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December 2024

Shirley Howington

Christmas Miracle

Picture Christmastime high in the mountains in 1880. The townsfolk of the small town of Maybelle, Colorado were preparing for the holidays by decorating, baking, and making gifts. The ranchers were making sure they had enough hay and feed to last the winter for their cattle and horses and any other critters they had. And, oh yes, that they had enough food for themselves and wood to burn to keep them warm and fed through the winter. The winters in the high country could be rough with the cold and snow. If one wanted to survive, one had to prepare. Yet there was an eerie beautifulness to the white blanketed landscape.

Tommy felt excited for Christmas. He was sure he would get a horse even though his pa had said they couldn't afford to feed another critter through the winter. "Maybe in the Spring we'll get you one, but not now," Pa said.

Twelve-year-old Tommy, in his heart of hearts, knew better. He had reached the age where he could ride horses and work cattle alongside his father and the ranch hands. His favorite horse, the old mare Doll, was pregnant. In her prime, Doll was the best cow horse they ever owned. Now, she was beyond her foal bearing years, and his parents were sure she wouldn't carry it to term.

Tommy didn't believe that for a minute. His intuition told him the mare and foal would live. As Tommy prepared for bed one night, he overheard his parents talking. "Burl, what are we going to do if that old mare dies giving birth and the foal lives?" Ma asked.

"Then we'll do everything we can to raise the foal, difficult as that may be. But it won't happen. I checked on Doll today and she didn't look good. I'm afraid she's only got a day or two left on this earth."

"Oh, this is just so sad. It will be so hard on Tommy. He loves Doll and has always wanted a foal from her to train as a cow horse so he could help out you and the ranch hands. This will break his heart."

"Now, Mildred, Tommy is strong, and he will get through it. There's nothing we can do other than to be there for our boy."

She won't die. I just know it! Tommy thought, as tears streamed down his face.

"Christmas is only two days away," Tommy prayed. "God, I need a miracle. Please save Doll and her foal."

On Christmas morning, Tommy and his pa went out to the stable to check on the horses. They heard a soft nicker from Doll. She was still alive! Then they heard a tiny whinny, and beside



her, standing on wobbly legs, the most magnificent foal Tommy had ever seen. He stood tall and proud and greeted them. Jet black, just like his mom, with a white star on his forehead. Tommy and his pa stood there in awe, unable to believe their eyes.

This was a Christmas morning neither would ever forget. Wiping away his tears, Pa said, "Well, son, it looks like I was wrong, and you have a horse in the middle of winter. What are you going to name him?"

Tommy smiled. "Christmas Miracle." ♦

The Dog Who Held Santa Hostage

Amy Law

While baking Christmas cookies in the chilly December kitchen, my chow-

retriever mix, Foxy, proudly presented me with a stuffed Santa doll, her eyes sparkling and tail wagging. Foxy was extremely proud of herself. It was time for me to chase her to get Santa back before she mauled him into bits of stuffing and red felt.

There was no way I could catch Foxy, of course.



The point was, I had to *chase* her. My usual response to a hostage situation like this is to ignore Foxy. I try to avoid encouraging her from grabbing random items and taunting me with them. But the look in her eye said that this time, Santa's days were numbered. If I didn't ransom him soon, he'd be nothing but an empty red suit and fluff floating around the Christmas tree.

I turned to time-honored hostage negotiation techniques: keep them talking and offer them food. I fetched a dog biscuit from

the box, but the Foxy knew this tactic. She cocked a challenging eye at me, and rolled Santa in her mouth, thoroughly coating him in saliva to mark him forever. Then she turned and placed him on the ground behind her, turned back to me, and carefully sat on Santa. Hostage secure, she was ready for her treat. I never knew dogs could look smug.

Rolling my eyes at her, I held the dog biscuit high over my head and rummaged under Foxy's hind quarters until I retrieved Santa, slimy, but otherwise unharmed from his ordeal. I rescued Santa, Foxy got her treat. Another hostage situation successfully resolved, and Christmas saved, to boot. ♦

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Kitty's First Christmas

A kitten's first Christmas is full of wonderment. Their human hauls in an actual tree, which smells good and sheds needles and is great for climbing, and sits it in a water pot for their enjoyment, or employs a plastic tree whose branches bend just so! As each human puts up the seasonal decor, they wonder just how excited and/or destructive their little ball of fur and claws is going to be, and usually know within a few hours.

The teenaged gray velvet Cap found the process of unpacking the boxes, pulling out the plastic branches, and fitting them into a tree with great enthusiasm, even though I repeatedly told him not to chew on the cord. His eyes full of this beautiful spectacle of lights and shiny glass balls, he waited until it stood proud and tall in the corner, launched somewhere into the middle of it and climbed proudly to the top—where his weight caused the whole thing to crash to the floor, breaking one of the plastic legs. Terrified, he ran under the bed and stayed there, as his exasperated owner (me) tore everything down four hours after putting it up and stuck it back in the box.

No tree that Christmas!

The next year, Cap had matured enough not to climb as high. Or perhaps he remembered my less than enthusiastic reaction! The mended tree still provided plenty of light entertainment and he bent a few branches to his satisfaction.

Then came Callie.

Unlike her calm “big adopted brother” Cap, who is mellow by nature, the little tortoiseshell came into this world bright-eyed and determined to cause trouble. Her mantra is “if it ain't forbidden and fun, don't do it.” She aided me in hauling up Christmas boxes from the basement first by tearing into them with her claws. (Maybe the cardboard scratcher wasn't such a good idea.) Then she climbed the tree while I put it together, all the way to the top, and threw the topper onto the floor. Chased baubles all over the house, got tangled up in the ribbons, and used a few presents as a chew toy. Since she got all the attention (negative is better than none, am I right?), Cap felt left out. He chewed on the

lower branches and vomited up copious amounts of plastic. I tried putting a doggie fence around the tree to keep him from doing that. It kept Callie out for ten minutes before she climbed over it and launched into the top branches. Now, both of them are old enough to harass the tree for a couple of days but then ignore it.

I don't recall our older, mellower cats ever getting into trouble with the tree. Our enormous orange tabby loved to lie under it on the tree skirt, so we arranged the presents to leave him a pleasant spot. Our gorgeous and loving Maine Coone had zero interest, except to sleep behind packages where nobody could find him. Years ago, my polydactyl white kitten, Mina, climbed my tree a few times, but rarely caused any damage.

My brother's cat, Prissy, on her first Christmas, totaled his tree. She climbed it so many times, she finally snapped it in half, and it looked bedraggled for weeks. Anyone who saw it bust out laughing, which provided a great deal of merriment. Even he got a few chuckles in about it, before we chucked it at the end of the season and bought him a stronger one for the next year.

Christmas is a time of great blessings, to remember our family and friends. It comes in the deepest part of winter, to give us hope for the future and remind us of what truly matters in life—our loved ones. It's a time to remember those who are gone, and how much we loved them. It is full of good food, parties, fudge, deliveries, wrapping paper, and church services. Our out-of-state family drives or flies in

for a few days, and we all stuff ourselves with ham or turkey and all the pie we can eat. We make fudge or give treats to people we forget to thank the rest of the year.

I often wonder what our pets think about Christmas. Is it a magical time for them, too? It's easy to believe they also enjoy it, because pet owners are generous. It doesn't feel right to pass out presents and not give Kitty or Fido one too. And for cats, there is a tree indoors to climb, full of ornaments just for them! (If they can get one off without breaking it, it's a new toy ball!) That's why I hang nothing old or breakable on my tree, and I don't care if they mess it up. They are my little treasures.

If you think about it, the love we show each other and our pets during the holidays is what the spirit of Christmas is all about. ♦



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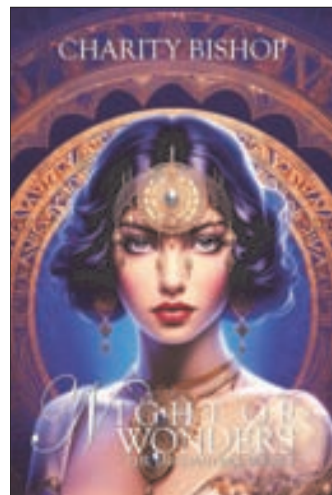
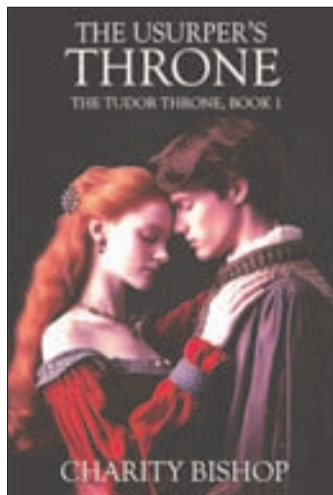
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The Gold Slippers

Author Unknown

Only four days remained until Christmas. The spirit of the season hadn't yet caught up with me, even though cars packed the parking lot of our local discount store. Things were even worse when I got inside the store. Shopping carts and last-minute shoppers jammed the aisles. *Why did I come today?* I wondered. My feet ached almost as much as my head. My list contained names of several people who claimed they wanted nothing, but I knew it would hurt their feelings if I didn't buy them anything. Buying for someone who had everything and deploring the high cost of items, I considered buying gifts anything but fun. Hurriedly, I filled my shopping cart with items and proceeded to the long check-out lines.

I picked the shortest, but it looked as if it would mean at least a 20 minute wait. In front of me were two small children—a boy of about 5 and a younger girl. He wore a ragged coat. Enormously large, tattered tennis shoes jutted far out in front of his much too short jeans. He clutched several crumpled dollar bills in his grimy hands. The girl's clothing resembled her brother's. A tangled mess of curly hair covered her head. Reminders of an evening meal showed on her small face. She carried a beautiful pair of shiny, gold house slippers.

As the Christmas music sounded in the

store's stereo system, the girl hummed along, off-key but happily. When we finally approached the checkout register, the girl placed the shoes on the counter, treating them like a treasure. The clerk rang up the bill. "That will be \$6.09," she said.

The boy laid his crumpled dollars atop the stand while he searched

his pockets. He finally came up with \$3.12. "I guess we will have to put them back," he said. "We will come back some other time, maybe tomorrow." With that statement, a soft sob broke from the little girl. "But Jesus would have loved these

shoes," she cried.

"Well, we'll go home and work some more. Don't cry. We'll come back," he said. Quickly, I handed \$3 to the cashier. These children had waited in line for a long time. After all, it was Christmas. A pair of arms came around me and a small voice said, "Thank you, lady."

"What did you mean when you said Jesus would like the shoes?" I asked.

The boy answered, "Our mommy is sick and going to heaven. Daddy said she might go before Christmas to be with Jesus."

The girl spoke, "My Sunday school teacher said the streets in heaven are shiny gold, just like these shoes. Won't Mommy be beautiful walking on those streets to match these shoes?"

My eyes flooded as I looked into her tear-streaked face. "Yes," I answered, "I am sure she will." Silently, I thanked God for using these children to remind me of the genuine spirit of giving. ♦

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The Little Santa Lantern

Judy McMillie

My three children and I have a zoom meeting every Sunday evening. It's a wonderful hour full of fun and laughter, and serious things if need be. Sometimes my grandchildren and great grandchildren join us for a few minutes, and it's always good to see my offspring and remind them of who we are and why we are important in their lives.

At one of our most recent zoom meetings, my son Chip held up a little toy familiar to all of us, and the reactions among those present surprised me. My children received the toy when they were very young. It has the head and shoulders of Santa Claus, with a sweet smile and rosy cheeks, but it's a lantern with a handle and a place in the bottom for batteries. When it lights up, Santa's face glows.

My paternal grandmother gave the little lantern to my children. As the oldest, Chip took charge of it, as older children do. He carefully and kindly took his younger brother and sister into a dark room—maybe a closet—and it was

super scary. But he spoke gently and turned on the lantern so they weren't afraid. Oh, my, reminiscing about that little lantern makes it all come alive again for me. I feel such love for my children when I recall their childhoods.

When Chip became a new father, he asked me if he could have the Santa lantern for his children. I told him it didn't work anymore, but he was welcome to it. Well, fix it he did! He's a mechanical engineer, so that kind of work is right up his alley. He made the little Santa lantern new again. Chip's children all played with it for twenty years, then relegated it to the Christmas ornament box until such time that he became a grandpa. Now that sweet little toy is again on the most-loved list for the next generation in our family. How sweet is that?

We never know which memories stay with us through the years, and which ones we will let go. I'm perfectly happy with my Little Santa Lantern memories. ♦



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MELODY OF CHRISTMAS

For me, Christmas is more than a one day celebration. It's an entire season of unique sounds, creating a melody of excitement filled with joyful laughter that sets my heart to singing!

Every Christmas season, starting at age four, and lasting into my teenage years, my Grandpa Onie showed me the true gifts of Christmas were not the presents I opened on Christmas morning but the multitude of awe-inspiring sounds I heard as I experienced the wonders of

Clap! Clap! A quick High Five, and it's time for Grandpa and me to scamper into a rustic workshop hideout where Grandpa hand crafts Christmas gifts and mends anything broken. Rusty door hinges sing out a creaky welcome as we walk into the workshop. Grandpa's boots crunch on the sawdust floor as he quickly slides onto a wooden seat behind his old-fashioned tool sharpener, smiles and says "OK, Katie-did, listen to the splatter, splash song of the water as it drips and rolls over my sandstone grindstone. It makes it work properly, so I can sharpen my ax."

The squeaky sound of the grindstone treadle and the sandpaper scratch, scratch of Grandpa's ax blade as it touches the grindstone, makes me cover my ears. But my heart leaps for joy because these grating sounds sing a melody of "ready, set, go!" Let's find a sweet smelling Douglas Fir tree to place by the fireplace in the family room.

