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The Florida Register

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Just A Note...

Once again, how can this be the last issue of the year?? This is a wonderful time of year to enjoy many traditions, shop for special gifts and decorating needs, and so much more that the holiday season brings. We have included recipes that you may want to add to your festivities. Have fun exploring the special events that are summarized in our Shows & Events Listing!

Please be sure to visit our Facebook page and like it. We post lots of updates about shops and events, plus we welcome reader comments and interaction. On our website, you can find links to our advertisers' web sites, view the current shows and events listing, read the paper online, subscribe to the paper, and more.

We do ask that you please let the shop owners know that you saw their ad in our publication - it is extremely important! Advertisers want to know that their ad in our paper is effective and they like it when you mention you saw their ad. Without the advertisers, our publication can't exist so they need to know the paper is working for them. Also, feel free to pick up extra copies for your friends ... we'd love for you to share it with them.

If you know a shop that should be advertising in the paper, please let us know (via email, phone, or mail). We are always looking for new shops to add to our list of great advertisers.

Dave and I visited Yellowstone and surrounding areas in late Sept/early Oct then went on to spend the weekend with Rachel in the Denver area! In mid-December, Rachel will graduate with her Anesthesiologist Assistant degree and will start at the hospital in Raleigh once her accreditation process is complete. It will be great having her closer to home! Grace is loving her life at UGA. We visited for family weekend for her sorority (Chi-O). It was an amazing weekend catching up with Grace. Both girls will be home for Thanksgiving=happy momma!

Our January/February issue will be out shortly after the first of the year. That issue has an annual theme of Quilting, Needlearts, Fiber Arts and Sewing! So be sure to plan a visit to your favorite shop to pick up your copy!

Have fun shopping this Holiday season. Don't forget to use our guide as your road map. We wish you and your family Happy Holidays!

Amy & David



January/February events due by December 1

Mail a check for \$25 with your event info to the address at the top of page 2.

Facebook Live or App Events

- Mondays 3:30 pm Quilted Twins (pg. 13)
- Tue-Sat 5:30 pm Quilts and Lace (pg. 29)
- Wednesdays 6 pm Inspire Quilting & Sewing (pg. 17)
- Wednesdays 7 pm Crafty Quilters (pg. 16)
- Thursdays 10 am Miss D's Quilts (pg. 27)
- Fridays 9 am Boutique 4 Quilters (pg. 32)
- Fridays 3:30 pm Quilted Twins (pg. 13)
- Fridays 5 pm Sweet Darling Quilts (pg. 18)

November

- 1-Dec 14 Super Savings on Brother Machines at Nana's Quilt Shop in Brooksville (pg. 17)
- 1-Dec 15 Christmas House Santa's Gift and Decor Pop Up Store in Leesburg (pg. 8)
- 1-Dec 31 Longarm Sale at Stitcher's Quest in Mary Esther (pg. 4)
- 6-8 Holiday Open House at Beyond the Stitches in Crystal River (pg. 6)
- 9 Box Class at Brick City Cross Stitch in Ocala (pg. 6)
- 14-16 2nd Annual Tent Sale at Meg's Quilt Cottage in Sebring (pg. 16)
- 15-16 41st Fantastic Quilt Show at the Venetian Center in Leesburg (pg. 8)
- 15-16 Quilters' Workshop of Tampa Bay Quilt Show at Higgins Hall in Tampa (pg. 18)
- 15-16 Suncoast Quilt Expo at Harvest United Methodist Church in Lakewood Ranch (pg. 20)
- 15-16 11th Anniversary Celebration at Pam's Fabric Nook in Port St Lucie (pg. 30)
- 16 Kimberbell Deck the Palms Event Virtually or at Quilts and Lace in Melbourne (pg. 29)
- 22-Dec 7 Visit Beyond the Stitches in Crystal River during the Central Florida Shop Hop (pg. 6)
- 22-Dec 7 Visit the participating shops during the Central Florida Shop Hop (pg. 11)
- 23 Flat Fold Class at Brick City Cross Stitch in Ocala (pg. 6)
- 23 Grand Re-Opening in New Location of Oceans of Thread in DeLand (pg. 9)
- 29-30 Black Friday Sale at Scrap & Sew in Lutz (pg. 19)
- 29-30 Colorful Friday and Small Business Saturday Sale at Quilt A Bit in Greenacres (pg. 30)
- 29, 30, Dec 2 Mystery Sale at Margie's Sew Much Fun in Crestview (pg. 5)
- 29-Dec 7 Inventory Reduction Sale at Brick City Cross Stitch in Ocala (pg. 6)

December

- 1 Christmas Open House at Stitcher's Quest in Mary Esther (pg. 4)
- 1-31 Month Long Anniversary Celebration at Fabric Smart in St Petersburg (pg. 20)
- 26-28 Super Clearance Sale at Quilt A Bit in Greenacres (pg. 30)
- 27-28 Year End Sale at Nana's Quilt Shop in Brooksville (pg. 17)

January 2025

- 18-25 Visit the participating shops during the North Florida Shop Hop (pg. 24)
- 24-25 Showcase of Quilts at Sea Breeze and Rohan Rec Centers in The Villages (pg. 7)
- 31-Feb 1 Celebration of Color Quilt Show at First Presbyterian Church in Lake Placid (pg. 16)

February 2025

- 3 Pre-Hookin' Event at Searsport Rug Hooking in Rotonda West (pg. 21)
- 4-6 Visit Searsport Rug Hooking at Harbor Hookin' in Punta Gorda (pg. 21)
- 4-6 Harbor Hookin' at Charlotte Harbor Event & Conf Center in Punta Gorda (pg. 22)
- 7-8 Vero Beach Quilt Show at Indian River County Fairground in Vero Beach (pg. 29)
- 7-9 Stampfest at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Clearwater (pg. 20)
- 8 11th Annual Airing of the Quilts at Maxine Barritt Park in Venice (pg. 21)
- 14-15 Mid Pinellas Quilt Show at Seminole Rec Cntr in Seminole www.midpinellasquiltshow.com
- 14-15 Quilts From the Heart Quilt Show at Central Panhandle Fairground in Panama City (pg. 4)
- 28-Mar 1 Peace River Quilters' Festival at Charlotte Harbor Event Center in Punta Gorda (pg. 22)

March 2025

- 1-Apr 30 Visit all the participating shops during the All Florida Shop Hop (pg. 3)
- 22 Suwannee Valley Quilt Festival at the Historical Train Depot in Trenton (pg. 6)

April 2025

- 22-27 Join Stitcher's Quest on trip to Quilt Week in Paducah, KY (pg. 4)



Amy, David, Rachel and Grace

Shop Hop

Fa-La-La-ing Until Christmas!

by Barbara Kalkis

My car audio system can store at least 28 pre-set AM and FM radio stations. I know it can "remember" more than that, but I do not care to master any more technology than necessary. Although I've worked in high tech for decades, I avoid incorporating it into my personal life. With a slot for CDs, plus fee-based channels and a connection for streaming music from my phone, who needs more than that? I have plenty of driving distractions already, singing at the top of my lungs while monitoring other cars, the traffic, other drivers' capabilities, and ensuring that I exit the highway at the right time and in the correct direction while cruising at 70-ish miles per hour.

While I have all traditional and contemporary ways to listen to music, news or the rants of someone with enough money to buy a piece of the airwaves, I love listening to traditional radio stations. The voice of a show host is like traveling with a friend. The "DJ" keeps things light and conversational. The news is read in snippets, allowing me to adjust to every calamity in a rational manner. I even like commercials. It's interesting to hear the sales pitch for a product, while public service announcements offer the first alert of breaking news.

And so, the year turns and the drill is the same: listening to current music, 70's and 80's rock, country-western, calming classical or the all-news station.

Christmas changes the pattern. One local station begins playing only Christmas and holiday music beginning on Thanksgiving Day and continues until midnight on December 25th. For that golden 5-week period, it's nothing but Christmas/winter/holiday music. This year, I considered why Christmas music is so appealing.

