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Page 11

Elbert County
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Page 24

Rescue on an Old Mountain Road

Shirley Howington

Winter approached. I lived up on the mountain west of Granby in the old cabin my ancestors built circa the late 1800s. I loved it up there. The peace and quiet with nature all around me was unsurpassed. I would wake in the mornings to the chirping of songbirds and look out the window to see a doe or two grazing in the long green grass while a crafty fox leaped across the mountain meadow. I had already hauled my horses down the mountain to graze on the pasture outside of Granby for the next few months. The snow and cold were just too much for any of us to stay through the winter on the mountain.

My neighbor, Maggie, an older lady in her 80s who lived three miles further up the mountain from me, had left two days earlier to spend the season with her daughter in Granby. She went in a panic because she had received word that her grandson had been in a car wreck, broken his leg, and was in the hospital. Maggie stopped by to tell me not to stay up there too long because a storm approached. I told her not to worry. The storm wasn't due for another couple of weeks. She shook her head and said I didn't know what I was talking about. She warned me again and drove down the mountain in her beat-up jeep.

That's ole Maggie, always warning me about something, I thought and went back in the cabin to finish eating my breakfast and ready the cabin to be shut down for the winter. That meant making sure insulation covered the water pipes, filling in any open holes with grout, and tightly shutting the windows. Nothing fancy; but just needed to make sure no critters could get in the cabin. Sometimes the cell phones worked up there, but most of the time they didn't. Texting was more reliable, but sometimes it didn't even work. I wish it wouldn't have been working on that fateful day. I received a text from Maggie asking if I would drive up to her cabin and make sure she'd locked her doors and windows. She had left in such a dither that she forgot to check. I texted her back that I would.

Later that afternoon, I jumped into my old Scout, a tough old bird of a vehicle that could go over anything. The single lane dirt road up to Maggie's was steep, narrow, and bumpy. One hoped they wouldn't meet another vehicle coming from the opposite direction because it was nearly impossible to pass one another. Tall pine trees lined the road while their roots encroached across it. I had driven it several times through the years, so I knew what to expect.

I didn't expect the strong, wet winter snowstorm that hit a few miles up the mountain. It came in with a vengeance with a heavy wet sleet snow mix. I could barely see the road through the windshield wipers.

Darn it, Maggie was right, I thought. *Nothing I can do now except go on up the hill to Maggie's and wait for this storm to stop. No way can I turn around and go home.*

As my Scout plodded along the old dirt road, the

storm got worse and worse. I had taken the top off the Scout for the summer and hadn't put it back on yet, so I was soaking wet, even though I had on what was supposed to be waterproof clothes. I guess that meant light rain waterproof. Oh well, I only had about a mile to go to Maggie's. I could make a fire and get warm there. However, a mile on that old road could take a good 45 minutes to an hour to cover. I realized that but figured I could stand the cold until I got there.

Then the unthinkable happened. The road tilted toward the drop offside and saturated me with wet snow. My Scout's wheels slipped towards the imposing ledge. My heart felt as if it would burst out of my chest as I pictured falling off the edge into oblivion. Thank God that didn't happen. My Scout had barely slipped off the side of the mountain when a gigantic tree stopped it. If not for its presence, we would have rolled into the bottom of the valley. Now my poor Scout was stuck, and there was no way for me to get it out by myself. My best bet was to walk up to Maggie's and wait out the storm. Her cabin provided the closet shelter for me to hunker down in and weather the worst of it.

As I trudged through the snow, I thought how foolish I had been to not heed the warning of the incoming storm and think I could handle anything. Now, I had to have my Scout towed out, which may have to wait until spring because of the heavy snow. Let alone how much damage there may be to it. "Oh well, I can't think about that now. I have to get to Maggie's and warm up. I'm shivering. So cold. Just keep walking. Just keep moving. You don't want to freeze to death!"

About that time, I heard what sounded like a baby crying. What on earth would a baby be doing up here? I must be hearing things. Then came the crying again. I looked up the side of the mountain from the road and saw a black bear cub tangled in an old barbed wire fence. The little bear had pulled and tugged so hard it could hardly move. It probably would die there. I felt sorry for it, but if you see a baby bear, steer clear. The mother isn't far away and will attack whatever or whoever she thinks is harming her cub. As much as I love animals, I better head on up the road to Maggie's before the storm got me rather than the mother bear claiming me.

As I rounded a curve of the winding old road, the mother bear blocked the way. She wasn't growling or acting fierce. Her eyes looked soft, almost as if



she was crying or pleading with me to help her baby. I thought I must be losing my mind. Surely, this bear isn't asking me to help. Besides that, I had no way of getting her cub out of the wire. Then I remembered my multi-tool pocket wrench, which included wire cutters. Did I have it with me? I felt my back pocket and, sure enough, found it. I looked at the bear. She slowly turned and started heading towards her trapped baby cub. She stopped after taking a few steps and looked back at me as if to say, "I need your help."

I took a few steps in her direction and then followed her at a safe distance. She stopped periodically to check on me. My mind told me "Don't follow," but my heart said "It's okay. Help these bears." I followed my heart.

When we got to the baby bear, the mother bear laid down beside her cub and looked at me with those same pleading eyes. "All right, all right, I'm going to help. It may take a while with these pocket wire cutters, but I'll get the job done." I looked into her huge brown soft eyes. She seemed to acknowledge my help and gently licked her cub. It took what seemed like forever to cut through all that wire with those tiny cutters in the freezing wet snow. My hands would hardly move in the bitter cold as I untwisted the last of it from the cub. When I finally freed the cub and it got up, the mother looked toward me as if to say, "Thank you," then led her baby into the forest.

I walked in the opposite direction through the heavy snow to Maggie's cabin. When I finally got there, I entered, locked the door, collapsed on the floor and said, "What a day. At last, shelter. Home, sweet home. Well, not my home, but for now, I'll claim it." ♦

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12 Months, 12 Changes

Charity Bishop



We've all heard of New Year's Resolutions, right? Those things we vow to do for twelve months and give up within three weeks because it goes against our nature or is boring.

I think I might have the solution: 12 months, 12 different resolutions.

What if instead of committing to "forever," we went in month-long increments? Instead of "I need to exercise more," we commit to, "In January, I will do 30 minutes of exercise a day." Doesn't matter what kind or who directs it, we could do aerobics or a dance video online, but we get to do it for 30 days and then we get to quit and focus on something else.

For example: In January, I will exercise 30 minutes a day. February: I will take a month off from social media for an emotional reset. March: I will read for 30 minutes a day. April: I will do Yoga for a month. May: I will get out my art supplies and draw every day...

You get it.

Doesn't have to be life-altering, but it can be habit-setting.

I think it's good for us to stretch ourselves, challenge ourselves, and be more mindful of ourselves. Often, we put off the things we really want to do, because we think we're too busy for them, when maybe all we need to do is commit to them or not do something else. If we want to draw or write, maybe we need to watch one hour less of television a week or get up earlier. That means thinking about how to set ourselves up for success, and making our decisions up-front. (If you struggle to break free of a TV habit, cancel your streaming services for a month.)

The start of a New Year always feels fresh and exciting, and we want to keep that happy momentum rather than let it piddle out when the humdrums of waiting for spring to show up. So, give yourself something

to look forward to, rather than just write up a list of stuff you need to "improve" on.

It is the "forever" that kills our resolutions, because that feels like too long, but most of us can do something for 30 days. We can diet, avoid coffee, drink no soda, exercise daily, journal, or learn a new skill. Resolutions do not have to be abstentions. They can be add-ons. We can watch one new movie a week, learn something we didn't know every day, devote more time to studying a topic we love, use up all the food in our pantry, cook one new recipe a week, etc., because... it's only for a short while. Some of these habits, we may enjoy so much we do them longer, but others will teach us "eh, I'm not a Yoga person."

You could even experiment with eliminating something one month, then adding in a new thing the next one. No social media this month, but next month I'm going to try TikTok, etc.

Set one larger goal and train your mind for it ("this year, I will eat more healthfully"—"is this going to help me be more healthful?"), but let's play this year. Let's try new things for a month and learn whether we are "that kind" of

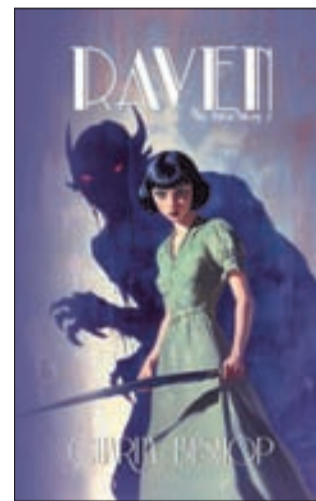
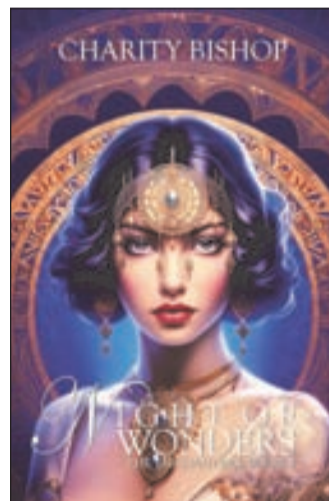
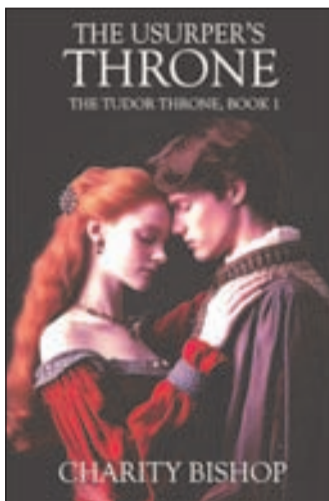
a person. If it works and you like it, extend the deadline. If it stinks and you hate it, finish the month and brag on your accomplishment, but cross it off your list as a learning experience that you won't try again.

Remember, you can start this any time you want. It doesn't have to be the first of the year. The past is behind us; the future is head of us, and we can make it work for us if we start in the present. Every goal starts with a decision to make a change in our life, but then it needs a plan to get off the ground. So get busy!

What will you do with 2025? ♦

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AD INDEX

Advanced Q. Auto	12	Calvary Chapel	11	Franktown F. Pantry	11	Love Funeral Home	6	Son Country Church	18
All Roof	16	Chunkys Towing	6	GAC Crew	12	Maverick Auto	18	Steel Corner	5
Barnyard Boutique	4	Cleary Building	7	Global Propane	3, 13, 21	Maverick Mercantile	14	Steel Structures	3
Barr Bear	18	Colorado Elite	9	Home Improvement	16	Mountain Heart	14	Stellar Solutions	3
BC Building	15	Core Electric	19	Integrity Insurance	20	Neal Wilson Ins.	12	Strasburg Auto Parts	13
Bender Menders	4	Diesel Repair	20	Just Window Screens	10	Plains H& A/C	9	Stratton H & A	16
Big Sandy School	11	El Co Abstract	6	Kim's Handyman	15	Prairie Creeks	3	Symphony Painting	7
Bijou Telephone	13	El Co Connection	24	Kiowa Senior Center	11	PRISM Financial	8	TLLC Concrete	11
Brandiwine Nails	9	Eliz Barber	10	La Junta Livestock	5	Rachel K. Books	15	Weller Insurance	10
Byers General Store	9	Eliz Presbyterian	11	Life & Health	17	Roggen Elevator	10	Western Hardware	20
		Eliz U. Methodist	11	Lifetime Construction	8	Running Cr Dental	8	Whiteside's Boots	22
		Forty Mile Feed	5	Linnebur Auctions	9	Shooters	23		

Frugal Fred

Low Spend January

The holidays are over and now come the credit card bills. Some of you learned a long time ago to live on and pay for stuff with cash, but the rest of us may wish we had been a bit more frugal last year. So, I have a challenge for you. A reset for the New Year. It's called "Low Spend January" (but you can apply it to any month of the year).

The principle is this: you purchase no non-essentials for a full 30 days, to see what effect it has on your bank account. You may pay bills, buy groceries (off a list you make; no "checkout" ad-on), and replace things you run out of if you can't live with it for 30 days, but no new shoes, clothes, books, movies, décor, tools, etc. It may sound difficult, but it's not, provided you learn to be mindful and add things to your digital cart, rather than click "Buy Now!" constantly. It means you won't be seeing your UPS driver for a month, but maybe he deserves a vacation.

Let's do this together. Here are some steps you might find useful.

Go back through your Amazon account (or Walmart, or wherever your money disappears) and add up all non-essential purchases for the last year, so you have some idea of your spending trends. (Non-essentials are new clothes, toys, shoes, electronics, books, movies, upgrades, vehicles, vacations, iPhones, etc., that were not forced replacements.) I did the last 6 years in my order history and found out I spent \$1,000 more last year than the four years prior, and my spending has been trending up. Yikes.

Now, decide why you are doing this, and what you want to get from it. Some people do this to pay off their debts quicker, others want to save up for a vacation. Every time you

feel tempted to spend frivolously, think about whether that item will be "stealing" from your future desire (paying off your mortgage, sending your kid to college, going on vacation, being debt-free).

Now, make a list of what you may buy and what you're not allowed to buy. Examples might be: groceries (off a list, but this is a good month to "eat up the pantry" and freezer), birthday gifts, emergency repairs, etc. Items on

the not-buy list might be "no eating out," "no paid streaming" (the library is free with tons of music, books, and movies, and there are free streaming channels with ads), no Starbucks, no clothes, no organizing supplies, décor, etc. Only you can prioritize what is

essential and what is not, but be mindful and know your brain is going to justify impulse purchases. January is not when you "restock," pick up a new hobby, or do your interior decorating. Use what you have and be clever!

Some people love the challenge of "not buying stuff." They have to figure out how to do without or use something they already own. We stuff our homes, garages, closets, etc., full of stuff... so see what you have and use it. Allow yourself to buy gifts for birthdays, or go out for your monthly lunch with your friends. We don't have to be Scrooge.

Now, the fun part.

Keep track, as the month goes on, of how you innovate and "do without" and of what you felt tempted to buy, and add up the money you saved. Add it up at the end of the month. (Didn't buy—24 pack of soda, \$\$, Sweater—\$\$, Etc.) Make figuring out how to save and NOT spend money "fun." Is there a hack you can use instead? A new way to pair off that pair of jeans with an existing shirt in your closet? Do you have that tool already? You just forgot about it? This would be a good time to dig into drawers and tool chests and take an inventory of what you own. You probably have more than you realize. (I rounded up all my wrenches recently and discovered 6 duplicates.)

