

Welcome to...

The Country Register of Kansas

Cindy Baldwin, Publisher/Editor
 988 9th Ave • McPherson, KS 67460
 phone: 866-966-9815 • fax: 620-241-1909
 email: countryregisterkansas@gmail.com

www.countryregister.com/kansas

We're on Facebook

Office Administrative Assistant: **Lonnie Capps**
 Advertising Sales Representative: **Beve Anderson**, South Central
 316-258-3416 • iloveantiquesme@yahoo.com

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USA

- Arizona: Barb Stillman and Lolly Konecky, 515 E Carefree Hwy, #1128, Phoenix, AZ, 85085, 602-942-8950
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From My Desk... to yours

By Cindy Baldwin

Unbelievably this issue of The Country Register of Kansas is bringing us to the end of 2022 and the start of 2023. It really seems that the year just started a few weeks ago -- and here it's coming to a close.

We have just finished a month of intentional gratitude at our church, during which we were invited to spend at least five minutes each day reflecting on something for which we were grateful. I found being focused on gratitude -- rather than dwelling on things that made me unhappy -- was very enlightening. I have so much to be grateful for -- especially when I consider what people living in many other parts of the world endure every day. Indeed, what some of the residents of my own county have to deal with every day. I'm concerned that my freezer isn't defrosting as it should making more work for me. There are people living within a few miles of me who aren't sure how they will pay their utility bills as cold weather approaches. There are people in a number of places around the world who watch as bombs explode around their homes and wonder if their building will be the next one hit. As a friend of mine said the other day, "we have first-world problems."

Many of the articles in this issue focus on similar ideas of appreciating the moments, the people and the activities that give us comfort and meaning in our lives. Noticing the many seemingly small moments and interactions that bring meaning and blessings. While we think of Christmas as a joyous time, it can also be a time of loneliness and sadness for those who have suffered loss in an area of their lives.

As we enter into the Advent season and the beginning of a new year, we would do well to remember that no matter what difficulties we may be facing, we are not the only ones who have had struggles -- and survived -- and there are many who are in more difficult situations than we in America can even imagine. For the people who love and care for us and communities in which we live, we should be grateful.

On a lighter note, many of you who read this column may remember that my husband began a sheep project last Christmas. Part of our Christmas present to our grandchildren was a gift of two lambs for each child, which we have kept here at our farm. Each child picked out two lambs and any offspring will belong to them. A ram was bought and put in with the sheep and, after much anticipation, the first lamb was born to grandson Banks' ewe in mid-November. There was great excitement as the grandkids waited to see who would give birth next. We're still waiting. Even though there is little doubt there are more pregnant sheep out there, they are on their own timeline. Maybe they're waiting to provide baby lambs for nativity scenes? Hopefully, by the time I write my next column there will be more lambs on the ground to report.

As you finish up your holiday shopping, remember to support your locally owned businesses. The Christmas season is their harvest time, which can determine whether they will have a successful year. The owners -- who are your neighbors -- will appreciate your business.

My hope is that you will have a blessed holiday season and a New Year filled with much anticipation and hope. Until next time -- Cindy

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On Our Cover...

The beauty of the Christmas season is reflected all around us!

Every effort is made to have an error-free paper, however, mistakes do occur. Please double check dates, times, and locations with a phone call before traveling a great distance.

The Country Register of Kansas Vol. 24 No. 3, Dec. 2022/Jan. '23

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Where is The Country Register available?

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- Most Lawrence grocery stores • Other various locations
- Online www.countryregister.com/kansas

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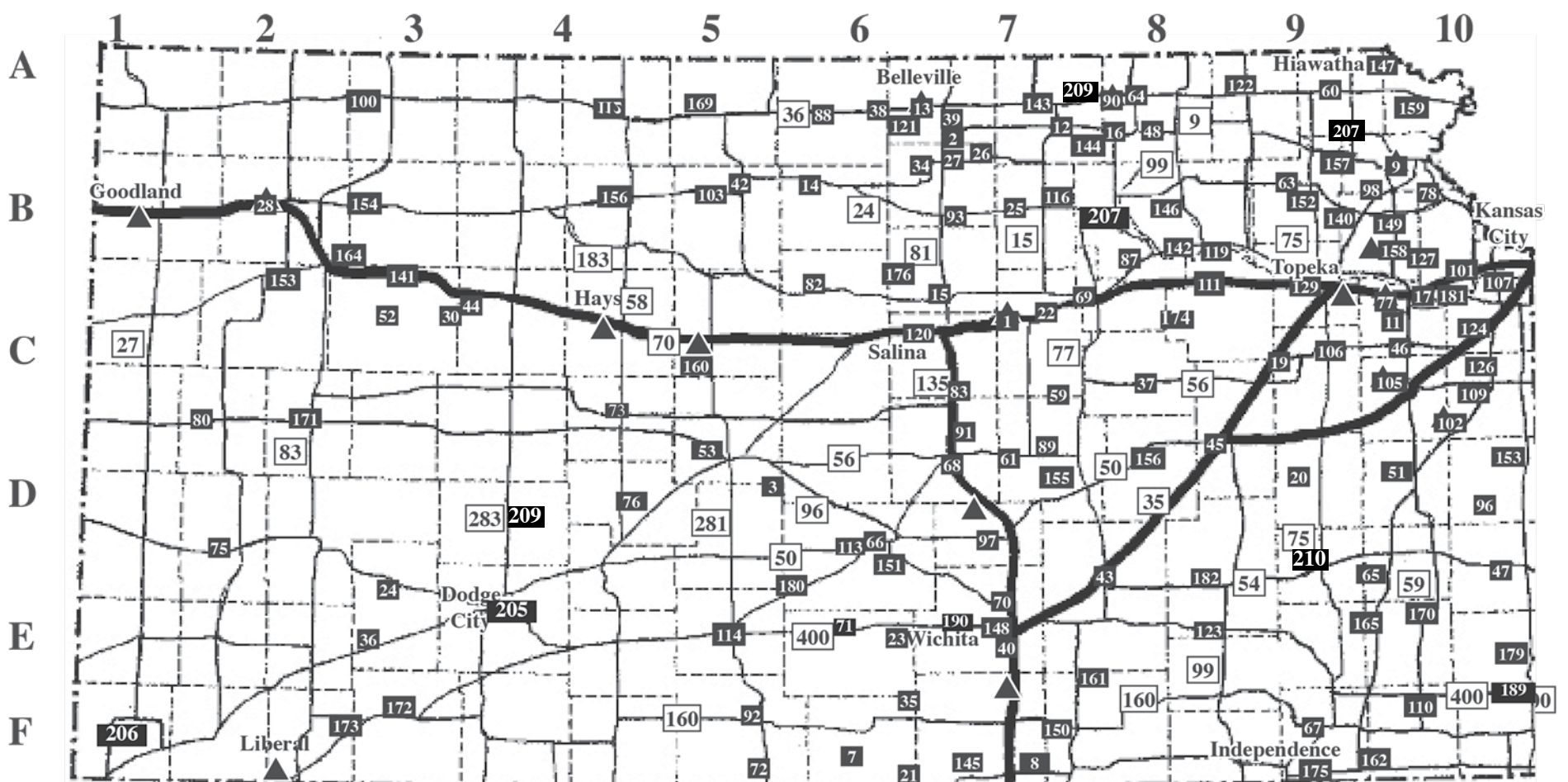
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Ad deadline for the FEB/MARCH 2023 issue is Jan. 9!
IF YOU MISS THE DEADLINE, CONTACT US AND WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO SQUEEZE YOU IN!



Map Index:

- # City numbers = white number in black box
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Gift Certificate Entry Form

Ann's Lovin' Ewe ...

By Ann Stewart

The gift that keeps on giving

One December my daughter Christine received an unusual Christmas present she didn't know what to do with. If I told you the gift was a hand-embroidered tea towel framed in an embroidery hoop, you might think that sounded sweet and that somebody put a lot of work into it. You might even question Christine's judgement and appreciation for the handiwork.

But if you saw the pattern, you'd wonder who originated the design, and who put the time into embroidering it. And why had someone found and rescued the antique towel, appliqued over the holes, and then framed the "art."

The real problem was the design. The former tea towel featured a lady wearing a dress pushing a vacuum cleaner with little appliqued potted flowers nearby to cover the worn fabric. That wasn't all: the woman had a tomato for a head. That part was downright frightening.



I don't know if tomato-headed vacuuming women were a popular vintage look in their day, but it wasn't something my twenty-something daughter planned to hang in her apartment. Oh, what to do with that gift?

Then I remembered a long-forgotten joke I'd always wanted to "give."

Christine's cousin Emily had just married and moved into her new home in a new state. Perhaps she needed a homemade wedding gift for her home decor. An additional wedding gift. And perhaps the gift card would be slightly smudged so that she didn't recognize the giver. Perhaps the mystery would amuse and befuddle the young couple. And perhaps it could be mailed from an unfamiliar state.

My friend Barb was driving to Texas at Christmas, so the timing was perfect for a postmark from an unfamiliar location. Barb wrapped the package, wrote a cheery Christmas greeting, smudged a signature, posted the envelope and sent it from Texas. Emily and Jim would have to wonder who would EVER give a gift like that. And how did the giver know their new address? The card read:

Merry Christmas dear ones, Sorry I couldn't get this mailed sooner. Blessings, and ho-ho-ho.

The signature was illegible.

It took months before the subject was ever broached. But when Emily finally acknowledged receiving a gift so questionable her husband Jim said it had to remain hidden in the closet until they figured out who sent it, we finally fessed up. Jim had felt the gift was creepy. Who would take the time to embroider something so odd? The "ho, ho, ho" and "loved ones" troubled him greatly. And who knew their address? He was happy and relieved to learn it was a joke.

Needless to say, they didn't want to keep it, so we happily took it back, ready to re-gift the white elephant. After all, there was another upcoming cousin's wedding and Barb was once again driving to Texas and could post the package.

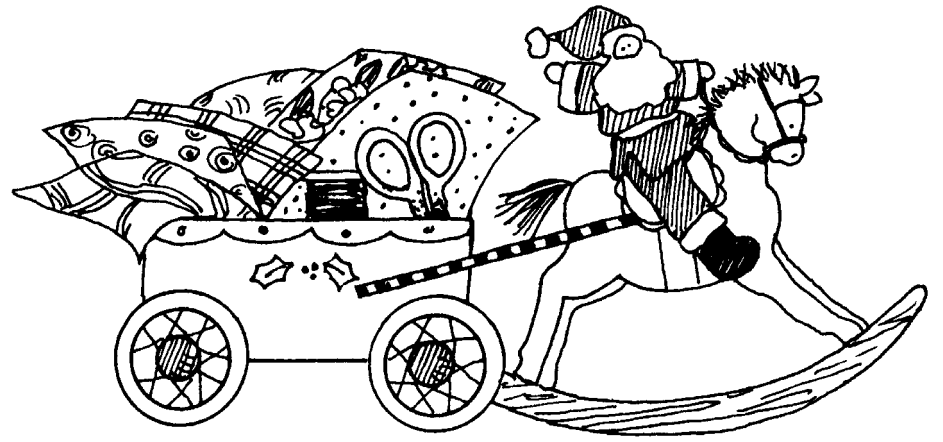
The next couple's spring wedding was lovely, and after the bride and groom went on their honeymoon, Operation Tomato Head went into effect. This time it didn't take months before inquiry. Just days after the bride and groom returned from the Maldives, Kenzie the bride immediately brought the gift to her mother-in-law for investigation. The name was smudged. It was sent from Texas. Could anyone identify the giver?

When no one fessed up, the "gift" was tucked away until it mysteriously reappeared at a housewarming for Lena, another cousin. She exclaimed, "Ooooooh! Who is this from?" looking around the gathering of family gift givers, including the two brides. Nobody in her festive circle of family and friends fessed up, curious themselves who would donate such a decoration. "It could go in my laundry area," she proposed with great tact. At last, we told the entire story with both brides now in the know about the tomato head.

And now, the tomato head vacuum lady hangs in the laundry area of Lena's new home, awaiting another gifting to the entertainment of all. Maybe a white elephant gift exchange, bridal shower, or housewarming. After all, it is homemade and it's in the spirit of giving and re-gifting. Look out.

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The PERFECT gift for Christmas? Ann's newest book ALL IS CALM, ALL IS BRIGHT for the Heart of Christmas, will inspire readers throughout the month of December. Support your Lovin' Ewe author and make them your gift of choice this holiday season.



AND THE WINNER IS

December/January 2022-2023 Gift Certificate Winner

Our lucky winner of the \$50 Gift Certificate to an advertising shop of their choice is Doris Bruce from Hutchinson, Kansas. Doris likes to do her shopping at Stitches Quilt shop in McPherson, just a short drive away, where, Doris says, owner Janet Yowell "is so helpful with picking out fabrics that go together or help with problems while piecing."

We hope you enjoy your drive and your time shopping this holiday season and thank you for the wonderful feedback for *The Kansas Country Register*. Doris commented, "Good job on diversity, I'm always looking for patterns that can be used for needle-turn or embroidery, or quilt blocks. Keep up the good work."