"Quick," shouts Grandpa, "get Flexible Flyer! My ax is razor sharp."

I giggle and tie a string of sleigh bells around the handle of my sled. As we walk into the woods behind the house, Grandpa whistles. I sing as we join in with the ring tinkling of the jingle bells on my sled. The swish-wish, swish-wish, of the sled runners through the fresh snow blend with the crunching our snow boots make on the hidden patches of ice. His ax creates a *thwack-thwack, kerchunk* rhythm as it hits the trunk of our prized Douglas Fir tree. Black Capped Chick-a-dees fill the crisp, cool air with their own holiday song. The voice of the wind through the Ponderosa Pines sends a symphony of sounds into the wintry air. A perfect Christmas melody!

Grandpa Onie insists that before we can decorate our hand cut evergreen tree, it must "become a part of the family." I need to hear a few moans and groans as it settles into the tree stand, and listen for the soft rustling of its needles as its branches grow accustomed to warmer air. When I hear those sounds, along with the whirling of the hand-turned antique popcorn popper, I pick up my string, needle, and miniature jingle bells and make popcorn garlands for our friendly family tree.

On the first day of December, Grandmother Mattie May moves her old Singer sewing machine into the family room. *Crackle! Pop!* The sounds of logs blazing in the fireplace gave her the idea of the rhythm she needed to set her feet moving on the treadle. As she creates holiday socks, aprons, shirts and blouses for each family member, the machine's bobbin whirrs as fast as a spinning top. The hand crank chug-thuds along as the needle whizzes through the colorful material.

Relaxing evenings by the hearthstone fireplace create a symphony of sounds. *Scrape, scrape, scrape, swish! Scrape, swish!* Grandpa's steel, hand engraved pocket knife sings a scratchy tune as tiny whittling curls fall silently to the floor. He whistles as he whittles wooden cooking spoons for all the ladies in his family, or horses, birds, and trains for his eight grandchildren. This blends in with Grandma Mattie May's sometimes soft, sometimes high pitched, rhythmic expression as she reads aloud her favorite stories.

Tears come to my eyes when I hear the silence of her voice as the "Little Match Girl" struck her last match. I clap when I hear her soft giggles when reading the Velveteen Rabbit being stuffed into the top of the boys Christmas stocking. I sigh in relief with her when the faded, shabby rabbit toy, with a sawdust heart, becomes real!



Of all the meaningful, heart touching sounds of Christmas that Grandpa Onie taught me to experience, my favorite sound occurred on Christmas morning. No, not the rustling tissue paper as I opened my gifts, but the reverberating tinkling, chiming church bells that pealed to announce the birth of Jesus. Grandpa Onie's antique phonograph played the hymn *Amazing Grace*, using the harmonious sounds of church bells, to call all family members to prayer time and a reading of the Christmas Story.

Grandpa Onie etched a kaleidoscope of long ago Christmas sounds forever in my memory to bless me every Christmas season. Newly discovered holiday sounds like the *pa rum, pum pum pum* of the *Little Drummer Boy* song, the *chug, chug, swish* of a toy train zooming around under my Christmas tree, and the *splash, splosh, gurgle* of hot chocolate filling up my mug remind me to say, thank you Grandpa Onie for your wisdom. The true melody of Christmas is heard, not seen. ♦

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the holiday season. He believed, "Christmas is heard with your ears, not seen with your eyes."

Grandpa Onie and I begin our Christmas seasonal listening adventure the day after Thanksgiving by standing quietly behind the swinging doors that lead into Grandma Mattie May's kitchen. We wait to hear the sounds of eggs being cracked on the edge of a bowl, followed by the steady *beat, beat, stir, stir* of a wooden spoon creaming the eggs, butter and sugar. If we hear her softly humming *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, as she moves her wooden rolling pin back and forth over a mound of dough, the melody of Christmas has officially begun.

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A Country Christmas

Lucy Lawshe

Times were hard in 1929. The small, rural community of Cherry Hill had a barber shop, a blacksmith shop, a cotton gin, a grist mill, and two large department stores—much like general stores. There were also two physicians: Dr. Philpot and Dr. Lee.

The members of the Highland Methodist Church were planning their annual Christmas Program. They took the play entitled *Last Year's Christmas Doll* from the magazine *The Christian Herald* and assigned all the parts. Several men of the church had offered to provide a tree for the program. As usual, the young people handled the decorations.

Several months earlier, after church one Sunday morning, the young people gathered under one of the giant oak trees in the churchyard to discuss how they might get decorations for the Christmas tree. They knew none of the families had any extra decorations or money to spare. One of the group asked, "Why don't we save our pennies? If we each save every cent possible, we might have enough to buy something for decorations."

Another one said, "I agree. Do you all remember when the kerosene lamp at church got broken? Everyone saved pennies until we had enough to buy a new globe."

One boy asked, "How much do we need?" A girl said, "I think if we save twenty-five cents, we can purchase decorating supplies." After some thought, the group agreed to save every penny possible. Having made their decision, they scattered to join their families who were in their wagons, ready to go.

During the following weeks, they were mindful of their promise. Each one found a container to keep their pennies in. From time to time, they would ask each other how much they had saved. The total slowly increased. In those days, one cent bought a lot of necessary items, so they struggled to save them.

The days flew past.

After church one Sunday, they gathered just inside the church door and each one told how much they saved. The total was fifteen cents. With heavy hearts, they left the church. It looked like they might not get enough to buy anything to make decorations with after all. Well, they were just going to try harder.

Finally, the time came to count the pennies they saved. They met at the Ryals' house and dumped their pennies on the kitchen table. Mrs. Ryals counted the small pile.

Everyone held their breath, watching and waiting. Mrs. Ryals smiled and raised her head. "There are twenty-five pennies here. Congratulations, you have done a fine job."

This announcement met with excitement. To celebrate the occasion, Mrs. Ryals made hot chocolate and served gingerbread fresh from the oven. After enjoying their tasty treats, they walked to town and entered one of the department stores. They took their time looking around at everything, wanting to spend their money wisely. After discussions, they bought crepe paper and tinfoil.

One girl in the group lived nearby and invited the rest to come to her house to make the decorations. Soon after they arrived, everyone got busy.

Some cut the crepe paper into strips they made into a long chain to wind around the Christmas tree from top to bottom. The others cut squares of tinfoil and place a sweet gum ball with a piece of string attached inside it to hang on the tree. Before long, the decorations were complete and put in a safe place until time to decorate the tree.

The young people felt a great relief to know the Christmas decorations were done. The past few

years had been difficult for everyone in the community. Families had done without things they needed and made do with what they had on hand. It would be a little more meaningful this year to enter the church the night of the Christmas Program and know they had



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provided the decorations.

At last the day came for the Christmas Program. Families worked harder all day to get chores done a little earlier, so everyone had time to wash up and put on their Sunday best. Later that evening, as wagons began rolling into the churchyard, children excitedly called to each other, and adults visited as they entered the church. The kerosene lamps provided a warm light, but the real comfort came from the wood stove, which dispelled the chill from everyone's bones.

The Christmas program went off without a hitch. Lorene Ryals played the part of the Christmas Doll. In the story, a little girl's doll had lost an arm and a leg. For the program, Lorene wore a dress belonging to her older sister. It fitted loose enough for Lorene to slip one of her arms down inside it without it showing. She bent one of her legs back and hid it beneath the skirt. With only one arm and one leg showing, Lorene looked exactly like *Last Year's Christmas Doll*.

When it came time for the presents, everyone's attention went to the tree. The parents all exclaimed how pretty it looked. Along with the crepe paper chain and the tin foil wrapped "balls," a present sat beneath it for every boy and girl in attendance that night. The Sunday School teachers had seen to that. Every boy and girl felt excitement as each opened their present. They treasured their gift and expressed their thanks to their teachers.

The evening ended before anyone knew it, and it was time to head home. Mothers gathered their children and began bundling them up and dads went outside to check on the teams of horses. Families exchanged last-minute conversation and goodbyes and loaded into their wagons. The children snuggled under the quilts in the wagon beds.

That night, leaving the church and going their separate ways, each family carried a feeling of warmth and joy in their hearts. It had been a good evening. They were thankful for the close bond of caring and sincere fellowship that made up the membership of the church family, and felt the joy of the season. Continuing along their way on the quiet country roads, they looked up into the clear, cold sky and saw bright, twinkling stars. They thought of that night long ago when one particular star led the wise men and shepherds to where the Christ Child lay in a manger. For that, they were the most thankful. ♦

The Four Christmas Envelopes

Richard B. Whitaker

Many years ago, the Christmas holidays in the beautiful city of Quito, Ecuador were fast approaching. While working at a mission, my wife Cheryle and I decided to identify four people who worked in and around our large apartment complex and give them a gift we hoped would brighten their day and remind them of the greatest gift ever given.

We selected four humble, hardworking people we believed would appreciate receiving a small token of gratitude for their tireless service. Having watched each during their working hours and gleaning information from them in our passing conversations, we knew they were in the lower economic level of the country and, with few friends, theirs was a lonely world.

A week before Christmas, we bought four Christmas cards, signed them, and slipped \$5 into each envelope with the recipient's name on the front. None of the recipients ever asked, begged, or solicited anything from us. They only smiled as we approached and greeted us each day with a warm and genuine, "Buenos días, Señora y Señor."

Our first recipient was an elderly man named Juan, who directed the parking of cars in our apartment/public market parking lot, and whose sole source of income were the tips he received. He wore a uniform of old, wrinkled gray trousers two sizes too large and a weathered black belt cinched tightly around his waist. A faded, gray military style shirt with button down front pockets and two curled epaulets attached to the top of each shoulder hung loosely from his slender upper body. A dilapidated, eight-point gray military hat sat pulled down low on his head, which caused his ears to fold slightly under the pressure of the hatband. In his right hand he carried a worn, red handkerchief. He waved it as a flag in his effort to catch the attention of the drivers entering the lot. Once he had their attention, he shuffled through the lot and stood in front of an open parking space and waved his handkerchief. He resembled a matador trying to gain the attention of a 2000-pound bull!

After they reached him, Juan stepped to the side, bowed, and directed them to the spot with his flowing piece of material. If the driver was a woman, Juan would gallantly walk to her door, open it and bow as she exited the vehicle. Juan also used his handkerchief to stop any cross traffic when you backed out of a spot. Rarely did someone fail to roll down their window and drop a few coins into his sun

-baked, wrinkled hands. He would shout a hearty, "Gracias," and quickly return to work.

When we gave Juan his envelope, he gave us a large toothless smile, bowed, and, being busy, slipped it into his pocket and continued working. A few days passed before we saw him again. When we did, he shuffled up to me, threw his arms around my waist, and with his head resting on my chest, gave me a massive bear-hug. Somewhat shocked, I glanced over at Cheryle as she mouthed the words, "I wish I had the camera!"



Following that expression of gratitude, not a day passed that if Juan saw me, this kindhearted greeted me warmly, removed his beat-up police hat, and saluted as though I were a general in the Ecuadorian Army. He would ask, "How are you today, Chief? Have a marvelous day!"

The next recipients were the two security guards that worked the front counter and the basement parking level security desk. These



young men were diligent in their service and did their best to keep the building and its occupants as safe as possible. Cheryle and I enjoyed giving each guard his envelope and during the next few days, each made it a point to knock on our apartment door and express gratitude for the card and money.

Our fourth and final recipient of a Christmas envelope was sweet, hard-working Maria. She stood four-foot ten and always had a sparkle in her eyes and a smile on her face. She wore a clean green jumpsuit with a white T-shirt under it, accompanied by a well-used blue apron wound tightly around her slender waist, and a green baseball cap. This was her daily uniform. She wore it proudly as she labored to keep the building and its surrounding areas clean for those inside whom she considered "Very Important Persons."

Daily, she swept the sidewalks, cleaned the tile floors and did basic custodial maintenance.

While cleaners in more affluent building complexes used expensive tools, Maria could only afford a small dustpan and old broom she brought from home. Her salary was .25 cents an hour, or \$2.24 a day, for a little over \$13 a week. To reach her employment, she travelled 4 hours by bus each day, or two hours' salary, just for transportation.

As Christmas approached, Cheryle and I began our search for Maria, but found her nowhere. To our dismay, we couldn't find her, so another woman in the building said she would send Maria to find us. We returned to our apartment and waited. Thirty minutes passed before we heard a timid knock at our front door. Cheryle opened it and there stood a smiling Maria. After the normal pleasantries, Cheryle gave Maria her envelope. She opened it with no idea what it contained. Tears filled her eyes, and she trembled. Slowly and with great affection, she stepped forward to give my wife a loving hug. Also in tears, Cheryle returned it and wished her a Merry Christmas. Maria said, "Gracias, señora." She went back to work, and Cheryle and I went on with our week.

Christmas Day came and went. We didn't see Maria for a few days, and when we did, we noticed she now carried a spray bottle full of glass cleaner and a pocketful of white rags. As we walked out the large, newly cleaned front glass apartment building doors, we said good-morning. Hearing our voices, Maria stopped what she was doing and hurried up to us, shook my hand and then stepped in front of Cheryle for another hug.

In tears, she said, "Senora, thank you so very much for the card and money. Your gift was the only Christmas present I received."

"You're welcome, Maria," Cheryle said with a giant smile. "I hope it helps."

