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# ...West of 98

(Continued from page 3) I have spent a lot of words in 2023 talking about the community. importance of Funerals can be inconvenient, but they are a powerful expression of community. I have sat in a church with a sea of people and I have stood at a graveside in the bitter cold with only a dozen others. Each time, it serves as a special reminder of what community truly meansa group of people not merely living near one another, but doing life together and being present for one another, through the ups and downs of life, standing alongside when it is needed the most.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and the Rural Church and State and West of 98 podcasts. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to him wherever podcasts are found.

### Revisiting the Neiman Marcus Chocolate Chip Cookie

By Sarah Thurmond On Christmas mornings, once the flurry of opening presents dies down, my mom always brings out the cookie tray. Gobbling treats while cleaning up wrapping paper has long been a family tradition. There are sugar cookies, butter cookies, sprinkled cookies, frosted cookies, powdered cookies, frosted cookies, powdered cookies myou get the idea. But no cookie tray is ever complete without Neiman Marcus chocolate chip cookies.

The ones my mom gets are packaged in a 17.6-ounce redand-gold tin canister and sold for around \$30 at the Dallas-based department store's 36 locations during the holiday season. She recalls first seeing them in the store's annual holiday catalog and thinking it would be nice to buy an item from the posh catalog. You know the one—it features outrageously expensive gifts only the 1% can afford, like a walk-on role in an American



Ballet Theater performance for \$195,000 (yes, that's an actual gift in this year's catalog). As far as store-bought cookies go, the Neiman Marcus ones are like a Goldilocks chocolate chip cookie: They're the right size and have the right amount of crunch and chocolate chips in every bite to satisfy any chocolate chip cookie craving. And you get a nice tin.

For decades, the Dallas-based retailer's cookies have persisted as a holiday staple for many Texas families, much like mine. In fact, I always thought these were the chocolate chip cookies that everyone talked about. But I recently learned the packaged cookies sold between Thanksgiving and Christmas are not the famous Neiman Marcus cookies. Those would be the large freshly baked ones sold at Neiman Marcus' in-store restaurants and bars. Sometime during the last century, a rumor started going round that you could buy the recipe for these cookies. The price? \$250. It turns out this mythical story is what really put the cookies on the map.

Neiman Marcus was founded in 1907 by Herbert Marcus, Sr.;

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his sister, Carrie Marcus Neiman; and her husband A.L. Neiman with a mission to provide quality fashion and service for Dallasites. After a fire burned down the first location, the store moved to the corner of Main and Ervay in 1914, where its flagship location at 1618 Main St. remains and, presumably, where the urban legend was born.

The department store thinks the rumor dates back to the 1930s, but it really gained traction in the '80s. According to lore, a wealthy woman from Beverly Hills was shopping at the Dallas store with her daughter. After purchasing a scarf for \$20, they decided to lunch at the Neiman Marcus Café. They had a salad, then capped off the meal with a chocolate chip cookie. The woman loved it so much, she asked for the recipe. They wouldn't give it to her, so she inquired if she could buy the recipe. "Just two fifty" was the response. Put it on my tab, she said. When she got her credit card statement, she was stunned to see she was charged \$250 for

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