Take a Break and Go Shopping WIN A \$50 GIFT CERTIFICATE

In this issue of *The Country Register*, we will give away a \$50 gift certificate. Use your gift certificate to go shopping at your favorite *Country Register* advertiser. The winners will be announced in the next issue. Deadline for entry is JANUARY 15, 2023. (Names are not sold, given away or used for any other purpose.)

Drawing Entry Form

Name _____ Phone _____

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If I win, I would like my \$50 Gift Certificate from: (list a current advertiser from this paper)

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2 Minute Lift: Two Minute Reads to Flip Our Script
By Kathy J. Sotak

Please invite me to your potluck

A common theme where I live is “I’m hosting a party, come on over. But don’t bring anything.”

Please don’t rob me of the joy of contributing. I’ve grown a collection of salivating recipes, just like you. Let’s share. There’s my German chocolate cake with broiled coconut frosting, a show-stopper from my random Midwest church cookbook. Or maybe I’ll bring my Quinoa-Tex-Mex Salad, a healthier party favorite from my Minnesota friend Jean. If I’m in the mood, I’ll create my crudité platter. If it’s the right time of day, I’ll bring a platter of scones. Have you eaten my scones? I love baking scones for you.

The potluck is the way to go because the food tastes better. It tastes better because everyone brings their best. The conversation is better, because there is a story to every dish. There’s more love in the air because social fabric is woven.

The word “potluck” should be the top result on our Google search for:

- How to build friendship
- How to host an easy party
- How to solve the mental health crisis

The last bullet above is the most important. Potlucks are an integral part of the social fabric of community living. Everyone, grab a plate. You are welcome here.

Growing up in rural America, I have been to more potlucks than I can remember. At the time I hated them, because I was shy, awkward and a general misfit. We had potlucks after church. We had them at the fire hall. At the Legion Hall. We had them at school events. We had them for fundraisers. We would have them at the park. Potlucks -- everywhere.

Little did I know, that the potluck kept our community heart strong. It held the door open to all, and it gave people an excuse to gather together. Was everyone friends? No, not at all. But everyone, and I mean everyone, came together for mealtime. Potlucks are written in the unspoken rules for building community.

The potluck from my childhood had four sections:

Relish Trays: Relish trays included home-grown and canned pickle relish, pickled beets, pickles and olives – always served on crystal relish trays.

Salads: No, there isn’t much lettuce here. Salads in the 1980s-‘90s were typically a concoction of canned fruit, cool whip and perhaps cut up snickers or fudge striped cookies. Oh -- and don’t forget the mini-marshmallows.

Hotdishes: Not to be confused with casseroles (yes, they are the same thing... only we preferred the name hotdish.) The farm wives NAILED the hotdish section. Imagine macaroni noodles, beef and sauce. It could be a Campbell’s Cream of Mushroom sauce, a tomato marinara type or a cheese variety. You’ll always find one that you’ll love.

Dessert: Finally, the dessert section; always the biggest section. One hundred percent of the time you will find rice crispy treats with chocolate-peanut butter frosting. I’ve kept track.

When was the last potluck you’ve experienced? What did you make? What was the tastiest dish that you ate? What was the most memorable part of the conversation? I bet you remember. I certainly do.

Are you feeling a little blue? Host a potluck. Are you stressed? Host a potluck. Finally, do you feel the need to celebrate? You know what to do!

For more of Kathy’s work go to www.2MinuteLift.com

The Artificial Tree

By Nancy J. Nash

On a marble-topped table near the bay window of her living room, my widowed grandmother displayed her house plants. I suspect that this stately and practical table came from the elderly man who owned the house before my grandparents. They were too poor to afford a house, but he gave them his in exchange for their taking care of him as his health declined.

Sometime during Advent, my grandmother would move the plants and replace them with a small spruce or balsam. Presents would mysteriously appear underneath. But one year, she supplanted the fragrant greenery with a tree that was less costly and easier to maintain. Realizing that she was aging, her son had thoughtfully brought her an artificial tree that could be displayed year after year during the Christmas season.

But as she grew older, so did the tree, and eventually, it fell apart. Years of use had taken their toll. Grandma declared that she would not have a tree that Christmas. It was too much work. She told us she just did not have the energy to set it up and decorate it.

One day, shopping in a nearby city, I happened to walk into a Salvation Army store and spotted a very small artificial tree. It was slightly worn but still quite lovely, with red bows and tiny packages affixed to its branches. I don’t remember the cost, but it could not have been more than a couple dollars. It did not require decorating and could easily be placed on the table in the bay window.

I purchased it and presented it to my grandmother, whose face lit up in joy and gratitude. The tree may have been artificial, but the love between us was real. As it turned out, she passed away the next February. The tree became mine.

Each December, the little tree finds its way to a table in my home. In October, a Christmas cactus finds its way from the porch where it spends its summers to a wooden stand indoors. The cactus was given to my grandmother in the 1920s when she and my grandfather first moved into the house with the marble-topped table in the bay window. During the Christmas season, the cactus diligently blooms. The tree and the cactus sit near each other, reminding me that I will see my grandmother again.

© 2022 Nancy Nash of Amherst, MA. She has a B.A. in English composition from Mount Holyoke College and an M.F.A. in Writing for Children from Simmons College, with two books listed on Amazon.com (Mama’s Books: An Oregon Trail Story and Little Rooster’s Christmas Eve).



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CHRISTMAS GIFTS

A poem from Yvonne’s new book,
A Stitch in Rhyme

*The kids nowadays at Christmas
usually rake in quite a haul;
it seems however long the list,
that Santa brings it all.*

*Then parents help ol’ Santa out,
and sometimes search in vain
for G-I Joe, a special doll,
or fine electric train.*

*Then here comes Christmas morning;
it is almost like a sin,
because gifts that children like the most
are “boxes” they come in.*

Order A *Stitch in Rhyme* at www.yvonnehollenbeck.com!

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Yvonne Hollenbeck, from Clearfield, SD, performs her original poetry throughout the United States, captivating audiences in her wake. She is one of the most published cowgirl poets in the West and is not only a popular banquet and civic entertainer, but also co-writes songs with many western entertainers. Yvonne also pens a weekly column in the “Farmer-Rancher Exchange” and writes articles about life in rural America in various publications throughout the West. For more information, visit <https://www.yvonnehollenbeck.com>

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Collector's Corner

The value of nostalgia

by Jim Olson

There are many factors that influence collector market trends. Typically, things that are rare, scarce, or of exceptionally high quality tend to be more desirable with serious collectors. But, when it comes to what people are after at the moment, one of the main factors to look at is nostalgia. It influences collectors greatly, especially during the beginning stages of a collection. It is usually how people decide what they are going to start with.

Nos-tal-gia—*noun*: a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. Example: "I was overcome with acute nostalgia for my childhood days."

Let's take a look at the collector car world. A couple of generations ago, cars and trucks from the 1940s and '50s were "the thing." Before that, it was 1930s roadsters and 1920s touring cars being bought to fix up. Today, however, it is predominantly vehicles from the late 1960s and '70s that are popular with car collectors. Why is that, you may ask?

Today's car collectors who are in the building or buying mode with their collections are typically folks in their 40s through early 60s and they are buying up what was "cool" to them when they were kids.

Nostalgia.

They are on the hunt for cars they saw drive by when they were riding around on their bicycles and thought, "That's cool. Someday I'll have a car like that!"

As each generation comes of age, they like to look back at things familiar from their childhood, and typically, it is middle-aged persons who are starting collections. They have made a little money, raised the kids, and now they have a bit more time and money for themselves than they did when they were younger adults.

On the other hand, the guys who typically thought the 1940s and '50s vehicles were the ones to have, are now a bit older and are in the selling or downsizing phase of their collections -- not the buying mode.

The people who used to look for and fix up Model Ts and such have pretty much disappeared due to attrition. This is not a hard and fast rule, but it applies more often than not.

Military collectibles are another example. It seems like the further away we get from a point in history, the less interest there is in collecting it. Many years ago, Revolutionary War Era stuff brought big bucks! Then it was Civil War items. But now, items from WWII and later seem to be more popular with collectors. Consequently, the overall resale value on the "common grade" earlier stuff is not what it used to be.

This is also one of the main reasons the antique market can be tough. There used to be buyers everywhere looking for old stuff. At the very least, any old thing would sell as decor, while the better stuff was being bought up and put into the higher-end collections. But now, only hard-core antique collectors are still buying, and with so many choices, they mainly go after only the best stuff. This means the run-of-the-mill (common) antiques are harder to find a home for. You see, there is not a nostalgic connection with most of today's home buyers for antique furniture or knick-knacks to decorate their shelves — so the market has waned.

"God! what would I forfeit to have the days of my childhood restored or to be able to forget them forever!" Charles Dickens.

Nostalgia stems from the idea that a simpler time from the past was better. And, as we all know, people tend to dislike change. But, like the old saying goes, "Change, death and taxes are about the only certainties in this ol' world." It doesn't matter much, however, that nostalgia still pulls at people's heart strings when it comes to collecting. It

is a driving force.

If you are a dealer of collectibles, knowing what rings nostalgic with the buying crowd currently is very important (so you know what to stock). But, as we saw in examples above, that can (and does) change over time as people go through the various stages of building, upgrading and eventually liquidating a collection. So, staying up on the trends is important.

If you are a collector, nostalgia helps determine what it is you might want to collect. At least in the beginning. Just remember that rarity and condition come into play at some point as well (important monetary components). But for most of us, it is still more fun to look at a collection of items that reminds us of pleasant memories.

You name it -- somebody collects it. From ephemera, Americana, early computers and computer games, cars, comics -- the list goes on and on. There is no shortage of things to collect, and it is ever changing. So, if you are wondering what the next "big thing" might be, maybe try looking for what is likely to be nostalgic to the next generation of collectors.

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A special Christmas gift from Uncle Merle

By Gayle Cranford

Being the first grandchild on both sides of my family, I was spoiled by grandparents, aunts and uncles. One aunt was only five years older than I, and we actually played together as children. Merle was a shade older than she.

He doted on me, giving me gifts that encouraged my creative side and lovingly teased me constantly. His nickname for me was to reverse my first and middle names, calling me "Annie Gayle." Of course, he was my very favorite indulgent uncle.

I grew up in a musical family that had organized a blue grass band that played for square dances and local radio stations. Merle played a dobro, what we kids used to call a Hawaiian guitar. The whole family encouraged my taking piano lessons, but Uncle Merle's encouragement meant the most to me. He occasionally bribed me to play the piano for him with coins, but I would have gladly done it without the monetary enticement.

I began taking piano lessons when I was nine years old. About three years into taking lessons, Uncle Merle asked me, jokingly, I believe, to learn "The Flight of the Bumble Bee." He promised a five-dollar bill if I would master that piece. If he was teasing me, I didn't know and considered his bribe.

That Christmas, my parents bought me a two-wheeler bicycle that was complete with saddle bags on the back rack. Inside one saddle bag was the sheet music for "The Flight of the Bumble Bee." Imagine the surprise of receiving that sheet music!! I got the message and was encouraged to learn it with the help of my piano teacher, Leo O'Brian.

Memory prevents me from remembering just how long it took me to learn it, but learn it I did...much to the surprise and amazement of my piano teacher and, most of all, my Uncle Merle.

He paid the promised five dollars, which was a lot of money in the mid-1940s.

About that time, my mother (who was a pianist) was asked to perform a piece at a local Protected Home Circle family get-together. She was encouraged to ask me to perform as well and for both of us to have encores prepared.

That PHC meeting was held in the large, second-floor ball room and the attendees were seated mostly along the walls opposite the piano. Mom played her piece and encore. Then, it was my turn, and I was very nervous.

My first piece was an appropriate piece for a beginner to play, Minuet in G by Ignacy Jan Paderewski, a simple but lovely piano piece. Polite applause followed, and I bowed and sat down again to play my encore, "The Flight of the Bumble Bee," which totally took the audience by surprise. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that many of the attendees were straining to watch my young fingers accomplish that difficult piece.

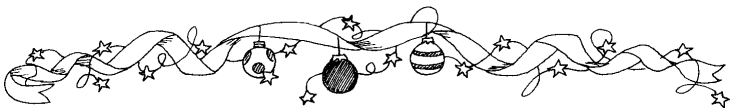
Thanks to Uncle Merle and his bribe, I had persevered to learn it.

Many years later, then widowed, after having had 50 years of marriage, I received a very surprising phone call from Uncle Merle and Aunt Doris, his wife, from New Mexico where they had lived for many years, raising their six children.

Uncle Merle got on the phone and asked me if I still played "The Flight of the Bumble Bee." When I answered that I hadn't even played the piano for years, he, laughing, remarked that my learning that piece had cost him twenty dollars!!!

In his mind, the five-dollar value through all those years was the equivalent to the current twenty dollars. And, in his growing dementia, he had truly remembered our deal from so long ago.

-Gayle writes from her home in Florida, where she lives with her daughter. At the age of 87, she is often referred to as "the energizer bunny." She enjoys writing letters to the editor and spending time with her daughter and granddaughter.



Shop News...