It touched me how a small act of kindness could touch another person's heart, especially at this special time of year. Cheryle and I were grateful



to do something for some wonderful people normally forgotten during the time of year when the Spirit of Giving is in abundance, as shown to us by the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ♦

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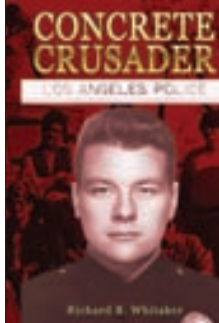
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The Biggest Christmas Surprise Ever

Janeen Jackson

Onnie Loutza lived with her parents in Camp Creek, Virginia, in 1930. Her father, James, came from Italy, where he met and married his wife Matilda. They lived on a 100-acre farm and raised six children, five girls and one boy. Onnie was the third oldest of the children. James grew vegetables, tobacco and apples on their little piece of ground; during the winter months, he worked in the coal mines. He was a well-respected leader in the community. Times were hard, but he kept shoes on his children's feet and all six kids later went to college.

Onnie was about twelve as Christmas time drew near, and her dad planned a trip to town, along with a list of things to pick up. Onnie had to go to the dentist and felt excited to get in on the pre-Christmas shopping for the smaller children this year. It was a first for her, so she could hardly wait.

Christmas was the only time the family got to enjoy the special treat of oranges. So when Onnie went into the little store to fill her mother's list, it pleased her to find the biggest oranges she had ever seen. They weren't all that orange, but they were beautiful and she knew

the family would be so happy to have such large ones. They bought the entire crate. All the way home, she could almost taste those giant, sweet oranges. Just the sight of them made her mouth water. She could hardly contain herself.

Christmas Eve, it took her a long time to go to sleep. How surprised and pleased all the family would be! They were in for a big surprise.

Yes, they were in for a big surprise. For when Christmas morning came, and they all bit into those massive oranges, they tasted their first grapefruit... and not sweet ones, at that. Faces puckered instead of smiling and it left a wonderful memory to share with succeeding generations. It still brings a smile to Onnie's granddaughter's face when she goes to do her own Christmas shopping and sees both oranges and grapefruit in the fresh food department of her supermarket. She pictures her Grandmother's face that morning and feels the disappointment that had to have huge for a little girl who thought she was buying her family the best Christmas surprise ever.

The surprise would have had the biggest impact on her. ♦





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The Christmas Doll

“I’m sorry, they still haven’t come in,” said the lady on the other end of the phone. I hung up and sighed. This had been my third call in two weeks. What could take so long?

I’d placed an order for the ceramic arms and legs I needed to attach to the cloth body of the doll. Her painted ceramic head was rumored to have come to from the days of the Civil War. Beneath the shiny, wavy black hair were two bright eyes, a button nose and rosy cheeks. Remind you of someone? I’m smiling, but she didn’t look like Santa Claus even though she had a droll little mouth drawn up like a bow. I felt

downcast about the arms and legs because this doll was my intended Christmas surprise for my mother-in-law.

My husband’s parents had come from nothing and survived the Great Depression

while trying to get by in New York City. In retirement, they moved up to the country home they’d bought right after WWII. They’d done all right and had come away with some precious family heirlooms. Pop, my father-in-law, owned a baseball signed by scads of players from the 1930s. He’d gathered them during the years he’d played semi-pro. They had a collection of Kennedy half dollars, Pop’s Swedish Bible and the doll’s head from down south.

We were young with two little boys and too little money. Christmas loomed. I had gifts tucked away for our boys, but I did not know what to give their grandmother that year. At Thanksgiving, after our sumptuous meal, we sat a while before even thinking of pumpkin pie. We collapsed all comfy in their living room and before my wondering eyes appeared the answer to



my quest, sitting on the fireplace mantle. My mental wheels spun. So did the penny pincher. What if I dressed this doll my mother-in-law held so dear? What if I sewed up a body and found ceramic arms and legs? Excited, I began to plot and plan.

Where would I purchase the ceramic pieces? I asked friends and checked ads in the newspaper. Back then, there were no computers except the behemoths that big business used. I had no Amazon or Internet. How did I ever survive in such primitive conditions? Finally, a friend told me of someone who did doll repairs as a hobby and soon I had a phone number in hand. I gave the doll lady a jingle (I’m holding off saying bell). She took my order, assuring me I’d have them in time for Christmas. I breathed a sigh of relief. She wanted seven dollars for her efforts.

I jingled back ten days later. No ceramic limbs yet. Okay, I still had time. Four more days and panic set in. I called again just a few days before we were to head out to share Christmas with grandma and grandpa, the picture of woe. There would be no doll arms and legs for me to wrap along with my note promising to dress her doll. What to do?

I seized on an idea. Thank God for my Avon lady. She’d been to the house several days before to drop off my order, which included a bottle of cologne on sale. At least this would be something to wrap and hand to Grandma from under the tree. Problem solved. Sort of. We took off over the river and through the woods with everyone in high spirits but me. My beautiful plan to dress the Civil War doll for Christmas was gone. It took everything I had to act cheerful.

Looking back, I now realize a pretty card and a note promising to dress the doll would have been enough. When my mother-in-law un-wrapped her gift of cologne, she smiled. It was not Tigris, her favorite, but she appreciated a girly gift. And having had a rough start as a young married woman herself, I think she understood that sometimes there are only moths in one’s wallet.

As the day wore on and we watched the boys having a ball with their new toys, I calmed down. I shared my intentions with grandma and told her I’d take the doll’s head home and dress her even if I couldn’t find the arms and legs. I never did. But I found material and ribbons and lace and set to work. I fashioned a soft body, made pantaloons, a slip and a cummerbund. She looked pretty good and even armless and legless, my mother-in-law loved her.

She has been gone a long time now and I have the doll back. She sat in an old sewing chair in our front hall for many years. I finally wrapped her up and put her in a good place. When I take her out to show my own grandchildren, I think she’ll need a new dress. ♦

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Christmas and the Jeep

A young man told us this story several years ago. He always remembers this Christmas as the best. I guess a white Christmas can really make a difference!

One year, we had a large amount of snow. I had gone to spend Christmas Day with my father and his family. In an area like ours, where we seldom see large snows, life ground to a standstill. This was my first snow. I found it incredible.

My father asked my brother and me if we wanted to go for a drive and look for places where we could go sledding. We thought it was crazy, but were ready to go.

We climbed into his bright red Willis Jeep pickup, one of us in the front seat with him and the other in the truck bed. We rotated sitting in the cab, so we didn’t get too cold. Bitter cold stung my cheeks when it was my turn to ride outside. The tires were huge. I guess that’s why we could get out while everyone else got stuck at home. My father would drive to the top of a hill and let us out with our sleds, then drove to the bottom to give us the all clear by honking his horn. Off we went, yelling and screaming as we flew down the hill. When we reached the bottom, he picked it up and drove us to the top.

After a while we would find a new hill... and then another. We persuaded him a few times to get on the sled with us. The deep powder and sledding with

my father and brother, one Christmas not so long ago, are among my favorite Christmas memories. He made this Christmas my favorite memory of all time! ♦



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Maureen Hastings, as told by her 94-year-old father Cecil Duffield

The Snow That Lasted All Winter

December 12, 1913, was a beautiful winter day on the plains of Colorado. The sun blazed, and the thermometer hit eighty-five degrees, but the next day it began snowing and didn't quit for three days. The wind didn't blow, so the snow came straight down. It reached a depth of four feet when it finally stopped. The fence posts looked like they wore tall hats as the snow piled three to four feet high on them. I don't know how cold it got, but it was cold!

We lived on a homestead south of Roggen. When Dad built our sod house in 1908, he piped water into it from our well run by a windmill. We didn't know anyone else with water piped into the house. He had buried the pipe only three feet deep. It froze and broke during the storm. Since he was hoping to build a new house in a couple of years, he didn't replace it.

After that, we had to haul water a 100 feet from the well to use in the house. The windmill had a pipe that ran from the well into a barrel, and a pipe went from the barrel to the stock tank. To get water, we dipped water from the barrel with a bucket. Hauling buckets of water was an unpleasant chore on wintry days.

The heavy snowfall stopped most trains from running. The Colorado and Southern steam train that ran from Cheyenne to

Boulder had to attach a steam-driven rotary plow to the engine. It threw the snow off to the side and cleared the tracks. Even with the plow, it took two days to make the trek during the storm. The Burlington that ran through Roggen had a rotary plow and made the trip to Denver.

Travel across the prairie was nearly impossible, and my older sister and brother could not get to school. Mama packed clothes for her and us five children while Dad hitched the horses to a wagon. We all piled in the wagon and Dad took us to the train station in Roggen. The horses had to work

hard to get through the deep snow. We boarded the Burlington train (later called the Burlington Northern) and went to stay with Grandma in Niwot. Dad stayed home to do chores and take care of our place. My brother and sister walked about a mile from Grandma's to school. The snow had a crust by then, and they could walk on top of the snow.

Grandma's neighbor, Mrs. Woodcock, asked Mama if I could keep her cow off the railroad tracks for her. Even though I was not-quite-three-years old, I watched the cow, making sure she didn't get on the tracks while she grazed.

Mama's brother, Dan, lived near Grandma. He owned a creamery in Niwot. One day, he took me to work with him. There were a lot of things in

the creamery to interest a young boy. One was a belt that came up out of the floor and went around a pulley. A steam engine drove it at a high rate of speed, and it ran the creamery machinery. Fascinated by it, I stood watching it for a while. Curiosity got the best of me. I grabbed the fast moving belt and got jerked into the air. That scared

me, so I turned loose and hit the floor. It knocked me unconscious for a while.

Uncle Dan never took me back to work with him after that. I guess he thought there was too much responsibility trying to watch out for a

curious little boy like me.

During our stay at Grandma's, Mama bought a new shiny, black and chrome Majestic wood cook stove for thirty-five dollars in Longmont. It became her pride and joy. It had two warming ovens about eighteen inches above the cooking surface. A copper water tank on the side extended into the firebox to help heat the water quickly. Once the water was boiling, she could slide the tank away from the direct heat, so the water stayed hot but didn't evaporate as fast. She could flip down a couple of small shelves at the back to set the coffeepot or teakettle on to keep them hot but not boiling. She also received several bread pans, a nickel-plated teakettle and a waffle iron—all for the price of the stove.

It was a good thing we enjoyed staying at Grandma's, and she





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enjoyed having us because the snow didn't melt until late April or early May. After school ended in May, Dad came and got us in a horse-drawn wagon. After loading Mama's new stove and our belongings into it, we

climbed in and headed for home. It took two days to make the trip, so we camped a couple of miles east of Fort Lupton and spent the night. The reservoirs provided irrigation water to the area. When the

snow from the storm melted, the run-off washed out both dams.

People were told to evacuate the area, but some didn't heed the warning. A wide area flooded, sweeping houses and barns away and killing a few people. It left our place undamaged, but the Hay Gulch Creek west of our house overflowed. North of our place, its channel filled up with silt, stopping the flow of water and forming a lake.

As we came closer to home, we saw the path of the flood. All the bridges had washed out, so we had to detour four miles to the south to find one to cross. We finally reached home and were happy to be back after being gone for so long. ♦

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Our Christmas Gift

Suzan Wiener

With Christmas just a few weeks away, the scent of pine and cinnamon hung heavy in the air, and we decked out our modest home with twinkling lights and garlands. The festive spirit slowly crept in, despite the challenges we faced.

One snowy evening, as the first snowflakes of the season dusted the ground, our friend and neighbor, Mary, stopped by with an unusual request. "Could you take in my son's friend Tommy for the holidays?" she asked.

His parents were in the middle of a difficult divorce, and Mary worried he wouldn't have a joyful Christmas. Normally, she would have taken him in herself, but she was hosting a big Christmas gathering with relatives arriving from all over.

At first, we hesitated. We were older, without children, and our finances were tight—Christmas presents this year were going to be simple, and our Christmas tree, though lovingly decorated, was not brimming with gifts underneath. But as Mary spoke about Tommy's situation, our hearts softened. After all, Christmas is about kindness, sharing, and opening your home to those in need.

"All right," we said, exchanging a glance. "He can stay with us for the holidays."

Mary smiled warmly and mentioned Tommy could help around the house with chores, a blessing because both my husband Howie and I had bad backs, and welcomed any extra help, especially with the house decorated but needing tidying before Christmas Day.

Tommy arrived the next morning, bundled up in a red scarf and mittens, looking nervous but with a hint of hope in his eyes. As the days went by, we noticed how much joy he brought into our home. He helped us decorate the Christmas tree with shiny ornaments, hung wreaths on the door, and joined us in baking gingerbread cookies that filled the house with the comforting smell of Christmas. His laughter filled our hearts as we told stories by the fireplace, and his presence turned what we feared might be a difficult holiday into one full of warmth.

Tommy washed dishes, swept floors, and whipped up a few meals that were not only delicious, but felt like the perfect comfort food for the season.

One evening, we all sat down together to watch a Christmas movie marathon with hot cocoa in hand and cookies fresh from the oven. It felt like we were a little family, celebrating the season in our own way. As Christmas approached, there was an unexpected twist of joy—

Tommy's parents reconciled. On Christmas Eve, he packed up his things to return home, and though we were happy for him, we couldn't help but feel a pang of sadness at the thought of him leaving.

Howie handed him a fishing pole wrapped in a red ribbon. "Merry Christmas, Tommy," he said. "When my back's better, we'll go fishing together."

Tommy's face lit up with joy, his eyes twinkling like the lights on our Christmas tree. He hugged us tightly, and in that moment, it felt like we had given and received one of the greatest gifts of the season—love and connection.

A week after Christmas, Mary returned to our doorstep, this time holding a large, festively wrapped package in her hands. "This is for you," she said, her face glowing with excitement. We opened the gift carefully, peeling away the paper to reveal something truly unexpected—a brand-new television! Our old TV had been on its last legs, and with money so tight, we couldn't dream of replacing it. What a miracle!

Mary beamed and said, "This is from Tommy and his parents. He wanted to thank you for treating him like family."