We use spending to assuage our boredom,

but having more stuff never makes us happy. It just puts us into debt. When you have a thought that instantly leads you to reach for your phone, an ordering app, etc., notice how conditioned you are to instant gratification and how you don't get the time to really think about what you are buying—impulse, hit "buy," it arrives a week later, when maybe you don't need it.

Pay attention this month to how often you browse, shop, or spend "for fun," and choose to do other things instead. Get books from the library or read through your existing collection. Dust off your DVD player and watch your old favorites. Do a deep clean or a declutter of your

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kitchen or garage. Spend time in person with your grandkids. Bake cookies and invite your friends over for a game of Clue. Start a book club with something on your shelf.

There's no better cure for thoughtless spending than boxing up stuff for the thrift store, and recognizing how much money you spent on things you never used, a fantasy version of yourself who is never going to do yoga daily, or the expensive tool that sits around in your garage waiting to be useful.

Let's do a Low Spend January together and see what happens, friends. You may enjoy the results so much, you turn it into a "Low Spend Year." You can get lots of tips and inspiration on YouTube from folks who do this annually. ♦

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Holiday Recovery in the Home

Abby D. Jones

Holidays can be enchanting. From Halloween to the New Year, they fill our homes and families with extra time with loved ones, extra food, and events. They break open routines that have grown stagnant, light up our homes, and enchant us with traditions.

But they can also become overwhelming, discouraging, and burdensome. Some holiday seasons we take on too much, some we can't take on anything, and many feel heavy by the end. We sail through the in-between week and wake up to winter with all the frivolities behind us. The go-getters pop out of bed on January 2 with a list of resolutions. The rest of us groan and stumble around with holiday-hangovers.

How do we recover from the most wonderful time of the year? How do we get our families and homes back on track without turning into the Wicked Witch of the West as we try to cut back on the amount of sugar in the house?

Rest: After the holidays, it is so important to give our homes and families a chance to recover. We must not carry on at the same rate we do in December. The beauty of January is winter and winter means rest. Winter is when the world slumbers. Cozy burrows, warm nests, naked trees. Let's slow down and rest, too. Grab a cup of chamomile, a soft throw blanket, and think about some of these productive ways to rest:

Hit up your local library for coffee table books about gardening and plants. These massive volumes filled with lush photos will warm you right up and remind you spring is coming. Grab a notebook and pen and start planning your spring garden. Coffee Table books about decorating or food might be more up your alley. Either way, don't do things, just

take in their beauty and inspiration. Don't run out and buy anything. Nourish your creativity. Get that audio book you've been meaning to listen to or catch up on a podcast, but instead of working out or cleaning, sit down and crochet, knit, embroider, or cross-stitch.

Order some herbs and focus on healing teas and tinctures. These take time and fill the home with delight.

Read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis aloud.

Read *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times* by Katherine May.

Let the early dark

give you permission to stop your day



sooner than usual, curl up on the couch, and do something quiet.

Set out a notebook and jot down any goals, resolutions, or projects that spring to mind, but let them sit and simmer before you tackle them.

Write a letter to someone you didn't get to see during the holidays.

Keep your calendar as clean as you can in January. Especially the first two weeks. Try your best not to sign up for outside-the-home commitments. I know this one is hard, but do your best to give yourself, your home, and your people a chance to breathe.

Routine: Routines are comforting guideposts for our family throughout the day. They keep life rolling along at a steady beat so no one gets left behind. Once we pack away the holidays, it can be tempting to stay at the breakneck pace of the last 8-10 weeks. Consider returning to your pre-holiday routines instead:

Bedtimes—remember when you had a consistent sleep schedule? Take January to return to it.

Mornings—by not burning the candles at both ends, give yourself space to have a morning that isn't sheer chaos. Get up early enough to move slowly and wake up.

Meals—getting back to the normal family menu at normal family times will work wonders on everyone's overwrought emotions and digestion.

Chores—the simple work of laundry, dishes, and cleaning being consistently done at the

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same time instead of just higgledy-piggledy working them in wherever they fit will do your family's sense of comfort wonders.

Reset: Instead of jumping headfirst into the goals of the year, take time to reset. This will help you make sure you're not biting off more than you can chew while the holiday fog lingers in your mind. It also gives you a clean slate to start from in your home, projects, and plans.

Put away the Christmas decorations. It's hard to know what to do with this new year when the Christmas decorations are still sitting around.

Declutter. Getting rid of books, jewelry, clothes, décor, dishes, makeup, medicine, unused pantry goods and more will help you feel lighter mentally and emotionally. I'm sure you got some wonderful gifts. Use the new things to help you check the value of keeping the old. Also, don't be afraid to create a re-gifting box for things that don't suit you.

Check your systems. Before you tackle a project, give your home and yourself room to breathe by watching the systems and seeing if they still work for you. You may need a new way to manage projects or to simplify. You may need to spruce up some old systems before anything new can happen. It might not be a good idea to tackle sourdough, kombucha, or fermenting (I say to myself) if you can't consistently keep the house clean or keep up with the dishes.

Review. If you haven't already done it, take time to review the last year and think about the coming one. Reflection is a great way to reset. Make it a game with your kids to review the highlights of last year, a fun date night conversation with your husband, or get a new journal and write your thoughts.

One of the biggest blessings of the holidays is their ability to get us out of the rut of life. Another is their ability to help us appreciate the rut. Many of us have been elbow-deep in flour, sugar, parties, cocktails, gifts, and people. January doesn't need to continue at the same speed and trajectory as December. Use winter to rest, get back into a routine, and reset yourself and your family before you tackle resolutions, goals, or weight loss. Get back into nutritional foods and nourish your creativity, delight, wonder, and order.

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Starting the New Year With a Bang

Avis Jaenson-Halbert

New Year's Day of 1959 dawned unusually warm. At the tender age of thirteen, I was very gullible, especially for what my big brother said. If Jim said it, I believed it; end of the story.

Though not above playing a practical joke on his buddies or his little sister, he never intentionally hurt anyone. Before he joined the Navy, Jim and I would go target shooting up in the hills. We drew targets on paper and gathered up old tin cans. We packed our lunches and spent the whole day. I never took a gun safety course. In those days, we learned gun safety from our family. We all had them around us in locked cabinets and developed a healthy respect for them. We practiced the safe handling of guns and used them for sport or hunting. I never saw Jim shoot anything other than tin cans and targets, but he had talent.

He'd pour his own shotgun shells. When given a mint-condition Flintlock rifle out of his grandfather's collection, he made his own "shot" out of lead. He melted the lead and poured the hot metal into small, round molds. Jim studied about that gun until he knew he could safely load the gunpowder and shoot, then practiced shooting it before he'd let anyone else try it.

That New Year's Day, our parents were sleeping in after too much celebrating. I whined that Jim should take me target shooting with him and teach me how to fire the Flintlock. Finally, he gave in to my wishes and we packed our guns, made our lunches, and took off for the hills. I loved to spend time with Jim, but that day I would get to do

something that no other female in our family had done. It helped that I was a tomboy to start with.

Jim and I drove until we reached our private shooting gallery: a natural target range with a non-inhabited foothill and rocks to place your targets. It was a deserted public-wooded area, and we were sure no one ever came there.

We carefully unloaded the guns, leaving the Flintlock for last. We practiced with the others for a while, and then came time for his cherished Flintlock. I couldn't

wait to get my hands on it. He gently pulled it from the trunk and slid it lovingly out of its case. Slowly, he handed me the gun so I could get a feel for its weight before shooting it. While he unloaded its ammunition, I pretended to drop it. Quickly, I decided not to joke about his "baby" again. He

scowled at me in a way that would make any red-blooded American hunter run for cover.

After enduring a serious lecture about gun safety, even when it's not loaded, I apologized and watched Jim load the gun. It seemed to take forever, which made me wonder how folks ever fought a war with a gun like that. Once ready, Jim motioned for me to stay behind and to his left. I obeyed. He aimed carefully at his target, took a breath, and squeezed the trigger. It set off the powder in a deafening explosion, and gun smoke shot out in the air. It hit the edge of the target. Jim said that it was not the most accurate gun ever made, but it was fun to shoot. He handed me some ear plugs after instructing me how to stand and to brace myself for a "kick" (the recoil). After another long wait, my turn came!

I took it out of his arms and felt how heavy it was. I stood just like he had told me and braced for the recoil.

Then it happened. The powder ignited. It was like a slow-motion action sequence in Marshall Dillon's *Gunsmoke* series. My ears and head exploded with pain as the powder ignited next to my face and the recoil propelled me backwards into the ground. My shoulder felt like an angry mule had kicked me. I struggled to catch the gun as I fell. Jim leaped forward to grab the barrel and prevent it from hitting the rocky ground. Next, he reached out to break my fall, but I landed flat on my back and moaned. I sat up and cried like a two-year-old, holding my shoulder.

Jim put the gun aside and helped me up. I knew he was asking me questions, but for the life of me, I couldn't make out what he said. My ears were ringing so



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loudly! I thought I'd be deaf for the rest of my days. I pulled out the earplugs and still couldn't hear. Jim left his prize gun and carried me to the car. It made me feel better just knowing he cared so much about his kid sister. He gave me some water out of his camping canteen and handed me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to eat while he loaded all the guns into the trunk.

We were done with target practice that day. Jim drove that '55 Chevy home with the radio blaring. "Please tell me you can hear the music?" He looked over at me.

"What? Are you talking to me?" I yelled back.

"I said, please tell me you can hear the music!" The look of worry on his face was good for a few more miles of faking it on my part.

When I decided he'd had enough teasing, I lifted my baseball cap and looked over at him with a grin. "Yes, I can hear you. I'm not deaf, but my shoulder's killing me!"

Jim swatted at me playfully as we listened to rock and roll for the rest of the ride home. I decided shooting a Flintlock was something I'd only do once! ♦

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My Last Cheeseburger

Don Boyer

August 5, 2016, a Friday, found me traveling to see a friend. He was recovering from a heart attack at a rehab center miles away. As was my habit, I pulled off the road at a filling station to get a burrito, feeling my breakfast wasn't enough—besides, I was doing something for a friend and entitled to a treat.

The filling station was out of burritos so my eyes fell on a cheeseburger. It came wrapped in clear plastic so I could see the thick burger and fat slice of processed American cheese encased in an oversized sesame seed bun. It was just the thing, so I bought it.

As I drove, I took my first bite and discovered the burger was a tasteless patty composed of some mystery meat concoction. When I tasted the cheese, I wondered if it was truly "cheese" or a nondairy product. The bun I found soggy and with little taste as well. What a dud of a purchase! But I had paid for it, so I gobbled it down.

In my extensive experience with cheeseburgers, this one stands out as exceptionally flavorless and disappointing. An all-around disappointment. Why I didn't just throw it away is still a mystery to me.

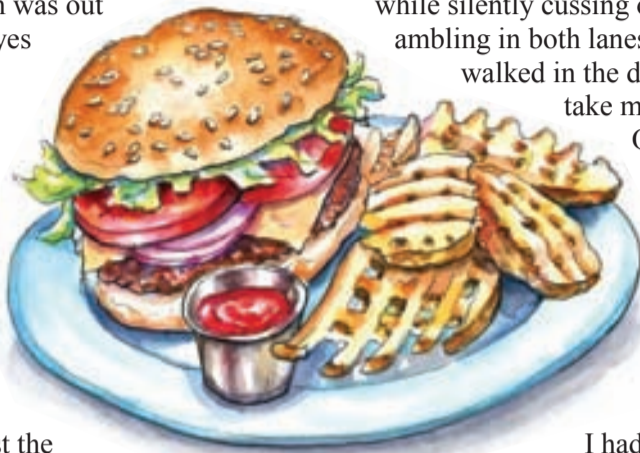
After visiting my friend, I got in the car and started the drive home. For the previous two weeks, I had been exhausted and a little dizzy, which I assumed was because of a current heat spell and/or some imbalance in my medications. It concerned me enough that I

got an appointment with my medical provider, which was a few weeks out.

In the car I felt a pain spreading across my chest, starting at the left side and migrating to the right. I became clammy and dizzy than before. The entire drive home, I carefully concentrated on the road and heavy traffic while silently cursing out the big trucks ambling in both lanes ahead of me. When I walked in the door, I told my wife to take me to the hospital.

Quick tests in the emergency room showed I had a heart attack. They discovered and repaired a blocked artery. That ended a carefree, irresponsible lifestyle

I had developed over decades of feeling invincible. I am now aware of my vulnerability. My heart-healthy diet prevents processed cheeseburgers purchased at filling stations. For that matter, any food I can buy at a filling station is off the list.



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My one regret is that my last cheeseburger was not a double stack loaded with bacon with wonderful, greasy burger patties and thick slices of cheese. The thought saddened me, but it couldn't have been more poetic.

So on to the fresh vegetables, lean cuts of meat and whole fruit. I always wanted to get "what I deserved," I just wasn't smart enough to realize that I usually deserve what I get.

After my heart attack, I shared this story with my doctor. She assured me that if I followed my diet and exercised regularly, I could one day have another cheeseburger.

It is now eight years later. I am forty pounds lighter but still overweight. Processed foods of any kind are off my menu, no more canned soups, etc. Recently on a road trip, I stopped at a Penny's Diner, which is a modern replica of the burger joints from the late 1950s. I had to have a cheeseburger once again.

This one had a quarter-inch thick patty, lettuce, tomato, red onion and real American cheese between a soft bun. I patted a blob of ketchup on the bun and brought the sandwich to my mouth. My first bite into it filled my mouth with an array of delightful flavors. It was delicious and authentic. Just like when I was a teenager. Once again, I got what I deserved. Once again, I earned it. ♦



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Suzan L. Wiener

My Surprise Piano Recital!

At ten years old, I started taking piano lessons. My mom hired a distinguished teacher for me from Italy. I didn't love playing, because I didn't find it much fun. A serious man, he grumbled if I hit the wrong

key. I tried not to laugh when he scrunched his face up, but I found it funny. Years went by, and to my family's surprise, I began playing fairly well. I enjoyed it once I learned on my own. I practiced every day, which surprised everyone.

One day, Mrs. Johnston, the music teacher in school, noticed I kept getting better at it. She taught music appreciation and took me under her wing. A very sweet lady, she always complimented me on how well I played. I practiced on the school piano. She asked me if I would like to do a piano recital in the school auditorium among other students showing off their talents. I felt pleased, but also very nervous. She said the parents of all the students would be there, but assured me she would teach me the correct way of playing a song that I picked. I chose a beautiful one Mrs. Johnston wrote called *So Close to Home*. I felt proud to play it and prayed I wouldn't be nervous.