Think about it. It encompasses every music genre there is. There's something for everyone. What other music genre can logically skip from "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" to "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" and still boost the holiday spirit? Religious, operatic, classical, symphonic, comedic, country, "pop," jazz, rock, folk, rap, punk... every music genre hails the Christmas season. Singers, soloists, choirs, orchestras, bands in every genre record a Christmas song – thus ensuring that they will be heard at least once a year and collect royalties.

Many renditions recall former artists whose names or works are forgotten or relegated to niche music channels. From Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" ballet to Charles Schultz's cartoon "A Charlie Brown Christmas" to Gene Autry immortalizing Rudolph as the "Red-Nosed Reindeer," holiday music delivers variety unlike any other music form and genre.

No mysterious-meaning lyrics here, either. We all know the tunes and can hum along or screech out the words while we are sitting at a light, zipping down the highway or finding our way home on a dark snowy evening.

Other music talks about love, loss, jealousy, hate, anger, revenge, sadness and loneliness. Christmas music is about love, laughter, joy, charity, family, hope, peace, presents and "presence" of the holiday spirit. It makes us stop, think, cherish what we have, consider change in ourselves, strive to do better and be a better person.

It is not meant to be a list of 'resolutions' that get tapped into our phone "notes," posted online, scribbled into our new year's calendar or even written on paper – and then forgotten as quickly as our holiday diet resolutions. The songs we hear from Thanksgiving through Christmas Day are reminders that we just need to keep the music in our hearts all year round.

©Barbara Kalkis, 2024. Barbara spends her time writing, teaching, and working in high tech. She's author of Little Ditties for Every Day...A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm. Contact her at BarbaraKalkis01@gmail.com

Stories of a Farm Wife

by Tammy Page

Christmas Stockings

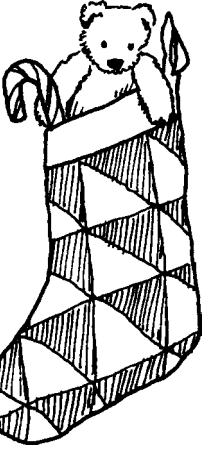
I remember as a child digging through my sock drawer on Christmas Eve to find the biggest sock I could find. I searched for the largest one that would be filled with a banana, oranges, nuts and candy. No other goodies, like what children receive now days. This is what my parents had found in their stockings and the tradition was passed down through them.

Christmas was not as "showy" back then. We marked the JCPenney Christmas Wish Book with our wants and wishes in hopes of Santa bringing at least one of the items and possibly our parents would chip in for another. My parents were not rich and with three girls in the family it was often just a couple gifts each that were under the tree come Christmas morning. Most years we got a new baby doll with an extra outfit for her and always one of the those disappearing milk bottles. As we got older, our dolls were ones that accomplished something such a talking or wetting their diaper. We always received a new board game or two. Our family were big on playing games. Such games were, Feely Meely, Hi Ho Cherry On, Twister and Sorry. We also played a lot of card games and often got a new deck of playing cards or Crazy Eights. Instead of sitting in front of a television all night, we played games before going to bed. As we got older the games advanced to Monopoly and card games such as Uno and Skip Bo. My mom was a pro at Skip Bo and we rarely beat her. But, when we did, we bragged on it for days.

I'm not sure if Santa wrapped your gifts but, in our house, he did not. Our gifts were sitting under or around the tree with our stocking nearby. We had one or two gifts from mom and dad that were wrapped and they consisted of clothing and other needed items. Not too exciting for a child but nonetheless, needed. And, of course we were not allowed to sneak into the living room and see what Santa had left but had to wait for mom and dad to get up out of bed. Most of the time we headed into their bedroom and pleaded with them to "get up". After some minutes of pleading they finally drug out of bed.

After growing up and getting married and having children of my own, Christmas morning had changed a little bit. Yes, we still heard pleas of "get up, get up, Santa has been here!" but the biggest change has been that the stockings are no longer socks from our drawers but homemade for each child. They are not filled with fruit and nuts but with their favorite candy, trinkets, sports cards and jewelry. I've carried this tradition on with my grandchildren and now fill 14 stockings. They say this is their very favorite part of the morning and look forward to seeing all the goodies in their stockings. I shop all year looking for just the right prize for each child and grandchild. I can usually find some bargains if I shop after holiday sales and put them back for Christmas. I've already got a nice stash of gifts stored away for this coming Christmas and am looking forward to seeing their faces on Christmas morning. It's so much fun to look for things that matches each child's and grandchild's personality. Although it is also one of my favorite parts of the holiday, my greatest pleasure is that we are celebrating the birth of Jesus together. Isn't that what it's really all about?

© 2024 Tammy Page writes from her family farm in Indiana.



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XO PARENTS WEEKEND 2024



Fun photos during Grace's sorority's Family Weekend a few weeks ago. We had a good time seeing her, eating great meals and visiting with UGA friends.

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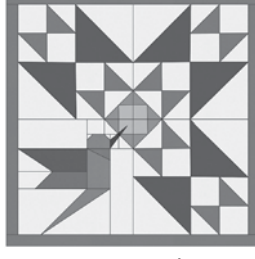
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Random Acts
by Maranda K Jones

Sweet Memories

Would you like some hot chocolate? Or would you prefer some hot cocoa? My preference is hot cocoa, but we tend to use those names interchangeably. Hot chocolate is usually made by melting solid chocolate in warm milk or cream. Hot cocoa includes a powdered base of cocoa with added sugar that is dissolved in hot water or hot milk. Hot cocoa tends to be sweeter, lighter, and much thinner. All goals I aim for in my everyday life, so it fits that hot cocoa is my warm drink of choice.

Some people enjoy a well-mixed cocktail or a sophisticated coffee, but as for me and my house, we will drink hot cocoa any time. We once left our hometown high school football field and walked home up the hill when the chill of fall was too much to bear on the bleachers. Around our picnic table, we wrapped our mittens around warm mugs and listened to the announcers several blocks away. The stadium lights mixed with the stars above as we sipped our warm sweet drinks and made sweet memories with our little kids.

They still love marshmallows, whipped cream, and chocolate chips, but the number of extra toppings in their cups has dwindled. They have grown older, and their focus on nutrition and athletics has taken precedence over their desire for sprinkles and sugar. We looked into the health benefits of hot cocoa and have chosen to believe everything we read on the internet about the beverage we like best.

It makes us happy! That alone is a great health benefit. Cocoa has been shown to increase levels of serotonin, helping to regulate mood and reduce anxiety, reduce fatigue and improve alertness. It satisfies the soul, reduces cravings and regulates how much energy is used. Some say it has positive effects on the immune system and heart health.

My heart beats joyfully thinking of our grandmothers and their hot cocoa recipes. My husband's grandma had the best recipe for homemade hot cocoa mix. Chris' grandma gave us a blue glass jar decorated with snowflakes full of her hot cocoa mix, and each time we emptied the jar, we would return it for a refill. That jar traveled back and forth between our houses often! When she finally shared the family recipe with me, Chris claimed she left out a secret ingredient because my mix just did not taste the same as when his grandma made it. Doesn't everyone have a family recipe that cannot be replaced? For my husband, his grandma was that one family member who cannot be replaced. Although we miss her greatly, we remember her with every mug of hot cocoa.

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GRANDMA'S COCOA MIX

1 8-quart package (about 10 cups) nonfat dry milk powder
16 oz. (about 4 ¾ cups) powdered sugar
1 ¾ cups unsweetened cocoa powder
1 ½ cups instant malted milk powder
1 6 oz. jar (1 ¾ cups) powdered nondairy creamer

Makes about 16 cups.
Place 1/3 cup cocoa mixture in a mug; add ¾ cup boiling water.

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Maranda Jones' new book Random Acts
is now available at amazon.com
The book includes her acclaimed articles from the last decade!

