

FRIENDS MAKING COOKIES
IN HONOR OF MY FRIENDS BRANWEN, EILISH AND ENZO
(Oh! and Jen and Kathy too)
by Ruth Wood

Hey, they taste ok in my coffee, especially if I take out the peppermint. I'm speaking of the marshmallows with a peppermint stick pushed into the middle, dipped in melted chocolate chips, and rolled in broken peppermint and sprinkles. I may pass them out as Christmas Eve favors, but fear rejection on the 'avoid all that sugar' principle that some of my friends live by. Nevertheless, I may persist because what these less-than-delectable treats represent is not decadent, disgusting, cloying sweetness, but the joy of the friendships we seem to appreciate most during the holidays.

I don't have children, and most of the time that is no great loss, but I have always enjoyed the company of "little people" because they have so much to share in terms of unique perspectives and eagerness to participate in proposed adventures. They are indeed individuals and can engage you in the most interesting conversations— some serious, some nonsensical. Thus, even though I don't see them nearly often enough, I do have one special day every year with my friends Branwen, Eilish and Enzo. They bring their mom, Jen, and Kathy comes too just for the fun of it.

Not sure, but I think it was Jen's idea originally. We can't remember how long we've been doing it—likely more than 10 years, but we gather on a weekend day in December at my house to bake and decorate Christmas cookies. John flees the house to do trail work or go to Moore's, but he always finds a time during the day to come in, say hello, and see what chaos is happening. These days, I have to remind him and Kathy, that politics is an off-limits discussion during holiday celebrations.

When we first started it was a riotous day of first teaching the girls to roll out the dough without eating too much— that was before the dangers of raw flour were known, and then making up the milk and powdered sugar icing as the cookies baked. The tasks of getting the consistency right without using all the powdered sugar in the house and learning that you have to use the food coloring judiciously would occupy most of the cooking time. Branwen has an excellent sense of color, and seems to be able to concoct any shade she chooses. Eilish is a very patient and precise decorator, and her cookies could definitely be displayed at the state fair if they had a Christmas cookie category. Enzo— Oh! Enzo! As a baby, he entertained himself on the floor. Once beyond

toddling, he brought his own brand of decorating to the table. That means, he chose a cookie, saturated it and the surrounding table with green icing and poured a whole bottle of sprinkles over it. Or would have, but we usually noticed and grabbed the bottle before all the sprinkles escaped. Now, Enzo runs in, dons the singing Santa Claus hat, and periodically during the afternoon, jumps up and commences dancing. When they were his age, Eilish would sneak upstairs and jump on the bed, and Branwen would find John in his office and impress him with her knowledge and appreciation of swans and sandhill cranes and birds in general. I so enjoy the shared sideways glance and sly smile on Branwen's face sometimes as we note something amusing happening at the table.

In the early years, Jen, Kathy, and I were continuously engaged in supervising the chaos and keeping the activity moving so that we could be done and cleaned up by suppertime, or sometimes perhaps martial arts class time. There was the time one of the kids went out to start Jen's car, and while the car was turned on, it wasn't started. The battery almost drained completely, but after a brief rest, it started - whew!

Now, very little supervision is needed. So, Kathy, Jen, and I can sip a little Prosecco or perhaps mulled wine. And, always, always the day is filled with laughter and love.