I practiced a lot before the recital. Mrs. Johnson sat with me every day, giving me tips on how to improve. She had such a kind way about her, unlike my former piano teacher.



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Finally, the day came, and when I saw the sea of people in the audience, I tensed up so much my fingers wouldn't even move. Mrs. Johnston took over, sat down next to me, and started playing beautifully. She smiled at me and I recovered and played along with her. Afterward, the audience clapped. I don't think anyone remembered what happened to my ineptness at the beginning. They applauded and even some stood up for us.

Thanks to this wonderful teacher, I remember the moment as a happy one. Now that I'm over 70, I still play the beautiful song she wrote, remembering her with love. ♦



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Perfect Coffee

For some people, coffee is really important. Every part of their experience is important. They really want the perfect, robust cup with an aroma that follows them through their house. For this, the coffee needs to have a deep, rich smell, so that when you open up the package, the aroma makes you smile. It is a sign the coffee is a certain kind or comes from a particular area of the world. Take a deep breath. Can you smell it?

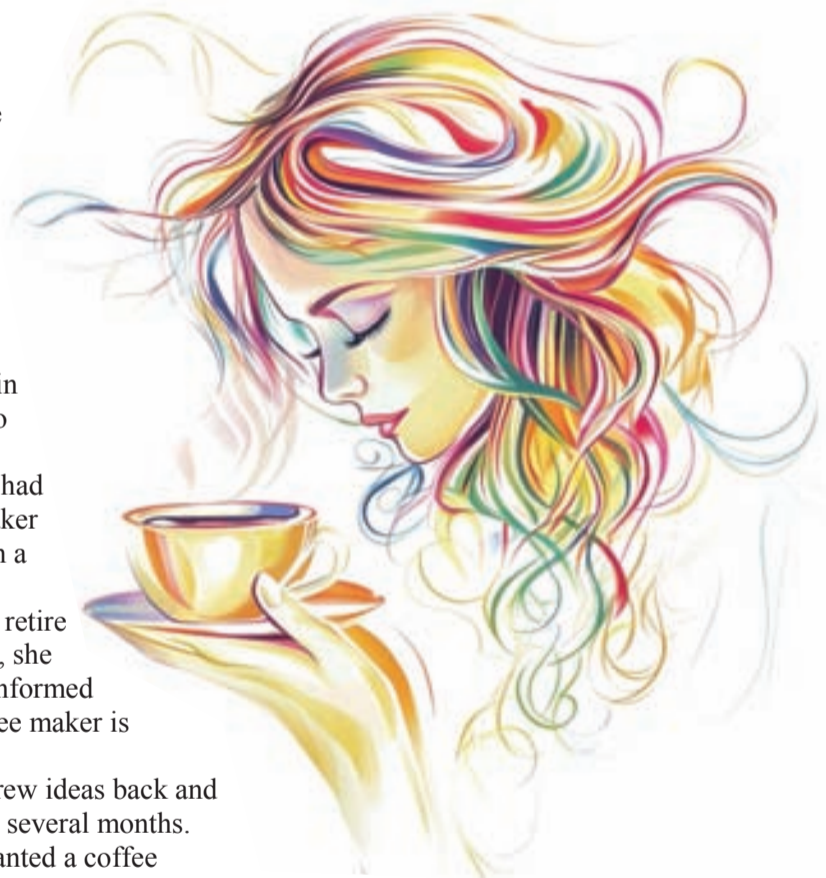
Then comes the variance of the preferred temperature of the water going into the pot, and how much coffee to use. Some people like it strong enough to take paint off the wall, while others dilute it down with creamer or water. Many people want their coffee fresh ground. It might be hand or electric, ground daily or once a week, for just one person or two.

Once the cup is warming your hands comes the choice of cream or sugar, unflavored or flavored. Everyone is particular about their artificial sweeteners or real sugar. Some folks use individual packages, while others buy bulk sweeteners and keep it in the sugar bowl. There are too many choices!

Recently, our friend Delia had problems with her coffee maker getting a lime build-up. Even a vinegar rinse and other ideas would not fix it. Deciding to retire her decade-old coffee maker, she searched for a new pot and informed me that, "Buying a new coffee maker is serious business".

We threw ideas back and forth for several months. Delia wanted a coffee maker like she had. The new one needed to be reasonable, reliable, and make a fabulous cup of coffee. We discovered there are so many coffee makers out there, and each one offers great options.

Some of them turn themselves on at a set time in the morning, so you can get up and pour your first cup. I can already smell it brewing. Do you smell it? Others turn themselves off automatically. Our friend wanted hers to stay on longer, just in case she wanted an extra cup.



Delia knew exactly what she wanted and looked for it, but noticed how much the prices varied, even with smaller models. She saw one for \$24.95, then an identical maker in a different store at \$39.95. After she went home and checked the model numbers, she found out they were the same and were identical to her own coffee maker. Thrilled with her discovery, she purchased the \$24.95 coffee pot.

Taking it home, she washed everything and made the first cup of coffee. Delia could not say enough good things about it. She never had such a "fantastic coffee maker." Exactly what she wanted! Pleased with everything, she sat down and enjoyed the aroma.

As she took the first sip, she said, "\$24.95 can still buy happiness." ♦



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HOLIDAY FOG

White clouds of frozen water vapor dissipate before my eyes. Icy wind brushes my face, causing my skin to sting as the blood rushes deeper, away from the biting air. I breathe in deeply through my nostrils, but not too deep, as the icy flames of sub-zero air attack my sinuses.

The little hairs stick together as the moisture immediately freezes with each drawing breath. Stocking cap, gloves, warm pants, and a thin but warm jacket will keep some of the frigid air from penetrating to my skin. Converting this morning's cereal and yesterday's pie into heat, my body will do the rest to maintain my continuance, if not my comfort. I am not out for my comfort, anyway. I sometimes fool myself and claim I do this for my fitness, but that is only part of the reason.

I begin my short trek in a sweeping quiet. No one in their right mind would venture out into this arctic wonderland. Even the birds and animals hold tight to their nests and holes until a more pleasant day arrives. But I can't imagine a better one. Frost hangs thickly on branches, leaving only a hint of pine bark underneath. Rays of light sneak through the clouds and fog and reflect off the frost encrusted trees, shimmering like the stars on a moonless night. How beautiful this will look during a full moon on a clear night, sparkling as if the stars have fallen from the sky and came to rest on the trees.

I plod along the road, making soft crunching sounds from my shoes compressing the light dusting of snow on the ground. There are no car tracks on the road. Only the occasional bird or small mammal has been bold enough to disturb the pristine layer of white, and now my



Reid Kaiser

shoe prints spoil the unblemished path. My motion generates a slight breeze against my cheeks, causing a stinging sensation that will transform into frostbite if my jog takes too long. Don't worry, I tell myself. I'll be in long before the blood completely retreats from my skin and the cells begin to freeze and die. So I

continue down the lane.

Turning the corner, the solitude of the place envelops me with peace.

Surrounded by empty corn fields, the only hint of people is the smoke drifting up from the chimney of the lone visible house. The heavy black cows with thick winter fur stare at me, motionless like dark statues. Their breath turns into a dense fog with the moisture freezing and collecting to the hair surrounding their soft, moist noses. The moisture from my breath also condenses and freezes, hanging like little icicles from my beard. I soon come to the next corner.

Recalling the cacophony of the house earlier, I remember their surprised expressions as I donned my stocking cap and told them my plan. What craziness is this, leaving the warmth of the house and venturing into the frigid afternoon air? But I needed to escape the inundation of stimuli that is part of large gatherings. Constant chatter, children racing around, and the television spewing lines from holiday movies all compete to draw me in. It was nearly enough for me to throw my hands up and shout! I understand an outburst like that would be socially unacceptable, so here I am two miles from the house, travelling along a snow dusted country road.

I turn the next corner and the sharp barking of a farm dog wakes me from my daydream. It is one of those nondescript creatures without an obvious breed to characterize it. While usually these animals are harmless, I realize how helpless I feel without a weapon in my hand. With each bark, a cloud forms before the dog's face. I imagine dogs all over the world barking and forming the clouds that generated yesterday's snowstorm. As that thought clears my mind, my legs carry me past the threatening cloud maker and on towards the next corner.

The sun is getting lower and I am getting colder. My hands have very little feeling in them and my cheeks are turning numb. I pull my stocking cap down further to cover the

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back of my neck. Few things chill as quickly as frigid air flowing down the back of my neck, especially now that a bit of moisture has escaped my pores, covering my body. One more corner to turn and I will be home. Back to the chaos, the noise, the arguments, the things I could escape for a time. It makes me a little sad that my solitude is almost over, but then I turn the last corner and my mood changes.

Near the farmhouse, the scent of burning cottonwood, pine, or some other remnant of a once towering tree strikes me. The smell brings back memories of warmth and comfort. A little closer, and I can see wispy streams of smoke rising from the chimney. The warm glow of orange light pours through the windows, as if the house might burst from the life inside it. I trot a few more steps through a snow covered road and hear voices and

mirthful laughter; joy and comfort well up in me as I imagine the warmth emanating from the fire and the smiling faces taking in the tales of the storyteller. How I desire to be that storyteller some day, filling the minds of the children with mostly true adventures and comic embarrassments. But that isn't my role yet.



I turn into the lane and step up to the house. I kick the small amount of snow off my shoes as I approach the door. Reaching for it, I am struck by a motley arrangement of aromas. Pies and cookies, wine and cider, candies and cold cuts attack my senses. Memories of the celebrations from past years rush to me and fill me with a deep sense of joy. Taking off my hat and jacket, I thrust myself into the warmth, the glow, and the smells of a holiday tradition. At that moment, I cannot imagine a place I would rather be. ♦

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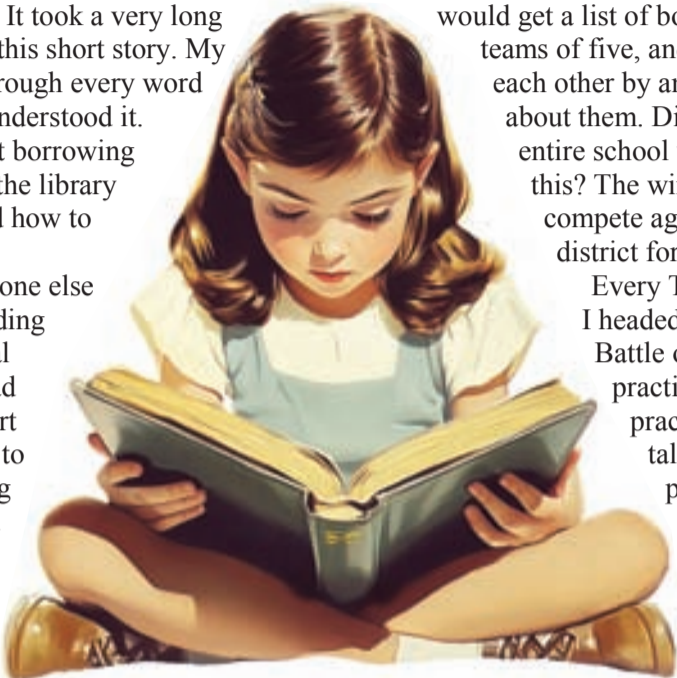
Loving Literature

Katelynne G. Good

As a young child, I despised reading. It didn't quite click with me. I couldn't understand how sentences worked or how someone could look at a page and tell a story. The first book I ever read had a cover with a blue-eyed kitten on it and cardboard pages. I borrowed it from the school's library. It took a very long time to get through this short story. My mother had to go through every word line by line until I understood it. From then on, I kept borrowing picture books from the library and I slowly learned how to read.

Meanwhile, everyone else in my class was reading "real books with real pages." Finally, I had enough of these short stories. Determined to read one of those big kid books, I found a cover with a skunk and some other animals in suits, sat myself down at the kitchen table, and I read until bedtime. My tired eyes went over the last sentence. I flipped the page to make sure there was nothing else. I startled my mother, who sat at the table with me, when I yelled "MOM, I did it! I finished a novel!"

Now unstoppable, I finished a book every week. My teacher even let me read the harder ones reserved for the upper grades. I dove into stories about dragons and the diaries of



historical figures. I even read an 800-page book about time travel. As I improved, the words on the pages faded away, leaving me watching the characters and their adventures.

Later on, as a 4th grader, my English teacher introduced the class to Battle of the Books. We would get a list of books to read, create teams of five, and compete against each other by answering questions about them. Did I mention that the entire school would watch us do this? The winner would get to compete against teams from the district for prizes.

Every Tuesday after school, I headed to the library for Battle of the Books practice. We would read, practice questions, and talk about our favorite parts of the stories. During any free time I had, I read the books on the list, most of them twice! From cursed princesses

to how a student overcame her disabilities. I had so much fun. Finally, competition day arrived. I put on my best gold sparkly eye-shadow and went over my flashcards one last time. Shaking from my nerves, I sat and waited for the tournament. And then it started. 1st question; my team knew the answer! Question after question we answered, and before I even knew it, Battle of the Books



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ended. The principal grabbed the microphone to announce the winners. I crossed all of my fingers and repeated, "Please!" in my head as she turned to face us. What was that? She had called my team! We had won!

Thinking back, these core events shaped how I perceive reading. From my first book to competitions, reading has become something I don't know how I'd survive without. The characters in books have become my best friends, and I've lived many lives through the stories they possess. Going forward, I plan to pursue a career as a writer and a teacher. And maybe, just maybe, my writing will affect a young child, the way it did me. ♦

Start the Year Right!

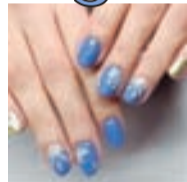
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Mick Mitchell

Me & the Old Bull

In the northeast corner of Yellowstone Park is a place called Lamer Valley, with a large herd of buffalo in it. Spotting a lone one at a long distance from the rest of the herd, I noticed they were all old bulls. Was this of his own choosing, a mutual agreement,

or was he kicked out?

As I proceeded up the valley, I saw another old bull by the side of the road. He looked as though he wanted to cross, so I stopped to accommodate the



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old fellow and observe him. He stepped up on the road about 10 ft from my truck, stopped, and looked at me. I imagined the look to be one of defiance, so I backed up 15 ft to give him some room. The buffalo didn't move but stood still to proclaim himself King of the Road.