Sew What Quilt Shop owners retiring

MARION -- Paula Perry and Jan Meisinger, co-owners of Sew What Quilt Shop in Marion have announced their retirement and will be closing the Marion shop on Dec. 31. Paula and Jan opened the shop along with Paula's sister, Carol Riggs, in May 2010 in a small shop on west Main Street in Marion. The shop is now located at 329 E. Main. Carol retired in 2020.

The shop has hosted a very active Quilts of Valor group, which meets monthly and has pieced, quilted and given away many quilts to area veterans and a regional group in Wichita. The shop has always stocked fabric suitable for Quilts of Valor.

"I have no idea how many quilts we have contributed to Quilts of Valor over the years," Paula said. "It's been a focus of the shop since we opened. We are hoping to be able to keep meeting."

She said they hope to use a community meeting space in the future.

The shop is currently having a retirement sale with significant markdowns of everything in the shop.

We wish Paula and Jan all the best as they move on to their next chapter.

First City Quilts Announces Changes

LEAVENWORTH -- First City Quilt Shop in Leavenworth has announced that they will be transitioning from a store front to an online store. Co-owner Maria McKenzie shared this announcement released in the shop's November newsletter.

"We wanted to take a moment to thank you all for your support and loyalty through the years. It is with heavy hearts that we have decided to close our brick and mortar store and continue in an online only capacity. The declining economy and family responsibilities have both been factors (in this decision)."

The shop, located at 514B Delaware St., is currently open on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. for an inventory reduction sale. Maria said that how long they will continue to have Saturday hours depends on inventory remaining. She encourages shoppers to call or text 913-297-8175 to confirm if the sale floor is open or email info@firstcityquilts.com.

Their website is currently under construction and they will continue to maintain a webstore at www.firstcityquilts.com where shopping will be available 24/7 beginning in December. Please check the calendar for dates and times of remaining 2022 events. Gift cards can be redeemed in the shop or by emailing your order.

"We treasure all of the friends we have made and all the joys and sorrow shared through the years. As the end of this season of our lives is bittersweet, we know we are being called into a new season to care for others and share our talents in new and purposeful ways. We sincerely appreciate each and every one of you and wish everyone blessed and healthy days to come." -- Maria and Connie



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Everything it's crocked up to be!

By Colleen Gust - *The Country Register of Manitoba & Saskatchewan*

I once heard someone complain about using a crock pot, because they needed to get up at 4 a.m. to start it for a meal that cooks on low for 14 hours, and they didn't think it was a time-saving device. I have no idea what they were cooking, but I love my crock pot. In this edition, the focus is on suitable recipes for prep the night before, so that all you need to do is plop in the ceramic insert and turn on the slow cooker before leaving for work.

Did you know that the words slow cooker and crock pot (which is a Sunbeam brand name) are used interchangeably? Slow cookers achieved popularity in North America during the 1940s when many women began to work outside the home. They could start dinner cooking in the morning before going to work and finish preparing the meal in the evening when they came home.

The Naxon Utilities Corporation, owned by electrical engineer Irving Naxon, developed the Naxon Beanery All-Purpose Cooker to cook a bean meal. Naxon was inspired by his grandmother making a traditional stew called cholent, which took several hours to cook in an oven.

When the Rival company bought out Naxon in 1970, they acquired Naxon's 1940 patent for the bean simmer cooker. They adapted Naxon's bean cooker into a large-scale production model, which could cook an entire meal for the family. The cooker was then reintroduced under the name "Crock-Pot" in 1971. In 1974, Rival introduced removable stoneware inserts, thus making the appliance much easier to clean.

The "crock," itself acts as both a cooking vessel and a heat reservoir. Slow cookers come in capacities from 500 mL (17 US fl oz) to 7 L (7.4 US qt). Personally, I have both a 2.5 qt. and a 7 qt., and yes, I have had both going at the same time! Because the heating elements are generally located at the bottom and often also partway up the sides, most slow cookers have a minimum recommended liquid level to avoid uncontrolled heating.

Recipes intended for other cooking methods must be modified for slow cookers. Quantities of liquids may need adjustment, as there is a little evaporation, but there should be enough liquid to cover the food. The long, moist cooking is particularly suitable for tough and hopefully cheaper cuts of meat. For many slow-cooked dishes, these cuts give better results than pricier options. The low temperature of the crock pot also makes it almost impossible to burn food. It's also great in that it's all-in-one, so fewer dishes to wash up. The disadvantage is that some meats and vegetables can become tasteless if over-cooked.

Unfortunately, some vitamins and other trace nutrients are lost, particularly from vegetables, partially by enzyme action during cooking and partially due to heat degradation. Since slow cookers work at temperatures well below boiling point and do not rapidly denature enzymes, vegetables lose trace nutrients.

I found out something interesting during the research on slow cookers concerning kidney beans. Did you know that slow cookers should not be used to cook dried kidney beans and other legume seeds? These foods contain the highly toxic lectin phytohemagglutinin. Symptoms generally appear within 1 to 3 hours after consumption of improperly cooked red kidney beans. Onset is usually marked by extreme nausea, followed by vomiting and diarrhea. This lectin is only deactivated by long soaking, then boiling.

Information published by the United States Food and Drug Administration and the Government of Canada states that slow cookers should not be used to cook bean-containing dishes. Commercially canned beans are fully cooked and are safe to use. Pressure cooking also deactivates the lectins.

How to Safely Prepare Dried Red Kidney Beans

These instructions follow the U.S. Food & Drug Administration's recommendations:

Soak - Raw kidney beans need to soak in water for at least five hours.

Boil - Drain the beans and change to a fresh pot of water. Bring to a boil (212 degrees F/100 degrees C) for a minimum of 10 minutes.

Prepare - By following the previous two instructions, your kidney beans are no longer toxic and can finish cooking in whatever method you prefer, such as in a slow cooker.

Just a bit of food for thought, if you're using kidney beans.

And remember, the nice thing about using a slow cooker is that the kids let you know at 8:00 a.m. that they will not eat dinner. It eliminates a day's worth of suspense on the issue.

Melted Butter Biscuits

We tried these the night before the road trip delivering the August/September *Country Register*. We needed something quick to go with our soup, and with the potential for breakfast the next day. The biscuits turn out with a crisp crust and are soft on the inside, so not quite a traditional biscuit. I also used "homemade" buttermilk, and I think it turned out fine.

2½ cups flour
4 tsp. baking powder
1 Tbsp granulated sugar
2 tsp kosher salt
2 cups buttermilk
½ cup butter, melted



Unbaked biscuits above; baked biscuits below.



Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Add flour, baking powder, sugar, and salt to a medium bowl. Mix the dry ingredients well. Pour in the buttermilk and stir until mostly combined, being careful not to overwork the batter.

Pour the melted butter into an 8x8-inch baking dish. Place the dough on top of the butter and use a spatula (or your hands) to evenly spread the dough out to the edges of the pan. Cut the unbaked dough into 9 squares (3x3 pattern).

Bake for 28 minutes, or until the tops are golden brown.

Allow the butter to be absorbed into the biscuits before cutting and serving.

Slow Cooker Pork Chop Cacciatore

The local grocery store had pork chops on for a great deal the other week, so I brought some home. I was looking for an easy way to prepare them, and this fit the bill.

1 1/2 lbs. pork chops
798 mL (26 oz) can diced tomatoes
3 Tbsp ketchup
1/2 cup chicken broth
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp pepper
1 1/2 Tbsp dried oregano
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 onion, diced
1 can of mushrooms with juice
1 green pepper diced
3 Tbsp cornstarch

Use a 4 qt. or larger slow cooker. Add the diced tomatoes, ketchup, chicken broth, garlic, salt, pepper, and oregano to the slow cooker. Stir until the ketchup dissolves into the diced tomato juice. Add the onion and mushrooms, green pepper, and stir again. Add the pork chops to the sauce.

Cover and cook on low for 6-7 hours. Mix the cornstarch with enough water to make a slurry. Add into the slow cooker & let simmer until thickened.

Serve over pasta or rice.

Buffalo Chicken & Potato Casserole

I usually do a variation of this recipe, in that I substitute chicken thighs for the breasts. I also don't bother to de-bone them. By the time I get off work, the thighs are falling apart and I can remove them as I plate up. Feel free to add more hot sauce to the recipe (or offer it at the table). We like heat, but not everyone does!

3 lbs. red potatoes, washed and cubed
2 lbs. boneless, skinless, chicken breasts, cubed
½ pound bacon (about 6 thick slices), cooked until crisp and diced
4 green onions, thinly sliced
6 garlic cloves, minced
1 Tbsp paprika
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
1/3 cup prepared hot sauce (I use Frank's) or more
2 cups shredded mozzarella, or cheddar cheese

Use a 6-quart slow cooker.

Place the potatoes into the insert and add the chicken. Add the bacon, green onions, garlic, paprika, and pepper. Stir in the buffalo hot sauce, and top with the cheese.

Cover, and cook on low for 6 to 8 hours, or until the potatoes are cooked through. 4 to 6 servings



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Slices of Life –

A memorable Christmas Eve

By Sherry Osland

Admit it. A lot of us have the Currier & Ives Christmas postcard picture in mind as our expectations of the season. Reality seldom results in that, no matter how hard we try. I have one particularly memorable Christmas that was totally the opposite in every way. My family was broken apart by the pain of divorce. Our traditions went out the window. No, that's not right. They were shredded.

What a way to start a Christmas story, right? Please hang in here with me. There are hard parts of life to get through and sometimes reading someone else's "past" experience helps us get through our "current" circumstances. Just knowing someone has been there, done that and come out on the other side can be an encouragement.

As I said, divorce had ravaged my family. In our divorce-ridden society, our story wasn't so different from so many others who have gone -- or are going -- through it. My kids and I moved out and into a mobile home that started falling apart around our ears. That forced me to apply for low-income housing, and we moved. I felt like I had a "D" branded on my forehead whereas before, I had been a reputable part of my community. My car drank oil as I drove a distance to a minimal paying job. To feed us, I got food stamps. I shopped in another town so no one I knew would see me using them. (I was angry and confused when I saw some using stamps but getting into Lincolns and Cadillacs. What?) It was the beginning of my being what my brother calls "The Goodwill Poster Child".

I can't say I ever got used to my two children being away for their visits to their Dad's house. I never got used to seeing them in what used to be my vehicle and riding with someone else. All of these things crashed in and overwhelmed me one Christmas Eve night. The kids were with their Dad at his parent's gathering, and I was alone -- totally alone, or so I felt.

I didn't feel like going to my church's Christmas Eve service, but I especially didn't feel like staying home alone. So, I went. It was an unusual service and, interestingly enough, they'd never done it this way before, and it's not been done this way since. I entered the darkened church. There were a few candles strategically placed around the altar and sanctuary. Carols were being quietly and reverently played in the background. There were only a few people scattered in the pews. They sat quietly and left quietly. I entered alone and sat in a back pew -- alone. It wasn't to be a social event, no one spoke to me. After a time of sitting and, yes, wallowing . . . I felt a Presence. My random thoughts quieted. My tears continued but with a difference, my Spirit within me connected with His, and Jesus held me. Thoughts changed and re-focused.

Yes, our mobile home was falling apart, but when my son and I had gone to look at it, he had explored and come back excited about which room would be his room. My heart choked. He was choosing to live with ME!

Yes, we lived in low-income housing, but it was the newest house we'd ever lived in.

Yes, my car drank oil, but God had stepped in and miraculously provided. (That's another story.)

Yes, my job wasn't paying much, but I've always felt my bosses carved a niche for me to have a job (they were previous bosses/friends). I was SO grateful.

Yes, I was on food stamps, but the local store owner graciously allowed me to shop unashamedly in her grocery store. I gave her all my food stamps each month and that allowed me to go through the check-out saying, "Charge it."

Yes, I shopped Goodwill. I still do. Give me a couple hours and I can shop till I drop. I'm happy.

Yes, over the years, I spent Christmas Eve physically alone, yet NOT alone.

That first Christmas Eve alone, God met me and held me. As I sat there and began to see where He had walked beside me and carried me when needed, I no longer felt so alone. As I left the church and walked in the dark to my car, chimes began playing carols. They were coming from a different church and the stillness of the night was perfect for hearing them so clearly. . . my own comforting silent night. I felt Jesus loving on me. He redeemed my life circumstances and affirmed me with chimes that said "Amen" (so be it).



For bearing through this, I would encourage you to find God's blessings in whatever circumstances you are in right now. Open your heart, let Him redeem you and take away your feeling of being alone. With God, no one ever is! Have a BLESSED CHRISTMAS! AMEN!



Written by Sherry Osland of Praise Works Quilting in Abilene, formerly writing the Quilts That Redeem column for The Country Register. For examples of quilting (as well as pictures of Hand-braided rugs and Quilts That Redeem books, for sale) go to: facebook.com/praiseworksquilting Contact information: sherryo51@hotmail.com or 785-263-5528.

Of apple pies and kitchen windows

by Kerri Habben Bosman

Always, around this time, it somehow surprises me that another year is almost over. It shouldn't. My brain regularly conjures up memories from the previous 10 months that remind me of both how busy it was and how lovely it was.

