

## **The Proof is in the Pudding: Sarah Cowper**

We have a family tradition that has been going on for generations. It's a story about the Christmas Plum Pudding. Memories past of sitting at Christmas lunch (later to be Christmas dinner as the children grew older), with my grandfather coughing up a very shiny 20 pence shilling from his bite of the plum pudding. We kids would all scream with laughter, as if it was the first time we had seen this performance, and begged to be the one to receive the money – often quickly spent at the corner shop on sugary lollies the next day. My grandfather had many shillings, or five pence pieces, in that plum pudding, enough for all the greedy grandchildren hovering around him while he tried to his dessert, lovingly made my grandmother.

This tradition was passed down to my mother. Several months prior to Christmas Day, she would start preparing the pudding. Her old brown coloured and stained recipe book surfaced for the occasion. She loved the whole process of buying the ingredients and systematically preparing and cooking each step. This was a delight to watch as a child. It took her days to complete the final process. Once this had been reached, she placed the plum pudding in cloth and then in a tin container which then sat in the fridge until the next 'performance' on Christmas Day.

However, an added element was introduced into the family production of the pudding. All the lights were turned off. Hushed chatter ensued amongst the wide-eyed children as a boiled pan of brandy was brought to the table. Dad had the match ready to be struck and as Mum poured the boiling brandy over the hot plum pudding, Dad lit the brandy and to screams of delight the plum pudding was alight with flames.

This production has been inherited by yet another generation and every Christmas Day, the tradition of the pouring of brandy over the plum pudding is now recorded on video. We are creating our own different production of a lifetime event and often re-watch the performances. Occasionally tablecloths have been scorched from the wandering flames, or failed attempts of non-burning puddings, but in the end it is the power of a tradition long held by those we love and loved.