Soon, there were six vehicles stopped, waiting on the King. He just stood there, glaring at the two trucks closest to him. Then he lowered his head, looked straight ahead and let out a loud groan, but did not move. A car in the back pulled out to go around, but when they got a good view of the situation, they wisely stayed put. He was a gigantic animal with a shaggy coat and a large goatee. Only his small tail moved. With his enormous head and shoulders and comparatively smaller rear end, he was an imposing creature and seemed to realize it. After a full 5 minutes of standing still on the road, he sauntered to the other side. That was when I noticed he had a gimpy rear leg. He favored it as though to put weight on it was painful.

"Why are you traveling alone?" is a question

I've been asked more than a few times. As I watched the old bull, I related to him. We were equally alone; each of us has a gimpy leg and are fervently independent. At one time, we were part of a family group, but old age and self-determination dealt us a life of solitude by our choice the choices of others. The old buffalo and myself want to be recognized; he by being King of the Road and I by writing short stories. In yesteryear, we made the younger bulls tremble and the young ladies pay attention, but those years have vanished and we are both reduced to our elderly imaginations.

Did Providence put that buffalo on the road to give me a picture of myself? If so, Lord, the image is coming in strong and clear. ♦

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Caught Red-Handed

Crystal Moore

The morning began with falling snow and ended with Andrea's friend Kim falling to her knees. "Where are they?" Kim asked, pulling open the drawers to the hall tree. "They were right here!"

"What?" Andrea asked, looking around her foyer without a clue.

"My gloves!" Kim said in disbelief.

"That's strange," Andrea's other friend Lynn said, grabbing her belongings from the bench.

Andrea's mind flashed back to earlier that morning when Kim had shown up for their Saturday morning get-together.

"It looks like a winter wonderland out there," Kim said, tromping into the foyer. Her gloved hands brushed icy flakes from her coat.

"Makes me want to build a snowman."

Lynn appeared in the hall and laughed. "In those designer duds?"

Kim grinned as she pulled off her expensive wool gloves and placed them on the bench beside Lynn's bag.

Lynn's green eyes froze on the garnet-red gloves. "Those are really nice. Maybe I should ask for a raise," she said, referring to her job as a staff photographer for their small-town paper.

"Just don't fleece them for some wool," Andrea joked as her seven-year-old daughter, Carly, came bounding down the stairs.

"Do we have any carrots, Mama?"

"In the crisper. Why?"

"I wanna build a snowman and send his picture to Grammy and Grampy. And look," she dangled a candy-striped stocking cap. "I already have his hat."

Andrea fingered the fuzzy pom-pom at the end of the hat's long tail. "Well, bundle up."

Carly nodded and dashed off to the kitchen.

"And don't take off your mittens to put on your frosty friend like last year!" Andrea called after her.

Half an hour later, while Kim, Lynn, and Andrea were enjoying coffee and cinnamon

rolls in the kitchen, Carly bellowed from the foyer, "Ma-a-m-a-a, I need something for the eyes and mouth!"

Andrea cocked her head toward the entry. "Is it that chilly you need goggles and a neck gater?"

"No, my snowman needs eyes and a mouth! And I just found

two sticks for his arms!"

"I have buttons in the sewing kit I keep in my bag," Lynn announced.

"Thanks, Ms. Lynn!" Carly yelled.

Lynn soon returned to the kitchen as the front door closed with a loud thump. "That snowman is going to be as cute as a button." She laughed, shaking her head.

"Silly me." She held up her travel-size sewing kit. "I forgot to put this

away. Be right back."

Thirty minutes later, after more chatting and chewing, Kim stood. "I should get going."



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Lynn seized another cinnamon roll. "And I need to get some snow pictures for the paper."

After Andrea walked them to the door, Kim began frisking her hall tree. And that's when they'd discovered her gloves were missing.

She stopped looking in Andrea's drawers and turned her attention to Lynn. "Do you remember seeing them when you put away your sewing kit?"

Lynn took a bite of the cinnamon roll. "Umm..."

While Lynn chewed things over, Andrea stepped into the living room to look. As she passed the half-frosted window, she stopped cold. "Kim, I know who has your gloves, and shall we say, *stick-y* fingers."

Kim got to her feet, a look of relief on her face. "Who?"

Andrea paused. She didn't want to believe it, but she had caught her own daughter and her snowman red-handed. After a good talking-to, Carly apologized and explained she'd taken the gloves after Lynn had returned to the kitchen. She planned on returning them after she'd taken a selfie with her polar pal.

Hearing that, Lynn unpacked her gear and went to work snapping shots of Carly and her new friend.

Delighted by the snowman, Kim joined in the fun and shook one hand of the red-gloved accompl-ice while Carly high-fived the other, which was captured for posterity and promptly appeared in the paper for Grammy and Grampy to see. What a memorable day! Snow doubt about it! ♦



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Jane Pitts

It's A Sin To Tell A Lie

On hot summer days, the kids in my neighborhood often said. "Jane, tell us a 'Lie Story.'"

"Okay, let's sit under that shade tree. Remember, it's not the truth, but we pretend it is. It's more exciting that way."

We sat on the grass and I made up a tale, feeling secure because I had clarified that I was not lying.

"Well, last summer when our family went to India—" I began pretending to believe it.

Marv said, "Boy, that's a long way off!"

"You said it. It's a good three-hour drive," I said.

"Lots of tigers there, you know." I went on about a certain tiger who was angry because someone had fastened a green velvet bow on his tail. He snarled at everyone who laughed at him. No one was brave enough to untie the bow. "The King—they have kings in India—offered a hundred dollars for anyone who could sneak up and untie that green bow."

"A hundred dollars! Wow!"

"I was afraid to try. Tigers eat people, you know.

But I wanted that bow for my mother's coat. So I took a big red jewel—they have those in India—and tied it to a rope. Then I climbed a tree near the tiger, lowered the jewel in front of his eyes, and dangled it back and forth. Guess what happened!"

"You hypnotized him," said Arthur Brown.

"Right. I hypnotized him. Then I sneaked up behind

him. Now tomorrow I'll tell you what happened and how I got the bow. That's all for today."

"Did you get the hundred dollars?" someone said.

"I'll tell you tomorrow," I said.

One little girl remained sitting. She fixed me with an icy stare. "You were lying."

"No, I wasn't lying. They all know I'm making it up."

"You were lying. You're a sinner. The Devil is going to come and get you."

In all my years, I had never given the Devil a thought. "He won't get me. I'll hide."

"He'll find you," she said, still glaring at me.

Trying to sound brave, but with a shaky voice, I said, "Oh, no, he won't. We'll just move to Boise."

"He can find you anywhere. You are a liar, so you are a sinner."

"Oh, go home Lorena," I said and went into my house.

I did not sleep well that night. That someone could find me wherever I moved disturbed me.

The next day I was morose, reclusive. I put an end to the "lie stories." Now I'm a grown-up and make my living by selling stories that are not true. The Devil has faded away. But sometimes, when I'm walking alone at dusk, I take a quick look around to be sure no one is following me. ♦

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Back Problems

Charles Oz Collins

It is the rare and fortunate individual who does not have an ache or pain after any considerable farm or ranch life.

Riding equipment over ground that approximates the lunar surface and in all kinds of weather, wrestling with large livestock, and the notion that God designed us in such a fashion that we figure He must have meant us to lift and carry, are only some ways we get bunged up. Slipping and slogging through the mud, stumbling and staggering through the frozen prairie, we are the medical profession's challenge, and their means to an early and comfortable retirement.

Among the rural debilitated, I am a rookie. No limbs have I lost, nor digits; I've had no major joints parted out, and on good days my running gear comes near to tracking just as well as the original equipment, though slower. I have now accumulated enough dings and dents that it seems prudent for me to pause when my wife says, "You probably shouldn't do that," or more commonly, "What made you think you could do that?"

For the benefit of those of you who have not reached my stage of enlightenment, let me give an example of what I am trying to say.

After a few decades of periodic grunting about an ill defined "backache," I came to peace with my condition. Pills did little to relieve it, and the best treatment I'd discovered came in a combination of avoiding cutting weeds, getting long back rubs from my good wife, and hydro-therapy attainable only by standing in a cold trout stream with a rod in one hand and a net in the other. This treatment plan never failed to bring relief, if I stuck to it long enough. But no medical procedure is foolproof, as I recently learned.

While attempting to execute the demanding task of getting out of my pickup, a rebellion instigated by the nerves lurking in my lower lumbar region beset me. I loudly remonstrated (during which my dogs retreated to the far side of the yard in deep confusion), but the upstart neuro-transmitters would only permit me to exit my vehicle after prolonged physical and verbal negotiations. When my wife arrived home, I delivered my diagnosis of the situation but pointed out that given the fact it was January, it would be hard to wade

in the frozen river. With no weed cutting to give up, I told her my situation seemed to dictate extended back rubs both before and after she fed the cows. She suggested we needed a second opinion, namely hers. At that juncture, I visited the family pill roller.

I hate to say it, but this time I could not make certain that the good doctor earned his diagnostic fee. He watched from his window as I approached and, after a charade of an examination, he rendered his opinion.

I was told I had the option of either wearing a glove to save the skin on the hand I was presently dragging as I crabbed sideways or I could submit to some high-tech hocus-pocus he called an MRI. Have you priced a pair of buckskin gloves lately? Besides, I was unwilling to settle for White Mule gloves since that stiff cuff collects gravel.

Hauled to the "Facility" by a friend, I discovered their bed had no mattress or covers and a pitiful pillow. The walls could have used curtains or pictures, something to absorb some of the noise in that place; I tell you, somebody was doing considerable groaning and wheezing while trying to climb up on that bunk. Then it rolled me under what looked like a big galvanized washtub hooked to the ceiling. For a moment I thought maybe MRI meant Massive Realignment Instrument, and they were going to mash me back into working order.

I was told to lie there on that cold plank while the tub made a bunch of distinct sounds. Once or twice I thought it sounded like a Dodge diesel dually with a couple of plugged injectors. Another time, the noise reminded me of our old dog leaning against the aluminum screen door while doing battle with fleas. Afterward, they gave me an envelope containing some big but badly underexposed pictures and told me to take them to a "Specialist" who could make them out. I hoped he had stronger bifocals than mine if he was going to make sense out of those high-priced

blurry black-and-whites.

By now I had a considerable pain in one leg, but only when I used it. At first I could get comfortable if I sat way back in the Lazy-Boy and Ruth brought me the TV remote and a steady supply of chocolate ice cream. But when the remote malfunctioned and the ice

cream supply ran low, another therapy seemed in order. I went to a second pill roller, then a third. When he told me the therapy would be a series of injections, I didn't much like it, but you can't say nobody warned me. The sign on his door said Pain Specialist.

An ever so pleasant gentleman greeted me in his office, explained what he proposed to do, and said they had experienced mixed results from the procedure. Some patients in a day or two were moving about with little or no pain

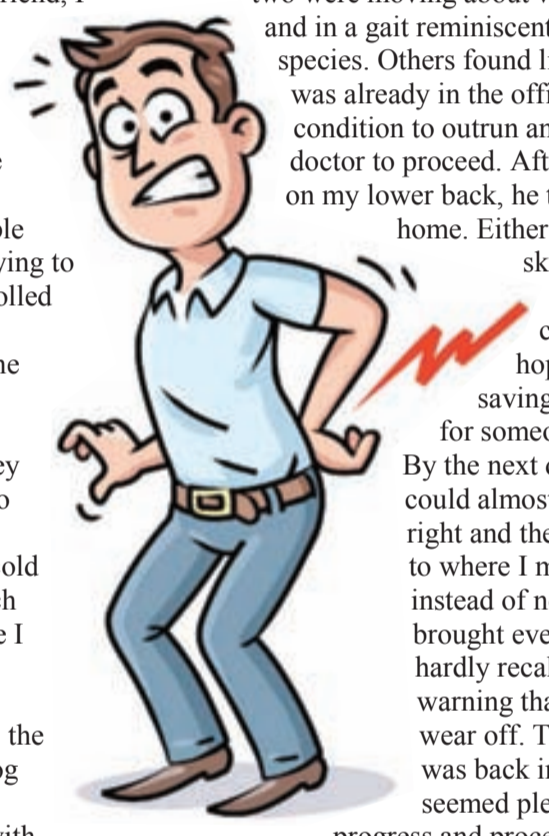
and in a gait reminiscent of the human species. Others found little relief. Since I was already in the office and in no condition to outrun anyone, I urged the doctor to proceed. After he pushed lightly on my lower back, he told me I could go

home. Either he was incredibly skilled at needling a fellow, or he considered my case hopeless and was saving his miracle drugs for someone else.

By the next day, my left leg could almost keep up with the right and the pain had dropped to where I mostly made faces instead of noises. Day two brought even greater relief. I hardly recalled the pain killer's warning that the effect might wear off. Two weeks later, I was back in his office. He seemed pleased at my

progress and proceeded with the second injections. Two weeks after that, I returned for my prescribed third session. In what I thought was a most unprofessional manner, he saw me at the appointed hour, spent a few minutes examining me, and then told me to go home and get to work. I thought about asking for a shot to take home for when I got his bill, but overall, I was so pleased that I simply left.

A couple of days of moderate work at home proved me healed at least as completely as half



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the folks who had hands laid on them by a Louisiana brush arbor Pentecostal preacher. There was no hitch in my gait, no sudden yelling at the dogs or wife. Everything seemed just fine.

The two young fellows from church who came to help me with tree trimming jumped right into the task. We got the ladder propped against the big cottonwood tree. The chainsaw came to life after only a dozen tugs, and I climbed that ladder to the ten-foot level. For once, the chain was nearly new and sharp and bit right through that five-inch limb.

As I look back at the situation, it occurs to me I only forgot one thing—that limb came attached to a bunch of smaller limbs covered with green leaves. I did a fine and clean job of lopping off that branch, but the end I wasn't cutting hit the ground first, whereupon the butt end joined me on the top rung of the ladder. There was not enough room for the both of us.

The trip to the ground was uneventful, though the landing could have used more practice. As I reclined on Mother Earth, it occurred to me I should take inventory. My two helpers ran up to me. One said he had checked on the saw and found it running, so he shut it off to save gas. The other apologized for not catching me, but also pointed out that I hadn't told him I'd be leaving that ladder in such a hurry. With these assurances, I rolled over and, to my delight, found that while a little dizzy from my head thumping the ground, my back felt fine.