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Win A \$25 Gift Certificate

We give away a \$25 Gift Certificate each issue to redeem at a local advertiser's shop! You can register online at www.theregisterweb.com with the link "Register to Win" or complete the form (photocopy is acceptable) and mail to: P.O. Box 2419, Cumming, GA 30028.

Please also include a favorite recipe, quote, tip or a craft project you want to share with other readers.

The drawing will be made prior to the next issue. The winner will be mailed information on redeeming their certificate and also announced in the next issue.
Note: We do not place your information on any mailing list.

And the Winner is...
Our winner from last issue is Laneisa Jones. Laneisa will receive a gift certificate to spend at My Sewing Barn in Milton. She enjoys this shop because of the "friendly atmosphere, good selection of fabrics and notions." Congratulations Laneisa!

The Florida Register Gift Certificate Entry Form
ALL ITEMS MUST BE COMPLETED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PRIZE DRAWING

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Our Writer's Favorite Holiday Recipes

Can be found throughout this edition!
 We thank them and hope you enjoy trying the recipes.

Christmas Shortbread
 from Lydia Harris

Cream together:
 1 cup butter, softened
 1/4 cup brown sugar

Blend in:
 2 cups flour
 Pat into a greased 9x9-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes, or until light brown.

Combine:
 1 1/3 cups flaked coconut
 1/2 cup mixed red and green candied cherries, chopped slightly
 1/3 cup candied pineapple chunks, chopped slightly (Or substitute candied cherry-pineapple mix for cherries and pineapple)
 1/3 cup golden raisins
 1/3 cup chopped walnuts (or substitute almonds, pecans, cashews)
 1 cup sweetened condensed milk

Spread over shortbread and bake an additional 35 minutes or until golden brown. (Check after 25 to 30 minutes.) Cool. If desired, dust with powdered sugar. Cut into small squares. Makes 2-3 dozen cookies.

Submitted by Lydia E. Harris, author of "A Cup of Tea with Lydia."

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Stories of a Farm Wife by Tammy Page

Retirement: Getting Used to It

After 30 years of working I am officially retired. I'm just a rookie at this since it's only been two weeks. I've worked in various public service positions where each one was stressful, unique yet rewarding. In positions where you're always helping others, you forget how to take care of yourself and need to re-train your brain to adjust to retirement.

My friends and family who have already retired have told me "you'll get used to it." Used to not feeling guilty for less money going into my bank account, used to not having a set schedule every day where the alarm rings every morning at 6:30, used to going to bed when you want instead of when you have to, used to not having to dress in business attire and able to wear comfy clothes any day I want.

Well, it's not happened. I'm not used to any of it yet. I'm still waking up with the sun and I'm still getting dressed within minutes. I'm not used to being able to watch television any time I want, read more than a chapter of book before nodding off for a nap.

Like most who retire, I do have a mental list of what I need to accomplish. Most are chores I've been putting off for years. Chores like cleaning out drawers that hold my children's art work from 20 years ago, catching up on laundry and finishing up projects long forgotten. I can brag a little and say I've purged a little so far but I have a long way to go after living in the same home for 29 years. I've yet to tackle the big chore of cleaning out from under the staircase where suitcases, children's games, old VHS videos and toys are stored. That chore is going to be one that might take days to complete. I keep telling myself, "I'll tackle that one when I get used to being retired."

There are some fun things I'd like to do now that I have the extra time. I'd like to call up a friend or two and plan an entire day out with no timeline. We could start out with a relaxing breakfast where we can drink our fill of coffee without worrying if I'll be able to sleep that night because of caffeine overload. Then, leisurely check out the shops I've been wanting to visit. I can't wait to look at all the beautiful decorations in golds and reds. Then after picking out a few autumn decorations to add to my collection, it's time to check out of chick flick that's been on my radar for months.

I'll be able to sit on my porch watching the leaves change colors from green to reds and oranges and spend more time with family. I can go see my 93-year-old dad, my in-laws, my children and grandchildren without being rushed to get back home to get ready for work the next day. The more I sit and contemplate all the wonderful things I'm going to experience since retiring, I think I'm getting a good start on "getting used to it."

© 2024 Tammy Page writes from her family farm in Indiana.

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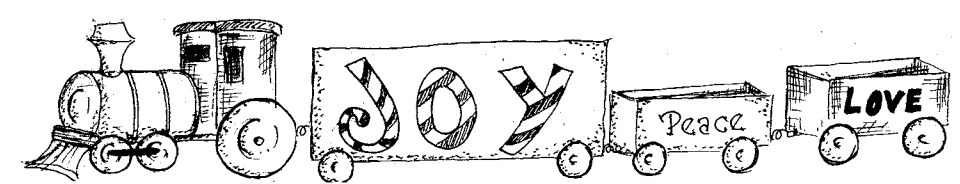
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A South New Jersey Farmer's Stories

Nicknames *by Ed Cuneo*

Is there anyone who did not have or give a nickname growing up? Very few I imagine. Yet today there seems to be a dearth of not only good nicknames but very few to begin with.

When I was growing up it was common to give or get a nickname. A lot of time it was based on physical characteristics or some memorable event or some talent that was head and shoulders above the rest.

Sports was a great way to gain a nickname. Our heroes had nicknames all over the map as sportswriters (before the medium of TV took hold) gave out nicknames as if they were samples from the local fudge shop in an effort to give players a standing that was larger than life since most people only read about them in the newspaper or saw them in a stadium.

There was George "Babe" Ruth, Ted "Splendid Splinter" Williams or "Sad" Sam Jones in baseball. Lou Gehrig was known as the Iron Horse. Lawrence Berra was known as Yogi. Nolan Ryan was the Express.

In basketball, Wilt Chamberlain was christened Dippy for his shots at the offensive goal. In football Harold "Red" Grange was known as the Galloping Ghost.

Physical characteristics also played a part in nicknames. William Robinson, the musician and producer from Motown Records, is well-known by his nickname of Smokey given to him by his family because of his light complexion.

Various neighbors of ours known as "characters" also had nicknames. There was Uncle Tippy or Moshi or Bishy. Girls I went to school with that did not like their given names of Helen and Renee so they went by Cricket and Poochy. Catfish, as you can guess, was a local boy who loved to fish for certain pescatarial species. Chug was so named because he loved to drink a bottle when he was a baby.

I gained a nickname as a child because of my physical standing. My uncle called me Bones while my brother was called Wireback because we were both tall and lanky. Alas, I am no longer tall and lanky and my wife has taken to giving me nicknames which I care not to print here. She does call me darling more than anything though.

Believe it or not, there is an art to giving someone a nickname. I say an art because anyone can get a nickname for any reason and so nicknames can be cheapened by giving someone a name that is derogatory. I suspect that the dearth of nicknames today has its genesis in what our culture feels that they are demeaning to a person's character. That may be true. But I also believe that the lack of nicknames has changed for two other reasons.

First, it is considered quaint. The younger generations today, who spend their personal time socializing in a different manner than we did, do not see any value in doing so. For us it could be entertaining; for them there are better ways to entertain yourself.

Second, the genre of nicknames, if you will, has morphed into the realm of user names given the place that technology has in our culture. So today someone may go online as Mydaddysgirl or Techno1234. These are the accepted nicknames of the younger generation.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, it doesn't hold the same allure that a good nickname from the past did.

—© 2024 by Ed Cuneo who hails from South Jersey. Ed Cuneo is a "Jersey Farm Boy" born and raised and still residing in Southern New Jersey with his wife, Teresa, daughter Anna and her rescue dog Henry. A retired school teacher, he owns the last 14 acres of his grandparents' farm where he has a market garden which serves as much as a place of quiet reflection as it does for its bountiful food supply.