We were both moved to tears. It wasn't just about the gift, but the thought behind it—the kindness, the love, and the spirit of giving that Tommy had shown. He had been a genuine joy to have around, and in return, he gave us something more valuable than any material gift—he reminded us of the true meaning of Christmas.

That holiday, we learned sometimes the greatest gifts aren't the ones wrapped in shiny paper under the tree, but the unexpected bonds we form, the kindness we share, and the joy of opening our hearts to others.

Thank you, Tommy, for reminding us what Christmas is really about. ♦



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Why Do I Do It?

It's cold. It's dark. I don't want to be here.

Bundled up in layers of clothing under my coat, I have a heavy scarf pulled up around my neck and am wearing a hat and boots. I pull into the parking lot and head for the choir section, holding my music folder up to the window for the usher to see.

He waves me forward with a swing of his flashlight. I park my car and head off into the night, watching my step on the dimly lit walkway leading to the entrance. Here we go again.

Once inside the bright entry hall, I meet up with friends. It's a chilly night but the smiles are warm. Other choirs are there, calling out to each other. Our director gathers us all together for a music warm up and a few pointers, before heading us out into the night. On a wintry night in December, dozens of choirs have come to our local gardens, and make their way down the lighted paths to their destinations. Every hour, choirs change at each of the venues. Thousands of people come to walk through the winter wonderland and hear voices ringing in the crisp air, singing the songs of Christmas.

The lit locations direct the lights onto the choirs; they can only see their music and their directors. Rarely do they see the people moving past in the darkness, boots crunching on the snow. It's impossible to tell how many have stopped to listen. It's hard to stand in packed snow in one place and sing for 50 minutes. Our director has divided our group up, this year, into three parts—children, adults and a small bell choir.

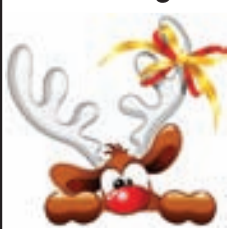
We adults lead. It's difficult to turn the pages with gloves but removing them



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The Perfect Christmas Tree

continued from page 10

exposes us to iced fingers—we make do. When we finish our section, we remain to hear and support the rest of our group, our feet freezing as we stand on the packed snow where they can see us. The children give a spirited rendition of the songs from their holiday musical. They end with old favorites, like *Rudolph* and *Frosty*. A little girl standing in front of me asks if she can sing along.

“It’s not our choir,” her father tells her.

“We won’t mind at all,” I assure him. They both smile at me.

The small bell choir is the finale for us. I don’t remember ever hearing hand bells played outside at night. The sound carries. Two small boys slip past me in the darkness and crouch at the edge of the site. A tall man leans over and whispers to me, “It’s the first time they’ve been quiet all day.” The boys stay there, silent and adoring, until the bells finish playing. “They’ve never heard bells before,” he says.

“They’re mesmerized.” I nod at him.

After our turn, we vacate our venue for the incoming group. Boots crunch on the snow. I hurry back to my car and turn my heater on full blast to defrost my toes. I know now why I do it every year—and will do it again next year. And the thought keeps me warm all the way home. ♦

Finding the perfect Christmas tree was crucial, not something to be ignored. We wanted it, planned to make it happen, and worked for it.

The state forestry service provided free young pine trees of various varieties for planting. My older brother and my dad took advantage of this program and recruited us kids for planting. We paid little attention to what kind of tree went where. We just wanted to get the trees in the ground and the backbreaking task over as soon as possible.

The years passed, and these grew to a size considerable for Christmas. We preferred a Blue Spruce, so John and I searched for the best one. Some years we thought we had found it, but it was never right. It had a lopsided shape or too much space between the branches. One year, we found a gorgeous tree except for the top. Two branches jutted up instead of one, and when we cut one off, it didn’t look right.

We always looked forward to Christmas and enjoyed the day, but longed for the perfect tree. One that everyone would agree on as just right.

One year, my brother John came home from scouting around the farm and announced at dinner he had found the perfect tree and marked it with a red plastic streamer. He kept the exact spot a secret, but gave us some clues to find it. John said it was a blue spruce, about seven feet tall and perfectly proportioned.

Out scouting to find his tree, while looking through a grove of scotch pines, I saw it. Gorgeous! The red streamer fluttered on a lower branch. I felt jealous that I hadn’t found it first.

Thanksgiving came and went. I bugged my brother about getting the tree. “No, we have to wait,” he said. “There’s too much work to do!”

In December, I became more persistent. But things were busy on the farm and we put it off until my mother put up her other Christmas decorations. We decided to go on Saturday and get the tree.

Thursday turned into a blizzard that lasted through Saturday, but at least we could see. We hooked a trailer to the International 460 tractor and headed for the woods, but it couldn’t navigate the deep snow. Confident we could approach the tree grove with just the tractor, we unhooked the trailer but almost got stuck. We went back to the barn to put chains on the tires. Surely this time we would make it. Nope.

John said we’d have to hike to the tree and drag it home by hand. In my mind, I thought, *If only we had come last weekend. Or the snow had held off for a few more days. If only we had a snowmobile. Or if only my legs were longer to walk through this waist high powder.*

I will never forget how hard it was getting

through that snow, nor how everything looked different. We were sure we knew where to find the tree marked with the streamer, but after looking in one section and then another, my confidence

eroded. Arguments erupted between us and the snow came down harder. We had to get a tree and get home. Giving up on finding the red ribbon, we cut down another tree and dragged it through the drifts to the tractor.

My mother, knowing the effort it took to get it, graciously praised it once we got it up in the living room. It was not perfect. We had to trim the top to make it fit and one limb on the back broke as we hoisted it into the tractor. John and I were deeply disappointed. The next year, we wouldn’t even look for a tree. Our dad bought one.

Years later, while I worked on a lot selling Christmas trees, a young, newly married couple came not to look for the best tree but to find one no one else wanted. They chose a tree with a misshapen top, lopsided

branches, and too much space between the limbs. They loved it and were excited about the special reduced price as well. I’ve often thought they had the best answer to the search for the perfect Christmas tree. ♦





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When Carols Ring Out Linda O'Connell

Many Decembers ago, I snuggled under warm blankets on our green sofa, with young Tracey and Jason. We munched fresh popped corn and drank hot chocolate with mini marshmallows as we watched cartoon-Frosty and Rudolph tromp across tundra through knee-deep snow. I shared true stories with my six- and three-year-old about living a short distance away from Santa's Village in North Pole, Alaska.

"It was before you were born, when your daddy was in the Army. Reindeer traipsed through the snowy woods across the road from where we lived." I told them about the large, free-roaming caribou that traversed the arctic wilderness near us.

"Did Rudolph's nose really shine bright red?" Jason wanted to know.

"You wouldn't believe the glow," I replied.

"Did Frosty get back to the North Pole before he melted?" Tracey quizzed.

"There were so many snowmen up there, I couldn't pick out which one he was," I said.

These days when Bing Crosby croons, *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*, I am transported to yesteryear when a six-inch blanket of snow covered our backyard. Bundled in long johns, two pairs of pants, socks, and double-gloved, I got out the door before Tracey and Jason woke up. As they slept peacefully, I worked for almost an hour, making a four-foot-high mound of snow. When sure of the tight snowpack, I stomped the snow off my boots and went indoors to thaw out and wake the children.

After breakfast, I bundled the kids from head to toe and helped them tug on two pairs of heavy socks. Despite their protests of, "Mom, NO!" I slipped empty Wonder Bread

plastic bags over their thick socks to keep their feet dry. Then I helped them stuff their feet into boots. We worked as a team to hollow out the snow mound to create an igloo the right size for two small children. We used shovels, our hands, and even the dog's dish to scoop out the white powder.

An old photograph of chapped-cheeked Jason in his blue hooded coat, and red-nosed Tracey in her plaid coat and stocking cap, peering out of that igloo, still fills me with so much joy.

Silver Bells, my holiday favorite carol, evokes memories of a thriving downtown St. Louis with bustling city sidewalks. My mom, also known as our family's beloved

Grandma Ginny, piled into the car with our family to drive downtown for the annual unveiling of the large department store's windows.

Each store occupied an entire square city block. Every large, plate-glass window displayed miniature winter scenes, animated figures, and speeding Lionel trains in make believe towns and country sides, triggering our imaginations.

We joined throngs of families with small children, our noses pressed to huge windows. Little kids "oohed" and "ahhed" (along with their dads and grandpas) when locomotive engines appeared out of tunnels puffing steam, dangerously crisscrossing, and switching rails. Children had to be coaxed to leave one enormous window and move on to the next. Despite Jack Frost nipping at our noses, we spent nearly an hour viewing the holiday scenes. Our annual pilgrimages became a family tradition which lasted until the kids grew up, malls came into vogue, and downtown department stores shuttered their windows for good.

In the first grade, Tracey cut out sections of cardboard egg cartons and covered them in aluminum foil.

Her teacher helped her add lengths of red ribbon and tie a bow on top. My mom cherished those bells as if she made them of actual silver. Tracey and Grandma Ginny would grab a wooden spoon and use it as a microphone. They bellowed the holiday songs at the top of their voices,



twirled and danced through the house. When they sang of silver bells, my mom pointed to the special bells hanging on her door, which made her first grandchild feel very special.

So many holiday songs bring me to the verge of both happy and sad tears. My eyes have been stinging more than usual because of a simple TV image accompanied by an age-old tune. The Hershey's Kisses commercial features red, silver, and green foil-wrapped chocolates which appear to be hand bells ringing out the refrain of *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*.

That carol makes my heart swell with love beyond measure for our beloved late cat. Every single time Tweeny heard that holiday commercial, he darted from wherever he was and perched in front of the TV, cocked his head this way and that as the individual colorful Kisses "rang out." Afterwards, he nonchalantly returned to his resting place until the commercial aired again, then came bounding back.



When Christmas music peals, nostalgia grips me by the heartstrings. I can almost feel my little girl's and boy's long-ago snuggles and sticky kisses; my late mom's hug; the sleek fur of our beloved cat purring softly in my lap...

My babies have babies and grandbabies of their own now. They have created their own traditions and are still making wonderful memories with their families. My grands and great grands will never know the joy of riding downtown to see the sights and sounds of busy sidewalks, gazing into windows dressed in holiday style, where imaginations ran rampant, and excitement made hearts palpitate. When Christmas carols ring out, vivid memories return me to a slower, simpler time. ♦

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Holiday Productivity for the Homemaker

It's amazing... how quickly the bones of the home chill once the days shorten and the sun stops blazing. How wonderful warm mugs and hot meals feel once we're not sweating. How cozy a lamp is, or how a quilt feels in the morning when the sun is slow to rise and life becomes more internal. But just as we think that life might slow down a bit, the holidays rush in loud and busy, twinkling and bustling.

Never fear, Homemakers. The Holidays *are* productive! They aren't interruptions of life, but part of it. They aren't a waste. They are a blessing.

Holiday madness is ours to manage. We decide what we can and can't attend, to go all in, or simplify. It is on us to skillfully and knowledgeably manage the holiday so we use our time right and well. This is our job and if we do it, the holiday season will be productive.

What do we have to do? There is no list of what holiday productivity is. It is a question for each household to explore and settle on. We should ask our husbands, kids, and ourselves what are the most important things to us, and observe their reactions, complaints, and praise. Is it decorating, feasting, gifts, crafts, cards, pictures, extended family, trips, snow, music, etc.? What we decide here will help us sort through what to do and what not to do.

Knowing our limits is vital. We must know our strengths and weaknesses, the dietary restrictions of our people, our budgets, and our social limitations. Nothing is worse than making everyone miserable because we wanted to fit in everything. Pick a few things and enjoy them. Don't make life frantic trying to do it all. And don't measure your holiday cheer by others.

Productivity is better measured by the love of our traditions, not the number of them. By the delight and wonder of our people, not the number of parties we rush to. By the joy and enjoyment of food, not by how much food. Our hearts, not our stuff, measure it.

We can find calm and a love of the holidays if we get our thinking set right first. Let's look

at the next few weeks as a change in our *type* of productivity, not the lessening of it.

Holidays are gifts to enjoy. They're here to remind us of spiritual truth and give us deeper family bonds and deeper cultural bonds. This is what holidays produce: bonds. If we manage them well, they will unite our families together for generations, and give them rich cultural heritages. If we

mismanage them, they will damage our family's unity and add to our lack of cultural

heritage. We must take our work and our role in this seriously.

We women have been managing the magic of holidays for generations by doing the feminine

work of tying people together through

feasting, merry-making, and tradition. We are linked mother to daughter, aunt to niece, grandmother to granddaughter in pouring love, joy, and warmth into these special days. Yes, they're busy, but this busyness is productive when we know why we're doing it and what all the busyness produces.

Sometimes it helps to look at what isn't productive, such as anxiety, franticness, and stressing out our families and ourselves. When our to-do lists seem longer than normal, and our heads are spinning with plans, we must have a sharp talk with ourselves: We do the *hard* things. That may be acknowledging our limitations and saying no to a party, craft, or baking project. (Saying no is saying no to things outside *and* inside the home.) It might be cutting back on gift-giving or picking up store-bought goodies instead of making handmade ones.

The messy part about doing the hard thing is deciding if we need to embrace the hard or cut out some tasks. That's when we go back to what is important to our family and what our family can handle.

Productivity is producing abundance and satisfying wants. We must identify those wants in our home. The holidays are a wonderful time to lavish love on our people, to change things up in our homes, and to bring wonder and delight inside. It's a magical time to create traditions that survive generations. Christmas is a way of holding back the dark



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and pushing out the cold of winter with light and laughter. It is a time for carols and hymns. It is a wonderful opportunity to teach thankfulness to your children.

