

The Handmade Christmas Ornaments

Cindy Baier Boelk

Our Christmas tree was the same every year when I was growing up. About a week before Christmas my mother and I would go to Oakfield and pick out a Balsam tree from the nice people on Main Street that sold fresh cut Christmas trees. My mother said they had the best trees and the most reasonably priced, generally around \$2 in those years. There were many to choose from, very few people shopped for trees earlier in the month. We would come home with “the perfect tree “and my dad would cut the bottom until it fit in the living room. It was always too large!

My mother did the time-consuming decorating. The Shiny Bright glass ornaments were placed perfectly on every branch, and an entire lighted snow village was set up beneath the tree. I can still remember the clacking sound of the big colored bulbs on the heavy wire as we spread out the strings of NOMA lights! And the last thing- the tinsel. Oh all that tinsel! And it was saved from year to year- as was paper and bows, even tags. The entire process took days – right up until Christmas Eve. The result was spectacular! The tree stayed up long after Christmas and there was nothing like the smell of that fresh tree.



In the early 60's my grandmother was teaching a craft class at the local tech school and the project was felt Christmas Ornaments with sequin trim. At 7 years old I had never seen anything so beautiful! Red and green felt, Christmas shapes, animal shapes, all hand stitched and sparkling. Soon kits to make these type of ornaments were available and they became more common. I loved those ornaments and wished we could have some! This was a new concept in Christmas decorating and my mother was not about to make any changes. They were very tedious to sew and my mother did not enjoy crafting- they simply were not her style. The felt ornaments remained popular throughout the decade and many Christmases I dreamed of a tree filled with them!

In the late 70's I married a son of the family that sold fresh cut Christmas Trees on Main Street in Oakfield. At the first Christmas Dinner with my in-laws I learned a favorite cousin and aunt of my mother-in-law's had made a complete tree full of felt sequined ornaments! I was so taken with the story- they were made while the cousin was engaged to be used on her first Christmas tree when she was married. By this time the popularity of this fad was winding down, these lovingly handmade ornaments were in storage and my mother- in- law's cousin was wondering what would become of them. I wasted no time in telling her how much I loved handmade felt Christmas ornaments!

My mother- in- law, grandmother- in- law, the favorite cousin and aunt, all enjoyed sewing and crafting – we had much in common and I became close to them in the years to come. One by one as they passed away I felt the loss of great friendship. The felt ornaments did get passed down to me a few years ago. Of this little group my mother -in- law and I are all that remain to cherish these

memories. We went through the box of ornaments one by one when I received them, marveling at the precise stitching and excellent preservation. My thoughts went back long ago to the day when my grandmother showed me the first soft little Christmas tree with twinkling sequins.

Today as I unwrap the felt shapes for Christmas decorating I think of the young woman working with her mother on the lovely ornaments for her tree, anxiously anticipating the new life that awaited her. I imagine how they were such a new, modern idea and that her tree was so fashionable for the times. I put them on a separate tree in my home – I decorate with several trees throughout the house each Christmas. My husband always picks the fresh cut tree; he brings home “the perfect tree” and just like my Dad, cuts the bottom until it fits in the living room. It is always too large!