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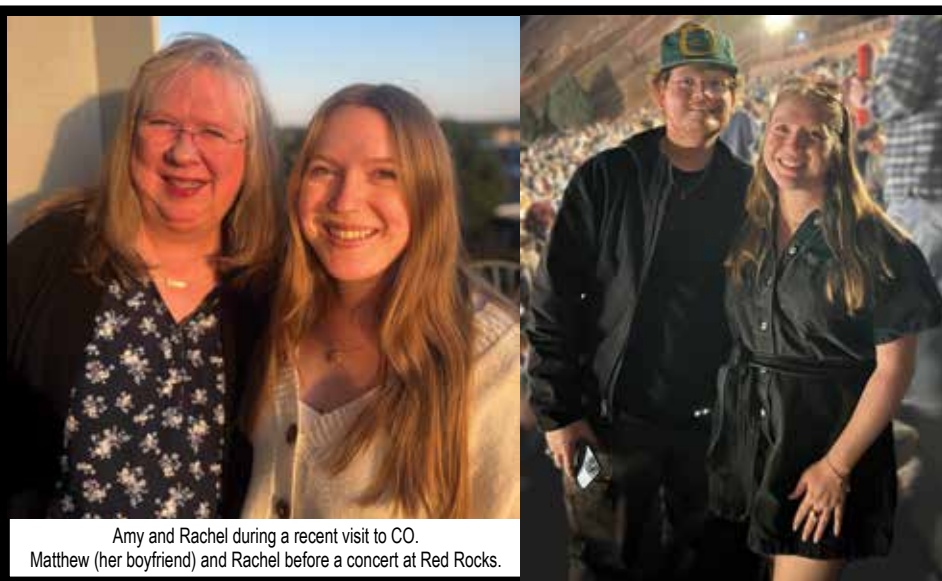
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Bunco and Aunt Tootie!

by Wayne M. Bosman

If I had designed the world, every family would have an Aunt Tootie, or someone like her. My Aunt Tootie was my Dad's sister, who married my Uncle Jack too late to have children. To compensate, and as an outlet for her overabundance of love, my brothers, sister and I became her "children."

Aunt Tootie and Uncle Jack visited every Monday evening, bringing along fruit and other staples, but more importantly for us boys, a selection of Mars bars that contained each of our favorites. The Monday night ritual of waiting for their arrival began right after supper while we looked out the window waiting for them to appear with "The BAG." Aunt Tootie is worthy of a whole book, or at least a much longer story, but that is not for now.

They were with us for every major holiday, whether they came to our house or we went to their apartment in town. Thanksgiving feasts were memorable and usually at our house outside of town, where we had plenty of room to run around. Right after the meal ended, we boys sprawled out around the living room, watching the football game that was the main event. Dad would fall asleep in his chair usually, and Uncle Jack had his regular seat at the end of the couch. It was the Packers against the Lions back then and as important as the NFL Championship game. The game would end and we would wander back to the table for pies and desserts.

Wisconsin weather does not set its schedule by holiday plans, however, and whether it was because of rain or snow there were times when we were all stuck inside. That was when Aunt Tootie taught us Bunco.

She loved games, and things would usually start with one or two of us sitting talking to her at the corner of the dining room table. She would get out a deck of cards maybe and we would play War or Crazy Eights. Authors was another favorite, but things got too noisy for my dad when we played Pit or Slap Jack. Aunt Tootie's favorite game was a dice game called Bunco or Airplane Bunco. We got out a pad of paper and the oldest usually kept score. We laughed and played until the scorekeeper got tired of keeping score and passed the pad to the next oldest. By the time I was old enough to go to school, I had painlessly learned addition and subtraction, often while looking over my brother's shoulder to make sure that he didn't cheat while keeping score. When Yahtzee came along, I got good at multiplication. Aunt Tootie taught us Poker too, with betting taking place from the penny jar, or if it were too empty from Mom's button box, which was always full.

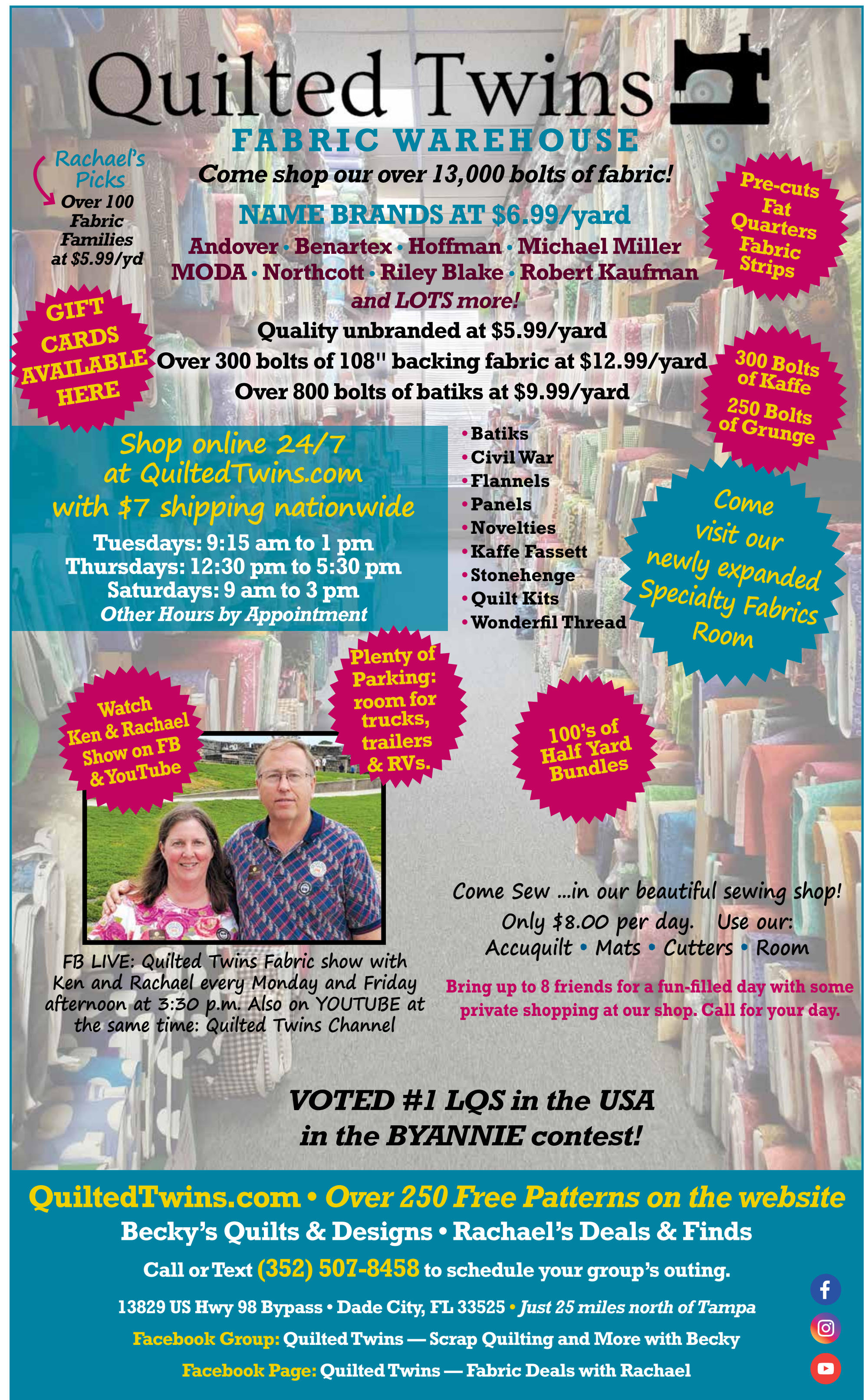
Over the years I forgot the rules to Bunco. I had always assumed that it was a game that Aunt Tootie made up. I had not heard of the game again until about a month ago when my daughter mentioned going to a Bunco party with some friends. The internet says that Bunco parties are all the rage. I got a refresher on the rules, which were much as I remembered them. I wouldn't be surprised if someone markets a Bunco computer now, since that is the way the world has evolved. But not for me.

For me, Bunco will always be Aunt Tootie's game, bringing back memories of who she was to me. How she laughed. How she still used words like "darn't" when she admonished us. How she always kept some peppermint candies in her pocketbook or coat pocket to hand out quietly as she was leaving, as if it were just our little secret. How she loved.