Don't bah-humbug the season just because some mistreat it. Embrace the truths, myths, stories, traditions, extra family time, extra crafts, and cooking. We can use this time in our homes to tie our families together with stronger cords. This is productive.

We get to embrace the holidays in all their glory because we are the homemakers. Ladies, we get to take this gift and use it to produce abundance in our homes if we stop seeing them as an intrusion. We should strive to see them as a blessing and a tool to do our work differently. Let's look at what we do and what we want to do and make wise decisions that let us see parties, presents, and decorating as productivity pouring from our hearts, hearths, and homes. ♦

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A Christmas Night's Dream

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Lying in bed, I watched hundreds of snowflakes glisten outside my windowpane, each one coating the cerulean sky in a shine of glitter as they gently swayed back and forth. The magic of Christmas Eve came alive in the night sky, and the world around me embraced this enchantment with peaceful slumber. My breath escaped me heavily as I felt a single tear drop mirror the downward descent of the falling snow. Though this tear drop lacked the luster of merriment I saw in the joyously dancing snowflakes, I took solace in the slumber of my husband next to me, my hand still held lovingly in his.

The magic of Christmas used to devour through my soul each year, creating an inexplicable elation; this year was a first for me, full of sorrow and an unrequited longing. Christmas Eve was always a bigger celebration for me—even over

Christmas Day—as it was a celebration of my mentor, best friend, and the brightest light in my life. With his jolly disposition and contagious smile, he embodied the Christmas spirit, making everything around him feel magical and full of love. We had lost my grandfather earlier that year and endured an endless ricochet effect thereafter. My heart felt heavier

and emptier, yearning to feel the embrace of his arms and the shake of his laughter in his belly. “Happy birthday, Grampa,” I whispered, hoping somewhere he could hear and feel the love of this birthday wish I sent longingly out into the universe.

I turned my head from the glimmer of the snow-filled window and closed my

eyes, remembering a place my grandfather had described to me earlier that same year. A place he remembered in his younger years where a meadow and a beautiful lake held ground in summer, but at Christmastime the trees hugged the rolling hills of snow that gently curved down to a treasure of ice so clear it looked as if the sky existed both above and

below this mystic, frozen lake. He recounted how he and my grandmother went ice skating there one year on his birthday. He cherished this memory and held it picturesquely in his heart over the years. My husband and I had driven through the mountains that summer searching for this lake. We planned to make a family trip to the lake that winter, but it never came to fruition. I propped a pillow under my knee, which had undergone an extensive surgery just a few weeks prior. I removed the pad from the ice machine to settle in for the night. My husband stirred and opened his eyes;

they shone with a twinkle of the snowflakes reflecting in them as he embraced me, lightly kissing my forehead. “Next year, babe, I promise. We will go ice skating, and your Grampa will be there with us.” He placed a hand over my heart. I smiled at him and melted into his embrace.

Dreams slowly enveloped my running thoughts; they took me on a journey through snowcapped mountains, marshmallows roasting over campfires, and twinkling stars, finally halting within the most vivid image I can ever remember within the land of dreams. I found myself in my grandfather’s garage in the house they lived in while I was a child growing up. My mouth gaped open in awe as I ran my hand gently over his tools organized on peg boards and work benches, just as I remembered. Movement caught my eye coming through the door from the backyard. I recognized my grandfather in the corner, putting up the garden hose. He made his way over to me, handed me a pair of ice skates, and pointed toward the center of the garage. Grampa had frozen water over the entire floor of the garage, turning it into a skating rink. He reached for my hand and held it tightly.

The clinking and swooshing sounds of the skates on the ice echoed in my ears. Whenever we exhaled, the frost from our breath turned to snowflakes that twirled around our heads and throughout the garage, never quite settling on the ice. They twinkled magically, just like the merriment in my grandfather’s eyes as we glided freely over the frozen garage floor. My heart was full as we skated, making circles and figure eights, the cool air brushing our cheeks and dancing through our hair, all the while his hand squeezing mine.

My eyes opened gingerly on Christmas morning, my heart full as the reality of the dream nurtured my soul and rekindled my spirit and love of the holiday. I felt the cool air in my lungs as I breathed in the magic of this gift Santa had brought me this Christmas. I carried this palpable experience in my heart. This gift taught me that while the tangible relationship may be gone, we can learn to look beyond life and open our hearts and eyes. Our ability to talk to our loved ones is not lost, it’s just that the medium through which we converse has changed. ♦

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FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY

In the 1958 film *The Proud Rebel*, a farmer (Olivia de Havilland) is shopping at a general store. The shopkeeper encourages her to go have her picture taken by “the new picture takers.” She says she doesn’t know what she’d do with it, but her hired hand (Alan Ladd) encourages her to go see what this picture taking is all about.

They walk out into the street to a covered wagon with his name and “photographer” painted on the side. He charges a dollar for “a miraculous likeness of you and your loved ones.” The first time I watched *The Proud Rebel* (which is in the public domain, by the way, so you can watch it too if you want!), I wondered if that was realistic. I’d seen other films that showed photography studios in Old West towns, but did some photographers travel from place to place with a covered wagon? Did photography equipment work that way back then?

In the 1830s, French scientist Louis Daguerre experimented with light-sensitive substances and lenses. He created a process which used sheets of silver-plated copper, iodine and mercury vapor, and a liquid chemical treatment to permanently record images. They called this original type of photograph a daguerreotype in his honor. Daguerreotypes required a subject to be totally still for several minutes, which made sitting for a portrait difficult. But this was still much faster than sitting to have your portrait painted, and the image was a perfect likeness, so photography quickly became popular.

In the 1850s, scientists across Europe and America experimented with different methods for capturing images. Another Frenchman,



Adolphe Alexandre Martin, created the “tintype,” also called a “ferrotype,” which used lighter and thinner plates to capture images, and fewer noxious chemicals. That made



transporting photographic equipment easier and faster, and photographers could set up portrait studios anywhere they liked. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, tintypes were the most popular form of

photography. During the American Civil War from 1861 to 1865, tintype photographers captured not only portraits of soldiers but also pictures of battles.

The advantage of the tintype was it developed fast—a photographer could hand a customer a finished product only a few minutes after taking the picture. They required less equipment, so photographers didn’t need lots of space to house their studios. After the Civil War, many photographers headed west. Some roamed from town to town with their equipment set up in the back of a covered wagon. Others rented a building, set up a studio there, took portraits for a few weeks or months, then moved on when they’d satisfied the local desire for photographs. Others

rode to people’s homes to take a picture of a family in or in front of their house. These were popular to send back east, showing their family members that their pioneering loved ones were thriving despite the frontier’s harsh conditions.

Those traveling photographers captured the frontier ways of life just before it disappeared. Thanks to them, we have photographs of

Native Americans and their way of life before they went to reservations. Images of famous outlaws and lawmen, from Billy the Kid and Jesse James to Bass Reeves and Wyatt Earp. We know what dugout homes or sod houses looked like. We can see what equipment cowboys kept close at hand while on a cattle drive, or how much pioneers crammed into the back of a covered wagon.

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the Old West remains so fascinating to us we can envision its people and places so clearly. We don’t have to imagine them. We’re familiar with the Old West’s faces and places because of photos of it.

The invention of paper pictures in the mid-1860s replaced the tintype.

George Eastman

perfected a combination of dry gel and paper he called film, and his Kodak company soon began selling cameras that used it. By 1888, they had made photography available to the public, and their introduction of the Brownie camera in 1901 made the hobby affordable for almost anyone. But, by then, the Old West was already fading into history.

All except the parts captured by tintype or daguerreotype, of course! ♦



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The Winter of 1948

Linda Gandy

December 1948. I felt proud of myself as a fourth-grader. I had never gone this far into a school year without missing several days because of illness. Maybe this would be the year I reached my goal: to receive a certificate of perfect attendance at the end of the school year.

That dream would last only two weeks longer.

What started out as influenza and a heart murmur quickly developed into double pneumonia and rheumatic fever. Our family physician, Dr. Stewart, told my family I needed to be in the hospital. He would make the arrangements.

A short time later, we arrived at the hospital. Before we even got to my room, a nurse stopped us and offered me a glass of milk. I refused. It would do the same thing everything else had done for the past several days—come back up. I said, "No, thank you. I don't care for any."

She explained I really needed to drink it. I told her nothing stayed down and my stomach felt sore from vomiting. She smiled. "I know you have had a bad time of it, but I promise you this will stay down. Besides, the doctor wants you to drink it."

I reluctantly accepted the glass and took a tiny sip. My stomach felt a little better. I took another sip, and then another. The milk looked and smelled normal. The nurse stood there while I drank it all. I handed her the empty glass and asked, "What was in that milk?"

She replied, "It is just plain milk."

I never found out what made it special, but from then on I accepted every glass of milk offered to me and drank it without question.

A few days after I entered the hospital, I developed yellow jaundice and scarlatina. My mother and grandma stayed with me during the day, and my dad and grandpa visited when they could (they co-ran a grocery store). They all

took turns staying with me at night.

One day, Daddy brought a small carton of ice cream to my room. The nurse provided us with bowls and spoons. I asked her if she could take a bowl to the boy in the next room. He was a friend of mine who was on the mend from pneumonia. The nurse gladly did, and later told me how much he enjoyed it.

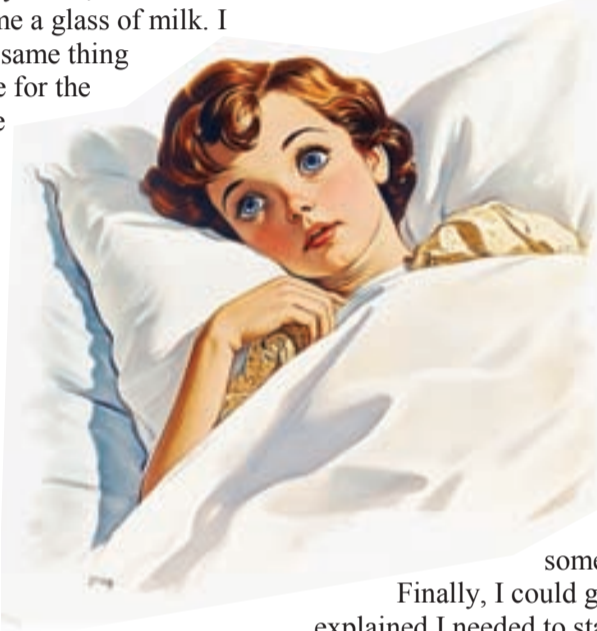
After I had eaten all I could hold, Daddy raised the window in my room and placed the carton outside on the ledge. It was cold enough outside for the ice cream to stay good until we finished it later. What a fun treat!

I spent Christmas in the hospital. Daddy cut the top out of the tree at home. The family came to my room loaded down with the small decorated tree and presents. I opened a few of mine before becoming too tired. The others took turns opening the rest of my packages and Mother arranged them on a table for me to look at. Gradually I improved. The nurses and I had become good friends, and they stopped by my room sometimes just to visit.

Finally, I could go home. Dr. Stewart explained I needed to stay in bed, and arranged for a nurse to stay at our house for two weeks. She would keep a record of my progress and give me a penicillin shot every two hours around the clock. She gave me vitamins, calcium, iron, and liver shots. I already had quite an assortment of empty medicine bottles I kept under my bed in a long box Daddy brought from the store.

Would they ever let me out of bed? Every time I asked the doctor about it, he said, "It is too soon to talk about that." The tone of his voice made me think it wouldn't happen soon. I thought of all the things I would do: ride my bike, climb my favorite tree in our yard, and skate on the sidewalk. Boy, I would make up for lost time!

My family and friends did many nice things to help me pass the time in bed. Dr. Stewart refused to let me do any make-up work for school, but I had books, puzzles, a view master with reels, board games, cards, and best of all, my family who took turns sitting



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by my bed telling me stories. I couldn't have any visitors, so people called to ask after me. I received cards through the mail and propped them up on the nightstand so I could see them.

It delighted me when Dr. Stewart gave permission for my friends to visit. They came in like a breath of fresh air.

After several weeks, when Dr. Stewart came by the house and checked me over, he sat back in his chair and smiled. I held my breath. He said, "Linda, if you continue like this for the next two weeks, you can get out of bed." He told me some other things, but I only cared about "two weeks." I would have liked it better had he said I could get up right then, or tomorrow, but at least now I had a goal to work toward.

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Everyone put forth a special effort to help me pass the time. Mother put little surprises on my meal trays. I looked forward to them. Sometimes she would hide it under my napkin, then pretend she had forgotten it. We laughed when I found the treat.

After an eternity, the two weeks passed. I could hardly wait until five o'clock when Dr. Stewart closed his office and began his house calls. Surely he would come to see me first. From my bed, I had a good view of the street through the two windows in my room. I watched every car that drove past and waited. Supper time came and Mother brought my tray. She had worked especially hard to make it attractive for me, but I couldn't think about eating anything. I just wanted out of bed. It got dark. Daddy turned on the porch light, and I scanned for any car headlights angled toward the curb.

The family gathered around my bed and tried to entertain me. I kept my ears alert for the sound of a car that might slow down in front of our house. By nine o'clock, I had given up. Then I heard a car pull up a door slam. "He's here!"

Dr. Stewart walked into my bedroom, looking exhausted. He gave me such a

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Kevin Lang

Torn Up Christmas

It is the season for Christmas tales, and I have a great one. Many years ago, my girlfriend (now my wife) and I went to my mom's house in Phoenix for Christmas. We brought our dog, Maury Girl. This trip was a milestone, as it brought my girlfriend and parents together for the first time. I was eager for my mom to like my girlfriend, and vice versa. We wanted to bring Maury Girl. My mom was not thrilled. She did not look forward to a week of cooking and food and presents everywhere with a dog in the middle of everything. We assured her our amazing dog could do no wrong.