Two mornings later, I awoke to the sensation that unseen hands were playing "Make A Wish" with my legs and the fellow holding the left one was winning. My wife and daughter hauled me to the car, where I crawled into the back seat for a very long ride to the Emergency Room. They hooked me up with one of those little funnels they stick into your arm and gave me three shots of something they called Dim-R-All. I'm telling you, that stuff dimmed-er-all, pain, sound, motion, speech. It wasn't long before there was nothing bothering me I cared to talk about, or could, in any intelligible fashion.

While no doubt still "dimmed a bit," they passed me on to a surgeon. I never thought I would be glad to be talking to that brand of doctor, but there I was listening with anticipation and a certain appreciation to a fellow that was telling me they needed to do a little trimming and touching up in my lower lumbar region. At that point, a thought pushed its way into the backside of my mind: could it be that my problem was not in my lower back at all but was concentrated several inches above the upper end of my spine? ♦

George Rice Old Is a State of Mind

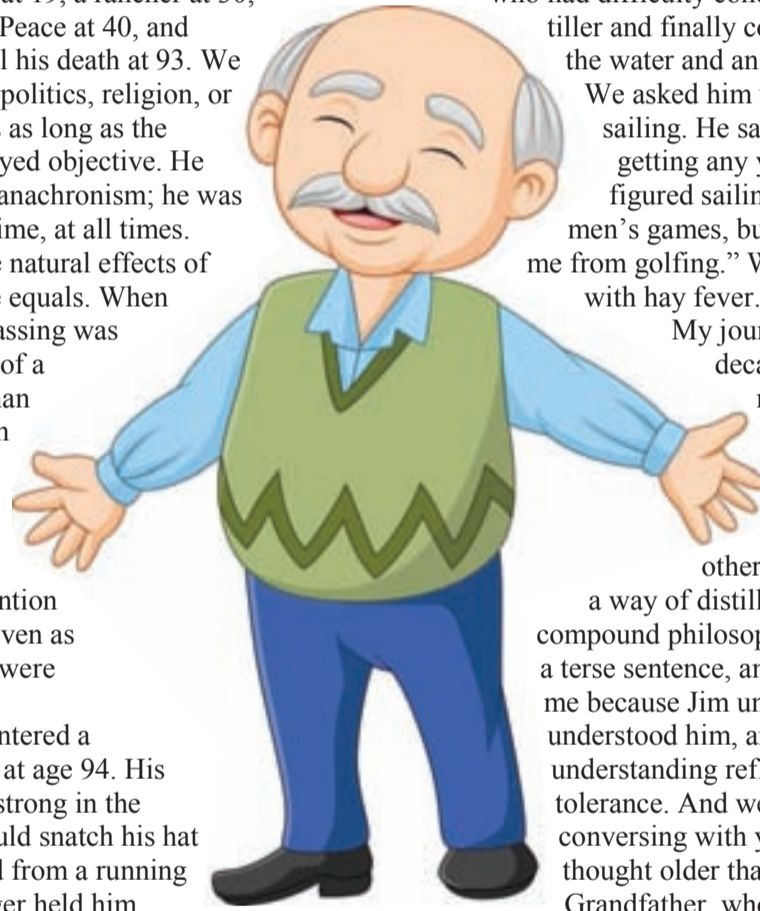
Several careers have kept me in direct contact with people most of my life, and I've found them compassionate, considerate, and polite. Most adults, confronted with a situation or condition out of the context of their experience, just pretend it's not there. Children ask questions about such things, but adults ignore them. An exception to this rule came to my attention when I became a college student at age sixty.

People who would not think of asking why I occasionally carried a walking stick (easy to equate with my thinning gray hair) had no problem with, "Why are you going to school at *your* age? Aren't you a little *old* for school?" There were a thousand answers, but they all said the same thing. Age is a chronological reality. Old is a state of mind.

I learned about age from my grandfather. He was a teacher at 19, a rancher at 30, Justice of the Peace at 40, and respected until his death at 93. We could discuss politics, religion, or current events as long as the discussion stayed objective. He was never an anachronism; he was a man of his time, at all times. Except for the natural effects of time, we were equals. When he died, his passing was more the loss of a good friend than the death of an old relative. I never considered him old and paid little attention to his aging, even as my own sons were growing up.

My father entered a nursing home at age 94. His legs, once so strong in the stirrups he could snatch his hat off the ground from a running horse, no longer held him upright, and a chair on wheels became his saddle. Hands that once gentled the most obdurate horse now inscribed a shaky signature and hesitated to pick up a coffee cup. But he was not old. He took great delight in cheering up the "old people" at the home. The inexorable ravages of time finally overtook him, but he wasn't clinging to life. He was living it.

Our four sons' births spanned more than a decade, but I never think of them in relation to their ages because each has a unique mental perspective not related to his chronological age. A sudden health crisis sent me to the hospital a few years ago. One son's first expression was, "Well, Pop's not a kid anymore. He'd better take it easy." Another



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said, "Gosh, Pop isn't old enough to be having trouble *that* serious." My age was a state of their minds.

Glenn, my sailing partner, wasn't old, even though he was born an entire generation before me. We once had a novice partner in his forties who had difficulty concentrating on the tiller and finally confessed a fear of the water and an inability to swim. We asked him why he insisted on sailing. He said, "Well, I'm not getting any younger, and I figured sailing and golf were old men's games, but hay fever keeps me from golfing." We left him to cope with hay fever.

My journalist friend Jim, a decade my senior, was never old. We enjoyed honing our wits on each other and respected each other's opinions. He had a way of distilling my most compound philosophical thoughts into a terse sentence, and it didn't offend me because Jim understood me, I understood him, and this understanding reflected more than tolerance. And we disliked conversing with young people who thought older than we did.

Grandfather, who was always learning and going on 60, was never old. And father, nearing the century mark, saw a duty in cheering up the old people. Glenn admired the beautiful sunsets and a crisp breeze. Jim forever thought sage thoughts and kept his sense of humor. But neither he, nor Glenn, nor my father was old, any more than Grandfather was. And by God's grace, neither will I ever be. Because old is a state of mind. ♦

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It's Not About Price

Pamela Gilsonan

As a little kid, I remember my parents occasionally buying a new station wagon. My father didn't believe in "trading" cars because you didn't really get anything out of it. That's what the accountant side of his brain said. So he just had the people in our church give the old car to a family that needed it. But before that all happened, he engaged in much haggling and wrestling with the guy at the car dealership. Surprisingly, it wasn't as much about the price, which is always hefty, but the features. There was always a package deal. If you bought a certain model of car, you could pick a few outside colors that would go with certain interior colors.



My father was adamant that our car not have ashtrays or a cigarette lighter. It was before you could plug other things into the lighter spot. Somehow it was like buying a used car—you got what you got—it didn't make a difference that you were paying to have it built or that it wasn't on the lot. It was a genuine sacrifice on our family budget to have no ashtrays.

My grandfather smoked Pall Malls from the time he was 11 years old and lived till almost 91. He quit before he was 88 and died of natural causes. I don't know if it was because Grandpa was a bad example to his

grandchildren or my father just didn't enjoy being told that he had to pay a certain price for something that included stuff he didn't believe in or want to purchase, much less pay for. So he paid extra and there were no ashtrays or a cigarette lighter in the cars when we were growing up.

A few of us took our turns smoking for a year or two and hanging out with people who did. It was bad enough that our smoking friends in high school would have to ride in an un-cool station wagon, but one without ashtrays was "over the top." When the dust settled, no one smoked any more.

The last car my mother picked out, she had to haggle to get them not to include the kids' safety locks on the back doors as her youngest child was in his 30s, but they didn't charge her extra.

I think I might have picked that mindset from my dad, but about cell phones. I just want to punch in the number and talk. But no, I have to have all the newfangled bells and whistles. Don't bore me with that stuff. I don't want to learn secret codes and how to do all kinds of stuff I don't want to do. Keep it simple. I just want to talk and have a voice mail!

I will pay to talk, but not pay for all those silly features. I don't believe in them, don't want them, can't make them work, and won't

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pay for them. It would be okay to be out of touch with the world and my fan club for a few hours or days without harm. Does it really cost them more to provide me with less? Okay, I notice at the grocery store that often no salt canned vegetables cost more than canned vegetables with salt. Perhaps they are gourmet. So I guess I want gourmet cell phone service.

It is the same with cable service, computers, Internet services, and a lot of other stuff. I'll pay for what I want. But gimme what I want! Shouldn't we have a right as consumers to buy what we want? We need to live life as simply as we want, knowing there are consequences when we don't order unlimited minutes. Our society is so advanced that we should be able to allow for individual differences; certainly we have the technology for it.

The car guy my dad dealt with at the Ford dealership died from lung cancer. He smoked like a chimney. I wonder if the arguments they used to have were really about principle and not about price. ♦

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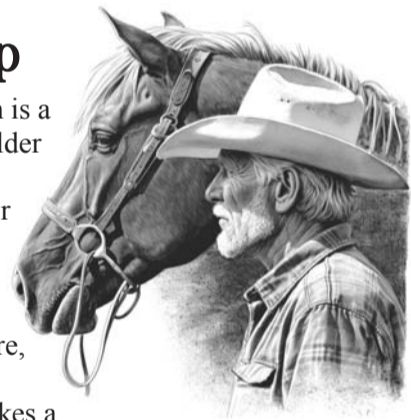
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Prairie Parson Don't Beat Yerself Up

When you get to be my age, which is a little younger than Noah and a lot older than Gen Z, you have a lot of dusty prairie trails in your wake. The older I get, the more time I think about what's behind me, and the folks who are no longer with me. I also think about the present and the future, but I've got more cattle trails in my past than I do still ahead. And it makes a cowboy kinda thoughtful.



Winter is a forlorn time of year in which we ain't got a lot to do but think, and read, and pray once we get the chores done and feed the cattle. Now, I know some folks don't like to face their mistakes at all, but I'll tell you: the only way you can learn from 'em is to think about 'em later, and to realize the role you played in hurtin' yourself and others. If you never feel the sting, you never learn why it was a poor decision. Then there are other folks who think too much about the bad things they done, and figure they gotta atone for it for the rest of their lives. Well, I got news for you. God forgives you, so you ain't got no business blamin' yourself for somethin' in the past.

He forgave, and He moved on, and you're the one who ain't able to forgive yourself or to move forward, and that's just as much of a sin (because it hurts you and your loved ones) as to claim you done nothing wrong. The Lord don't care about our past once we give it to Him. He cares about the person we are today and who we want to be down the road. To self-recriminate, or to self-punish, can be self-worship, because it puts you and your "sin" at the center of your universe, an altar to which you bow every day in humility. It's time to move on and realize that you ain't the center of attention.

It's sorta like an apologetic grandkid, who done something stupid, coming to me each time I take off my boots and askin' forgiveness again and again. If I give it, I mean it, and it should hold firm, unless that kid is doin' the same thing all the time, and that means they're

THE WEST OF YESTER-YEAR

Rachel Kovaciny

Anne Bailey

Today, the idea of Virginia having ever been part of the American frontier seems silly. When we think about the history of our country, Virginia definitely springs to mind, but as an important setting for major Revolutionary War and Civil War battles. It's a state we might associate with colonists and statesmen and great military generals. But frontiersmen and frontierswomen? Not really.

However, during the early days of our

country, much of Virginia remained a frontier. When American colonists talked about moving to The West to build their homes where the countryside was wild and free, they meant what is now western Virginia and West Virginia. Although I

wouldn't exactly call it the Wild West, it's still part of the history of our nation's westward expansion. And it was still plenty wild in the mid-1700s. In fact, it was so wild, no one seems to have raised any eyebrows at a woman named Anne Bailey joining the militia to replace her deceased husband and serving as a scout and courier for the military. Or, if they did, they didn't raise them very high, at least not in her presence.

Born Anne Hennis in Liverpool, England, Anne received a formal education, an oddity for girls at the time. After her parents died in her late teens, Anne sailed westward to see what the American colonies were like. She settled with relatives near Staunton, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley. There, Anne married Richard Trotter in 1765, ten years before the American Revolution.

Richard Trotter was an experienced and respected frontiersman and former soldier who had served under General George Washington

during the French and Indian War. Together, they had a son named William. The Staunton area was on the frontier, with English settlers moving out into lands inhabited by native tribes such as the Shawnee. Skirmishes between the two groups led to a militia being formed to protect the settlers, a militia Richard Trotter joined. In 1774, he died in the Battle of Point Pleasant against the Shawnee.

Anne entrusted their young son to a neighboring friend and took her husband's place in the militia. She did not disguise herself as a man, but simply stepped into her husband's spot and performed his military duties. She wore a skirt and petticoats,



with buckskin leggings underneath them, and a man's boots, coat, and hat. Equipped with a rifle and a hunting knife, Anne worked as a courier by delivering messages for the Virginia militia during the American Revolution, and scouted for the military. And she served as a recruiter for the revolutionary cause, stopping at farms and taverns along her route to encourage men to join the new American Army.

After the Revolution, Anne remarried to another scout, John Bailey, and they moved to a far-flung frontier settlement called Clendenin's Settlement (now Charleston, West Virginia). This settlement had grown up around Fort Lee, a military outpost that Anne famously saved. During the Northwest Indian War in the early

1790s, a large party of Shawnee warriors besieged Fort Lee. The soldiers and settlers sheltering in the fort ran low on gunpowder and were in danger of having to surrender. Legends have clouded the facts, but Anne took it upon herself to ride over a hundred miles alone through hostile wilderness to Fort Savannah, the closest military station. There,

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Prairie Parson, Continued

not sorry they're doin' it, just afraid of bein' punished. A wise man once said if you decide to sin (because it's a choice, not something you do by accident), SIN BOLDLY. Don't ask for forgiveness for something you're dead set on doing all the time. Just recognize it as a part of yourself that the Lord is gonna work on later (whether you want Him to or not) or that there's not much you can do about it, without a passel of His help. I know a mighty remorseful alcoholic who can't stop drinkin' when he's sad, and that's often. I figure it pains the Lord

to see him like that, stuck in a hole where it's awful hard to climb out, but God is with him at the bottom, and at the top. He may or may not ever be able to quit drinkin', but since God loves each one of us he's never alone.

The Lord wants the best for you and your life, and that means to be free of guilt and shame about the things you've repented from in the past. You can stop lookin' behind you, saddle up your horse, and ride forward, knowin' you've been forgiven and the Lord wants to be walkin' beside you at every moment. ♦

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she convinced the commander to give her the gunpowder needed at Fort Lee and then rode back with it, evading capture by the Shawnee all the way.