© 2024 Wayne M. Bosman is a retired auto mechanic living in Cape Carteret, NC. His email is wbosman1@gmail.com.



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One Big Gift

by Becky Van Vleet

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

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

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

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

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

Our idea to make our own Christmas presents and focus on our hearts was not original. No, it wasn't. Our parents had learned to give gifts from the heart and make things from home during the Great Depression. Simple and homemade gifts repeated again during World War II with the government mandated rations and push for the war bonds.

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

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

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

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

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



Winter Haven

Anticipation

by Janet M Bair

Recently, our quilt guild held a sale of surplus donated fabrics. You could fill up a shopping bag for five dollars. I was astounded at the array of different Christmas prints other members lovingly shopped for over the years.

I eagerly filled my bag because "new to me" fabric means possibilities. Now that my ten-year-old granddaughter, Eva, is interested in sewing and crafts, I am happy to share my bargains with her. Sometimes I think the best part of the holiday season is anticipation.

I am always asking myself: "What can I make with this? Who can I give it to?" I love making different Christmas ornaments every year. One year, I crewl embroidered little birds and stuffed them with batting. I have made tiny patchwork stockings, fabric covered Styrofoam balls, small embroidery hoop ornaments, and decoupage wooden ones. Felt, glitter, velvet-- you name it, I have used it. Some ornaments were more time consuming than others. Some were so hard; I'll never make them again! But it doesn't feel like Christmas if I'm not making something.

I know that I don't have to make everyone on my Christmas list a homemade gift, but I like to put some "heart" into my gifts. I would rather be snug at home making a gift when it's snowing rather than trudging through dozens of stores searching for items.

I like making useful things. Last year, our family was celebrating Christmas in Florida and my daughter could only find long sleeve and long pants Christmas pajamas for her children. I made matching pajama shorts out of a red and brown gingerbread print for the four grandchildren. My daughter paired them with red short sleeve T-shirts. They worked for the photos and everyone was comfortable instead of sweltering.

Whatever I end up sewing this year, I will be sure to pick something fun, relaxing and simple enough to finish. Years ago, I stayed up until midnight finishing a gift. I was so tired on Christmas day that I decided I would never do that again. It's more important to me to enjoy the day and the people around me.

Anticipating the grandchildren's reactions to what I create is a lot of fun. Our quilt guild has a holiday potholder exchange. You can make a potholder with a Christmas, Hanukkah, or winter theme and bring it in a plain brown bag. Each person gets to pick whichever bag they want. Anticipating the surprise is half the fun.

Many of our Christmas carols are about anticipating the momentous event when God gave the most amazing gift of all: Jesus. We sing "O come, O come, Emmanuel..." We look forward to God being with us. We look for signs of the baby in the manger and with each Christmas season, we remember. We search our hearts to invite Him to live in us.

Christmas is a time of touching that wonder. The wonder of the shepherds and the Magi and that special star all invite us to come to the manger again, and remember.

I hope that you have a fun time creating things this holiday season and enjoy your family and friends. If your family is anything like my family, you will also have fun anticipating the after-holiday sales to stock up on supplies to make things through the winter!

- © Janet M. Bair of Ansonia, CT. You may contact her at librarybair@hotmail.com

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Lentil Soup

from Kerri Habben Bosman

Ingredients:

1 cup lentils
2 quarts water
8 beef bouillon

Salt, pepper, garlic powder
(a pinch-about 1/2 tsp each)
2 bay leaves.

Instructions:

Simmer the above for 1 hour, and then add:

2 chopped carrots
1 diced turnip
2 stalks celery, diced
1 medium onion, chopped

1/3 cup oil
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar with a splash of sugar
1 can stewed tomatoes, chopped-reserve liquid.

Simmer for 1/2 hour or until vegetables are tender. Combine 3 tablespoons corn starch with reserved tomato liquid. Bring to boiling; briskly stir the corn starch mixture into the soup.

-Submitted by Kerri Habben Bosman - My mother always made this soup for the Christmas Eve meal. It is her recipe that she tested and tweaked until she was happy with it. She often substituted vegetable bouillon for the beef to make it vegetarian.

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Life in Skunk Hollow by Julie A. Druck

Best & Worst - Making Others Feel Valued

I find people fascinating. And I find them even more so when they are sharing about their life, experiences, and passions. I've lately begun a simple practice that teases out the things that light people up. It's really rather simple - I just ask the person to share the best and worst of an experience. Usually it's in relation to their job or life's work, but it can also be about an event, a trip, or something they've been through. Just recently I got a "behind-the-scenes" look into a man's 6-year stint in being a staff photographer for an NFL team, heard the frustrations and benefits of being an electrical lineman for three decades, and was amazed by the sharings of a 90-year-old man who looks (and acts) more like 70.

I can't express how much I love doing this. Upon asking myself why I enjoy the practice so much, I think it's because I realize that doing so makes people feel seen, recognized, and valued. When someone takes the time and care to genuinely express interest in another's life (even if only for a few minutes), it seems to make them feel special and honored. Without fail, every single time I do this, I notice that when people share about things that are important to them, they - physically - light up to some degree. And the feeling I get from making others feel valued in this way lights me up. Such a simple little practice that costs me nothing but a few minutes of time seems to give others such a boost. Why would I not want to invest in that?

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

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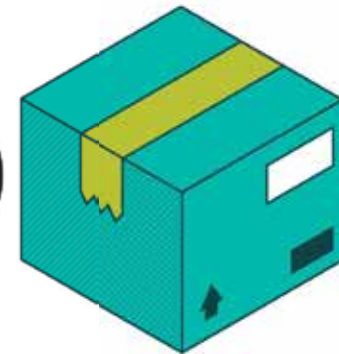
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GIRLFRIEND WISDOM



What would we do without Appointment Reminders? I receive them as a Text, an Email, and once in awhile on a little card. Life is very busy, and the time flies by so quickly that we really need and appreciate a way to keep us on track. Some of the messages actually brighten my day! "Thanks for scheduling your appointment with us. We're reaching out to confirm your upcoming appointment on (date) at (time) for (purpose). You're all set!" Short, to the point, and gives me a feeling that - all is good in my world! Receptionists have told me that reminders greatly cut down on no-shows and late arrivals for appointments. A tool for good business practices that flows over to good service for the entire day. Isn't it always the small things that make a big difference in daily life.

GIRLFRIEND WISDOM
 "Rejoice in the little things and they will continue to grow!"
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Girlfriend Wisdom is written and illustrated by Jody Houghton®. For color files of this writing, contact Jody at: jodyhoughton@msn.com

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Sewing On-the-Go

by Steve Baker

Why Every Child Deserves a Handmade Quilt

In a world increasingly dominated by mass-produced goods, the charm and significance of handmade items often get overlooked. Handmade quilts are unique symbols of love, care, and tradition among these treasures. Let's delve into why every child deserves a handmade quilt, exploring the emotional, educational, and cultural benefits of these special items.

A Tangible Expression of Love

Handmade quilts are more than just pieces of fabric stitched together; they are tangible expressions of love. Each quilt is a labor of love, often taking weeks or even months to complete. The time, effort and care invested in creating a quilt make it a unique gift that conveys deep affection. For a child, receiving a handmade quilt can be a profound experience, as it constantly reminds them of the love and care of the person who made it - even if the child isn't completely aware of it at the time.

Comfort and Security

Children often form strong emotional attachments to their belongings and a handmade quilt can become a cherished item that provides comfort and security. The softness of the fabric, warmth and familiar patterns and colors can all contribute to a sense of safety and well-being. In times of distress or anxiety, a child can find solace in their quilt, making it a valuable emotional support tool. That is why organizations such as Project Linus and Quilts for Kids are so crucial for distressed children.

Encouraging Creativity and Imagination

Handmade quilts often feature a variety of colors, patterns and designs that can stimulate a child's creativity and imagination. The intricate details and unique combinations of fabrics can inspire children to think creatively and explore their artistic side. Additionally, quilts can be storytelling tools, with each patch or design element representing a different part of a story or theme.

