

## Christmas Conversation

By Gail Grenier Sweet © 2003

We sit in “St. Somewhere” coffee shop in West Bend, where we meet when we miss each other too much. It’s a little too “wallpaper” for us, but it’ll do.

We used to meet down Main Street, at “Round the Clock,” where we always laughed at how they never cleaned the floor in the wee corner of the bathroom. We stopped going there after new owners took over and we lived a “Twilight Zone” episode there one day, customers shouting all around us.

So we sit, drinking our fancy coffees, now and then getting up to use the very clean bathroom.

The conversation is the same as ever, with tears and the laughter of the slightly off-kilter. Today, it’s our Christmas conversation.

She tells me about going to see her Aunt Cristal in France. She traveled there with two friends as they wandered Europe in the seventies.

“We were iconoclastic girls and we knew it all. We laughed at Aunt Cristal singing Christmas songs in her operatic voice. We laughed when she put a pound of butter on our toasts. We didn’t know why she treated us like queens.

“When I got home, I asked my Auntie Ann about it. My aunt explained that I was her link to Aunt Cristal, the relative she never met. The Nazis had imprisoned Aunt Cristal and her father and other Slovenians. When Aunt Cristal and her father got out of Dachau, they went to France. Her father died soon after. Auntie Ann sent Aunt Cristal \$20 every year, and still does.”

I tell her about my Pepere (Grandfather) Grenier, who had a rare blood type and donated his blood again and again because a sick lady in town needed it. After the lady recovered, she and her husband rode a bicycle out to thank Pepere. The man was white and his wife was black. Pepere didn’t care about color, yet they were an odd sight, the couple on the bike. Later, Pepere contracted a fatal bone marrow disease from giving blood too often.

Then we talk about the apron ladies, the applesauce ladies we miss — our grandmothers.

My friend isn’t a Christian. I am. It doesn’t matter. We drink our coffee, tell each other stories and make Christmas for each other.

The End

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