

## The Christmas Pudding

“Hey Mum,” called George excitedly as he skipped up the passage, “Gramps says we are going to have a Christmas pudding made by a thousand men!”

Jenny smiled to herself. Her Dad certainly knew how to gain the youngster’s attention and interest.

“Well George we’ll just have to wait and see. Comb your hair and let’s round up the troops for church.”

George’s mind was now firmly fixed on this big pudding and he set to his task with a will.

The church service was a blur to young George as he knew that Gramps always weaved the most amazing things around his stories and this was surely going to be a good one.

The Christmas turkey and trimmings were as delicious as always. Then came the moment - Mum brought in a silver platter and set it down on the table.

“Tarantara tarantara,” said Gramps as he ceremoniously lifted off the lid to reveal, what looked to George, like a fairly ordinary Christmas Pud.

“But Gramps it’s so small,” gasped George, “How could it be made by a thousand men?”

“Life is full of surprises, George me boy,” laughed Gramps. “Because something takes a thousand men to make, it does not mean that it is large, it may just mean that the process of making it is quite complex.”

While Jenny spooned out the pudding to all the eager faces around the table, Gramps passed around the caramel sauce.

The sound of happy munching filled the expectant room as all eyes were on Gramps.

“Now, George, let’s think about the pudding.” From next to his chair Gramps lifted up a little box.

“Here is the container that the pudding came in. It says that it was manufactured in Australia. Someone made the pudding, someone put it in a plastic container, another person put the container in a box and yet another packed a whole lot of puddings together in a big box which someone else sealed. “Just imagine this box, and many others, standing in a warehouse. Then an order was received from South Africa and a whole lot of boxes were moved by truck to the railway station. At the station the boxes were packed into a truck and sent off to the docks. Here they were placed on a ship which sailed to Durban. At Durban harbour the boxes were transferred to another ship to get them to Cape Town. From Cape Town docks they went by truck to Pick and Pay’s warehouse where they were stored until each branch asked for its allocation of puddings. At this stage another truck delivered it to Pinelands where it was put on their shelves and your Mum and I bought a pudding.”

“WOW,” exclaimed George.

“See how many men were involved so far,” said Gramps with a twinkle in his eye, “and I have not even mentioned what went into the pudding. Just imagine how many men were involved in collecting or harvesting the ingredients.”

“The ingredients of the pudding are all listed on the box, so let’s examine them.”

“The first one is wheat.”

“Harold, will you please pass me the dictionary behind you” Gramps said to George’s father.

Gramps opened the dictionary and read, “*wheat - an annual grass, native to South-*

*western Asia and the Mediterranean, some types of which are widely cultivated in temperate regions for their edible grains. Grains are harvested from the wheat plant, ground into flour and used to make bread, pasta, and other foods."*

"Where do you think the wheat came from?" asked Gramps.

"Australia?" ventured George.

"No, it was actually grown in South Africa and exported to Australia."

"Isn't that a bit daft, just to send it back here?" asked George.

Gramps laughed, "That it is but it's the way the economy of the globalised world works.

"

"After a whole long journey, similar to that of the puddings, the wheat had to be ground into flour. What does our dictionary say about flour? - a powder made by grinding the edible parts of cereal grains and used to make bread, cakes, or pastry and to thicken sauces."

"Jenny, did you use flour to thicken the caramel sauce?" asked Gramps.

"Sure did," was the reply.

"Amazing, isn't it?" said Gramps to the wide-eyed George.

"Another ingredient is breadcrumbs."

"Why breadcrumbs?"

"They help to bind the whole mixture together. When your Mum makes Frikkadels she uses eggs and breadcrumbs to hold the mince together."

"Salt. Our next ingredient is salt, - *a substance, usually in the form of small white crystals, with a sharp tangy taste that is used to season or preserve food. Salt consists mainly of sodium chloride and is abundant in sea water.*"

"Did the salt come from the sea?" asked George.

"Probably not," said Gramps, "There are big salt mines in Australia and the salt was most likely mined there."

"Now we have baking powder - what is baking powder?" Gramps consulted the dictionary again, "*baking powder - a mixture containing sodium bicarbonate, starch, and acids, used to make cakes and some light doughs rise. The acids react with bicarbonate of soda when liquid is added, releasing carbon dioxide that aerates the mixture.*"

"What does it do?" asked George.

"It is used to make the pudding rise, without it the pudding would be very stodgy and doughy."

"Then they added a spice, nutmeg - *an aromatic spice made by grinding or grating the large hard seed of a nutmeg tree.*"

"Where do nutmeg trees grow, Gramps?"

"They are native to the East Indies."

"So Australia would have had to import the nutmeg as well?" "Quite right."

"Ah, the next ingredient was locally available, suet - *a hard white fat found on the kidneys and loins of sheep and cattle, used in cooking and as a source of tallow.*"

"Oh Yecch!" exclaimed George.