The year 2022 has many highlights -- from family get-togethers to enjoying grandchildren's music and sports. January started with beginning a stash of hats and scarves for a Giving Circle later in the year. In April, we all gathered together, from the youngest at 5 to the oldest at 101. At the end of June my husband, Wayne, retired after 49 years as an auto mechanic. We traveled both to visit family and for Wayne to repair grown children's cars. A mechanic can retire, but a Dad never does. I began to knit and crochet handmade Christmas gifts in August. With a family of 18, it helps to begin early.

Since I often look ahead to upcoming deadlines, I take time to remind myself to fully focus on the present. For it is all too easy to be channeled to the next thing that needs doing -- or how quickly the last two months of a year can pass by.

It is in these moments that I turn to autumn and winter activities that comfort and inspire me at the same time. One of these things is baking. For nearly three decades I have loved to bake pies, mostly fruit pies. No one in the family seems to mind. Fifteen-year-old grandson, Isaac, particularly likes them. Sometimes an apple pie appears at his house just because he has a baseball game coming up.



I savor the whole process of making a pie from scratch. Whatever kind of pie I make, the most important ingredient I add is love. For preparing food is a way of giving of ourselves to the people in our lives. The work of our hands is one of the most tangible ways to show others how deeply they are treasured.

When I peel, core and slice the apples, I like to look out the kitchen window. It seems that I can feel beyond the view of the yard to sense the plethora of people who came before me and worked the very same way. I think that, for all the technology we have, there is still something inherently amazing about how a piece of fruit evolves. I pay attention to the motion of my hands. I say thank you for being exactly where I am, right in that very moment.

I try not to add too much sugar -- just enough of a blend of white and brown and then some cinnamon. My nose always awaits the addition of the lemon juice as its acidity blends with the sweeter ingredients. If Wayne is nearby, he helps by tasting the apple mixture to make sure it is just right. No sacrifice is too great.

I truly enjoy preparing pie crusts, and I have three or four recipes. When I spread out the dough, I use my great-grandmother's rolling pin. I think of her, even though I had never met her. She passed away 15 years before I was born. I think of my mother and grandmother who taught me by example that food is love.

This holiday season I remember being with my 101-year-old mother-in-law in her Wisconsin kitchen. The same kitchen where she baked when Wayne was growing up and where she still bakes for her family. We stand at the kitchen window, and we wash and dry the dishes together. We look out, and I watch the land through her eyes, seeing all that has gone before and so much that still is. All of which is love.

Kerri Habben Bosman is a writer in Chapel Hill, NC. She can be reached at 913jeeves@gmail.com.

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One Big Gift

by Becky Van Vleet

With close to 70 Christmases behind me, I have many memories of this special holiday that have been set aside to celebrate the birth of our Savior. My parents, from the Greatest Generation, started some traditions that carried over to my own family. And you can imagine my delight to watch my adult children carrying out some of the same traditions in their families today.

One such tradition stands out as I go down memory lane. In 1993, my husband lost his job. When Christmas rolled around, money was tight. What little we had was earmarked for food, clothing and shelter. Only the necessities.

Instead of fretting about the lack of Christmas presents, I decided we needed to be positive and focus on what we could do, not what we couldn't. Out of prayer, thanksgiving, family love and creativity, I birthed giving gifts from our hearts that Christmas. Always the teacher, I used this time for teachable moments for our four daughters, ages five to 15.

We traded out store shopping for homemade presents. No Pinterest back then. We didn't even have the internet. But we had our imaginations, no cost involved. I was amazed at the ideas our daughters came up with, even helping one another and talking about their secret gifts behind closed doors.

We got creative when we planned our own family recital with singing and musical instruments. Our voices, violin, clarinet and saxophone came together for the best Christmas songs I've ever heard, even with "off notes" and a mistake here and there. But it didn't matter. Our recital endeavor came from our hearts. We even made a plan to go Christmas caroling and take our voices to others.

Our idea to make our own Christmas presents and focus on our hearts was not original. No, it wasn't. Our parents had learned to give gifts from the heart and make things



from home during the Great Depression. The practice of giving simple, homemade gifts repeated again during World War II with the government mandated rations and push for the war bonds.

Cloth dolls and teddy bears created from socks delighted little children. Grandpas whittled toys from wood. Lip smacking could be heard a mile away when popcorn balls, straight out of the kitchen, were made, even when sugar rations pinched holiday baking.

Yes, our Christmas of 1993 still stands out to me. Our family discussions surrounding the true meaning of Christmas ramped up. We were focused on Christ's birth and His plan of salvation more than the usual glitz, glitter and glamour of the commercialized holiday. The tradition of homemade gifts continued in our family after that particular year as our daughters grew up.

Today, almost 30 years later, instead of store-bought gifts in our much bigger extended family, we make contributions to missionaries and other good works in honor of each other. Volunteering for Operation Christmas Child through Samaritan's Purse and making goodie bags for the homeless keep us busy around the holidays. We continue to visit nursing homes and sing Christmas carols as we reach out to others.

The heartache of a lost job in 1993 turned from ashes to beauty. Fortitude, family love and a can-do spirit wrapped us up together in one big gift, and it still does to this day.

Becky Van Vleet, a retired school administrator, lives near Colorado Springs with her husband, Troy. They are the parents of four grown children and enjoy spending time with their nine grandchildren. Becky is a children's picture book author, and her website is devoted to family stories and creating memories: www.beckyvanvleet.com.



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Life in Skunk Hollow

By Julie A. Druck

Time for Thanksgiving

Our family took an early autumn trip to the beach this year. It's been about seven or eight years since we were there, so I was particularly looking forward to the trip. My husband and I love to get up early in the morning to watch the sun come up on the beach. On our first morning, we quietly and eagerly walked the two blocks in anticipation of the event. We were surprised to see how many other people were already on the beach who had also come to watch the sunrise. There were little clusters of people here and there: some standing watching the horizon, others who had brought their beach chairs and were sitting quietly. Many had their phones poised to capture the moment. As we walked along the shoreline, there was a quiet air of reverence all along the way, and I was struck that in this day and age of constant distraction and noise, that so many people would show up to mark the event of a simple sunrise.

We experienced a similar occasion last autumn when we went to visit our son in Missouri – except this time, it was to mark the sunset. Our son lives in Branson, and one evening he took us to a restaurant that sits high above the city and provides a stunning view of the Ozark Mountains and lakes below. Every evening there is a sunset ceremony. As the time draws near, patrons gather on the outside balconies to listen to the lone bagpiper play down the sun. At the moment the sun sets, a cannon from the Civil War is fired. I found it to be a moving, reverent experience.

During both these events – the watching of the sunrise and the sunset - I found myself giving thanks. When one deliberately recognizes and acknowledges the rising and

passing of a day, it makes you remember that our days are limited and numbered. It provides opportunity to be thankful for such a seemingly insignificant event that reminds us how much beauty and joy there is in this life.

Pondering these experiences has reminded me that Thanksgiving shouldn't be just one day out of the year that we take to deliberately give thanks for all that life holds. But thanksgiving should be a daily event – as consistent as the sunrise and sunset - to help cultivate humility and thoughtfulness in our hearts. There is truly so much for which to be thankful . . .

Julie Druck is from York, Pennsylvania, and writes from her farm in Skunk Hollow. She'd welcome your comments at thedrucks@netzero.com.

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Prescription for Adventure
By Naomi Gaede Penner

Making "Home" during the Holidays: Tanana, Alaska, 1957

(Adapted from *The Bush Doctor's Wife*)

It hadn't been Ruby's idea to leave the familiarities of Kansas for the remote unknowns of Alaska. And, if moving to Anchorage, Alaska, which was called a "city," wasn't incomprehensible enough, her physician husband, Elmer, decided to go farther north, to a small village, accessible primarily by airplane. At this dot along the Yukon River, she no longer had the dependable platter of meat and produce outside the farmhouse doors, or the culture and language of her relatives from South Russia, or simple amenities – needles and thread, greeting cards, balloons and hairbrushes – within a short driving distance.

When the holidays hit, they'd been there four months with their two grade school-age daughters and almost two-year-old son.

Ruby found comfort by mimicking what she imagined her loved ones were baking and what had been family holiday food traditions. She wrote home, "I have been baking all week, I made Mom Leppkes' peppernuts, and they taste like they should, surprise. I made date roll candy and Mom Gaedes' Christmas black walnut cookies. I try to make as much like being with you all is possible."

Caroling was not something she had grown up with, other than singing Christmas carols in church, but now when she got an invitation, she decided to try out a new holiday celebration. She wished Elmer could come along, but when the time arrived, he had a woman who had just gone into labor, and he needed to keep watch at the hospital. One of the new nurses who informed everyone within earshot that "not with a team of wild horses could drag her out in that awful cold" agreed to watch the children, so there was nothing to stop Ruby from joining the merry group of hospital personnel, Civil Aeronautical Authority (C.A.A.) employees and a schoolteacher.

There were no streetlights, and on the particular night the carolers went out, there was not a hint of moonlight to mellow the darkness. In consideration of that, before Thanksgiving, some people in the hospital complex and C.A.A. compound had strung Christmas lights around their windows. This color had a heartening effect, along with flashlights that led the way with friendly circles on the snow.

Ruby wrote her mother, "Monday nite I went caroling with a dozen others, ages varying from 10 to 47. It was 50 below and we had to watch our noses and lungs so they would not get frost bitten."

This was her first below-zero caroling adventure, but it would lead to more. It would become a part of her Alaska Christmas traditions. At one point, she would carry a cassette player with taped carols, knock on someone's door, turn on the player and sing



Ruby Gaede in her snowsuit holding a cat. Dressed for the Alaska weather.

Christmas joy. By herself. In the dark. On a frigid night she would bring cheer, both to others and herself.

Yet that winter of 1957 in Tanana, she wrote her Kansas family, "How we would like to be with you at Christmas, it seems that during this time we especially like to be with loved ones." Much later, in a memory book she noted, "I liked Tanana, but sometimes Kansas seemed so far away."



Read about Naomi's mother, Ruby, in "The Bush Doctor's Wife" and "From Kansas Wheat Fields to Alaska Tundra." Available at prescriptionforadventure.com, or by calling 303.506.6181. In Kansas, they are available at Faith & Life (Newton) and Kansas Originals (1-70 at Wilson "The Bush Doctor's Wife" is also available on Amazon.



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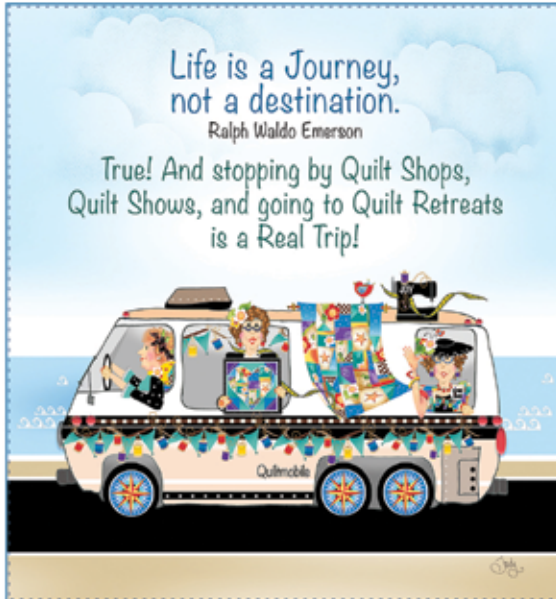
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GIRLFRIEND WISDOM: It is a fast pace world and things can get carried away. As soon as you catch yourself worrying about something, or complaining about something, quickly look at a picture of your grandchildren, or a beautiful flower, or hum a little tune. Choose a different thought, choose a peaceful thought, choose Blessed instead of Stressed. You will know when you have been successful because you will naturally take in a great big deep Breath of Life and you will feel Joyfully Blessed!

Joy & Blessings, *Jody*

Girlfriend Wisdom is written by Jody Houghton®. For color files of this writing contact Jody at: jodyhoughton@msn.com or www.JodyHoughtonDesigns.etsy.com

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Random Acts

by Maranda K. Jones

December Rose

In the many blocks we walked, we saw and heard the Christmas spirit in many forms. Window displays in every store, sharing the spirit of the season. Festive songs choreographed dances with lights above our heads, strung from building to building. Kindness among strangers in a city reputed to be rough seemed to be running rampant. Then we experienced that for ourselves celebrating in New York City.

J. M. Barrie said, "God has given us our memories, that we might have roses in December." This quote from Peter Pan's author comes up in books and online so much that I began to take notice. It even showed up in a cookbook I was using. For some reason, this phrase kept appearing. I could not ignore it. I used it to embellish a scrapbook page that is now hanging in my parents' dining room.

The background is a decorative sheet of paper full of red roses from corner to corner atop a square clipboard. On top of that, photos from a girls' trip my mom planned for my sister and me show our cold smiling faces. We are bundled up in coats, scarves, stocking hats and boots as we visited New York one December.



The author and her sister on their New York City trip. Pictures on wall behind them are caricatures of Hank Azaria and David Hyde Pierce hung in Sardi's.