This heroic action saved the fort and its inhabitants, and it earned Anne Bailey folk hero status immediately. Legends and myths grew up around her, such as a tale about her military scouting days in which the Shawnee gave her the nickname "Mad Anne." The legend says some native warriors had nearly caught her, but she turned her horse loose to let her pursuers capture it, hid inside a hollow log to escape them, then sneaked into their camp to get her horse once night fell. As she rode her horse away from them, she let loose with a series of triumphant yells and whoops that made the Shawnee warriors think she had either gone mad or that her ghost came to reclaim her horse.

After Anne's second husband died in 1794, she moved in with her son William and his family, and lived with them on their farm in the new frontier region of Ohio. Anne Bailey died peacefully on her son's homestead in 1825, at age 83.

We also tend not to think of Ohio as the frontier, but once Virginia got more or less civilized, pioneers pushed farther west into Ohio, and eventually into what we now think of as the American West. ♦

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granddad

Linda Jones
Boughman

Granddad is an elderly man with white-grayish hair peeking out from beneath his western hat as he walks, slightly bent from the farmhouse door. His blue denim jacket is just enough to keep away the chilly Oklahoma wind. The chill and wind had not changed in all the years, he notices. Defined wrinkles on the light brown, tired face reveal the walk is not the only change these days—but today he would rather remember days gone by. He recalls the days of farming and handling cattle in his younger years; he was an active cowboy then. Cattle and farming was enough of a challenge in itself with the normal worries of the weather: will there be enough rain to make the corn and wheat grow, not too much wind to develop into a tornado, not too hot to work in the field? With six boys to raise, He had to give them food, an education, guidance for life and provide a decent life for his wife as well.

A smile invades the wrinkles, and they practically disappear when he remembers those past days. No, it wasn't an easy life back then on the farm, but it wasn't all work and hardship, either. The boys may have thought so; they had to milk the cows, feed the chickens, and slop the pigs at different hours of the day, but then there were the horses they got to ride and call theirs. With this many brothers, there was always somebody to go with to enjoy these events or get mischievous with, then someone to blame when the fun got "out of hand" and over the years, there were a few of those times.

The age range of eleven years between the oldest and youngest brother didn't really seem to make a difference in their relating to one another. There was the usual squabbling about whose turn it was to do this or that chore and how unfair certain things were because of age. But then the difference in age allowed for the experiences to be passed on to younger siblings. Both young and old benefited.

The smile doesn't really leave his face, just relaxes, as his body would like to. Thinking of those boys as he walks out the door causes the relaxation. Reflecting to those years on the farm in Oklahoma wasn't something the man needed to look at with disappointment now.

He worked hard at giving his family what they needed. His life now in his eighties is mostly reflective; all the boys are married with their own children and own set of worries; his different lifestyle in these later years; scenes of cattle, horses, crops of corn and wheat with boys running around are replaced with a different wife, a new area in Oklahoma, and a slower pace of daily living. Not that he is regretting, just realizing that things change with the times and a man must change with them.

So these days he enjoys his daily routine at this different home in this different area. The routine is simple for him and his ever-faithful



companion, his dog. A small, short-haired, cream-colored friend is beside him all day and excitedly joins him for the daily ride to the metal mailbox a little way down the lane from home. The dog's tail wags rapidly as the man starts the engine and slowly heads down the road. He stops the red pickup, opens the box, and glances at the envelopes. "Hmmm" is his only word as he tosses them on the seat beside the dog. "Let's go back, boy," he says his friend. The dog sniffs at the envelopes and licks the wrinkled hand. The man smiles and gently strokes the dog's head.

Once again, that tail wags rapidly, and he barks with approval. The trip back to the house is, once again, slow as he remembers another time when the boys would rush to another mailbox and often come back with envelopes in hand waving them in the air, "Look, one from aunt and uncle," they would say. Now it is just bills or ads. The trip to the mailbox has become a ritual these last ten years.

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Several thoughts go through his head as he travels back to the house with the dog by his side. There are no large animals at his present farm where he lives with his wife and no planting crops, just yearlings that need fed. He misses all that, but it is less work now and easier on the body. He is content with the slowing down of life. The years on the farm and the hard work put in by all did not leave him rich in material possessions, but the boys ended up fine with good families and occupations. He hears from them often and tries to keep up with all his grandchildren. He loves them all, but to be honest, is glad they are not at his place all the time.

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He knows he is not rich in material possessions, but that had never bothered him. He was never one to express his feelings of love either, but the feelings for the family were there and they knew it. I remember him as a quiet man who did not let many things bother him in his later life. He was content and had a good, lively word ready to be said anytime to anyone who wanted to hear it from him. He has left a lasting memory in my life, one that will pop into my mind whenever I see his picture and I hold him dear in my heart. ♦

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Autograph Albums

Julia McMillie

I hope you've been able to read and enjoy autograph albums through the years, whether they are yours or belong to others. They are such fun! I suspect somewhere there is a big stash of these quaint history-holders, but I don't know where that would be. If you ever find one, please take time to enjoy the many entries and appreciate each one.

When I was 10 years old, autograph albums were all the rage. Occasionally, I take mine out of my box labeled "Things to Look At When I Get Old" and read the entries written sometime between 1947 and 1952. We learn a lot about ourselves when we read what others write about us, or to us.

My Girl Scout leader, my 3rd grade teacher, my piano teachers, and my Sunday school teacher all had nice things to say about me. Even my grandpa and grandma wrote in my album: "Don't forget me when you're happy, Keep for me a tiny spot, And in the depths of your affection, Plant a sweet forget-me-not," and Grandpa added at the bottom of the page: "Don't ever forget that patience will conquer any problem."



My sweet little brother wrote, "Roses are red, violets are blue, no one is a stinker but you." My 5th grade teacher said, "As you are sliding down the banister of life, Consider me a splinter in your ca(rear)."

My friend Sanda had this to say: "When you get married and live in a tree, Send me a

coconut C.O.D." My cousin Myrna wrote: "Trees may wither, Flowers may die, Friends will forget you, but never will I."

Little ditties forever etched into my memory. Each page has little drawings and handmade

emoticons and other embellishments. Forget-me-nots is a recurring theme, and there are oodles of drawings of other flowers.

"First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Judy with a baby carriage." How prophetic!



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Brenda Flipse

"Once I had a little pig, I tied him to a heater. Every time he turned around, he burned his little seater."

Someone named Judith H. wrote: "When twilight pulls the curtain, and pins it with a star, remember me, dear Judy, no matter where you are." I've tried to remember who Judith H. is, but I don't recall her. I'm ashamed I haven't followed her orders.

The boyfriend/girlfriend theme was the best, of course, in my 10-year-old opinion. Some writings tell me "Barbara likes Bob," "Eva likes Barbara and me," and "Jack wants to change desks so he can sit by Barbara in the back of the room." These funny and upbeat messages were part of the pop culture in the post-WWII era, along with the Kilroy sketches that dot several pages. Kilroy was big in the 1940s.

Enjoy your autograph album as often as you can. Reminiscing is a healthy activity. It exercises our brains and hones our discernment skills. Life in another time, another world—it is good to recall and bask in our memories. ♦

Sam

John Fleming Sr.

As Sam Worthington left his church after Sunday service, Reverend Holland surprised him by catching his shoulder and wishing him a happy ninetieth birthday. Several parishioners stopped by and added their wishes. Within minutes, the entire congregation surrounded him. Sam felt overwhelmed. Their kind words brought tears to his eyes.

Reverend Holland asked Sam how long he had been a church member. Sam thought for a minute and said, "Well, I started Sunday school at age five so I guess I've been a member for eighty-five years."

"Sam, you have been one of our most beloved and loyal members."

Everyone echoed the minister's words. Some recounted memories of Sam's generosity. One member reminded everyone Sam had led the successful effort to raise money for the new church. Another member praised him for organizing the "Funds for the Homeless" campaign. A mother recalled how Sam had contributed his money and time to build a children's playground at the church.

Blushing from all the attention, Sam politely thanked everyone and excused himself.

Home, Sam reflected on the kind words and love showered on him. However, he couldn't

help thinking about what the members would think of him if they knew how often he had used the Lord's name in vain. Especially after he bought a computer for his seventieth birthday and quickly realized his inadequacies in the new electronic world. He remembered how ashamed he became for swearing at an IBM Customer Service employee from the Philippines. He couldn't count how often he had used profanity while trying to purchase a simple item from Amazon. Worse, he could never find the right password when he needed it. Sam felt sure he had tested the outer limits of God's ability to forgive his vile language.

Unexpectedly, Sam passed away the following year. He would have been so pleased that his entire town honored him by attending his funeral and burial ceremonies.

When Sam approached the Pearly Gates to Heaven, he made out a long line waiting their turn. He worried when he realized they were not accepting everyone in line. Some were being directed to another one. It occurred to him that the other line might be for those requiring a more thorough entrance investigation. It relieved him to reach the gate



and have St. Peter warmly welcome him by name.

"Sam, it's an honor to meet you. We have been waiting for you. Please follow me."

A wonderful peace came over Sam as he strolled up to heaven's gates. A step away from them, St. Peter turned to him and uttered the words that had been a major cause of his foul language. "Sam, I'll need your password."

Hell seemed inevitable. ♦

Harald H. Prommel

The New Year's Resolution

Flash back one year. I'm staring at piles of paper haphazardly stacked across my desk and almost burying the telephone. The in-box is so full that things hanging out at the top flow over to cover the sides. It looks like a paper haystack. The political pile has grown to dimensions beyond belief. I have long ago forgotten the details of what each stack contains, except for two. These I work at consistently enough to remember the subjects to which they refer.

In a small brown space at center front, a blue inked pen rests on the left edge, a red one hides among paper edges at the right. This is all that's left of my original work space. I'm normally not one to make New Year's Resolutions. I've always figured things needing to be done will somehow get accomplished without having to put oneself under undue pressure. But I must admit a resolution might be in order because my work



space has finally reached a point of no return. I glance quickly toward heaven, then solemnly vow that this year I will clean up my desk.

To begin immediately, however, is out of the question. It's the first holiday of the new year, a day fraught with the possibility of fun times with friends and family. I can postpone my action until sometime next week.

A month later, I complete an exhaustive review of the problem and determine the reason for the clutter; there's no more room left in the filing cabinet. I begin by starting with the

desk's single file drawer. In an hour, I have worked through six files. The clean-out created a little space, a sign that once through this

receptacle and on into the three drawer file cabinet I could probably salvage enough space to take care of the desk load. Fine, but a problem began eating at the edge of my mind. Why file the load on the desk if I had not looked at the stuff for heaven knows how long? Why not start by working the desk first, and then anything worth keeping I can designate for file cabinet space, after which we would create that space by cleaning out the files?

This well-organized plan of attack was brilliant in its simplicity. It required, however, a complete rethinking of the total problem. It was July before I moved into action. The day before I start this project, a friend sends me and a mutual friend a

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special videotape he has recorded. He tells us it is a collection of musical memorabilia from the time we were all in high school together. Unfortunately, neither I nor our mutual friend have a VCR, so for the moment the tape lands near the telephone on top of a small stack of letters from Congress persons. It is like putting a magnet into a dish of steel filings.

I suppose it was because the tape offered such a stable base it attracted many envelope-sized paraphernalia. That stack grew at an alarming rate. In two or three weeks, the tape was completely out of sight. The plan of attack ground to a halt. The subtle sign seemed to be that until I got rid of the tape, I could not move stuff off the desk. And of course, logic dictated that before disposing of the tape, I should first listen to it.

In early November, we ran the tape through our granddaughter's VCR. It was great—worth keeping—but where to put it? On arriving home, I found a place in the bookcase. The tape went into a small stack of things I had never found the space for anywhere else. I told myself this was only temporary, then promptly forgot about it.

By mid-December, the stacks have grown to what I would call a collection of structures, each defying the laws of gravity and balance. I decide a person could get hurt working near this disaster waiting to happen.

There's absolutely no question about it. My New Year's Resolution for this year **MUST** be to clean up my desk.

Of course, I'm quite busy at the moment producing two books for a couple of my client's authors, so no way can I get an early start now. It will probably be into the second or third week of January before I can seriously get down to actual desk cleaning. It doesn't upset me, though, because if there's one thing I've learned about New Year's Resolutions, it's this: you simply can't succeed if you rush helter skelter into them without proper thought or planning. ♦

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Plains Living

Amy Reichert

Wow... another Sunday evening and driving home from dinner I can't help but say again, "It is so beautiful here, so quiet and peaceful." After nearly a year, I finally feel at home. I believe farming is in my blood—well, okay, I know it is by heritage. But I really feel it no matter how corny that sounds. Even though we couldn't afford to buy enough land for an actual farm, the acreage we have is very rewarding. I can still see neighbors, but they aren't two inches from my face.

So many things we've experienced this year have been entertaining. The sunset over the creek—indescribably beautiful. I've spotted golden eagles and an endless variety of hawks, falcons, and smaller birds that I won't even try to describe. I enjoy hearing birds in the morning. In the city, you can't typically hear them because traffic, barking dogs, emergency sirens, and screaming children blot out their voices.

Personally, I have nothing against any of the aforementioned—except that they take over the airwaves. I believe they are the true reason stores stock and sell thousands of electric fans every year. Fans are a peace-rendering solution—electric peacekeepers in overcrowded situations. Now I can actually sleep without it on. It's so quiet.

When we moved in, there were no cats. At least I didn't see any. Now, don't get me wrong, I adore cats and have house cats. Two weeks after we moved in, I saw a couple of cats had moved in. One is still here and has produced five others. The kittens I am now allowed to handle, so I think they will be more people-positive. Gracie is momma cat's name. She watches me dump the cereal in the bowl and is glad to let me know when it's empty. But I can't pet her. I can talk to her, and she's finally able to stay in the tack room, but there's absolutely no touching. I'm going to catch her eventually so I can get them all spayed and neutered. I have no mice though. I haven't seen a mouse for several months. There are advantages to everything. Five cats and a bull snake inhabit my feed room.

Snakes. Even the word gives me the willies. I didn't see snakes in the city unless they were in the zoo, circus, whatever. Either way, contained. Not anymore. I knew there are going to be snakes out there. My approach? I looked up and read the entire Colorado State University Extension Office information on handling snakes humanely.