Since my mother had no backyard, Maury Girl had to stay in the house. Where to put her? We didn't want to lock her in a room, so gave her the run of the place. We didn't bring a kennel with us because we couldn't afford one. I promised my mother she wouldn't do her business inside or climb on the counters. Maury behaved.

Then came



Christmas Eve.

We had all the Christmas presents wrapped and under the tree. It stood a few rooms away from the front door. Before we left to go shopping and left the dog alone, I asked mom if there was any food wrapped among the presents? Nope! Great! Nothing to worry about.

When we got home, way later than we planned, we found out that our dog had ruined Christmas. Our first clue lay inside the front door in a mound of torn wrapping paper.

The trail of it got bigger as we walked up the hall. Maury Girl had gone into hiding.

She was a good dog... but how could we expect her to be perfect? Really, it wasn't her fault. To paraphrase Chris Rock, the dog just went dog. No, this was our fault, as my mother was good enough to explain with a cloud of profanity that resembled that hanging over Cleveland from *A Christmas Story*.

We crept through the house and entered the room that

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Brenda Flipse

held the Christmas tree, full of trepidation.

It was, um, fine. Completely, totally fine.

Maury Girl had not unwrapped or ruined a single present.

But dog toys were everywhere.

Here is what happened. My mom, being the best mom ever, bought our stupid dog some presents. I did not know this, nor did my girlfriend. Maury Girl, however, knew it. She sniffed out every single one and opened it, then played with it. It was the most wonderful and strange incident. How did she know those were dog presents? I still can't figure that out. Ever since then, my mom wrapped one for her and put it under the tree.

Maury Girl has since long passed away, but it is still my mom's favorite Christmas story, and I think it might be mine, too.

Merry Christmas, Colorado! I love you. Thank you for being here and reading and sharing. You keep me going! ♦

thorough examination I thought he would never finish. Then he said the magic words: "Linda, I know you have waited a long time for this, and you are a good patient. You can get out of bed."

I was on the floor in a second and took a step when I felt a firm grip on my arm.

Startled, I turned my head toward the doctor. Looking puzzled, he asked, "Where are you going?"

Huh? "You told me I could get up."

His expression changed from puzzled to pained. He picked me up and put me on the chair. "Linda, I am sorry I did not make myself clear,

but I explained to you a couple of weeks ago that when I let you out of bed, it would be for one step only. You have taken that step. You must get back in bed so I can see how your heart reacted."

I slowly climbed into bed. I barely heard Dr. Stewart say my heart was beating normally. He and my family went into the kitchen, where they sat around the table and talked about my progress. I turned over on my stomach, put my

pillow over my head and cried. One step! Would I ever be free of this bed?

The next day, I got to take two steps. Then three. Over time, I built up enough strength to walk through the house. I felt like a bird out of a cage. I continued to make progress.

Slow but steady. Then came the day the doctor had me visit him at his office instead of coming to

me. It lay upstairs over the drugstore, and when I arrived, the receptionist took me to one of the examining rooms. Dr. Stewart checked my heart. I could tell by the look on his face I was making progress.

Gradually, I got to see him only once a week, but he kept a close eye on me. They let me ease back into

the activities I'd been involved in before I got sick. Dr. Stewart and my family maintained a constant watch over me, however. Despite their good care, sometimes I became ill and developed a fever during the night. Daddy would pick up the telephone and when the operator asked for a number, he would give her Dr. Stewart's home telephone number. She would ask, "Charles, is Linda sick again?" He always came, no matter the hour.



I experienced no heart damage from the rheumatic fever. Nor did it ever reoccur. Dr. Stewart found me healthy enough to return to school for a half day, but I had to stay indoors during recess and went home to rest after noon. My parents arranged for my fourth-grade teacher to tutor me during the summer.

Eventually, I was strong enough to stay for the entire school day and go to recess with my friends. In high school, Dr. Stewart kept a close watch on me. He insisted I come to his office if I caught a cold. One day, Mother noticed me sneezing and said we'd better go see him. I answered it wasn't necessary and complained to him when Mother hauled me into his office the next day.

Dr. Stewart put my medical folder down on his desk and looked me in the eye. "Young lady, you nearly died when you were a little girl. It took a lot of medical knowledge on my part and a tremendous amount of care and attention from your family to get you where you are today. I expect to see you in my office every time you sneeze. Do you understand me?"

I replied, "Yes, sir." He smiled and patted me on the shoulder. I never felt it necessary to bring that topic up again.

Dr. Stewart continued as our family doctor until he moved away. I never received a certificate for perfect attendance, but have enjoyed relatively healthy adult years. God spared my life. I am grateful I had an excellent and attentive family doctor and a loving family. It made me a fortunate little girl. I am blessed that God has allowed me to lead a happy, productive life. ♦

Prairie Parson

Gift of Grace

Sometimes when her dad goes travelin' fer work, our youngest granddaughter stays with us for a few days. It plum tickles my wife to have her around, but the other day the eight-year-old came into our kitchen after school like a storm, threw her backpack in the corner, and said, "That Jeff has been actin' up again! I found him lickin' one of the smaller boys!"

Bein' a cold day, I sat near the radiator and lowered my paper a little to peer at her over my glasses. My wife, who ain't much bothered about nothin' and has the wisdom God gave her, let this sink in while she got a glass of milk and a cookie out of the refrigerator. "And what did you do about it, darlin'?" she asked.

"I wanted to sock him in the jaw," Jenny said, "but I just told him he's a mean old thing!"

My wife patted her on the shoulder and said, "I am proud of you for not fighting." But she went away with one of her special looks.

Jenny fumed and ate her cookie. A little sugar does wonders for a kid. Then she came to sit with me and cradle her grandma's cat. It purred in her lap, while she gave it a good long think. Then those blues eyes just like her daddy's came up and fixed on me. "Pop," she said, "what do you think I should'a done?"

I folded up my paper and put it aside. "This would be Jeff," and I gave his last name.

She nodded.

"Well, sweetie, I know Jeff's daddy, and he's what we call a 'hard man.' He ain't never seen a day without a cloud in it. A man he can't fight.

He is angry about a lotta things, about the life he never had, the woman who left him, the kids he's gotta raise alone. I reckon an angry man like that ain't much of a daddy, and Jeff has only had a whole lot of learnin' how to be mean, cuz that's what he gets at home."

Her face fell while she figured on this.

She didn't bring it up again, and I figured that would be the end of it, but the next day she asked if she could take an extra cookie packed in with her lunch. Now, I know my Jenny and I figured what she was up to, and so does my wife, so we said yes.

Both of us waited anxiously for her to get home, without tryin' to look like we watched for the bus from the farm house. I idled in my chair, and didn't read my paper, but perked up my ears real good. She came in the backdoor, and my wife asked, "How went school?"

"I went up to Jeff at recess and gave him a cookie," Grace said. I held my breath.

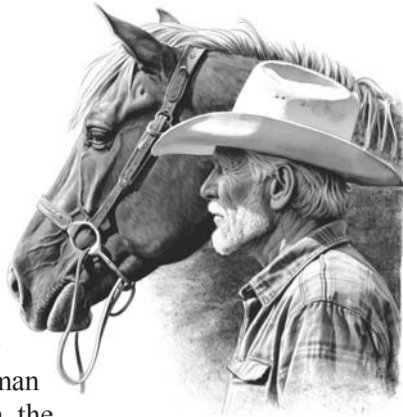
"Oh? And did he say thank you?"

She frowned. "He knocked it out of my hand and said he didn't want nothing from me."

We changed one of our meaningful looks, and left it alone, but she took another extra cookie the next day. And the next. She never said nothin', so we just waited and watched.

Then came the day when she entered the kitchen with a smile on her face. She said, "Jeff took the cookie this time, and didn't insult me or nothin'!"

Jenny ain't one to take no fer an answer. She loves people until they can't help acceptin' it. But it reminded me of a truth that's good to remember, all times of year. You never know where someone's been, what they went through, or what happened to them today, to make 'em treat you that way. It's a lot easier to flare up and get mad at folks, but it's a lot better to give them a gift of grace. You may be the only person in a week that treats 'em nice, even when they don't deserve it. And that's true grace. ♦



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MOVIE REVIEW BY CHARITY BISHOP

WICKED! PART ONE

Are people born wicked or is wickedness thrust upon them? In the big-screen spectacle, adapted from an award-winning Broadway musical, we get the answer to that question in a way that might surprise you.

This frienemies-to-besties tale introduces us to the spoiled, full-of-herself Glinda (Ariana Grande) on her first day at Shiz University, where she dreams of being taught magic by the famous Madame Morrible (Michelle Yeoh). Unfortunately for Glinda, Madame only takes a few students per year, and when the green-skinned but magically gifted Elpheba (Cynthia Erivo) shows up just to see her wheelchair-bound little sister safely installed in her new dorm and causes chaos, Madame sees untapped potential and invites her to stay. The two girls, who can't be more different, wind up rooming together, and a funny and touching series of events ensues that takes them from "loathing" to friendship, and accumulates in a trip to Oz to meet the Wizard (Jeff Goldblum).

The award-winning Broadway musical has been cut into two parts for film, allowing a lot of time for character development, background stories, and to give us a magical experience at Shiz, a school where the talking animals are disappearing under sinister circumstances. As Elpheba strives to find out what's happening and take a stand against it, she sparks thoughts in the mind of the school's shallowest attendee, Prince Fiero (Jonathan Bailey).

This story takes everything you know about *The Wizard of Oz* and rewrites it. Provided you don't mind a different take on a beloved story, *Wicked!* is fun, engaging, and emotional, full of fantastic costumes, fabulous set design, and powerhouse vocal talent. It has moments of wit and comedy, but is also a tear-jerking story of a marginalized girl coming into her own pointy shoes. Elpheba has never had a friend in her life until she came to Shiz, where she faces



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Spotty and Me

more scorn and cruel jibes, before she earns the respect of her peers for her courage to stand alone for what is right. If you are thinking this sounds way different from the original, you're right. The story goes into how villains can be manufactured by those who don't like what they have to say, which seems like an apt message for modern audiences.

It's a faithful and expanded version of the first act of the musical, full of many tributes to *The Wizard of Oz*, and catchy tunes. Ariana steals the show as the likable narcissistic Glinda, who has a change of heart but not of attitude and has the self-confidence Elpheba lacks. She sings and dances her heart out in a pair of sparkly heels, while Cynthia has the harder job of playing the "straight part" to Glinda's silliness. It plants the seeds that will carry through in Part 2 next year—hinting at the origins of the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, and the Scarecrow.

You may want to leave the smaller kids at home, because it's almost three hour length might test their attention span. But it's otherwise fairly family-friendly; there's a flirting and drinking scene between a woman and her lover that leads to a child. Fiero is attractive to everyone at Shiz, men and women, but is straight. One male character is effeminate. Of course, magic is a big theme. Elpheba reads a spell from a Grimoire without knowing what will happen that causes painful wings to sprout out of the monkeys on guard at the palace. In a scary-for-kids sequence, those monkeys chase and attack her and Glinda. A talking goat teacher is also forcefully dragged out of the classroom, to the distress of everyone present.

Whether you're a fan of the musical like me, or have never seen it before, *Wicked!* is visually sumptuous and delightful candy-coated treat that does what movies haven't accomplished for a long time—it simply *entertains*. ♦

The year I turned 9 years old, Dad came home from a farm auction with a pair of geese: a pure white Gander and a white and gray mate. They made wonderful watch dogs. If anyone drove into our yard, the geese ran up to the car, squawking and honking and making a huge ruckus. The pair made a nest under some trees and anyone foolish enough to approach got quite a shock. The big white Gander ran out, flapping his wings and hissing. He raised quite a welt on your legs if you got nipped.

One day, I spotted two little yellow powder puffs trailing the geese as they headed for the creek and a swim. I soon discovered one gosling had a leg that wasn't formed properly, making him lame. Fearful some harm might befall him, I decided to raise this goose myself. We had trouble getting him away from his parents. Dad helped by running interference. While the geese were chasing him, I darted in and snatched "Spotty." He soon had a new home on our lawn. I made a pen out of some boards and set in on the lawn where he could graze. Geese do well on green grass and Spotty not only grew fast but mowed each patch off in a couple of days. I kept moving the pen around; they call it rotational grazing now. The yard seldom needed mowing that summer, but my mother wasn't fond of the fertilizer Spotty left every place he grazed.

By Fall, Spotty had outgrown the pen and roamed freely. His leg had healed, and he had grown into a big, fine-looking goose. Domestic geese can't fly well. Whenever wild geese flew over, Spotty stood up tall, flapping his wings, honking, and staring at them. I couldn't help thinking what locked in him was a deep yearning for the complete freedom of soaring through the skies.

When my uncle and aunt visited for Thanksgiving, Aunt Fern took one look at Spotty and said, "I see you have your Christmas goose just about ready." I needn't have worried though; when I asked Dad about it, he just laughed and said, "Fern thinks everything that grows, walks, flies, or swims is food. We couldn't eat your pet, now, could we?"

By Christmas, Spotty spent most of his time in the henhouse

with the chickens as well as his parents and sibling because of the deep snow. Each morning, I fed the chickens. Spotty waited for me by the door. I always gave him a special treat. When

Christmas day arrived and we had our big family dinner, I slipped out afterward and took a plate of mashed potatoes and corn to Spotty, along with some cranberry sauce. He made quick work of that meal, especially the mashed potatoes, using a shoveling action, all the while making a soft purring sound. Aunt Fern had been right. Spotty really was my Christmas goose.