The camera captured so many fond memories from that week in the city. One photo shows us on the ferry to Ellis Island. The Statue of Liberty holds her torch high above her head and ours, but little warmth is felt from that light source while we are on the water. Surrounded by buildings with even more lights around us, we are standing next to each other in Times Square, admiring the glow of billboards, screens and flashes everywhere. Rockefeller Center hosts ice skaters and its huge evergreen elegantly dressed for the holidays.

Another photo zooms in on my sister and me posing next to celebrity headshots after our dinner at Sardi's, the best place to eat before a Broadway show, known for its caricatures of movie stars. We are smiling next to drawings of Hank Azaria and David Hyde Pierce, stars in their own right, who were currently starring in the production of Monty Python's Spamalot. We enjoyed the show and wanted a picture with its stars. We were not sure ours were going to turn out...

As we exited the theater the night before, our mom said we should watch for celebrities. Knowing that we should always listen to our mother, we heeded her advice and took our time making our way through the crowd. Sure enough! Outside the door, Hank Azaria took some photos and visited with fans. A few minutes later, David Hyde Pierce arrived and did the same. We asked for a photo, and he welcomed us next to him. Another woman offered to take the picture, and I handed her my camera. We smiled, waited for the flash, and nothing happened. My camera was frozen.

I froze too. It felt like time stood still while I stood there flustered. All of these thoughts were forming in my mind as I tried to warm the camera just enough to take one more snapshot. I did not want to waste this man's time. I did not want to detract from anyone else's celebrity sighting. A crowd was forming. I felt rushed. I was so disappointed that my camera was too cold to work. I was wondering if anyone would ever believe that we met these actors while we were in NYC. I was sad that my TV-watching mom would not have photographic evidence of meeting the Niles Crane from Frasier, one of her favorite shows. Her celebrity-sighting skills created an experience that would be turned into a memory. A rose in December.

Then the woman offered to take our picture with her camera and email me the photo. We posed again with a gracious and patient actor, remembering every second of this exchange. I shared my email address and wondered if I would ever hear from this woman. Maybe she just wanted us out of her way so she could have a turn. Maybe she saw how much it meant to us and would follow through. She did not owe us anything. She would not have to go through of all the steps it once took to upload and download photos. We were simply strangers walking up and down the same street.

Fast forward a few weeks, and mail from an unknown sender arrives in my inbox. Through blurry eyes, I see what I think is a picture taken on Broadway. Tears were welling up as the image downloaded. Sure enough! It was our photo. The photo we did not expect to develop. Staring at my screen, I saw what most often is only felt with the heart. I now have photographic evidence of the Christmas spirit and faith in humanity.

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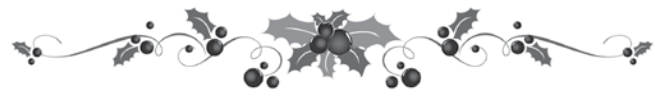
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My Christmas Wish Is for Tradition

by Barbara Kalkis

I'm a great believer in change. Change kicks us out of the ruts of old habits. It forces us to see things from a new perspective. It stretches our imagination. In business, it is essential to survival. Yes, change is good. I'm all for it. But not at Christmas time.

At Christmas, I want tradition -- like heirloom family ornaments on a green tree that is real or fake, as long as it's green! *Not* red, blue, metallic silver or gold. I crowd my house with red and (full disclosure) white poinsettias and pinecones nestle in evergreen boughs and wreaths on every flat surface. Angel ornaments dangle next to bells just in case Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life* was correct about bells ringing every time an angel gets its wings.

I love houses cloaked in red, green, blue and yellow lights, interspersed with strings of white fairy lights. (*Thank you, holiday clearance sales.*) These traditional colors comfort as well as cheer me. They symbolize the enduring constancy of the Christmas message: Peace and goodwill.

However, change has invaded Christmas holiday culture. Designers have introduced decorations in colors that don't symbolize the season. Blues morphed into aqua, turquoise and navy. Red faded to cotton-candy pinks. Yellow invaded nature's rich blue-greens to become drab olive tones. Gold darkened to burnished brass and brown. Not to be left out -- white must include hints of mint, blue, yellow and every other hue imaginable. It's like trying to select a paint color for the house.

At the same time, technology has bequeathed us with programmed flashing electronic lights. They dance in dizzying designs against the house. It's like staring at a broken neon sign.

Buzzing fans -- busily bloating electric bills -- pump up gargantuan plastic snow people, larger-than-life elves (*always scary*) and deer with blank stares. Forget the kids, it's enough to give adults nightmares.

Technology has even consumed the Christmas card tradition. Tired of selecting the perfect image and saying for the annual greeting card? Do you find that nothing extraordinary happened in the year to make letter-writing worthwhile, let alone having someone read it? No problem! Simply visit a website, select a picture with moving images and a message to match. Type the recipient's name and address, add your credit card

number and voila! Instant card. No stamps, no hassle printing labels, no jogs to the post office. Click, click and you are finished. Easy-peasy.

I look at these cards once, email a thank-you and delete them. They are not real. They are convenient.

How's this for a change: Traditional paper Christmas cards -- purchased or hand-made -- that can be taped to walls and doors, creating a collage of holiday images that reflect the personalities and tastes of friends and family. I keep and re-read Christmas letters that talk about the everyday events that made the year memorable. Photos of the kids, the dogs, cats and -- yes -- horses that relatives and friends have acquired over the year create a link that closes distances.

It's trendy to be innovative, bold, attention-getting, but traditions 'center' us. It's like trying a new recipe for company dinner. You can use exotic new ingredients but underneath the spices, garnishes and gravies, guests can relax knowing that they are eating good old familiar chicken.

We live in a constantly changing world. We must adjust every single day. That's life. But, maybe this Christmas, we can cherish tradition: like making a card, crafting decorations or writing a Christmas letter about the routines that are life's real blessings.

@Barbara Kalkis. Barbara is a teacher, high-tech marketing consultant, and author of Little Ditties for Every Day: A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm. Contact her at BarbaraKalkis01@gmail.com.

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Writing From Life

by Jeanette Lukowski

Following her lead

I have a friend I met a few years ago who never ceases to inspire me. We met at a quilt guild meeting (my first time attending), and now we mostly visit and share via cell phone messaging.

My humble beginnings as a quilter started with flannel baby quilts I would make for friends' children. Then I expanded to incorporate leftovers -- which my mother called remnants -- from whatever garment I had sewn, inspired by my grandmother who had crafted tied quilts for her family. (My mother has one in a closet; the few others which still exist are distributed among my grandmother's other children.)

Unlike my friend, who is a third- or even fourth-generation quilter, I regard myself as a self-taught quilter. Ergo, I attended that first guild meeting to find out why quilt guilds exist.

Only able to attend for three meetings before the world shut down with Covid, she and I would frequently chat on the telephone; then one day she invited me over to her front yard for a quilt show. I returned home from the visit with one of her leftover quilt blocks, and a new design and inspiration to chase after.

Months later, I moved out of state. Time to locate a new quilt guild!

The more I have been quilting, the more I have been learning. I feel like I could have a trunk show for beginners, walking them through my many experiments: the polyester-blend half-square triangles throw I made from a bag of unfinished projects rejected by others before reaching my lap after an aunt passed; the denim-and-flannel rag-style throw I made from a bag of someone's denim discards; the corduroy-and-flannel rag-style throw salvaged from another's bin of remnants; the flannel-and-heavyweight cotton quilt I made from fabric passed on from somewhere. And the table runners. And the wall hangings. And the myriad of other projects made and gifted.

The challenges I am presented with are the most fun, though. One quilt store held monthly meetings to share the newest fabrics, patterns and products with us. In exchange for attending, we were each given a coupon for a percentage off our purchase for the next three days. I bought a bit of fabric that way. And I participated in the contest-challenge of creating a project using a fat-quarter she provided. (We each got different fat quarters. I assume they were from bolts she had already sold out of.) Although I didn't win the contest, I love the project I created!

Back to my friend. The projects she makes are masterpieces, which makes my projects feel all the more amateurish. She won a blue ribbon this past summer at the guild's quilt show; the photo she shared reveals its beauty.

Last week, my friend shared the photo of a bargello table-runner with lacy crocheted doilies she had tatted to represent falling snowflakes. Stunning!

I sent back a photo of my first Log Cabin block.
Will I ever reach her level?

© Jeanette Lukowski 2022. Jeanette is a mother, grandmother, teacher, and author who lives in Mankato, MN. She is inspired by the lives of strong women. Her email address is: writingfromlife@yahoo.com



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Town and Country Cooking

By Janette Hess

A potato mash-up

Although mashed potatoes are among the most expected offerings on any holiday table, their piping hot goodness is welcome any time of the year. Keep the celebration going!

The recipe for Cottage Mashed Potatoes pairs russets with cottage cheese to create a creamy, herb-laced take on traditional mashed potatoes. The dish has ample, stand-alone flavor, so gravy absolutely is not necessary. Garlic Mashed Potatoes also deserve a spot in any potato rotation. Garlic lovers will flock to this dish not only because it's packed with garlicky flavor, but also because it's appealingly flecked with pimiento and green onion.

Some cooks claim that no holiday feast is complete without sweet potatoes, so why not surprise and delight family and friends with a tropical version? Featuring the flavors of coconut and macadamia nuts, the recipe for Tropical Sweet Potatoes tastefully blurs the line between vegetables and desserts. The dish is worthy of being served even into January, when everyone is craving a taste of warmer climes.

Cottage Potatoes

- 2 pounds russet potatoes (approximately 4 large or 5 medium)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups small-curd cottage cheese
- ½ cup sour cream
- 6 tablespoons melted butter, divided
- 2 tablespoons fresh, diced parsley
OR 1 tablespoon dried parsley
- 2 tablespoons freshly snipped, diced chives
OR 1 tablespoon dried chives
- ½ teaspoon garlic salt
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon white pepper
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs
- Paprika for garnish

Peel and quarter potatoes. Place in large cooking pot and cover with water. Add 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium low; cover and simmer until potatoes are fork tender. Drain. While still very hot, mash potatoes completely. Quickly add cottage cheese and continue mashing until combined. Add sour cream, 4 tablespoons melted butter, parsley, chives, garlic salt, onion powder and white pepper; stir to combine. Spoon into buttered or sprayed 9- by 13-inch (or similarly sized) baking dish. Combine remaining 2 tablespoons butter with panko bread crumbs. Spread over potatoes and sprinkle with paprika. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes. Let rest at least 10 minutes before serving. Makes 10 servings.

Garlic Mashed Potatoes

- 2 pounds russet potatoes (approximately 4 large or 5 medium)
- 4 cloves garlic
- 5 cups water
- 3 chicken bouillon cubes
- ½ cup light cream ("half-and-half")
- ¼ cup butter, melted
- 1 2-ounce jar diced pimientos, well drained
- 2 to 3 green onions, tops only, thinly sliced
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Peel and quarter potatoes. Place in large cooking pot. Peel garlic cloves. Add to pot along with water and bouillon cubes. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium low; cover and simmer until potatoes are fork tender. Drain and reserve cooking broth. Mash hot potatoes and garlic. Stir in cream, melted butter, pimientos, sliced green onion tops and freshly ground pepper. If potatoes seem too stiff, add 1 or 2 tablespoons reserved broth. (Discard remaining broth or save for another use.) Add salt to taste. Transfer potatoes to serving dish. Makes 8 servings.

Tropical Sweet Potatoes

Potato mixture:

- 2½ pounds sweet potatoes (4 to 5 large sweet potatoes)
- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup canned, unsweetened coconut milk
- ¼ cup butter, melted
- 1/3 cup brown sugar

Tropical topping:

- ½ cup chopped macadamia nuts (dry roasted with salt)
- ½ cup sweetened, flaked coconut
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 2 tablespoons melted butter

Peel and quarter potatoes. Place in large cooking pot. Cover with water and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium low; cover and cook until tender. Drain and mash. In large bowl, beat eggs and coconut milk. Add sweet potatoes, butter and brown sugar; beat until smooth. Spoon into buttered or sprayed 9- by 13-inch (or similarly sized) baking dish. Combine topping ingredients and sprinkle over sweet potatoes. Bake at 325 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes. Makes 10 to 12 servings.



A trained journalist, Janette Hess focuses her writing on interesting people and interesting foods. She is a Master Food Volunteer with her local Extension service and enjoys collecting, testing and sharing recipes.

All mistakes teach us something,
so there are, in reality,
no mistakes.

-- Nikki Giovanni, poet

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Wit and Wisdom

The voice of reason

By Judyann Grant

A dense cluster of willow bushes and maple saplings at my childhood home served as a natural clubhouse. With the help of my brothers, we cleared out the center of the thicket. Surrounded by thick leafy foliage, that small, cleared area became a playhouse and dreaming spot.

Fast forward the years . . . in anticipation of the arrival of grandchildren, I dreamed of creating an outdoor play area for them, like I enjoyed as a child. To help bring my dream to fruition, my husband brought home three spruce saplings. I envisioned the grown trees, planted in a circle, joining their boughs to form a secluded place where our grands could dream and play on carefree afternoons.

