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**Throughout the holiday season I hum a lot of carols.** When I'm walking, I tend to favor all the faster paced songs. They keep me moving on a cold day. So if you happen to see me on my walk around Pleasant Lake, there is a good chance that *Deck the Halls*, *Jingle Bells* or *The Twelve Days of Christmas* is running through my head.



When I was small, I think I was a bit envious of anyone who celebrated Christmas for twelve whole days. Although Santa was always quite generous, the idea of days and days of gifts, not to mention a true love, was certainly intriguing. That said; I must have assumed that my twelve days would be filled with Barbies, books and maybe a sweater or teddy bear. A cavalcade of livestock, leaping lords and dancing ladies were definitely not on my list to Santa.

Sure Mrs. Ferguson taught ball room dancing to most of the kids in town but pipe and drum corps marched in parades, not the living room. Although a small minority preferred cats, almost everyone in the neighborhood had a dog or two. Along with our two family dogs, my brother John was the proud owner of three turtles but no turtle doves. I'm guessing a few kids kept a gold fish or maybe a parakeet or canary. But French chickens or flocks of geese? Herds of cows and maids to milk them? Definitely not.

**In the spirit of the twelve days of Christmas, here are twelve gifts I wish for you for the holiday season and beyond.**

1. Good health.
2. A good laugh.
3. Peace of mind and peace in your heart.
4. Lots of reasons to smile and a smile for no reason at all.
5. Curiosity.
6. Creativity.
7. Courage.
8. Knowledge.
9. Wisdom.
10. Wonder.
11. Wanderlust and an open return ticket home.
12. Friends you love you like family and a family you love like friends.



My list is in no particular order and far from complete. What about you? What would yours look like?

Wishing you a joy-filled holiday and bon appétit!

*Susan*

## Baked French Toast

*A sweet and hearty breakfast treat for young and old! Prep the casserole in advance and pop it in the oven while you open your stockings. Enjoy!*



Serves 6-8

3/4 cup raisins, currents or dried cranberries  
 About 1/2 cup orange juice  
 3/4 - 1 loaf country-style bread, cut in cubes  
 1/4 cup brown sugar  
 1 teaspoon cinnamon  
 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg  
 8 eggs  
 3/4 cups whole milk  
 3/4 cups half and half  
 1/4 cup maple syrup  
 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract

### Topping

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter  
 1/2 cup brown sugar  
 1/2 cup maple syrup  
 1 cup chopped pecans or walnuts

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Generously butter a 13 x 9 inch casserole dish.

Put the raisins in a small, microwave safe bowl and add enough orange juice to cover. Loosely cover the bowl and zap the raisins in the microwave on high for one minute. Let the raisins sit, covered, for 30 minutes to plump.

Spread the bread cubes on a rimmed baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees for about 10 minutes. Cool the bread to room temperature.

In a large bowl whisk together the brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg. Whisk in the eggs and maple syrup. Add the milk and half and half and whisk until well combined.

Place the bread cubes in the prepared casserole dish. Sprinkle the raisins and drizzle the soaking liquid in and around the bread cubes. Gently pour the egg mixture over the bread and raisins. Cover with plastic wrap and let soak overnight in the refrigerator.

In the morning: remove the casserole from the refrigerator and preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Make the topping: melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the brown sugar and maple syrup and cook for 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in the nuts.

Spoon the topping evenly over the bread and bake until the casserole is set, puffed and golden, 45-55 minutes. Remove from the oven and let sit for 10 minutes before serving.