"Sugar, brown sugar, is our next ingredient and this comes from sugar cane - *a tall tough-stemmed species of grass grown in warm regions throughout the world as a source of sugar, which is obtained from its sweet sap.*"

"Sugar itself is defined as - *a sweet-tasting substance, usually in the form of tiny hard white or brown grains, obtained commercially from sugar cane and sugar beets, and used to sweeten food and drinks. Different types of sugar, for example granulated sugar, brown*

*sugar, or icing sugar, are made at different processing levels."*

"Do they grow sugar in Australia?" enquired George.

"No, and my enquiries indicated that they import their sugar from? Why, South Africa, of all places."

"It really is a funny world we live in, Gramps."

"It sure is. Now we come to the ubiquitous grape."

"What does, ubiqhawwhatever mean?"

"We have a dictionary, let's look it up, *ubiquitous - existing everywhere: present everywhere at once, or seeming to be*. What I mean is that it is used in many things for many different purposes."

"Different types of grape are used for different purposes. This pudding uses three different kinds of grape which are dried and then used for baking and other purposes. The three we find in our pudding are; *sultanas - a small dried seedless white grape; raisins - a sweet grape that has been dried in the sun or by being processed with heat, usually to prevent spoiling and permit long-term storage; and currants - a small dark dried seedless grape originally from the Mediterranean, used in cookery*. These are also used in the fruit mince that Mum uses to make the mince pies."

"Where did they get these from Gramps?"

"The Australian wine industry has developed very well over the years and a by-product of the grape growing has been the development of their own dried fruit industry so these all came from their local market."

"Let's check out grapes in our dictionary, - *an edible green or purple berry with sweet juicy flesh that grows in bunches on a vine. It may be eaten fresh or used to make wine or grape juice. Raisins, sultanas, and currants are dried grapes*. Wow, see how things are interlinked, even in a dictionary?"

"Our next ingredient is almonds."

"I know where they come from; we have some of those trees in our orchard."

"We do indeed, but the tree originally comes from West Asia. Now what does our book of words say about almonds - *an edible, oval-shaped, brown-skinned nut that is widely used in cooking, particularly to flavour desserts, cakes, and biscuits?*"

"Almonds are also ground to a paste and used as the almond inner icing around the Christmas cake," said Mum.

"And do you remember Grandma's almond cookies," said Dad.

"Sure do. I wish she were with us today."

"She is in spirit, my son, you can be sure of that," said Harold ruffling George's hair.

"The next ingredient was one of Grandma's favourites," said Gramps, "She used to use it in many different recipes including her famous scone ring."

"Yummy," remembered George. *"Candied peel - sweetened, honeyed, candied, crystallized peel, skin or outer layer of something, especially a fruit or vegetable."*

"I suspect that the one they used in the pudding was fruit - rather than a vegetable," said Gramps.

"In addition to the candied peel they also used the juice and skins of lemons - *a yellow or, in some climates, green oval citrus fruit with a thick fragrant rind and sour juicy flesh.*"

"Then there are your favourites - glacé cherries. Cherries are defined as - *a common fruit tree or shrub that bears a small edible fruit in clusters with long thin stalks. Varieties include the sweet cherry, sour cherry, and Morello cherry.*"

"What does glacé mean?"

"Ah ha, our book of words says - *glazed with sugar solution: coated with a sugar solution that results in a glazed finish, such as glacé cherries.*"

"Would you believe it; the pudding also contains eggs?"

"Why?"

"First, how does our dictionary describe eggs - *the hard-shelled, oval, cream- or light-brown egg produced by a hen or similar fowl, used as food.* Why eggs? Remember the breadcrumbs and Frikkadels? Eggs are used both as a binding and as a rising agent. As a rising agent they perform much the same function as baking powder."

"Sort of like a double insurance?" queried George. "Exactly."

"Yet another ingredient is milk. Milk is defined as - *an opaque white fluid produced by mammals and used by human beings as a food and for other purposes. Milk, especially that produced by cows and goats, is widely used as a beverage, as a cooking ingredient, and to make other dairy products, for example butter, cheese, yogurt, and cream.*"

"Then last, but not least, of our ingredients is brandy. And guess what? Here we find, remember the word? The 'ubiquitous' grape again, for our book says, *brandy - a spirit that is distilled from the fermented juice of grapes or other fruit.*"

"Why do they put brandy in it, Gramps?"

"For two reasons, some say it enhances the flavour and also as a preservative, the alcohol in the brandy helps to preserve the pudding."

"There you have our pudding made by a thousand men - perhaps many thousand women and men. What do you think?"

"Thank you Gramps. It is fantastic to think that so many different people, who will never know each other, can work together in harmony for the same purpose - to give us a Christmas pudding."

"Well said, son," said Gramps. "It is such a wonderful lesson for us at this time of the year especially. We believe that there is one God and therefore all these people must come from him. All people, be they pink, yellow or green (howls of laughter from George) are all part of the One God. Your Hindu friends, your Jewish friends and your Moslem friends they are all part of the God. So what's the lesson here?"

"Gee Gramps - I guess that if we all worked together in harmony like the pudding makers what a wonderful world it would be - no more war and fighting anywhere," observed George.

"Thank you, Dad," said Jenny, squeezing Gramp's hand and smiling at him through the tears in her eyes.