We made Christmas special at my house. My parents were never well to do, but that didn't stop us. Our gifts weren't extravagant and often were homemade. On Christmas Eve, we sang carols while Mom played the piano. We celebrated the day by giving gifts in remembrance of the gifts by the magi at the birth of Jesus. Jesus was called Emanuel, meaning "God with us." From then on, people could really know what God was like by observing Jesus and learning his ways. The Angelic choir announcing his birth proclaimed "Peace on Earth and Good Will towards men." God loved and wanted the best for each of us. Our present life isn't all there

is. The Lord knows each of us by name. Merry Christmas! ♦



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Charles Oz Collins

The Cup of Coffee

A time in my life, long ago, I deemed it important to learn to drink coffee. My folks seemed to consume the vile fluid in large quantities. Nearly all the adults I came in contact with likewise seemed habituated, if indeed not addicted, to this social lubricant. At seven years old, I had reached the age when I desperately wanted to grow up, and fast. I therefore deduced that to be grown up, one must do what grown-ups do, including the nasty habit of coffee drinking.

I almost didn't start my journey towards self-improvement. My first sip was hot, black, and "strong enough to float a wedge," just the way my folks liked it. The kind of coffee that first provoked the exclamation "that'll grow hair on your chest!" In reality, it seemed more likely that it would take skin off your tongue, or, for that matter, the paint off a wall.

The solution was to doctor the coffee. Eventually, I hit upon a tolerable (if not tasty) recipe. The procedure called for half a cup of Jersey milk, a quarter cup of coffee, and three tablespoons of sugar. I could actually drink this concoction without visibly grimacing, and thus I felt I could blend into the adult society I yearned to join. Then it happened. I don't claim to receive revelations regularly, but on this occasion, if I had been a comic strip character, a light bulb would have appeared above my head.

As I courageously tried to down part of a cup of "my coffee," it flashed into my youthful mind: "You are ruining a lot of good milk!" And milk was something I truly enjoyed. So then and there, I abandoned my quest for adulthood via the coffee route. I was confident I could discover a more pleasant means in time, though years later I question the worth of my goal.

For a score of years, I was neither cold enough, thirsty enough, nor sufficiently lacking in social companionship to go near a cup of coffee. Then I married a full-blooded Swede. These refugees from the cold northern climes would die without coffee. Morning,

noon, and night, and several times in between, all activities cease while they make

and drink coffee. Hang around them and you will hear these descendants of Lief Erickson and Eric the Red fondly refer to their national weakness as "Swedish gasoline." Indeed, the thought of using this tropical boiled berry juice for Holy Communion has more than once crossed their collective mind. So it is that several of my in-laws try to this day to draw me into their vice, but to no avail.

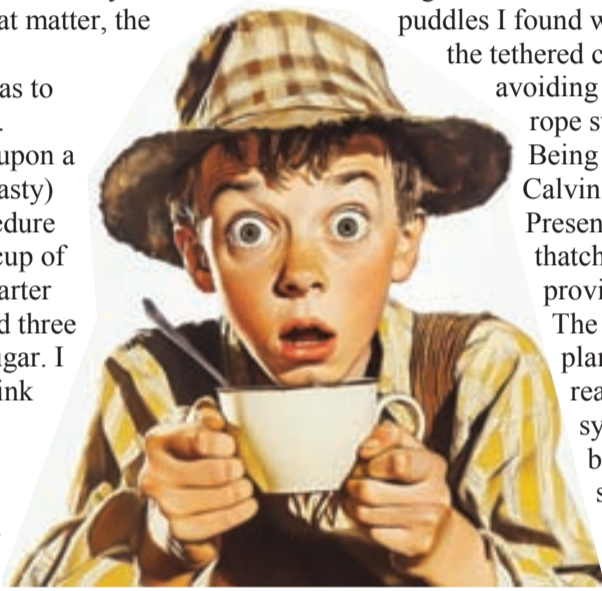
A few years ago, my vigilance slipped. I trekked along in the dark, trying to follow Pastor Calvin through a Central American refugee settlement in the middle of a tropical rainforest. I was having some difficulty. First, he seemed to know where he was going; I didn't. That explained why he wasn't using his half-dead flashlight. He also seemed to have a night vision that allowed him to avoid all the puddles I found with unerring accuracy. I saw the tethered cow at the last moment, but in avoiding her, ran into an invisible rope strung between two trees. Being about half-a-foot shorter, Calvin had simply walked under it. Presently, we arrived at a pole-and-thatch church. A solitary lantern provided illumination, of sorts.

The seats were rough two-by-six planks set on short posts. But the real treat was a public address system powered by a car battery. The mechanism seemed to have but one setting: "full blast." In a room approximately twelve-by-twenty, the sound could nearly roll you off the narrow benches. I have been around Baptists of the Southern persuasion, and a few Nazarenes. None could hold a candle to these good folk in the matter of spirit and the sheer number of heart-felt "Hallelujahs." Emerging from that service, my ears were ringing, but nobody was answering.

Calvin and the other pastor led the way to a small house, also of thatch and poles, dimly lit by an open fire on the ground. Along the alleged path, Calvin fell back and quietly asked if I drank coffee. I replied it was possible. These refugees had little in material goods, and if they were going to offer coffee, at least I could be gracious enough to accept it. It also occurred to me if I backed a step or two away from the light of the fire, it was possible to share the gift with a banana plant or palm tree without offending my hosts.

From the low-roofed "rancho" emerged a middle-aged lady with two clear glass cups with matching saucers. I thought at the time how incongruous these seemed near the small hut, camp fire, wandering hogs, and rainforest. There could be no doubt these folks brought out their best for us. The clear glass cup also allowed me to see the gift of steaming coffee reached all the way to the brim.

My first polite (tentative) sip reminded me that not only was coffee grown locally, so was sugar cane. This was like "my first" coffee, but without the liberal dose of milk. At least the sweetness took the edge off the bitterness. In order not to prolong my discomfort, I stopped sipping and downed the entire cup in



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several sizeable gulps. I declined a refill with thanks and simultaneously reflected on the unusual setting for my first ever full cup of coffee.

The hike back through the forest was less eventful, in part because I walked stooped over in case Calvin walked under another rope or low-hanging branch. I actually felt pretty good and quite alert. Of course, part of this was owing to our transportation, Calvin's ancient one-eyed Toyota with missing floorboards. It was best to keep one's feet up since mud holes, gigantic spiders, and bigger snakes frequented the road (trail!) we were on, none of which seemed to concern my friend.

As Calvin dropped me off and as I walked the quarter mile to my "condominium," a seven-by-ten foot affair of boards and screen

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complete with a foam pad perched on a narrow bench, I thought of the alleged power of coffee to steal one's sleep. Even people who liked coffee would complain when they drank it too late in the evening they couldn't sleep. And my "first cup" was about one-third sugar, enough to "buzz" a corpse. Yet soon after my head hit the rolled-up jeans that served as my pillow, I felt myself drifting off. So, it was just another old-wives' tale.

By rough reckoning, two hours later, my eyes snapped open. It may have been the combination of the coffee, sugar, Calvin's driving, and a bumping noise beneath the floor of my hut, but I had a full-blown case of the "Big Eye!" I doubt you could have closed my eyelids with a pair of pliers, at least for long. You may have heard that tropical nights are long and filled with strange noises; I'm here to tell you it's absolutely true.

It has now been a decade since my last cup of coffee. I'm hoping for at least another decade or two before I fall off the wagon again. Hopefully, the situation will be as interesting as that refugee's coffee in the rainforest, though I could easily pass on that car-battery-powered "Hallelujah Horn." ♦



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Best Present Ever

Avis Jaenson

One Christmas, when my children were two and five, we went through a “dry spell” in our finances. We all have challenges in life and even though both my husband and I were working, there just wasn't enough money to pay every bill and buy presents for the children.

At first, I started feeling “less than abundant” in the blessings department but soon after my personal pity party, I got an idea: I could hand make all of our Christmas gifts out of the scraps of material I had in my quilting supplies. I started staring at my daughter's Barbie dolls and realized they were so small I'd have to design my own patterns as well. I'd make matching shirts for my husband and my son. That would be easy. The doll clothes provided the biggest challenge.

I sat down with my hot cup of coffee while my giggling children played with their father in the living room. I used regular typing paper and used the outfits the dolls already had for my template. The clothes were so small it seemed like an impossible task. Was I crazy? The more I tried to make sense of what I was doing, the more I tried to talk myself out of it. I peeked through the door into the living room and saw my children's lovely faces and realized mine was a project of love. Even if every snap and stitch wasn't perfect, they'd be happy. When I put my project in the right perspective, one of unselfish love, it didn't seem so hard.

The winter was unseasonably cold, with deep snow, but my husband bundled up the kids and grabbed his hand saw. A Christmas tree farm nearby allowed folks to cut their own tree for a minimal amount of cash, and that's where he headed with our little ones. I left the breakfast dishes to soak and

put all my concentration on the project lying on my sewing room floor. Within a few hours, the small outfits were ready to stitch together. In some places, the corners were so tight I couldn't use the sewing machine, so I did it by hand. I never dreamed that I could turn all those little fabric pieces into jackets, skirts, and pants for tiny dolls.

I dressed my daughter's dollies in their new outfits, wrapped them up in used paper I had saved from other holidays, and stacked them up in the corner. The shirts were easier and went together fast. By the time my husband and the children returned, I had all the presents finished.

In he came with the most beautiful, fragrant pine tree I'd ever seen. We sat down at the kitchen table and had toasted cheese sandwiches and hot tomato soup. Then off to bed we went.

We all were excited to make construction paper chains to wrap around the tree the next morning, on

Christmas Eve. Then we made snowflake ornaments with popsicle sticks, glitter and spray painted pine cones from the yard to string up as well. We were all proud of how much effort we put into decorating our beautiful tree. It sparkled with glitter and pine cones, making it special. My youngest yawned and rubbed his eyes, but agreed it was a special night.

We went to bed early. I read stories to the children, and we prayed for our family and grandma and grandpa. The next morning would be full of fun and would no doubt start early, so we had to get a lot of sleep.

That night two more feet of fresh snow fell on our little town, making each home stand out as if frosted with powdered sugar. It made our neighborhood peaceful and fresh looking.



Christine Collier

Blizzard in the Music Room

Our children and grandchildren all attend a family party on Christmas Eve. The kids range in age from three to thirteen. This past year, we were having our usual festive time. After opening gifts by the Christmas tree and fireplace in our living room, the grandkids ended up in our spare bedroom, which I turned into a music/play room for them. We heard lots of screaming and laughing, banging on the keyboard, sliding the closet door back and forth, the usual. But when our youngest walked into the living room with tiny white blobs of packing foam in her hair, we all laughed. Then we heard one kid say quietly, “it's snowing... inside the music room.”

We thought it was funny for about a minute. Then... we saw what had happened. The kids had a chunk of white packing material out of a gift in the music room. Everyone knows about the white foam. If you so much as look at it, pieces shred off on the floor or stick to the rug; it's next to impossible to clean up.

Years ago, I started a small chimney fire in our basement fireplace by burning an empty gift box full of packing peanuts. As the peanuts caught fire and floated up, they ignited the soot in the chimney. The firefighters arrived. While the house went undamaged except for a few ceiling tiles around the fireplace, they had to turn on huge fans to blow out the smoke. It could easily have been serious. That's when my hatred started for packing foam. Did you know there's a page on Facebook named I Hate Packing Peanuts? I got me some “liking” to do on

that page.

My grandchildren decided that since it was Christmas Eve and lightly snowing outside, it should snow inside! Why not scratch and hit that piece of white foam on everything, including their heads, and make it snow inside? Sounds like a plan, right?

I knew it was bad when I saw my daughter-in-law quietly telling my son he should see the mess their son made, and he had to go talk to

him. Then my other daughter-in-law came into the living room with her mouth open and whispered, “you should see it in there!” I never saw the room covered in fake snow, as I was busy in the kitchen. I'm glad I didn't. It would have been a real downer. My husband got out our sweeper with hose attachment and within minutes, the roaring sound of a vacuum cleaner swept through the house. Not quite the same as *Silent*

Night or Away in the Manger.

My grandson sat in a chair chomping potato chips, watching his mother cleaning up the mess. It suddenly hit her that there was something wrong with this picture! She put him to work, minus the chip bag, and he sucked up every bit of white foam snow he could find. It covered the chairs and rug. I think having the attachment hose made it fun for him. Finally, the sweeper stopped and we could hear again. When my grandson came out, I asked him if he had really cleaned everything well. His guilty look



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The next morning, I got up before everyone and made cinnamon rolls and hot chocolate for breakfast while listening for the first footfalls in the living room. The lit-up tree looked gorgeous in the morning light. Then the children were up and excited about their presents; the rolls would have to wait. They sat with anticipation for us to hand out all the gifts. We went around the room and took turns opening, so each could see what the other one received. There were some clothes from grandma and grandpa and toys from their aunts and uncles. It was fun to see the looks on each child's face as they opened each gift with a loud hoot.

The homemade shirts fit perfectly. Then came my daughter's Barbie wardrobe. She opened each carefully, as if they would break, and squealed with delight to see the new clothes on her dolls. She had them all undressed and redressed over and over in all the newly sewn outfits within an hour.

As I looked around the room at the happy faces, I realized Christmas was about giving and loving and celebrating the birth of one special baby, born in Bethlehem, who spent His life in selfless service to others. I got thankful for all the blessings we had: food on the table, air to breathe, running water, a stove to cook my rolls in; my problems seemed small when surrounded by all the love and blessings around me. ♦

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briefly disappeared when he answered yes. After everyone went home, I glanced inside the music room and it looked pretty good. I was too tired to do anything about it, anyway.