With great enthusiasm, I showed Don where I wanted the three trees planted. "Here, here and here," I announced, tapping the ground with my sneakered foot.

"That's too close," he said.

"No, it's not," I countered.

"The trees will grow into each other."

"Look how tiny they are!" I argued, "It will take forever for them to grow large enough to touch. By then the grands will be grown too."

"Spruce trees grow fast," Don said, "I'm telling you, you're planting them too close." He leaned against the shovel.

A cold drizzle began to fall. Frustrated and getting wet, I fumed, "Do I need to do it myself?"

Without another word, he spaded three spots, dropped in the tiny trees and tamped the ground firmly around them.

Satisfied, I went in the house and fixed us lunch.

The spruce saplings were happy in their new home. They took root, quickly growing tall and thick. Within a few years their boughs entwined. Tightly. Even the youngest grandchild couldn't squeeze in between the branches of this impenetrable fortress.

In his youth, Don helped plant thousands of spruce trees with his Boy Scout troop. He knew how fast they grew. He knew how far apart they should be spaced. He knew he was right. But he let me have my way.

I should have listened to the voice of reason.

God, likewise, longs to instruct us in the way that is right. He speaks to us through His Word, through prayer and through gaining knowledge and encouragement from His people. But, of course, we often have ideas in our head of what to do - we want to do it our way! Unfortunately, "our way" is often the wrong way, and we are left to deal with the consequences.

When we read God's Word, it's important to pay attention to our heavenly Father's advice. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22 NIV).

When we pray, it's important to remember that communing with God is not a monologue. After we pour out our hearts to Him, it's important that we remain quiet and still and listen for His voice speaking to us. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you" (Psalm 32:8 NIV).

Sun and water and fertile soil helped those spruce trees grow, so too, when we listen to God's voice, and follow His directions, we grow in faith, wisdom and knowledge of the Lord.

(Note: It's taken me many years to admit I was wrong about the spruce trees, but here it is - you were right, Honey! I should have listened to you . . . !)

-Judyann Grant and her husband Don live on a few country acres in northern New York where they grow vegetables, flowers and thick stands of spruce! Contact the author at witandwisdomwriters@gmail.com

Back Porch Break

by Nancy Brummett

Clippin' Through the Holidays

In this season of holiday grocery shopping and inflated prices, we're all focused on ways to save. Maybe my confession will help. My name is Nancy and I'm a coupon clipper. Yes, I admit it. For most of my adult life I've been addicted to picking up a pair of scissors and clipping coupons I think I might be able to use from any and all sources. BOGOs are a definite trigger for me (buy one get one free!), so those never go unclipped.



Do I use these coupons? Well, sometimes! I organize them by category and keep them in a small purse in my car. On a good day I remember to sort through the food coupons before going into the grocery store and take the ones correlating to something on my list. (Of course, I'm also guilty of buying something I didn't really need just because I have a coupon for it, so that may negate some of the savings I've accumulated over the years.)


I always try to avoid the two downfalls of the coupon clipper: letting the coupons expire before using them or forgetting to turn valid ones in to the cashier when you check out! I confess to being guilty of both, and yes, I've been so frustrated with myself for not using a coupon that I've gone back to the store with the receipt and coupon in hand and asked for a refund. It's not the money, it's the principle!

With food prices skyrocketing, coupons have become more of a necessity. But to all coupon clippers everywhere, may I say the times they are a changin'! When I took a friend recovering from surgery to do her grocery shopping, she was vigilant about finding the items for which she had a coupon, but I never saw her hand over the coveted clip-outs to the cashier.

"Did you forget to use your coupons?" I asked, hoping to spare her the coupon clipper's contrition. "Oh, they're all on my phone so they went through automatically," she said. What? Yes, I'd seen the grocery store ads for mobile apps that allowed you to access coupons, but I never imagined that practice would be so easy, or that it could replace having clipped-out coupons completely. I stood amazed.

So now that's my goal. Sorry, scissors. I may not be needing you as much. This holiday season I, too, may waltz through the grocery store coupon-less, phone in hand. I know the people behind me in line will be glad I'm speeding up the check-out process. They'll no longer have to overhear the clerk telling me, "Sorry, you had to buy three to get one free," or "this one's expired" as she hands the coupons back to me. My, oh my. What will they think of next? Happy clippin' through the holidays!

Nancy Parker Brummett is an author and freelance writer in Colorado Springs, CO. "Like" her author page on Facebook, or to learn more about her life and work, visit www.nancyparkerbrummett.com. Back Porch Break Now Available! Back Porch Break The Hope of Glory A Devotional Guide for Older Adults From Columnist Nancy Parker Brummett Order print or eBook from VO L U M E T W O



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Those Were The Days!

Psst! We dish out the inside "Scoop"

by Jay Mark

O.K. Today we're really going to *dish* it out as I give you the inside *scoop* about special tools designed to serve what is arguably America's favorite dessert. You'll discover that getting ice cream out of its container can be almost as much fun as eating it.

But first, ice cream goes back to the dawn of civilization. Some say it was the Chinese who figured out how to freeze things and subsequently created what might be considered ice cream. But then there is evidence the ancient Egyptians were making an ice cream-like concoction long before the Chinese.

Much later, it is said, Italy discovered the delicious dessert. And, of course, when nearby France got hold of it, they made it their own.

Closer to home, in the United States, ice cream goes back to Revolutionary America. We know Dolly Madison dished out the frozen delight in the White House. With the introduction of the home-use, hand crank ice cream freezer in 1846, anyone could turn out a decent pint or two.

It was natural for drug store soda fountains, which came along in the 1850s, to add ice cream to their menu. With so many people clamoring for this delightful treat, a new challenge arose -- how to easily and efficiently get ice cream from a container to a dish. Initially, spoons were used. But they proved to be inefficient and hard work.

The first patent for a mechanical ice cream scoop was awarded in 1878 to William Clewel of Reading, Pennsylvania. This may be the time to note that the early serving devices were called by several names. In his patent application, for example, Clewel described his invention as an "Ice Cream Measure and Mould." Later, other inventors labeled their mechanical appliances as "disher," "dipper," "scoop," and "spoon" for non-mechanical servers.

Believe it or not "scoop" is a relatively modern name for the more traditional term "disher."

Clewel's pioneering concept for a device that could dish a measured and shaped amount of ice cream would ultimately lead to nearly 250 patents being issued before WW II. That's a good enough number to form a collection.

Most 19th century scoops were two-handed affairs -- conical shaped with an inside blade that was rotated from the top to scrape the frozen treat from the walls of the bowl, leaving an appealing cone shaped serving. Sensing there was a more efficient way of serving ice cream than with a spoon, African-American hotel porter, Alfred L. Cralle, was one of the first to introduce the one-hand concept with his 1896 patent application. By the 1890s, more complex mechanisms that allowed for one-handed operation were being awarded patents.

The 1890s also saw the introduction of the recognizable bowl-shaped scoops. And, by the 20th century, inventors were coming up with more imaginative ideas in the forms of complex mechanisms and odd shapes -- pie à la mode, banana split, heart to be served in special heart-shaped dishes, cylindrical, bullet, tubular and more. But the most popular form was the ball -- a perfect fit for filling the top of an ice cream cone that, by the way,

was introduced at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.

An indication of the popularity and demand for ice cream dishes are the number of manu-

facturers that emerged to produce them. While many started up in the 1920s, between the 19th century and the present day, 56 companies have been documented as producers of ice cream scoops. Raymond Gilchrist, one of the most recognized names in scoop manufacturing, began making dippers in about 1907. His company grew to be the largest maker of scoops. The Gilchrist #33 Pyramid Disher was patented in 1910 and was designed to serve ice cream in a fancy shape on a plate.

The novel, nickel-over-brass IcyPi disher was created by James Denaro, an Italian immigrant ice cream cone manufacturer, who in the mid-1920s began making a 3-sided wafer "box" to hold a square of ice cream, for his novel ice cream sandwich. Ultimately 17 patents were issued for ice cream sandwich dispensers.

If you are intrigued, ice cream dippers are a relatively inexpensive collectible. Depending on rarity, mechanical ice cream scoops can range in value from about under \$10 to about \$100...depending on rarity. It's best if they are clean and mechanically sound, still serviceable and fun to use pieces of history.

Hint: In most scoops, you will find a number on the scraper blade. It indicates how many measured scoops will be dished from a quart of ice cream. Most are in the range of 6 to 40 scoops, which explains why ice cream servers are found in a variety of sizes.

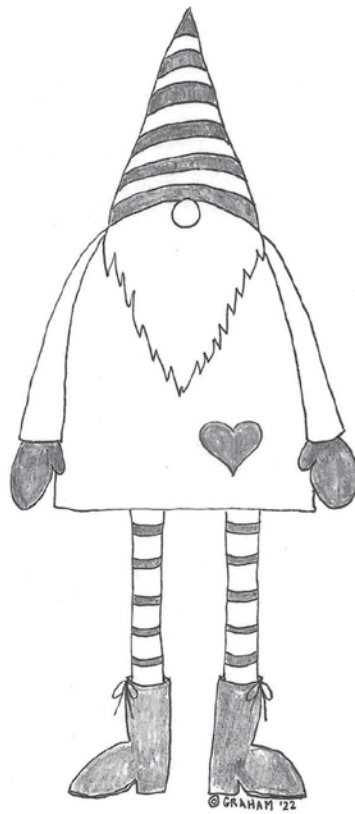
A Good Book: *Ice Cream Dippers*, written and published by Wayne Smith in 1986, is a slim volume, but a most comprehensive, scholarly history of this intriguing appliance. It is a thoroughly researched and illustrated account of the evolution of ice cream scoops.

Virtually an antique himself, Jay Mark, a nearly half-century antiques business veteran and historian owns *Those Were The Days!*, an online specialty bookstore. He also teaches, lectures and frequently writes about antiques and history. Reach him at jaymark@twtdbooks.com



A collection of 20 ice cream dishes that include early cone styles, ball scoops, spoons, and two ice cream sandwich dishes in the center. Photo: Jay Mark

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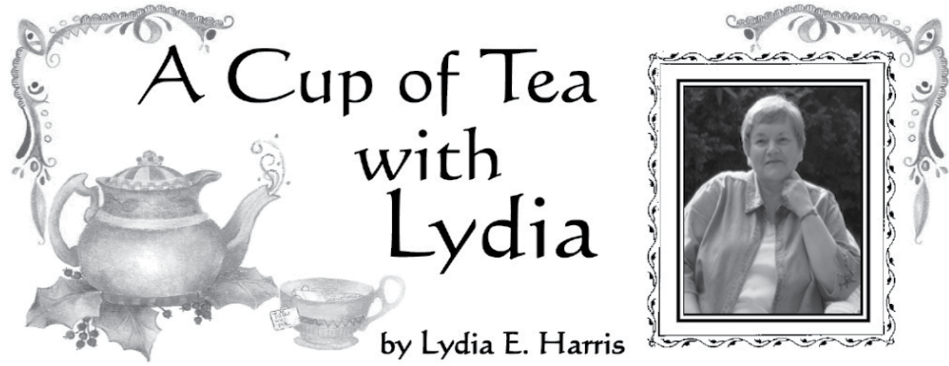
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The gift of tea

Christmas and gifts go together like a cup and a saucer. So why not give the gift of tea this holiday season? Your tea gift could be an invitation to come for tea, to share tea in a tearoom, to deliver tea, or to mail a tea party in a box. I enjoy giving and receiving tea in all these ways.

Come for TEA

Sharing hospitali-TEA in my home is my favorite way to give the gift of tea. My recipe for a memorable teatime includes: a pretty setting, tasty tidbits and a relaxed time to chat.

For easy hosting, sometimes I order the food from a local tearoom. Other times I buy special foods from the market such as mini croissants, chicken salad and fancy desserts. This gives me more time to set a lovely table and relax with my guests.

No time to invite someone for a festivi-TEA this December? Consider a coupon gift for a cuppa' tea in the New Year. That will extend the holidays for both of you. For a very dear friend, you could even give the coupon in a teacup.

Go Out for TEA

Taking someone to a tearoom for tea makes a sweet and generous gift. My husband and I have enjoyed taking our granddaughters to tea since they were old enough to hold a teacup -- and now they're 12 and 19!

During the holidays, my Sweet-TEA and I gift each other with a jaunt to one of our favorite tearooms. Their festive settings, special menus, and our time together create warm, lingering memories. Plus, I gather ideas for serving tea at home, such as the recipe included for Tree-mendous Treats made with pretzel sticks and melted mint baking chips.

Par-TEA to Go

Brighten the life of someone who is unable to get out by delivering a par-TEA. Make arrangements with them and pack everything you need in a basket or box. I use a soft cooler with straps and fill it with teacups, delicious foods, tea, and a tablecloth or placemats. Sometimes I bring a small gift or flowers. Then we enjoy tea together.

I've delivered and served tea to friends in their homes, in hospitals and in retirement communities. It cheers their day and mine.

