

Christmas in Sicily

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Maria lives with her Great-Grandparents, her Grandparents, her Parents and her brothers. Maria's family came here when Maria was eight. Maria is now in first grade and learning how to write and to read English. Today Maria's teacher wanted the class to write a letter to Santa and to ask the students to pick out another classmate to buy a present for - a secret Santa. Maria was so excited that she ran into the kitchen to tell her family about school. Both grandmas' were in the kitchen preparing supper. Maria gave each a hug.

"What's the matter bambina you look all red in the face?" her grandmother asked.

"My class and I wrote a letter to Santa" Maria explained.

"Who?" asked her grandmother.

"Santa, Nonna don't you know about him?" Maria asked.

"I heard about him bambina but in Sicily we don't write letters to Santa we write letters to our parents."

Maria looked from one to the other confused. "To our parents?" she asked. "Sit down - here mangiare" Nonna gave her a cookie. "Let me explain - When I was a little girl in Sicily around Christmas my friends and I would get together and write letters to our mamma and papa telling them how much we appreciate them and how much we love them. We're not taught to write letters or lists of what we want - that would be rude - but was most important was our appreciation of all that our parents did for us throughout the year and these letters would be read after our Christmas Eve dinner. All the children would stand around our parents and read our letters aloud in front of the family."

"Wow, I can't wait to tell how we do Christmas tomorrow at Show N Tell - what about the tree Nonna - when do we put up a tree? or don't we have one?" Maria asked reaching for another cookie.

Nonna looked at Maria and smiled. "Yes, Bambina we too have a tree, although it wasn't until I was expecting your momma that we had one."

"Momma, I remember having a tree when I was about two." Maria's mother said.

"Yes and if you ask you're brothers they would tell you we didn't have a tree until

the year I became pregnant with you.”
Maria’s grandmother explained.

“Before we had trees we would have the Nativity Scene to celebrate. It was during the Allied Occupation in 1943 that we began having trees and decorating them with candles, but we don’t put them up until the Feast of the Immaculate Conception” Maria’s great grandmother explained.

“When’s that Bisnonna?” asked Maria.

“Around December 8th” answered Maria’s Great-grandmother.

“And on Christmas we get our presents, right?” asked Maria excitedly.

“Well our tradition is a little different Maria” stated Nonna.

“How different?” asked Maria.

It was at this time that Maria’s great-grandfather came into the kitchen for his traditional espresso and a cookie.

“What are you women talking about? Is it a female conversation or can an old man get into it?”

Nonna served her husband his espresso and his cookie, gave him a kiss, and said, “of

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