On Christmas Day, I checked the room again and found the easy chair too close to the heater. I pulled it farther into the room. Aha! Guess what I found. White blobs of packing foam everywhere. Only then did I know what it must have looked like the night before. I have an automatic vacuum cleaner, a Roomba, which I love, and use all the time. But we have learned in the past that even Roomba doesn't like little white packing demons. It blows them to the side and picks them up only by accident after several tries.

If you want to have a good life, follow my words of wisdom: “Step away from the packing foam and peanuts now and nobody gets hurt!” ♦

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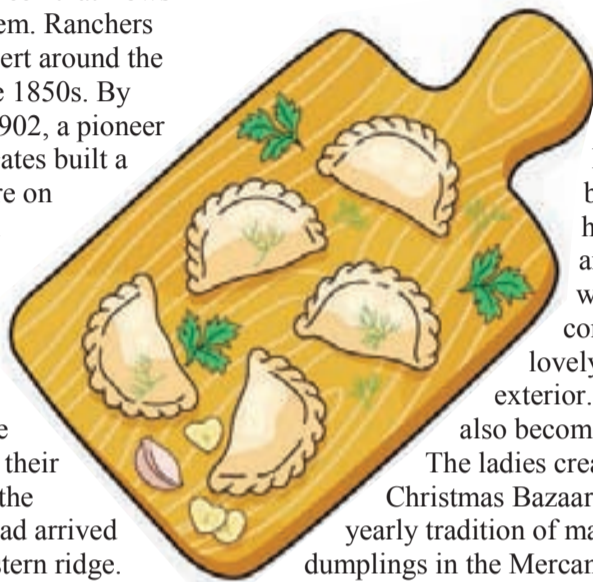
Our Wonderful Christmas Tradition

Janna Benkelman

The small town of Elbert, Colorado, at 7,000 feet, lies nestled between two pine tree covered ridges, and beside a creek that flows through the valley between them. Ranchers and loggers began settling Elbert around the Colorado Gold Rush era in the 1850s. By 1875, it had a post office. In 1902, a pioneer entrepreneur named Russell Gates built a beautiful brick Mercantile store on Main Street. This store, which sold everything from clothing and dry goods to plows, was the largest retail store in the county and sat across from the livery stable.

With the Indians gone, white settlers slowly began bringing their own version of civilization to the county, and in 1881, the railroad arrived just outside of town on the eastern ridge. By 1925, despite a miniscule population of less than 200, the Elbert Women's Club formed with a mission to help the community

and build lifelong relationships among the ladies who called Elbert "Home."



In the mid 1960s, the Elbert Women's Club decided to restore the Mercantile building, which had been painted an ugly shade of white that concealed the lovely red brick exterior. The interior had also become dilapidated.

The ladies created the Elbert Christmas Bazaar and began their yearly tradition of making apple dumplings in the Mercantile building.

They sold craft items, Christmas trinkets of every shape and size, homemade delicacies, and apple dumplings to the community to raise

funds for their projects. Eventually, they raised enough money to restore the historic building, which is now used for many community events.

When my family arrived in Elbert in 1998, the apple dumpling baking had been temporarily passed off to the Junior and Senior High School Cheer Squad at Elbert School. My daughter enthusiastically joined the squad, I became an assistant coach, and we both learned how to make apple dumplings that winter! On the prescribed day, we set up many rectangular tables in the school's gymnasium and set into motion the monumental preparations. Moms, teachers, townswomen, and the cheerleaders carried it out. Starting at 8m, you could find various tasks in progress.

Some people washed, peeled, and cored apples, others mixed pie dough to wrap around the apples, and others cut the butter cubes and mixed the cinnamon and sugar poured into the center of the cored apple. We sealed the apple dumplings with more dough on top, sprinkled them with cinnamon and sugar, and sent them to the school's ovens. Baked to perfection, we set them on racks to cool. We prepared caramel sauce, packaged the dumplings, and sent them to the Mercantile to be sold in the bazaar.

By the time my daughter stopped cheering for Elbert High School, our family was hooked on the apple dumplings. We have continued the tradition of making apple dumplings for gifts and charity events for the last twenty years. Although we make only 100 dumplings as opposed to the 1,500 made by the Women's Club, we still love this tradition!

Each November, a select group of us come together to re-create the tradition the Elbert Women's Club so lovingly started so many years ago. Last year, my best friend and equine therapist at Affinity Ranch, my daughter, my daughter-in-law, my seven-year-old granddaughter Maggie, and my three-year-old granddaughter Sloane all met in the large kitchen of my home to work on our task. Maggie assisted by pouring the sugar/cinnamon mixture into the wrapped apples and placing the leaf-shaped lid on top. The rest of us split up the remaining jobs, and Sloane helped by making glitter pies out of spare pie dough and pink sprinkles. Even the family parrot got involved with eating and tearing up the long strings of apple peels that spun off the apples as they whirled through the hand cranked peelers.

It took us about 6 hours to create 110 apple dumplings that we placed into their festive cupcake boxes, along with the caramel sauce that gets drizzled over the warm dumpling. For the truly daring, you can scoop vanilla ice cream onto the side of the plate, creating a decadent, delicious and spectacular holiday dessert!

This year, sixty of our dumplings were sold at a therapeutic equine facility south of Parker Colorado, called Affinity Ranch. Along with Jeanne, I work as an equine assisted therapist there, and love spending time with the beautiful horses, the wonderful children, and the enthusiastic volunteers! The ranch will use the profits to improve their paddocks and stalls for the most important members of their program, the horses! We'll give the rest of our homemade apple dumplings as gifts to dear friends and family members, just to make their holiday spirit a little brighter and the season a bit more special.

Merry Christmas!!! ♦

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It's Been an Honor to Serve You... from the County Commissioners

Reflecting on Eight Years of Service

It has been a tremendous honor to serve the people of Elbert County as a member of the Board of County Commissioners for the past eight years. As I transition to my new role as Representative for Colorado House District 56, I am deeply grateful for the opportunities I've had to work alongside our citizens, fellow elected officials, and dedicated county employees. While I will miss the daily interactions, I am excited to continue serving our community in a new capacity.

Together, we've achieved significant milestones. From stabilizing county finances to enhancing public services, these efforts reflect our shared commitment to responsible governance. I am particularly proud of our success in countering government overreach and reducing mill levies, returning \$3 million to our residents between last year and next.

During my tenure, we upheld the proper role of government, whether by declaring worship an essential public function during COVID, defending citizens' rights against Red Flag Laws, or protecting life and property during natural disasters. These accomplishments underscore our dedication to the principles of limited, constitutionally based, and fiscally responsible governance.

As I move forward, I take pride in leaving the county better than I found it. I extend my best wishes to the incoming Commissioners and trust that our organization remains in capable hands. Serving Elbert County has been a privilege, and I look forward to continuing to champion our shared values as I join the Colorado General Assembly.

Respectfully,
Chris Richardson
Commissioner, Dist. 1

2025 and Beyond!

Before thinking about 2025, I wanted to thank outgoing Commissioners Richardson and Thayer for their outstanding work over the past 8 years; specifically in the areas of the County finances, decorum at BOCC meetings and providing structure to our County government. They have fulfilled the statement, "Leave it in a better condition than you found it." These and many other accomplishments have created a foundation for future success for the County.

What do I envision for 2025?

While I cannot speak for the two new incoming commissioners, I can relay my thoughts on 2025.

One of the primary roles for the Commissioners is the fiduciary responsibility to citizens to provide transparency, stability and accountability to the County finances. This includes alleviating potential liabilities to the County, providing professional services to the citizens, and maintaining a balanced budget. It also means that County government must conduct self-assessments to assure taxpayer's funds are being spent wisely and efficiently. County government should not collect taxes just to have big account balances.

Following this principle, in 2024 the Commissioners reduced property taxes by \$2 million and have committed to \$1 million in property tax relief in the 2025 budget.

Will BOCC meetings have a different look and feel to them? Probably.

Will roads continue to be a topic of conversation? Undoubtedly.

Will I still have an open-door policy?

Absolutely.

The future is bright. The county is stable. County staff is ready to serve you, the citizens, in 2025.

Respectfully,
Dallas Schroeder
Commissioner, Dist. 2



and a **Happy Holidays** from everyone at Elbert County Government.

Financial Future for Elbert County

It has been my sincere honor to serve Elbert County as County Commissioner for the last eight years. I enjoyed a professional analytical opportunity to serve with my fellow Commissioners, Danny Wilcox, Ric Pettitt, Dallas Schroeder and Chris Richardson.

When elected in 2016, Elbert County was recovering from several years of difficult economic times. Property taxes and other income were not sufficient to pay ongoing expenses in a timely manner. Economic conditions improved over the last eight years and the County Commissioners have adopted detailed financial plans and a comprehensive budget process.

We recognized that the County was understaffed and that each employee was underpaid. The County is now fully staffed, including recruitment to fill identified open positions. Salaries and benefits are well within those of the surrounding market. Each staff member contributes positively to Elbert County.

Today Elbert County is in good financial condition and has sufficient cash balance available to ensure that unpredicted calamities such as road destruction due to flooding can be repaired and managed in an effective timely manner.

Respectfully,
Grant Thayer,
Commissioner, Dist. 3

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- **Plan Ahead—Check Road Conditions**
- **Stay Alert**
- **Avoid Distractions**
- **Slow Down**
- **Buckle Up**
- **DON'T CROWD THE PLOW**



Have a Safe and Happy New Year!

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Home for Sale in Elbert Co. 10 ac. 3 bd, 4 ba. 3600 sq ft 2 car garage. 2400 sft garage. Many bonus rooms. Coop, corrals. \$930,000 Text Gary at 719-680-0481

Motor Home: 2006 Jayco Seneca 35 ft Super C. 44K, 1 slide, Jacks, Queen Bed, 50 Amp, Dual A/C, New Michelin Tires, Satellite Dish, Garage Kept, \$68,000. 303-646-1735

Bedroom for Rent. Furnished, utilities, fiber \$650 Sun Country. 720-422-8200

LGD Christmas Puppies: Pyrenees / Anatolian Shepherd. Great w/families, kids, chickens, goats. 14 weeks old. Text or call, leave message. Cindy 719-680-1364

Hay for Sale: \$8/bale OBO. Alfalfa/Brome mix. 1st cutting. Located a mile South of Safeway. 32525 Pine Ridge Street & County Rd #132 Elizabeth or call 303-646-5333

For Rent in Eliz: 2 bd, washer/dryer, security system, on-site mail kiosk, across from park, close to town. \$1250/mo. No pets. 303-646-0872

2006 Yamaha 4-wheel ATV: recently overhauled with new carb, good tires, runs great. \$2500 Jackie 303-648-3286

Help Wanted: Sewer/installer, tarp fab, system install, repairs. Truckhugger - rcarroll@truckhugger.com

Masterbuilt propane/charcoal smoker: model CSMMP7. Manual & recipe books. \$100 303-648-3286

For Sale: 2006 Jayco Seneca 35 ft Super C Motorhome. 44K, 1 slide, Jacks, Queen Bed, 50 Amp, Dual A/C, New Michelin Tires, Satellite Dish, Garage Kept, \$68,000 303-646-1735.

For Rent in Elizabeth: 2 bdrm, washer/dryer, security system, across from park and close to town. \$1250.mo. 1st and last + \$2000 deposit. 303-646-0872

Ammo cans are back: 120mm mortar, 81mm mortar, 60mm mortar, 50cal /.223. Dozens of each, \$12 to \$25 each, Buy 10 and get one free. Kevin 720-908-8821

Full care horse boarding: \$350. Paddock with triple wide shed. Arena and round pen. Neighborhood trails. Trailer parking. 35 acres. Eliz. Sun Country 720-422-8200

Yamaha Snowmobile: Last ran 4 years ago. Needs a seat. \$100 OBO. 303-648-3286

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For Sale: Roto-tiller, Ryobi, used for one project 2 months ago, 40 volt battery, 18 inch, self-propelled, rear tine. \$800 303-570-9213.

Help Wanted: Someone to break/ride 2 colts. 303-931-0291 for info.

Winter Cleanup: snow shoveling, fence repair. Justin 720-598-1630

For Sale: Custom truck bumper Ford Super Duty, with Warn winch 16,500 lbs capacity Never used. \$1200. Steve 720-231-0138

5th Wheel Hitch: Pullrite #2600 Single point Attachment 5th Wheel Hitch, 20K Lb Towing Capacity, 5K Lb Pin Capacity. \$900 new, sacrifice at \$300 OBO Leave Message: 303-644-4635

For Sale: 4/x ft trailer \$500 OBO 303-243-0488

Snow blower, Ryobi, used last season, 40 volt battery. 24 inch, 2 stage self-propelled. \$800 303-570-9213

For Rent: 27ft. x 50ft. Steel Barn for work shop/ Hobby shop/ Storage. Heat available. \$990 mo. Plus deposit. John 720-231-1612

Bedroom for rent in a shared house with mellow mindful roommates. Furnished, utilities, walk in closet. \$700. Sun Country. 720-422-8200

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Elizabeth Presbyterian Church, Helping People Walk with Jesus **Sunday 9 am** elizabethpc.org/home

Elizabeth United Methodist Church Come As You Are We Aren't Perfect Either **Sunday 9 am** elizabethunitedmethodists.org

Elbert Women's Club -DINNER & BINGO- 1st Monday Nights Dinner (6-7) Bingo (7-9) Russell Gates Mercantile 24223 Eccles St. Elbert. 303-243-1308

Food Bank of the Rockies 2nd Friday 10:30 am Franktown SDA Church 905 N. State Hwy 83 Franktown Jack 303-688-8730

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