Mail a Par-TEA

This fun idea works well for out-of-town friends or relatives. Last Christmas I mailed my Arizona pen pal a tea party in a box. It included a few decorations, holiday paper plates and napkins, assorted teas, hot chocolate mix and candy-cane stirrers, her favorite cookies (see recipe for Everyone's Favorite Cookies), a scone mix and jam, and a book of Christmas stories, which included one of mine. The note inside said: "Wish I could serve you tea in person. Since I can't, here's a tea party in a box." I added my tea-time blessing: "Dear God, as we fill our teacups, fill our hearts with love, joy and peace. As the tea warms our bodies, may Your presence warm our hearts and friendship."

Would you like to gift someone with tea -- in person, in a tearoom, to go or by mail? Or give a coupon to share one or more of these tea gifts in the future? Whenever you give a gift to someone, you're also giving yourself a gift, because "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). God bless us everyone!

Lydia E. Harris is a tea enthusiast, grandmother of five, and author of *In the Kitchen with Grandma: Stirring Up Tasty Memories Together* and *Preparing My Heart for Grandparenting*. Her books are available at Amazon.

From Lydia's Recipe File: Tree-mendous Treats

These pretzel Christmas trees taste yummy and make cute toppers on mini-cupcakes, muffins, tarts, or even a birthday cake for Jesus! Fun, festive, and easy to make.

Ingredients:

small pretzel sticks (about 3 inches long)
mint baking chips or green candy melts
sprinkles or crushed candy canes for decorations



Directions

Line a baking sheet with waxed paper. Lay pretzel sticks on sheet at least four inches apart.

Melt mint chips in a small microwave-safe bowl for 30 seconds, then stir. Continue to heat, 15 seconds at a time, until chips are completely melted.

Place a small plastic bag in an empty coffee mug and fold the top of the bag over the side to hold it in place.

Carefully spoon melted chips into the plastic bag.

Remove the bag and twist-tie it closed.

Cut off the tip of a bottom corner of the bag to make a very small hole.

Gently squeeze melted chips onto a pretzel to create Christmas tree branches. Start halfway up, leaving 1 1/2 inches for the tree trunk.

Use a back-and-forth motion to make a triangle shaped tree.

Immediately add sprinkles or other decorations. Refrigerate pretzels until firm, then peel off the paper.

Repeat the process to make more trees. Use trees for cupcake toppers or eat them as a treat.

If you frost cupcakes white and add grated coconut and stand the trees in them, it

looks like the trees are standing in snow.

Yield: 1/4 cup baking chips makes about 5 trees. 18 candy melts make 8 trees.

Everyone's Favorite Cookies (Brun Kaker)

(From Lydia's cookbook: *In the Kitchen with Grandma*, page 158.) For special holidays, add a few colorful sprinkles before baking. The key ingredient is golden syrup (available online and at some grocery stores).

Prep time: 15 minutes

Baking time: 15 to 20 minutes for each baking sheet of cookies

Ingredients

1 cup butter, softened
1 cup granulated sugar
2 T. powdered sugar
2 T. golden syrup (e.g. Lyle's)
1 tsp. vanilla
2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking soda

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350°.

In a large bowl, cream together the butter, sugars, golden syrup, and vanilla.

In a medium-sized bowl, combine the flour and baking soda.

Add the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture, 1 cup at a time. Mix until blended. You may want to mix it by hand.

Divide the dough in half. Form each part into 2 long rolls, about 1 1/2 inches around.

Place 2 rolls of dough on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake the cookies for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the rolls have flattened and are lightly browned.

Remove the cookies from the oven and place the cookie sheet on a cooling rack.

Using a pizza cutter or knife, cut each rope into diagonal strips 1-inch wide. Allow the cookies to cool slightly before moving them from the pan to cooling racks. When cool, store the cookies in a covered container.

Makes 3 to 4 dozen cookies.



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B	O	S	O	I	O	L	A	A	A	E	I	A	P
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| Believe | Grinch | Mistletoe | Presents | Snowman |
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| Cheer | Jingle | Naughty | Rejoice | Winter |
| Cocoa | Jolly | Noel | Rudolph | Wisemen |
| Faith | Merry | Peace | Santa | |

I sew

By Sheila Tinkham

I sew
One stitch at a time
Sewing a new quilt

Sewing a new life
One patch at a time
One seam
Another patch
Another thread

The time ebbs by,
I am at peace
My needle threaded
My heart calm and serene
I sew

A new quilt
A new life
I sew and sew far into the night
A new found delight meets my eyes
I sew
My life made anew
I sew.....

Sheila Tinkham lives in Lincoln, NE. She started quilting when she sprained her ankle and fell in love with the process of sewing and the focused peacefulness of making and designing quilts. Writing is her passion and she has self-published three poetry books. You can follow her on Twitter at SheilaTinkham.



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It's Party Time With Lesley

by Lesley R. Nuttall

The holiday season is approaching, and as we haven't been able to do much partying over the past couple of years, I suggest it's time for us to start by easing back into some fun! The magic of Christmas can be fun, the excitement and above all else, the memories we make! Entertaining should be fun! I've always been known to be a very organized person, which is likely because I'm a Capricorn, and lucky for me, that's one of the traits of a Capricorn!

As Christmas is on Sunday this year, I would like to suggest a mingling cocktail party on Friday, December 23 from 7 to 11 p.m., or a time of your choosing. I am suggesting this because some families plan their traditional customs on Christmas Eve or Christmas day.



Planning is a big part of any successful party. Sit down with a pen and paper and plan how many guests you intend to invite. The biggest decision is usually what food to serve. Here, I would suggest finger foods, as guests are able to serve themselves from a special table or counter you set up.

Any number of foods are suitable for this type of party, hot or cold such as: Assorted crackers and cheese; a tray of bite size vegetables and dip; a cold meat tray with buns; you could add some appetizers from the frozen section of the supermarket to heat and serve; if you have time, it is always nice to have some homemade choices, such as deviled eggs; or bacon and cheese balls (recipe included). You could add some of your own choices as well.

Plan your beverage list to include, wine, a non-alcohol beverage, soft drinks and bottled water.

A plate of homemade dainties would be perfect to satisfy anyone craving sweets!

A good time to serve the food would be around 8:30 to 9 p.m.

For a decorative edible table center, I have used the following arrangement: It looks like a ball of different colored fruit. Use an orange or an apple for the base and place it in a low bowl.

Arrange bite size pieces of fruit -- such as, grapes, strawberries, pineapple or melon balls on a fancy cocktail pick, or a plain toothpick, and stick each one in and all over the apple or orange. It makes a beautiful table center, and people can nibble throughout the night.

To be completely organized, now would be the time to sort out your serving trays or platters. For a festive, more Christmas look, you could cover them with silver tinfoil. Will you use your good china side plates or use Christmas paper plates. Decide on the glassware you want to use as well. Of course, napkins are a must, as well as silverware and condiments.

On party night, arrange to have some low Christmas music playing and soft lighting for ambiance, and enjoy your own party too!

I'm always so thankful for the love and friendship of family and friends! Enjoy a blessed Christmas with your loved ones, and Merry Christmas to all!

Bacon Cheese Balls

- 1 cup mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup cheddar cheese
- 2 tubs/ bricks (227 g) Philadelphia cream cheese
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- 1 cup bacon small bits, cooked

Leave cream cheese out for an hour to soften. Whip to make smooth. Grate mozzarella and cheddar cheese and add to cream cheese. Add onion powder and bacon bits, combine well. Form into small balls. It helps to have your hands damp to keep from sticking. If it's too sticky, add more grated cheese. Cover with plastic wrap, and chill. Will last for several days. Yield: 25 to 30 balls

Lesley is the Author of Secrets of Party Planning. She also loves to write poetry, and lives in Thunder Bay ON, Canada with her husband.



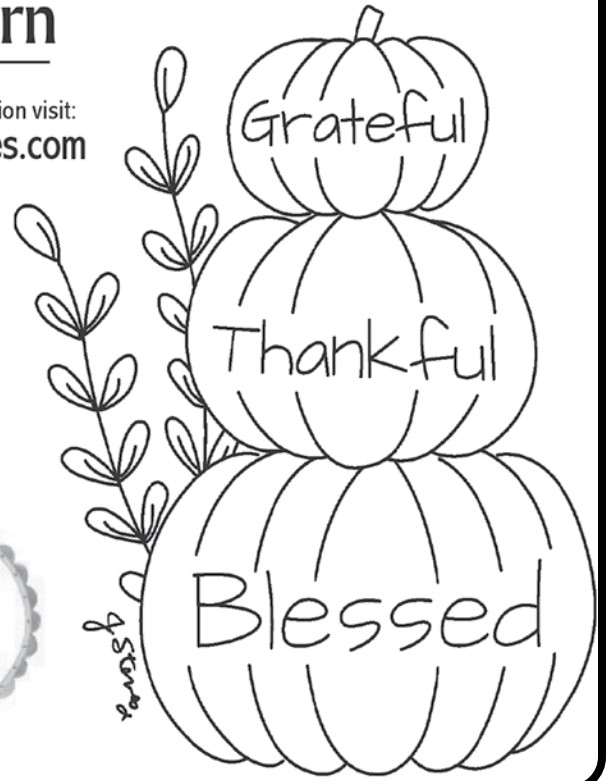
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Ghosts of Christmases past

by Jeff Cappis

"I'm afraid we're going to have to face it this year," I told my wife, Cathy. "It's pretty much just us for Christmas."

Cathy was disappointed, but she understood. The children were grown with other family commitments, and the grandchildren were busy celebrating Christmas with their friends. Even her brothers and sisters had scattered around the country, so she rarely got to see them. This just happened to be one of those years that things didn't work out.

We talked about past Christmases when our now-adult children were small and the same about our grandchildren. Lots of memories. Maybe that's one of the things that Christmas is about. We have lots.

The more we thought about it, though, the more Cathy started to look ahead. Are traditional Christmases behind us? She didn't want to become an obligation that the family had to endure each year. Even more, she didn't want us to become the invitees at someone else's place where we were the subject of polite and friendly conversation on Christmas Day. Sort of ghosts of Christmases past.

Wow. What a downer. We reminded ourselves that maybe that's the way things go this year, but there will still be others yet. Also, we do still have our families all year round and Christmas, after all, can sometimes be just another day of the year. Maybe we could curl up with a fire and a movie. A glass of wine and a hot tub wouldn't be a bad idea either. (I loved that idea.) So, we settled into that thought.

I could tell this all still weighed on Cathy, though. I tried to think of ways to make it special for her. Hang mistletoe? Balloons? Bake a cake? Hmm. I'd think of something, I guess.

As Christmas got closer, we both started getting the usual excitement. Guess it was a habit. We decorated the house and put up a tree. All the presents we got for everyone were wrapped, labelled and bowed. But it all felt so hollow.

"Since no one is going to be here, we might as well FedEx the presents to everyone," Cathy said bitterly.

Then came the day. Christmas Day. Cathy got up first. Mostly because I was snoring. She looked around. Merry Christmas she said to herself. She got me up. We each opened a present, shared a cup of coffee, read the news, then got tired and took a nap. Merry Christmas. At about 11:00, the dog scratched at the door to go outside. He didn't make it. Merry @%\$&*& Christmas.

Now, before you get so depressed about this Christmas story that you want to go hang yourself, just wait. I have to remind you that the day wasn't over yet.

The fire was warm, and the movie was good. After two hours of curling up together, we were pretty cramped up. My arms and legs had fallen asleep.

Cathy said, "Well, it's four o'clock. If we have a bite to eat and

get the hot tub out of the way, we can be in bed and asleep by eight.

"Not the Christmas I imagined," I replied.

Cathy looked sad. Then, right on cue, as if God himself had planned it, a bed and breakfast minibus pulled up to our house. When the doorbell rang, Cathy and I answered.

"I've got the guests for your bed and breakfast," the driver said.

"This isn't a bed and breakfast," Cathy explained.

He showed her the address on his order sheet. It was ours alright. A group of elderly people got out and started to unload their luggage.

"That's the right address, but this isn't a bed and breakfast!"

The driver just shrugged.

When Cathy began to protest, a man in the back stood up and said, "But Jeff promised us a free stay!"

The voice was familiar. Cathy knew that voice. It was her brother, Mick. She'd only seen him twice since he moved to the east coast. Next to him was her other brother, Jimmy, and her sisters, Emiline, Mary and Bertha. All her brothers and sisters were there! She couldn't believe it!

There were hugs and kisses all around. Cathy hadn't looked that happy in a long time. I paid the driver as they all went inside, and the house turned into an instant party. (Told you I'd think of something.)

The hours flew by as they all caught up on what they'd been doing with their lives. We shared stories, sang Christmas songs and the wine flowed. Cathy and I scratched up stuff in the kitchen to make a pretty good dinner. We all laughed hard and told funny stories about each other.

That evening the talk turned to the way Christmas was changing.

Mick said, "I'm in the same boat you are in. My daughter is off with her husband's family this year, so I didn't even get to see the grandkids."

"Same here," said Emiline. "Used to be my house was full at Christmas. I'd be cleaning that place for a week."

"At least you have kids," said Mary.

Jimmy nodded.

