

# Crackers, Bushmills Whiskey and minced pies: An Irish-German Christmas

By Jules Zipp

In Northern Ireland in December, twinkling lights illuminate the dark nights and tantalizing smells waft through homes and in city markets. In a scenic landscape made famous by the *Game of Thrones* TV series, "Happy Christmas" echoes throughout the countryside. In the capital of Belfast, Christmas Markets bustle with Christmas cheer as shopkeepers in chalets sell homemade jewelry, arts and crafts. A predominantly Christian country, Christmas plays an im-

portant role in Irish life.

Hailing from the causeway coast of Northern Ireland, Jasper resident Barry Dunlop joyfully recalls Christmas celebrations in his hometown of Portballintrae in County Antrim. He says it was always a time of family, rest, food and drink. Every year, Dunlop continues to buy a childhood trinket online, now bringing the Irish custom to his Jasper home.

"We have Christmas crackers [cardboard cylinders wrapped in colorful paper] that are served with your meal on Christmas Day that you pull with the person on your right hand side. It lets off a little bang noise," Dunlop explains. "It has a toy and joke inside that you share at the table. You get a paper hat in the cracker that everyone at the table wears."

In 1997, Dunlop immigrated with a Green card to work in Chicago. He met Jasper native Brittany Becher in the windy city eight years ago. After living together in Colorado for two years and Cincinnati for six months, the couple moved to Jasper after their 2014 marriage. With Barry's dual citizenship and Brittany's German heritage, they celebrate the holidays by honoring both traditions with their 8-year old dog Preston.

"We try and do an Irish and German Christmas," Dunlop

says. "We put a tree up and a few other items but don't go crazy like what people do over here with tons of lights all over the outside of the house."

Two years ago, Brittany accompanied him to visit his Irish homeland for the holidays. Dunlop says Christmas lasts a lot longer in Ireland, with most people taking two weeks of vacation. He says this is because most Irish get four to eight weeks off work, plus bank holidays. Dunlop laments that celebrating Christmas in America seems rushed. While he considers Jasper home, he especially misses family and friends during the holidays. His twin brother Paul still lives in Ireland.

"It was harder years ago at Christmas time but much easier with cell phones, Skype, FaceTime etc.," Dunlop notes. "It is great though to be living in Jasper during the holidays and Brittany being from here and her family all live here."

Dunlop daily bakes many

European delicacies as co-owner of Brew in Jasper. As a chef, he brings the spirit of Ireland into the holidays with family favorites like minced pie.

"Minced pies are a big thing at Christmas for dessert," Dunlop says. "I also like to make turkey as it's a tradition I grew up with."

In his home county of Antrim, the oldest working dis-



tillery in Ireland makes Bushmills Whiskey, another holiday staple in Dunlop's family. He continues to toast with the Irish whiskey each December. Mulled wine is another traditional Christmastime drink served in Ireland and many other parts of Europe.

As part of the United Kingdom with Great Britain, nearly all families in Northern Ireland gather around the telly on December 25 to hear the Queen's Christmas message. Queen Elizabeth II has performed the yearly review since 1952, now broadcast in the U.K. and all 52 member countries of the Commonwealth. Throughout most of Europe, festivities don't end on Christmas Day. Many countries, including Ireland, continue the celebrations on December 26 to honor the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen.

"The day after Christmas is another big day called Boxing Day. In the old days, the rich would box up leftovers and give to the poor, so you get the name Boxing Day," Dunlop said. "It's another day of eating and drinking a lot."

"Nollaig Shona Daoibh," or "Happy Christmas" in Irish Gaelic.

May you be blessed with a healthy, happy

**Merry Christmas**



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