Preserving Traditions

Quilting is a time-honored tradition that has been passed down through generations. By giving a child a handmade quilt, we help to preserve this important cultural heritage. Quilts often tell stories of the past, reflecting the history and experiences of the people who made them. By sharing these stories with children, we can help them better appreciate their cultural roots and the importance of preserving traditions.

Celebrating Diversity

Handmade quilts can also celebrate cultural diversity by incorporating different fabrics, patterns and techniques from various cultures worldwide. Exposing children to these diverse elements can help them develop a greater understanding and appreciation for different cultures. This can foster a sense of inclusivity and respect for others, which is essential in today's global society.

Customization and Personalization

One of the greatest advantages of handmade quilts is the ability to customize and personalize them to suit the individual needs and preferences of the child. From choosing the fabrics and colors to incorporating special designs or motifs, a handmade quilt can be tailored to reflect the child's personality and interests. This level of personalization makes the quilt a truly unique and meaningful gift.

In a mass-produced world, handmade quilts are unique treasures offering far more than physical warmth. They are heartfelt gifts that embody love, care and tradition, making them invaluable for children. These quilts provide emotional comfort and security, stimulate creativity and imagination and serve as a bridge to cultural heritage and diversity. By giving a child a handmade quilt, we offer them a cozy blanket and a piece of art that tells a story, celebrates individuality and fosters a sense of belonging. A handmade quilt is a timeless gift that enriches a person's life in countless ways, making it an exceptional and meaningful present, which is something every child deserves.

~ Steve Baker is the Director of Marketing at SewEndipitous located at 1093A Albright Road in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Visit www.SewEndipitous.com for more information.

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Christmas Traditions

by Deb Heatherly

Traditions are typically described as long-established customs or beliefs passed from one generation to another. These may take many forms.

As a child I knew it was getting close to Christmas when my grandmother came over to help my mother make fruit cake. Large plastic tubs of ingredients were mixed by hand and I could not wait to get my little hands in there and help. I remember having my hands and arms scrubbed clean, until I passed inspection, and standing on a chair in order to reach. My grandmother called this mixing process "gooshing" the fruit cake. I am not sure this is even a real word but I will never forget hearing her say it.

The best part to me was being able to lick my fingers when we were finished. Since I did not like the cooked fruitcake, to me this was the wonderful culmination of the entire process. I never did acquire a taste for the cake, but always I loved the raw batter, so my mom would set aside a small cup of batter just for me. I remember sitting down with that cup, grabbing a spoon and enjoying every drop of that heavenly mixture.

Today the 'cake police' would shudder, since we've been warned not to eat uncooked cookies or cakes, so I am very thankful that the 'cake police' did not exist at that time. And, between you and me, I still love to use my finger and get the last drops of batter from the bowl when I make a cake. My sweet husband knows this and when he makes a cake, he brings me the bowl and spoon when he's finished. It's the little things in life that make me happy. This is just one example.

The fruit cake tradition stopped with my mom because I never did develop a love for fruit cake. I did however love the fruit tarts she would make and I continue to make those, pecan tarts, and sugared pecans to this day. My daughter Tarrah once told me that it did not feel like Christmas until she came home from school and could smell the tarts or sugared pecans cooking. She now makes the tarts each year herself and has passed that love to her son, Luke. It is my hope that when he marries, his wife will want to make them too.

Other traditions in our family were in the form of gifts. When she was younger my daughter was always allowed to open two gifts on Christmas eve. One would be a book or small toy, the other would be Christmas Pajamas. She would wear the new pajamas to bed that night and when pictures were taken on Christmas morning, they would take on a festive feel. This tradition was shared by a friend when my daughter was very young and I adopted for our family.

As she got older, I added a new fun tradition for Christmas day. Once all of the presents were opened, she was allowed to search the trees, (we lived in a very large older home and I put up numerous trees throughout), to look for an ornament she had never seen. It was always something that opened. Inside she would find a small piece of jewelry or a note with clues for a treasure hunt leading to a final surprise. When she was old enough to get her driver's license, the clue led to a key, and eventually outside to her new car complete with a large bow on top. I smile at this memory because my daughter used this same approach this past Christmas when my grandson Luke received his car-red bow and all.

There was also the advent calendar. Ours was a mouse that moved to a new pocket each day of the count down. Just to see if she noticed, her dad would sometimes move the mouse backwards when she was not looking. With a groan she would just move it back to its rightful location. This advent calendar went with my daughter when she married and she has used it all these years with my grandson. I've always wondered if it will go with him when he marries and has a family of his own or stay with her as a link to her childhood.

I've since heard of several traditions that I wished I had known when she was younger. I love the idea of an "anticipation quilt." This is a Christmas quilt that appears on the child's bed on Dec. 1 and then goes away on Dec. 26. Each year when it appears, the child knows that Christmas is right around the corner and is wrapped up in a 'Christmas hug' each night as they wait.

Another is the progressive nativity. This is a nativity set with 24 pieces. Each day in December a new piece is added with baby Jesus as the last piece to be put in place on Dec. 24.

Finally, one family I know has the "hand made rule". All gifts exchanged must be made by the giver. I can image the wonderful memories created as the older children and adults help the younger children make something to give to those they love. From popsicle snowflakes to book marks and more, I can just feel the joy that would fill your heart as you received one of these treasures.

Each family has its own unique way to celebrate, but I still believe that the best tradition of all, is to gather together and enjoy each other's company. May you, your children, and your grandchildren enjoy the traditions passed down from those who came before you while leaving room for new ones to make the season bright.

~ Deb Heatherly is a designer for Creative Grids® rulers and the author of eight popular pattern books. Creative Grids® fans are invited to join her Facebook group, "Grids Girls", for tips and inspiration, and two free mysteries each year. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/770429649800457/>. Shop Owners are invited to join her group just for you, "Grids Girls for Quilt Shop Owners Only" <https://www.facebook.com/groups/273593657256524>. Visit Deb's website at www.Debcatsquilts.com.

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Join a Quilt Guild – Become Inspired

by Susan Clay

Looking for new ideas for your quilting? One of the best things I did for my quilting was to join a Quilt Guild. When I joined a guild, little did I know I would not only meet new friends, but that I would also come away with new inspiration at every single meeting. Are you a beginning quilter who would like to have some basic ideas for different projects? Join a Quilt Guild. Are you an experienced quilter who feels your design level has become a bit stale? Join a Quilt Guild.

Think of a Quilt Guild as the modern evolution of the Quilting Bee. A quilting bee is loosely defined as "a social gathering at which the participants make quilts." Imagine walking into a room where all the people attending love quilting. Imagine five people huddled over a table comparing the construction technique of a specific quilt block. Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Well, trust me, it is.

We quilters all know quilting can be an isolating hobby. We go into our "spot," whether it be a dining room table, a special sewing corner, or an entire room dedicated to our love of quilting. Now, imagine sitting in a room full of people, all at different quilting skill levels, who share your love of quilting. Oh wait...does that sound intimidating? As a true introvert myself, it's really not. You have the common denominator of the love of quilting.

Just at a basic "Show and Tell" of a guild meeting, where members show off a project or pattern, we will find beautiful examples of design modifications. If there is a specific project being shown by all members at a meeting, the variety and interpretation of the project can be endless with color and fabric selection. Experienced quilters can often find that looking at a quilt pattern through the eyes of a new quilter gives an entirely new perspective.

Many quilt guilds meet just once a month. However, with the presence of social media, texting, and messaging in our lives, we don't need to limit our sharing just to the physical guild meeting. Most guilds now have a Facebook page and many have an Instagram account. We can share our love of the craft often if we so wish.

When a quilt guild friend recently told me about her new quilting project and sent a picture, it was inspiration for me. She had added a seasonal quilted piece to her front vestibule. Though I don't have a vestibule to decorate, I do have a perfect outside spot to hang a small quilted seasonal piece.

