned a 45-rpm recording of Little Rita Faye singing the classic Christmas-birthday anthem, ["I Fell Out of a Christmas Tree."](#) We kept it up so long, even my daughters know it's part of Grandmommie's birthday heritage.

The first stanza goes like this: "I arrived one Christmas morn, / That's the

day that I was born. / Other kids are not like me, / I fell out of a Christmas tree. / They didn't find me in the park, / I wasn't brought here by the stork. / I'm a personality, / I fell out of a Christmas tree."

Another few lines probably were prophetic: "When my mama thinks I'm bad / And turns me over to my dad, / He never takes me 'cross his knee. / I fell out of a Christmas tree." Maybe that's why Popo, Mother's daddy, was perhaps the gentlest, most laid-back father and grandfather in the history of parenthood.

Looking back, particularly as a kid, I think I always felt sorry for Mother, because her birthday landed on Christmas. Several months separate my birthday and Christmas, but even though we tried hard not to fold Mother's big celebration into Christmas, you couldn't hide the fact all her partying and remembering always happen almost simultaneously.

But Mother always has taken that in stride, applying the last stanza to herself: "Now Christmas birthdays may be nice, / but I'll give you a clue. / I have a party once a year; / the other kids have two. / But still I want it understood, / I wouldn't change it if I could. / Cause it's plain as plain can be: / If it wasn't for Christmas, there wouldn't be no me."

Mother taught me a gentleman neither asks nor tells a lady's age. So, I won't divulge how old she'll turn on Christmas Day. But this birthday is big, and we're all so glad she's here to celebrate it. She's a treasure—not only to our family, but to all the churches Daddy has served as pastor, to legions of friends, and to countless children she taught across the decades.

At Christmas, our family thanks God for Jesus. And also Mother, who apparently fell out of a Christmas tree.