I don't like them. I'm uncertain why, but I just don't. However, I don't want to kill them either. After all, who else is going to control the prairie dogs and ground mole population without getting in trouble? There are two kinds of snakes out here: rattlesnakes and bull

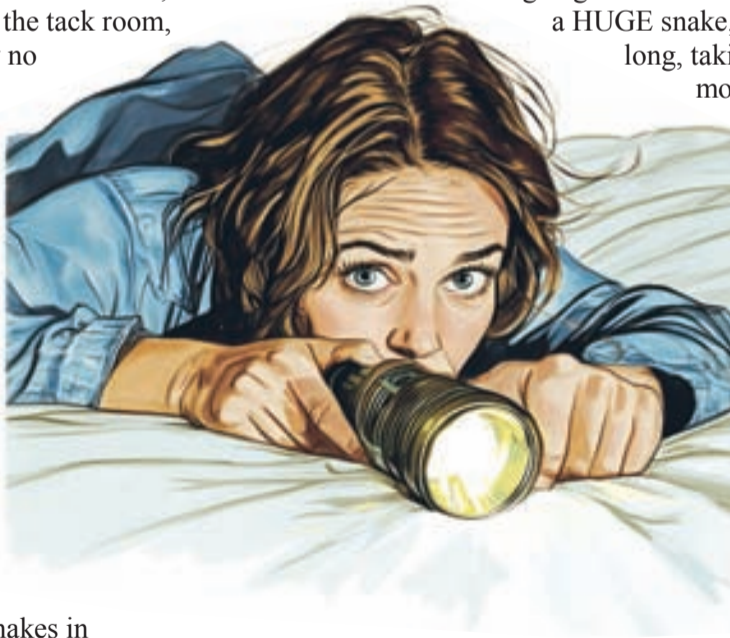
snakes. Rattlesnakes everyone knows are poisonous and bull snakes are not.

None of this information is comforting to me. Let's take the identification part. Okay, venomous snakes have vertical pupils in their eyes and non-venomous snakes have round pupils. Personally, I don't want to get that close. You're going to have to get pretty close to count scales or see pupils. Here's a more useful tip: venomous snakes have triangular heads and non-venomous snakes have rounder heads. Good. I think I can see that from several dozen feet away. I'll be several dozen feet away by the time I initially scream and bolt (see, I'm a real horse person—run first and look back later).

Fortunately, I've only come across bull snakes from gigantic monsters to small monsters. The first one I ran into one evening when it was about to rain. I had just finished washing the truck and turned around to turn off the hose so I could drive it down to the garage. I let out a large scream at a HUGE snake, about five feet long, taking its time

moseying across the driveway and under the truck. I forced myself to look at its head—round, thank goodness. It looked at me like, "Geez, lady, what the heck is your problem?" It camped out under the truck. Oh no,

I'm not opening the door to the truck with a snake under it. Instead, I squirted it with the hose since I hadn't recovered enough to turn off the water yet. It took off fast... good to know: snakes don't like water. I quit walking through the field, however—I only walk around the driveway where I can see. I've since run into several bull snakes around the barn, yard, and garden and that's fine—they don't seem interested in seeing me either. We have an agreement. They are free to live as they please. I just don't want to see them.



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One night during a lightning storm, the dog jumped up on the bed, whimpering and shaking. That's odd. There's lightning and thunder going on outside, but she's never been afraid of it before. I'm getting suspicious—I have one cat on the bed who's terrified of lightning but is peering over the side of the bed. My other cat, and typically the one causing any trouble, is in the middle of the floor, staring under the bed. I heard a hiss. It took a few seconds to sink in.

The action got lively. I crawled to the opposite side of the bed, put the scared pets outside the bedroom door for safekeeping, and got my glasses. As I peered under the bed—sure enough, a young bull snake sat there, coiled and hissing, trying to look as large as possible. Think back. Instructions on how to get rid of a snake. Bucket and broom. However, if you put the snake in the bucket with the broom, someone has to pick up the bucket. I got the broom. Meanwhile, the snake secured himself in a slipper. Good to know—always check your shoes first.

It didn't stay there. I tried to nuzzle it, but it shot out of the slipper as soon as it went up over the lip of the threshold. Darn. Now it's loose in the bathroom. Great. I herded it again and finally swept it out the door and onto the porch. Slammed the door shut. My heart was pounding so hard I didn't actually get to sleep for two more hours, less if you count the number of times I woke myself up thinking I felt something slither across me.

Yes, plains living is great, provided I stick to horses. You can keep the snakes. ♦

Kathy E. Granlund

Trapped in a Car

Claustrophobia. Yes, I knew what it meant even though I had to check the spelling, and I knew I did not suffer from it. Until last Thursday. The day did not start out all that well anyway, as I was feeling sick, like I had either bronchitis or strep throat. I left work early, and Mighty Warrior and I went to our son's house for dinner. My husband does not like me to use his name in my meanderings, so I call him M.W. (Mighty Warrior), which is absolutely, unequivocally complimentary.

After dinner, we got into the car to return home. It was early enough, a little daylight was left, but it was raining—July and we were about to have flood conditions. The key turning in the ignition gave just enough power to lock our car doors, and then the engine quit. Dead silence. Nothing. When I started screaming, "I need air," I guess many heard me because porch lights went on and people came into the street carrying umbrellas; and kids jumped onto their bicycles and were busy riding in and out of the gathering crowd.

Our son knows plumbing and tinkered beneath the hood; his neighbor has some computer experience and looked beneath the hood; hoping we wouldn't spend the night, our daughter looked under the hood; and then the United Airlines mechanic stopped to lend a helping hand. Evidently, the battery is located under several hundred other pieces of machinery. There were parts flying, cussing, umbrellas, bicycles, and me threatening to break a window.

M.W. (Mighty Warrior) uses a portable oxygen tank, and I was about to heave it through the window when he tried to reassure me with loving words like, "The car is not airtight." "Yes, there is air; just take a deep breath." "Here, take a hit of my oxygen." And finally, "Just sit still and shut up." Eventually, we were nose to nose with a giant truck; they hooked up jumper cables; there was enough of a spark to unlock the doors; and I fell into the waiting arms of the crowd.

If you ever get locked in your car because of battery failure, there is a button on the door near the handle that does not require battery power. Just push that button up and you can get out of the car without waiting for jumper cables. I just today learned about that button. M.W. says he was under just too much pressure from my screaming that he did not think to push it. Personally, I think he too has claustrophobia and lost his mind for a few minutes back there on Thursday in the rain. ♦

A Dirty Welcome

T.C. Wright

My Father was an itinerate Methodist Minister, the modern equivalent of a Circuit Rider, the old-fashioned frontier preacher who moved on horseback from place to place, serving local congregations and forming new ones. I was born in 1935 in the Methodist Parsonage in the small Nebraska town of Bertrand. In 1937, the family moved to Kansas, seeking a place with better educational opportunities. For the next ten years, we lived in Manhattan, where my four siblings attended high school and college.

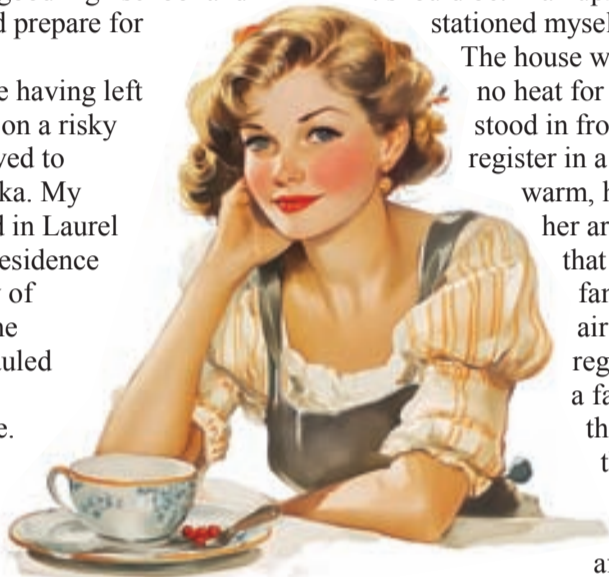
My father ministered three small churches in Westmorland, Fostoria and Pleasant Run, a few miles from the city. Dad, at sixty years of age, needed a better assignment where he could put me into a good high school and he and Mother could prepare for retirement.

With all except me having left the nest, he decided on a risky gamble, and we moved to northeastern Nebraska. My parents and I arrived in Laurel to take up our new residence on the last Thursday of January, in 1948. The moving van crew hauled our goods into the Methodist parsonage. The prospect of becoming the new preacher for the beautiful white church next door pleased my father. As part of the preparation for welcoming our family, the congregation had hired Harry Pritchard, the legendary local plumber, furnace expert and well-driller, to install a new forced-air furnace system to replace the "gravity" system in our new house.

This would be a tremendous improvement, and we were pleased about it. It was a two-story structure and the old system operated on the assumption that heat created in the basement furnace would rise of its own warmth to the first and second floors; which it did, but not with any dependability or control. Now there would be a blower and a thermostat to keep a flow of warm air into rooms where the register was open on either floor.

The first person we met in the new town was Harry Pritchard, working away on the furnace in the parsonage's basement. Harry was a large person, maybe 6'2" or and 250 pounds, with a constant smile. He wore a pair of overalls over a simple shirt and changed neither one very often. His grease spattered presence was evidence that he worked all the time and that he took his work seriously. He had a great laugh and could string a line of bull with the best over coffee and donuts at the local cafe.

On this sunny but frigid January morning, while the moving-in took place, I watched him put the finishing touches on the furnace work. The furnace fan and thermostat were in place and ready for heat. He turned the stoker on and it began grinding the coal into the



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furnace, which was formerly done by hand and shovel. Harry let it run until a fire-ring had formed in the bottom, and announced it was ready to heat the upper floors. He asked me to run upstairs and report to him whether the blower worked and the heat was getting where it should be. I ran upstairs eagerly and stationed myself near a register.

The house was freezing, having had no heat for several days. My Mother stood in front of the living room register in a futile attempt to get warm, her teeth chattering and her arms shivering. It was then that Harry started the blower fan. For fifty years or more, air flowed out of that register slowly and deposited a fair amount of soot along the duct from the furnace to the space above. Coal soot! Without realizing anyone would be affected, Harry threw the blower switch. A cloud of black smoke-like air came out of the register and went up under the skirt of my mother, standing there waiting for heat. As the saying goes, "She got more than she had bargained for." You should have seen the look on her face—first in ignorance of what was happening, then dismay, then shock as she jumped to get out of the way of whatever the black stuff was and what she felt it doing to her; then, with the other people in the room, with laughter and embarrassment, she joined in the fun.

When I reported to Harry about his success and what had happened, I thought he'd never stop laughing. Rough and tumble Harry had won again, but his timing was either lousy or perfect depending on whether you were wearing a skirt and standing over that register. A lot of effort the next few days went into removing a similar persistent layer of coal dust over the rooms and everything in them. But in my mind, and in Harry's, it was a grand welcome to our arrival in my new hometown. ♦

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Outhouses 101

Theresa Nelson

My mom introduced me to an outhouse after the harmless request of, “Mom, I have to go.” Being a young child, I didn’t realize that the farther one is from civilization—we were in the Olympic National Rain Forest—the greater the chance of no running water, which causes the need for the decades old outhouse. Upon viewing the outhouse, I promptly informed her I no longer needed to go. It’s interesting how the fright of an outhouse increases bladder capacity.

While many styles and species of outhouses exist, most exhibit key characteristics which classify them into one of the following categories. Overlap can occur. Some outhouses claim two or more of the following annoying traits, scaring off even the bravest users.

1. Outhouses without doors. Because of the open and spacious feeling one experiences when inside, an outhouse with this deficiency is easy to identify. Most likely, a previous user with a very sensitive nose hastily removed the door.

An accomplice is advisable if one wishes to use a doorless outhouse with the least potential embarrassment or without attracting a crowd of onlookers. To diminish the user’s view, the accomplice’s job is to stand in the doorway, facing outwards. Choose the largest accomplice available. Small children are not good door blockers. Not only do they keep asking, “Are you done yet?” but their size does not obstruct much of the doorway. Children also dash away when something more interesting captures their curiosity: bugs, unexplored landscape, and approaching voices.

2. Outhouses used as target practice. From a distance, this variety looks like Swiss cheese. Always approach a bullet hole riddled outhouse with extreme caution. Check to see if

any pickup trucks sporting gun racks are cruising the vicinity. For safety reasons, never linger beside a perforated outhouse, unless you find the sound of lead whizzing through wood exciting.

Positive aspects of an abundantly bullet-punctured outhouse are that an occupant can secretly observe people and nature while inside the cubicle. Gaping spaces also provide ventilation for fresh air. But on cold days, wind whips through the openings, freezing every exposed body part.

3. Outhouses with leaky roofs. We usually need this kind during a rainstorm, with the leak commonly located directly above the seat. If you notice the leak before using it, you can remedy it by using an umbrella while inside. This can be very tricky, though. Securely closing five buttons on a pair of jeans with one hand, while holding an umbrella with the other, requires an admirable amount of dexterity.

4. Outhouses perched on the edge of a steep ravine. Emerge slowly from this edge hugging variety as the door always faces a spectacular drop off. Emerge too quickly, chased by the smell or the hornets that nested beneath the roof, and one may savor the sensation of running on air before plummeting down the vertical embankment. Unless stopped by a tree, the protruding rocks can scrape off much of your skin.

5. Outhouses with poisonous spiders. Spiders, or any biting insect for that matter, enjoy lurking beneath the seat, waiting for an unsuspecting target. Whether spiders like the taste of human flesh, or enjoy the embarrassment they cause to their victims, who arrive at the doctor’s office with swelling bites illuminating their backside, is not yet clear.

Besides checking for leaks in the roof, hornet’s nests, drive-by target practices, would be outhouse tippers, and the availability of



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toilet paper, one should also add poisonous spiders to the list.

6. Outhouses missing a locking system. While this kind of outhouse has a door, it is impossible to secure. It is once again wise to get an accomplice, whose job is to lean against the door to keep the wind or other hands from swinging it open.

Remain around this variety long enough and invariably the door will swing open, revealing a surprised occupant whose outstretched arm is grabbing at air. To relieve the occupant’s tension and shock, the observer can tell an outhouse joke, or they can wave hello and comment on the weather. Whatever approach the observer chooses is inconsequential, as long as one refrains from all forms of laughing or smirking while in the occupant’s presence.

Outhouses are still as popular with youngsters as immunization shots administered with square needles. Last week during a camping trip, my three-year-old daughter had her first confrontation with an outhouse. After announcing that she had to go to the bathroom, the small square building topped with a green metal roof surprised her.

“Where’s the bathroom?” she inquired, carefully noting the primitive facilities.