Bertha said, "I live next door to my daughter, and she can't make it over. She never does."

"Do you realize," Cathy added, "That this is the first time in almost 50 years that we've all been together for Christmas?" She paused, then said quietly, "If Mom and Dad were here, we'd have the whole family together again."

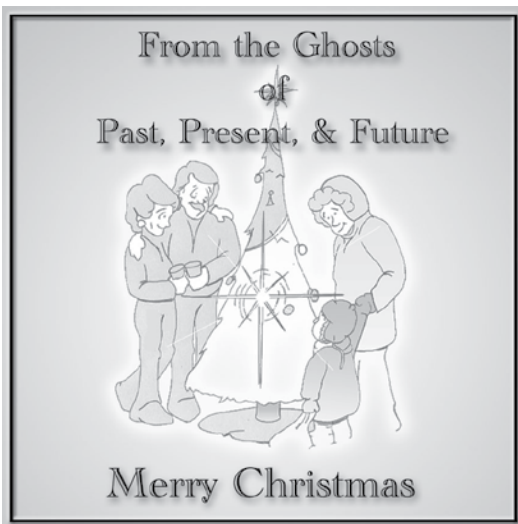
They all got quiet. Then Mick smiled and pulled a DVD from his inside jacket pocket. "They are," he explained, "I had all of Dad's home movies digitized and put on this disk."

The room got noticeably more excited as I put the disk in our DVD player. In no time, there were Cathy's parents. They were playing with the kids, opening presents and sharing a Christmas dinner. At one point, Cathy's parents both looked into the camera and mouthed the words "Merry Christmas."

I thought Cathy was going to melt. For a short while, she got to go back to past Christmases with her original family and relive those moments she thought were long gone. She felt the magic of Christmas again and it brought a tear to my eye, seeing her heart open up the way it did. This Christmas was beyond special. For her, it was almost spiritual.

Now, we did have normal family Christmases for years after that and they were good. But, as far as Christmas went, that year -- well, screw the kids -- that one was for us.

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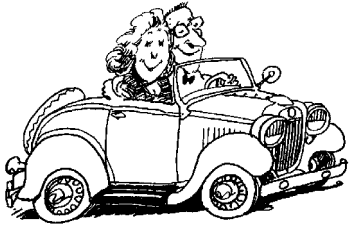
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

When making a road trip, always call ahead to confirm times and dates. We make every attempt to provide accurate information, but there are instances when things change. Always check weather conditions and travel safe.

November 2022

25-Dec. 17...Twelve Days of Christmas, Needle in a Haystack, Severy, p. 15

December 2022

1-15...Retirement Sale, Sew What Quilt Shop, Marion, p. 21
 3...24th Annual Pajama Party, Elsie Grace's, Frankfort, p. 19
 10...Give a Gnome a Home, Elsie Grace's, Frankfort, p. 19
 16-31...Retirement Sale, Sew What Quilt Shop, Marion, p. 21
 27 - Feb. 4 .. End of the Year/New Year's Sale, Clark's Fabric Shop, Kiowa, p.9

January 2023

1-31 ... New Year's Sale, Clark's Fabric Shop, Kiowa, p.9
 14, 28, & Feb. 11 "Going to Bali" Batiks Quilt Class, Seneca Variety, Seneca, p.19
 20-31...Sew Cozy Heartland Shop Hop, Various, p. 13

February 2023

4...Learn to Machine Applique with Amy Bradley, Prairie Point Quilt & Fabric Shop, Lenexa, p.17
 13-18...Cabin Fever Shop Hop, Various, p.13
 18...Sew Fun Day, Prairie Point Quilt & Fabric Shop, Lenexa, p. 17

March 2023

20-25...AQS Show in Branson, MO, 2023 Quilter's Motor Coach Trip by Pack and Go Tours p. 23

April 2023

April & May...2nd Annual All Kansas & Nebraska Shop Hop, Various, p. 13

November 2023

1-5...Houston Intl. Quilt Show, 2023 Quilter's Motor Coach Trip by Pack and Go Tours p. 23

From My Farm

By Donna Jo Copeland, farmeress

Just Flat Out Thankful

Sitting at my kitchen table on the last day of September it's hard to visualize November. The past few fall days here in south central Indiana have been story book, nearly perfect. Dry breezes to hasten the crops, one more hay cutting, no frost yet. Roses, asters, sunflowers and mums still flourish. You want a heavy wool sweater for morning chores, a tank top at noon and the sweater again at eventide.

Of course, with fall, approaching winter, comes the very long list of chores to be done NOW. Windows to close, winter curtains to hang, wood stove and flue to check, another load of firewood, barn to tighten up, one more load of hay. Then there are still fleeces from the spring shearing to skirt, wash, dye, spin and then knit, hook and weave. Plotting the last few warps for Lady Mary in the loom house before the weather turns too cold to weave in there.

For the chickens -- the window needs replaced, more plastic on the door, clean out and new shavings on the floor, new straw in the laying boxes. Dress those three young roosters.

The sheep list includes barn cleaning and tightening up, roof check, hoof trim and water tank heaters checked.

Bunny barn needs wind proofed, cages cleaned, winter water dishes washed and put out.

Dog houses need cleaned, new winter beds.

And as for me, check canned goods and staples, air out wool blankets and flannel sheets. I am the end of the chore list. Farmeresses always are.

Yes, there is a great deal of activity, but there is also gold in Indian Summer days, the winding down of fall, the call of winter. The fogs and mists are denser, deeper shadows. Pumpkins and dried corn stalks decorate porches. We pause and should give thanks.

Being mindful of our blessings is nearly a lost art these days. Oh, I can hear my grandparents in those words. False sense of deserving and greed seem to be upper most in the minds of most people. They have forgotten how to understand and appreciate simple blessings. The vivid colors in a leaf as it floats down to the ground, big fluffy clouds on the horizon, the fragrance of decaying leaves in the crisp morning air. And I am so thankful for my animals, those big eyes, tail wags, soft baas and snuggles. The old phrase, may you always have enough, resonates through my soul and for the most part has been lost in the echoes of time.

In the eyes of the world, I have very little. I am extremely thankful for what I do have, the life I have made. Not been an easy path. My animals, my health, my talents, my friends and family see me through. As one of my guild sisters on my birthday (yes 73...) said, a life well lived. I am trying my best.

Every night I thank Mother of All for my blessings, and I count them. Most nights I fall asleep before asking for anything. I am simple, my wants and needs are few. And I smile when my sheep call me to the barn for breakfast and supper.

I do hope each day is a bit better than the last. There is promise in the sunrise and may the sunset bring you peace.

As the years pass, the holiday season becomes less holiday. More like a time to just get through. Living alone with my animals our daily routine remains. I will spend a bit with friends and a meal with family. With only the woodstove for heat I can't be gone long. I am needed here. During the covid lockdown I made a Christmas list, got it out the other day and read it again. Nothing to change. I am either very boring or content.

The end of 2022 will mark a new year coming. Weather this year has been a horrid challenge for many of us. Perhaps the disbelievers will come to understand the harm they are doing to our world, our home.

If anything, Santa please fill their stockings with common sense.

And now a recipe --

Apple Butter Bread

Use any banana bread recipe, mine is from Better Homes and Gardens cookbook 1966. Instead of bananas use 1 cup of apple butter and ¼ cup of applesauce. Mix as directed. Pour into a parchment lined bread pan, bake at 350 for 45 minutes. I sprinkle extra cinnamon sugar on top before baking.

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Facebook Live • Directory of Advertising Shops

These are the ones we know; more will be added as we discover them. If you are an advertising shop who hosts a scheduled Facebook Live program, let us know so we can include you.

Monday:
 2 p.m. -- Quilter's Paradise
 4 p.m. -- The Quilted Sunflower - weekly

Tuesday:
 6 p.m. -- Make It Sew, Quilter's HQ, weekly
 7 p.m. -- Facebook Live Flash Sale, Birds of a Feather Quilt Shop, weekly

Thursday:
 9:00 a.m. -- Prairie Point Quilt & Fabric, weekly

Friday:
 9 a.m. -- Yellow Dog Quilt Shop, weekly
 1 p.m. -- Charlotte's Sew Natural, weekly
 5:30 p.m. -- "Come As You Are" Sales Party, Wool Market and DIY School, weekly

Saturday:
 9 a.m. -- Overbrook Quilt Connection (2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th Sats.)
 9:30 a.m. - Overbrook Quilt Connection (1st Sat.)

Look for updated Directory in each issue of The Country Register. You can have Facebook remind you when an event is starting -- great for those times when a shop posts an unscheduled Facebook Live event.

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Start Making Your Plans Today!

- AQS Show in Branson, Mo March 20-25, 2023
 Pick up in Beloit, Salina and points along 170 east
- Houston Intl Quilt Show November 1-5, 2023
 Pick up in Beloit, Salina & points south along I-135
 This trip is usually a sell out so reserve today

Photo bombs

by Deb Heatherly

Do you have a pet that insists on being in your photos? I have four cats – two girls and two boys. Max, Lacey and Little all hide when a camera comes out but not Monroe. This little guy thinks he was born to be a star.

Here's a great example. I spent several months this summer doing photography for my new book, *Quilted Occasions*. Although I shot on location in various places, a few of the pictures were scheduled to be staged and taken inside my home. Each photo had to be set up with quilts arranged just so, tripods for lighting in just the right spots and all the usual paraphernalia to create the best shots possible. Each shot might be taken hundreds of times with little tweaks between each click – all the while hoping that at least one will be useable.

Photo bomb #1 occurred while I was staging my dining room with a table top- per from the book. The pattern can also be finished as a tree skirt, but this sample was the table topper version. Step One was to press the topper to make sure there were no wrinkles. This step takes place with every single quilt. Step Two was placing it in the center of the table and arranging the props slated for the shot -- in this case two paper mâché deer.



Monroe photo bombing. Do you see him in the picture?

Step Three is to double check the lighting and reposition as needed while finding the best angle for the shot. Step Four is taking a good look at the quilt with the selected props and changing or adding more props if needed. Step Five is when I'm ready to begin taking the photos.

Setting up can take a half hour or more, especially if I am deciding between several props. It can also mean leaving the room numerous times to retrieve needed items. After what seemed like an eternity, I was ready to begin shooting but, as I looked into the camera lens, something was definitely out of place. The deer had suddenly grown an extra set of ears.

You guessed it – Monroe had quietly inserted himself into the scene. He had done so ever so gently, and nothing was moved out of place. He knows he is not allowed on the table, but it was almost as if he thought, 'I match the deer, and I will be silent so mom will never know.' To make him happy I took several pictures before I removed him from the scene and pulled out the kitty treats to redirect his attention elsewhere.

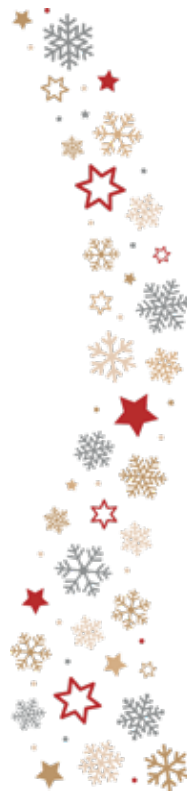
All was well until I was ready to set up for the book's cover photo. This meant moving furniture, setting up additional tripods, finding the special tape that I would use to make loops for the quilt I would hang on the wall plus a multitude of other little details like fluffing the pillow and lint rolling the quilts for any stray threads. It can get pretty time consuming, and I distinctly remember thinking to myself that in the future I might want to hire this part out to a professional photographer. That thought was fleeting

because when it comes down to it, I love every aspect of producing a book – even the photography.

Photo bomb #2 happened as I readied myself for this very important photo. We are all told at a young age, "Don't judge a book by its cover." But, if we are honest, we do just that. If the cover does not capture our attention, many times we will move on to another without even perusing the inside. Knowing how my little ham likes to be the center of attention, I really should not have been surprised when there he sat. Sweet Monroe was in just the right spot with his feet and head placed exactly as though posed. Not only posed but sitting motionless and waiting to be a star. Once again, I took numerous pictures to make him happy – all the while wondering if he knew better than I what needed to be on this cover.

You've probably guessed that out of 121 'cover' photos, the ones with my goofy orange guy were by far the best. Many have told me that his coloration enhances the colors in the quilts. I'm not sure about that, but I know that when I look at this book and see his cute face, I can't help but smile. I hope it does the same for those who purchase the book. Ask for *Quilted Occasions* at your local quilt shop. Tell them that Deb and Monroe sent you.

Deb Heatherly is a designer for Creative Grids® rulers. She is the designer of the Creative Grids® Cat's Cradle Tool, Strippy Stars Tool, Turbo 4 Patch, Ultimate Flying Geese Tool, Cat's Cradle XL, and Kitty Cornered Tool. She is the author of 'Cat'itude, Strippy Stars, 4-Patch Panache, The Ultimate Flying Geese Book, Catitude XL, Creatively Yours, The Build A Quilt Workbook, and Quilted Occasions. Visit her website at www.Debcatsnquilts.com.



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With Love from the Heart of the Home Come...
Susan Branch

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