And that, my friends, is what we gain from belonging to a Quilt Guild. It's what "Show and Tell" sharing, and posting pictures does for us...it gives us inspiration and ideas. Never underestimate the power of your quilted project on one another. So, when you have finished that special table topper, baby quilt, throw, or bed-sized quilt, don't hide it away. And remember "Perfect is the enemy of finished". Please share it with your new guild friends. Be The Inspiration!

Search online for your local quilt guilds or more advertise in this publication. You may be surprised at the choices available to you. Many guilds have open membership and others begin membership in January. It doesn't matter when you join; what is important is that you join! You will always be inspired. Trust me.

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KISSed Quilts *by Marlene Oddie*

AnglePlay® Time

Many years ago I was introduced to Margaret Miller's AnglePlay® templates through my local guild when they made a stunning raffle quilt with blocks from guild members. This started my intrigue with half rectangle triangles and all the design possibilities this presents.

Several years later I was reconnected with the system through it's new owner, Off The Wall Quilt. During C* I was able to take, via zoom, the certification course to become a Certified AnglePlay® Instructor.

After making several sample blocks with a variety template sizes, I wanted to see what I could do with just one template. The project shown here is what I came up with. Yes, I got three sizes out of one template -not its original intent, but none the less, it is possible!

I've called this - Modern AnglePlay®. With all the negative space and irregular placement of the blocks, it gives it a feeling of perspective with the blocks floating away from me.

Working with Island Batik and Northcott fabrics, I've designed several new quilts using these techniques. Some are just repeating blocks, colored multiple ways, or alternating blocks, but others are more unique with a variety of blocks that work nicely together. If you've invested in the entire template system, then I've got a pattern that rewards you and uses three of the five sets.

The engineered tip on these templates, makes the piecing so easy with consistent and accurate results. What a joy to work with!



Marlene Oddie (marlene@kissedquilts.com) is an engineer by education, project manager by profession and now a quilter by passion in Grand Condes, FL at her quilt shop, KISSed Quilts. She quilts for hire on a Cammill Optimum Plus, but especially enjoys designing quilts and assisting in the creation of a meaningful treasure for the recipient. Fabrics, patterns, kits and templates are available at <http://www.kissedquilts.com>. Follow Marlene's adventures via <http://www.facebook.com/kissedquilts> and <https://www.instagram.com/marlene.kissedquilts>



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Writing From Life

by Jeanette Lukowski

Quilting Lessons



I have been doing a lot of mental comparisons lately: Quilting Lessons vs. Life Lessons, for lack of a better way of phrasing it. If you don't mind, I would like to share these musings with you.

1) **No two are ever alike.** I remember seeing a twin to one of my quilted wall hangings in someone else's house. Turns out we had both purchased a kit in the 1990s—but not from the same supplier—so our background fabrics were different.

This past spring, I went to a quilt show where several members of the guild used the same pattern with different fabrics. The dramatic difference created by simply selecting their personal favorites left me in awe.

2) **Things take time.** Have you ever watched programs where someone talks about making an entire quilt in a day? Good for them! I can't do it. I can't even make a table runner in a day.

Then again, quilting is my hobby, working around many other activities which fill my days (and nights).

The one quilter whose videos I enjoy watching wears several outfits during the fifteen-minute video. It took me a while, but I finally realized the video is recorded over the course of several days, then edited down for content.

3) **Not everyone does it the same way.** Historically a "rule follower," I was surprised to discover there are nearly as many ways of creating a quilt as there are quilters who make them! For instance, which method do you follow when you create a flying geese unit? Or, half square triangles? Depending on who taught you, and the decade within which you learned, I can bet there are a variety of answers to these questions among the readership. Now there are even trim-tools to help quilters achieve that perfect, uniform size, if that is of great personal concern.

4) **Doing what brings me joy can be so mentally healthy!** I don't aim for perfection in my quilting. Perhaps that's why I never sell my work? What began as a way to bring art into my family's bedrooms has evolved over the years. These days, I make quilted items for gifts, to brighten a plain wall, keep someone cozy, or donate to a variety of organizations.

I'm excited when corners match up perfectly, or my points remain intact—but I don't fret when they don't. I quilt to relieve stress, not create more.

5) **There's always another new pattern, idea, tool—or job—coming.** For those readers who might be wondering about how I ended my previous article, no, I didn't get / take that job. Ironically, though, the space got filled by two other part-time jobs I hadn't known about, but appeared in my email box as queries from employers wondering if I were available—and interested.

Reminds me of emails I get from quilt shops, sharing their new arrivals. Happy inspiration for tomorrow's sewing time break! The ideas are flowing; the excitement to sew builds.

© Jeanette Lukowski 2024. Jeanette is a mother, grandmother, teacher, and author who lives in Mankato, MN. She is inspired by the lives of strong women. Her email address is: writingfromlife@yahoo.com



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Baking Christmas Cookies with Friends

Talking at a luncheon one day with girlfriends, the topic came up of baking for Christmas which was just around the corner. Discussing the amount of time each of us spends baking holiday cookies had us tired just thinking about it. One of the gals said, "Why don't we make them together. My kitchen is available." Three of us accepted her invitation. We chipped in money for basic ingredients like flour, sugar, butter and eggs and brought additional ingredients like nuts and chocolate chips for different varieties. We each chose one of our family's favorite cookie recipes to made enough for everyone to take a batch home.



For efficiency, we divided the tasks: I measured and mixed the various doughs. One gal placed them onto cookie sheets. Another was in charge of baking and timing, and the fourth removed them from the oven and put them on racks to cool. We had a constant assembly line cranking out cookies all day. The kitchen smelled heavenly and of course we had to make sure they were edible! Hard to beat a warm cookie with a cup of coffee or tea!
I learned a trick I'll share with you when we rolled out the sugar cookies. My friend made quarter inch thick, eighteen inch long by two-and-a-half inch wide oak slats. Flour the rolling surface and your rolling pin. Place the dough between the slats, roll, flip, and dust with flour until the rolling pin is even with the top of the slats. The result: perfect, quarter inch thick dough ready to cut into shapes. If you have a sticky sugar cookie recipe place parchment paper on top of the dough before rolling. It was simple!

We spent the entire day making and sampling cookies together. It was best time I've had baking cookies in a long time. This year the girls are coming to my house! I can't wait.

©Judy Sharer is the author of A Plains Life series published by The Wild Rose Press. Settler's Life, Second Chance Life, Civil War Life, and Love-Challenged Life are now available wherever online books and eBooks are sold. Judy's sweet historical romances has a thread of quilting that runs throughout the family saga series. Visit judyshare.com for more details and watch for the release of her next true romance novel.



A Cup of Tea with Lydia

Three Kings Tea

by Lydia E. Harris



When our grandchildren were younger, they loved to play dress-up year-round. It didn't need to be December for them to put on Christmas costumes and become Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, or kings. Often the glitzy robes and crowns were their favorites. They draped themselves with glittery fabrics, donned shiny crowns, and became wise men from the East. Perhaps being "wise guys" and bearing gifts from afar was what appealed to them.

In the spirit of children and the Magi, who followed the star, let's celebrate the season with a Three Kings Tea.

Royal Guests

This tea would be fun for children, adults, or families. Send invitations to three or three times three—any number that suits you. Pick a date, make your guest list, and get ready for a festive teatime. If December seems too busy, host your Three Kings Tea on Epiphany, January 6.

Royal Decorations

In December, your home is probably already decorated for the holidays. Nativity sets with wise men may sit in prominent places, and gold garlands, twinkling lights, and colorful balls may adorn your Christmas tree. All that's left are table decorations.

For a regal touch, consider gold lamé fabric, golden candleholders, and gold napkin rings. A glass bowl filled with purple and gold Christmas balls could add a royal touch, along with crowns or stars to represent the Magi and the star of the East they followed.

Festive Foods

Select one or more recipes you love to serve during the holidays. If sugar-cookie cutouts are your favorite, cut them into stars, crowns, and wise men. If children are invited, they could frost and decorate their cookies. To make golden star or crown cookies, buy edible glitter at candy or cake-decorating stores to sprinkle on top of the frosting.