“This is it,” I explained.

She then tried the multiple question approach. “What is that smell? Where’s the flusher thing? How do you wash your hands?”

It was time, I decided, to acquaint her with the narrative of outhouses. I explained how outhouses were necessary before running water—how sometimes people today still used them. “Oh,” she said, wrinkling her forehead.

I could tell that my history lesson impressed her.

“But,” she added, after a moment’s reflection, “couldn’t people smell back then?” ♦

I Resolve

Ima Klutz

This year I’m determined to keep all my resolutions. That’s because I’m only going to make one: “I resolve never to sell the house for Wilbur again.”

Right after Christmas, Wilbur crossed the mountains and went to a job interview. He said it was a promotion, so I thought I’d come up with a wonderful way to celebrate getting a new job in a new place by selling the house. I began by cleaning out the basement and doing the laundry, then I called the newspaper and put in an ad. Wilbur came home a day early, which was both good and bad. Good, because I got rid of a family with 12 kids, and bad because his ears turned red.

The next day, Wilbur called the newspaper and took out the ad. He also called all the people on the list I’d made who were interested and told them the house was not for sale. One man said he would sue us

for false advertising and Wilbur offered to send me over to smooth it over. I think he was kidding, but nothing ever came of it.

Finally, I had enough of the red ears and huffing and puffing and apologized for everything I could think of. Some of what I apologized for Wilbur knew about and some of it he didn’t. That was good and bad. Good, because I got it off my chest, and bad because it didn’t help get his ears back to normal.

Finally, I got him to talk about the job and whether we were moving and he said he’d turned down the job because of me. That made me feel good and bad. Good, because he thought of my needs. Bad because of what he said next. “I told them I couldn’t possibly take a management position. I couldn’t even manage my wife, whom I’d been married to for 20 years.”

And that’s when I made my New Year’s Resolution: Never sell the house for Wilbur again. He doesn’t appreciate it and he looks awful in red ears. ♦

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The Hurricane and the Old Church

Jerry Bloss

I had been in Hawaii for a couple of months when I got transferred from Schofield Barracks to a place on the western shore of Oahu called The Waianae Rest Camp. It was like a motel for military folk. There were ten cabins—five for enlisted men and five for officers—an officers' club, a mess hall and the camp office. Chosen to be the office clerk, I did all the paperwork. The Rest Camp was only a five-minute walk to the village of Waianae.

At that time, the village had a few stores, a couple of bars, an unoccupied church in the middle of it, and only a hundred houses. One weekend, I gave in to my curiosity about that old church. I had some time away from the office, so I ambled over to it. I tried the front door and found it locked. As I turned to leave, I found a short, wise looking man standing behind me. He was handsome, in his own way. In a polite, soft voice, he asked, "May I help you?"

"No thank you," I said and explained that I only wanted to see what the inside looked like. He took a key from his pocket and stepped around me, saying, "Excuse me, please."

When the doors opened, the air inside was musty, and it looked like no one had been in there for a long time. He and I stood side by side and took in the soulless surroundings.

I looked down at the man and asked, "What's your name?"

He gave me a curious look and answered, "It's Sam. Samuel Atanaka. The people of this church were mostly like myself, Japanese, and when the war started many of us became afraid to gather here or at anyplace else on the island, so we gave up going to church and closed it. Several years ago, we built another church on the other side of Waianae, so we never reopened this one. I always loved this building. Before I came here, I was married on my home island in the Marianas and my children were baptized there. I had two."

I didn't like his expression when he said, "I had two."

"What do you mean, you had two?"

He looked toward the front of the room and, with his musically soft voice, said, "I had already been living here and my family was about to leave the Mariana Islands many months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Japanese soldiers killed my children as they invaded. Maybe by accident. My wife quickly found a way to come here."

His broken English reflected his broken heart. When I asked him about his wife, he remained silent for a few moments. Staring at the altar, he said, "An American sailor killed my wife after Pearl Harbor. When this

happened, it was most difficult for me to be forgiving, but God taught me I should, no matter how this happened. I learned to forgive. But for the longest time, at least in my heart, I wanted to strike back at all American servicemen. Not just the one who killed my wife."

I couldn't help but say with a most deep felt sincerity that I was sorry. He looked up at me and said, "Oh, that's okay. It took a long time to get over the bitterness, but the hate has gone."

There was an organ console right up in front covered with a green cloth like the kind painters



use to protect furniture. I'm no organist, but I have learned to play some basic chords and sometimes I can even put them to melodies. I wanted to see what this instrument looked like. Sam and I walked up to it, and we removed the tarp. He reached down in back of the console and pulled up a long flat stick. It looked like a baseball bat. He inserted the end into a small opening in the side and began an up and down pumping. When I heard a faint wheeze coming from inside the console, I pulled a few stops, not knowing what kind of sound they would offer.

Gently I depressed the keys that would give me a basic C major chord. The stops I had set gave me a blast that almost knocked me from the bench. I hadn't even thought it would work. It worked. A few keys were a little flat, but wow, did it work! Sam had tried real hard to keep this God-given instrument working and clean.

From this time on, we built a deep friendship. Some weekends, we took a trip to Honolulu and visited his friends. On other days, he would come out to the Camp and do some fishing. He showed me how to do a lot of things the Hawaiians had been doing for centuries. Many times, while we sat on a wall next to the beach, he told me stories. One day, he asked me if I

would like to learn how to cast a net. I told him, "Hey, you bet. I'd love it."

The next day, he brought out two casting nets and showed me how to hold and throw it. It wasn't long before some little fish got tangled in mine. He taught me the Hawaiian names of each one. With one of my casts, I brought in quite a few and as I was picking them out of it, Sam literally jumped up and yelled, "Hey! This time you got a real good one. It's wonderful to eat and you can even eat it raw, if you like."

I've learned a lot of interesting things from Sam, so as soon as I separated this one from the net, I flipped it into my mouth. No problem, it's only about two inches long, but Sam nearly had a fit. "I didn't mean you eat it here. Not on the beach. Take it inland." He threw his hands up into the air like he was saying a prayer. "If you eat this on the beach, a terrible storm will come and do a lot of damage. This beautiful creature represents one of our Sea Gods. You cannot treat it like any other fish. If you eat it, you have to do it where the spirits of the ocean cannot see you. They can get furious because when you do this to one of them, you have not shown them the respect they deserve. We can never forget that for thousands of years, this ocean has provided us with life."

Following this vivid explanation, he grabbed his fishing gear and ran towards home. He may have been old, but he sure could still run.

It stunned and hurt me to make Sam so upset. The natives had many superstitions. I picked up my gear and headed back to the camp thinking, "Oh well, he'll get over it and I'll apologize."

I didn't see him for a couple of days. Clouds rolled in, along with an increase of wind. We closed the camp and headed inland because it didn't take long to learn a hurricane was heading straight for us and we were going to be right in the middle. It hit us hard and did millions of dollars of damage, hurt many people, and killed others. It took a couple of weeks to even get through the mess. Clearing streets, removing fallen trees and a general cleanup took ages.

Thousands of houses and large buildings got destroyed. When our military staff returned to the camp, Sam and many of his friends met us and pitched in to help clean up the place. They wanted to help us rebuild. I apologized to Sam for what I did. "That's okay. I should have told you sooner, but sometimes I think even if I had, you mainlanders wouldn't have believed me. I think some of your people aren't too smart."

When he said this, I raised my eyebrows, but he came back with a ghost of a smile. It was late in the afternoon. We had to call it a day, so we walked into town to see if the hurricane had damaged the church.

We were a block down the street from it

Good & Bad Choices

Larry Thomas

One long cold winter, Dad ran out of hay for the stock and money, both at the same time. That very day, a long truck drove into our yard with a big load of hay. Out jumped a distant neighbor, saying, "I thought you might use this. I've got more than I need this year."

Then there was the time hail pounded our wheat field shortly before harvest time. Dad looked at the field and said, "It probably isn't worth harvesting, but I'll take the combine for a round or two and see what happens." Turned out to be an excellent yield.

The stories I remember from my parents' small farm and ranch in eastern Colorado didn't always have happy endings. My brother's prize 4-H steer he was counting on for college money got snake bit and died three days before the fair. My collie dog jumped through the open window of the family car, knocking the gearshift into neutral. Down the hill, the Chevy sedan rolled straight over a cliff and into the creek. Lassie escaped okay, but it wrecked the car.

Life is full of surprises. Some things are coincidences, some things result from decisions and some could be miracles. My brother carelessly left the corral gate open so his steer got out of the corral and ran out over the prairie, sniffing everything in sight. Somebody left the window rolled all the way down on the car, tempting Lassie to jump in the front seat. She always loved riding in the car. We never knew how our distant neighbor knew we were

out of hay. We didn't see or talk to him much. There was no explanation why the driving hail and rain didn't completely thrash our wheat.

It wasn't until later I learned my mother had been faithfully praying to God for our family all along. Dad and I weren't "religious" and were skeptical about anything "spiritual." Over the years, we had discussions about coincidences, luck and odds. Are there logical explanations for everything that happens? Is it possible some things could be supernatural as opposed to natural? Can we explain everything? Do miracles ever really happen? It's difficult to be open-minded about these subjects.

My cousin has been married six times; none of her husband's died, just all of them departed. She claims none of it was her fault. Another cousin is a good foot shorter than me and weights twice as much as I do. He spends most of his time in doctor's offices and hospitals. Tom has had two knee replacements and takes insulin injections every day for diabetes. He's only 51 years old.

We can't control everything, but we can control a lot. People don't choose who their



parents will be or what genes they will inherit, but they can choose the lifestyle they choose to live. A few unfortunate individuals are born with major disabilities, which nothing much can be done to help. Kind of like the old country and western song "Play the hand you get the best you can." Of all the things we can wish and pray for, wisdom is the best one. Happy 2025, may you be blessed with abundant wisdom this year. ♦

The Hurricane and the Old Church, Continued

when we heard the organ. It stopped us cold in our tracks. We looked at each other. "How can this be?" Sam asked. "I'm the only one with a key to the front door and we nailed the back door shut years ago."

We got closer, and the playing, a beautiful Mozart Mass, became louder. Suddenly, a choir began singing *Gloria*. When we came to the front door, a frightened Sam gave me the key and scooted around behind me. The instant I inserted the key, the music stopped. Slowly, I pushed open the door. Both of us just stood there, trying to see inside. No one. Not a soul. A cloth still covered the organ.

The church had been closed for several years. The storm had just passed, and no one had done any cleaning. We found the windows sparkling clear. The pews, the railings at the altar and everything everywhere were spotless. The carpets looked new. Sam got down on his knees and ran his hand over them. They *were* new. No one had ever taken a single step on them. We crept toward the front of the church and sat in the first pew. Sam leaned forward and prayed. "God, is this your way of asking us to come back?"

Many times when we ask God a question, we want Him to give a noticeable answer. He rarely does, but this time, the cross on the front of the preacher's dais became brilliantly lit. Sam and I both wanted to bolt out of that place, but sat frozen to our seats. When the light faded, we decided the organist had to have been a heavenly visitor, and the choir was a group of angels. There couldn't possibly have been any other explanation. Not to us, anyway.

The word went out, not that we heard a heavenly organist or that an angel choir visited the church singing a Mozart mass, but only that it was open for business again for anyone who wanted to attend, no matter their denomination. People came. From that time to the present, that church has never closed its doors. Sam and I kept on being friends and I assured him that from that time on, I would listen carefully to every Hawaiian tale I ever heard. And I would believe every word. I still do. ♦



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COUNTY MANAGER RECEIVES COVETED ACCA "RISING STAR" AWARD

Elbert County Manager Shawn Fletcher was recently recognized by the Association of Colorado County Administrators (ACCA) with their "Rising Star Award." He was selected from ten nominees from the state's sixty-four counties for this recognition. The Rising Star Award is presented annually to new county managers that have been judged by the ACCA to have made immediate, lasting, and positive impacts on the county and citizens they serve.

The award was presented on December 3rd at the association's annual winter conference and Elbert County applauds this recognition.

Shawn Fletcher has significantly improved the fiscal health, operational efficiency, and service delivery of Elbert County since joining as County Manager in January 2023. When Shawn started, the county faced substantial challenges, including high staff vacancies, outsourced HR services, and budgetary constraints. His strategic assessment and restructuring efforts, such as insourcing the IT department, saved \$500,000 annually and enhanced service quality and security. By optimizing resource allocation, securing grants, and addressing staff shortages, Shawn led initiatives to align employee salaries with local market standards, reducing turnover and attracting skilled personnel. These efforts allowed the Board of County Commissioners to return \$2 million in property taxes to residents, with further reductions anticipated.

Shawn's leadership style emphasizes empowerment and collaboration, guiding department heads to innovate and take



Elbert County Road and Bridge participated in the Town of Simla's Christmas Parade

ownership. This approach has yielded transformative outcomes, including enhanced Building Department operations through partial outsourcing and technology integration, significantly reducing service timelines and improving citizen engagement. His strategic foresight during emergencies, such as FEMA reimbursement efforts following natural disasters, expedited fund recovery and ensured financial resilience for future contingencies.

Committed to the county's strategic and master plans, Shawn prioritizes long-term goals while addressing immediate needs. His focus on community well-being is evident in his support for Human Services and Public Health, improving access to essential medical services for vulnerable residents. Shawn fosters open communication through regular coordination with local leaders, department heads, and staff, addressing challenges proactively and ensuring alignment across county initiatives.

Shawn's leadership is marked by integrity, professionalism, and a commitment to professional development. His extensive credentials—including graduate degrees in Legal Analysis and Business Management and a Human Resource certification—enhance his ability to refine processes and

build organizational capacity. His support for the county's "Neighbors Helping Neighbors," initiative has strengthened collaboration among nonprofits, optimizing volunteer efforts to address community needs effectively.

Shawn's empathy and dedication are exemplified in his pastoral counseling, providing comfort during challenging circumstances which has included the unexpected passing of a beloved and respected senior staff member. His thoughtful guidance has helped unify and heal the organization. Shawn Fletcher's vision, expertise, and compassionate leadership have made him an indispensable asset to Elbert County, earning him recognition as a Rising Star among Colorado's county administrators. ♦

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Avoid the "Second Shovel"

After a snowstorm, how many times have you shoveled your driveway only to have it plowed in when your local snowplow comes through? Clearing an area to the right of your driveway (as seen in the diagram below), giving the snow on the plow a place to go other than your driveway, should keep you from having to do the same job twice.