If you serve cake, add a royal look with a crown cut from a gold or silver doily. Place it on top of the cake along with candies that look like jewels. For a warm glow, add three candles, one for each wise man.

Our neighbors often made an angel food cake, frosted it with whipped cream, and decorated it with crushed candy canes. I have a recipe to make this Peppermint Angel Cake along with a candy cane poem in my cookbook, In the Kitchen with Grandma (pages 135–136). A mint or chocolate tea goes well with this cake.

Three Kings Bread also seems perfect for this teatime. It's a sweet Mexican Christmas bread that reminds me of my mother's tea ring served at our family gatherings. Made with yeast dough and candied fruit, it's formed into a circle, so I call it a crown.

Every tea party needs a pot of tea. Choose your favorites, and include a decaffeinated blend for those who can't have caffeine. For a merry sound, tie jingle bells onto your teapot's handle.

Festive Favors and Extras

For a welcoming ambiance, play Christmas carols, including "We Three Kings." Perhaps someone could read the story of the Magi from Matthew chapter 2, or a few people could act out the story.

Since the wise men brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, you could suggest guests bring an inexpensive wrapped gift to exchange. Or buy small favors for guests to take home—something spicy to remind them of frankincense, or something shiny and bright to remind them of gold.

No matter what you give your guests, the real gift of the party will be the warm memories of the time shared.

Lydia E. Harris is a tea enthusiast and the author of three books for grandparents: GRAND Moments: Devotions Inspired by Grandkids, In the Kitchen with Grandma: Stirring Up Tasty Memories Together, and Preparing My Heart for Grandparenting, all available at amazon.com.

From Lydia's Recipe File: Three Kings Bread

Ingredients:	2 beaten eggs
Your favorite yeast roll dough or	Powdered sugar glaze or
2 loaves of ready-made frozen bread, thawed	3 tablespoons melted butter
1 package candied fruitcake mix or	¼ cup sugar
Red and green candied cherries and	2 large egg yolks, beaten
pineapple	2 cups semisweet chocolate chips (12 oz. bag)

Directions:
On a greased cookie sheet, form the two loaves of bread into a ring. Moisten the ends to make them stick together. Press candied fruit into the top of the ring. Let it rise according to the package directions. Before baking, brush the top with beaten eggs. After baking, brush the top with butter and sprinkle with sugar. Return the bread to the oven for 5 minutes. Cool on a cooling rack.

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Sugar Cut-out Cookies
from Judy Sharer

Ingredients:
8 ounces butter 1 teaspoon vanilla flavoring
1/2 cup sugar 2 eggs, large
1/4 cup sugar 24 ounces flour
2 teaspoons baking powder 1/4 cup milk

Instructions:
In a large bowl beat butter and sugar, add baking powder and flavoring until pale yellow and fluffy. Beat in eggs until well blended. With the mixer on low gradually add the flour and milk until well blended. Divide dough into three discs, cover and refrigerate for 3 hours. Roll to 1/4 inch on lightly floured surface. Bake 350 degrees 10-12 minutes. Cool and frost.

Submitted by ©Judy Sharer is the author of A Plains Life series published by The Wild Rose Press. Settler's Life, Second Chance Life, Civil War Life, and Love-Challenged Life are now available wherever online books and eBooks are sold.




Ukrainian Snowball Cookies
from Edward Cuneo

Ingredients:
1/2 cup of powdered sugar 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon of salt 2 1/4 cups of sifted flour
1 cup of softened butter 1/2 cup chopped nuts
Some extra powdered sugar for the coating

Instructions:
1. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Cream together thoroughly in a large bowl the powdered sugar, salt and the butter.
3. Add the vanilla and blend into the butter and sugar mixture.
4. Stir the sifted flour gradually into the creamed ingredients.
5. Work the nuts into the cookie dough.
6. Put the dough in the refrigerator for a few hours or a day, until chilled through.
7. Form the cookie dough into balls about one inch in diameter, and place them on an ungreased cookie sheet about 2 inches apart.
8. Bake the cookies at 400 degrees Fahrenheit for ten to twelve minutes. They should just be set, not turning brown.
9. Roll the baked cookies in the extra powdered sugar. Put them on a plate to serve.

Tips for Your Snowball Cookies
You may choose to use tinted sugar to decorate the snowball cookies. To make pastel snowballs, put two cups of powdered sugar into a blender. Drop several drops of food coloring into the blender with the powdered sugar. Blend briefly. Watch the cookies carefully and take them out of the oven before they turn brown.

Submitted by Edward Cuneo, author of "Stories from a South New Jersey Farmer."



Christmas Memories
by Nancy J. Nash

"Daddy, is Santa Claus real?" I was a small child when I asked my father that all-important question. I believe his reply included something about using our imaginations to make a story for children and their parents to enjoy together. The news was somewhat disappointing, but I rallied and asked, "Will I still get my presents?" Dad assured me that he and Mom would continue that part of the tradition. I was satisfied.

Over the years, I could count on at least three gifts: a needed piece of clothing, a book (I was a bookworm), and a doll. I outgrew the clothing long ago, but even now I take pleasure from my childhood books and in displaying my doll collection. I soon learned the joy of giving to others. I was still quite small when my older brother and I decided to buy presents for my parents. With a few dollars donated by our grandparents, we walked to the corner store. It wasn't like a corner store on a city block, with everything from watches to embroidered handkerchiefs to imported chocolates. It was in the country, and the corner was simply a place where a side street joined a bend in the main road. This establishment sold bread, milk, and popsicles, the latter being of great interest in the summertime.

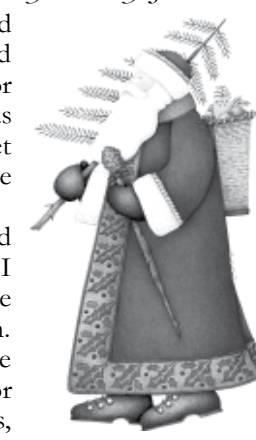
We scurried down the aisles searching for holiday gifts. There was nothing seasonal on display. The proprietor, taking note of our disappointment, asked about our mission and informed us that the store sold razor blades. We decided they would be perfect for Dad, who shaved away his face whiskers each morning, lest he come to resemble Santa Claus! And lo and behold - a travel kit for Mom, complete with a nail file? What exciting discoveries these were!

We purchased the articles, wrapped them loosely and placed them at the bottom of a cardboard box big enough to have held much more. In a sense, it did hold much more - our love for Mom and Dad and our joy in having a surprise to give to them.

Christmas evolved over the years. As my mother grew older and found shopping and wrapping more laborious, my brother and I enjoyed finding presents for Dad and Mom to exchange with each other. Such memories of our rituals of gift-giving open window after window into the past.

Material goods are not an end in themselves. At best, they simply reflect a glint of light from afar - from that night when the stars spread their glow over a town called Bethlehem and over the birth of a very special Child. May your holidays be filled with gifts of many kinds, especially those of the spirit that still spring forth from that perfect love.

© 2024 Nancy J. Nash. Nancy J. Nash is the author of Mama's Books: An Oregon Trail Story, and Little Rooster's Christmas Eve, each available on amazon.com. She has a B.A. in English composition from Mount Holyoke College and an M.F.A. in Writing for Children from Simmons College. She can be reached at nancynash341@gmail.com



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Christmas, A Time of JOY - or is it?

by Janet Young

Traditionally Christmas symbolizes a time of Peace, Love, and Joy. As we enter into "the most wonderful time of the year", our hearts are filled with excitement, as we begin our preparations for the upcoming festivities. But as the years roll by, perhaps we experience moments of sadness instead of joy as life's changes have brought us to a new level.

For example, maybe for the first time your grown children will not be able to fly home for Christmas. Or, maybe someone in your family is seriously ill, and your heart is not in the usual planning, cooking, baking mode. Whatever the reason, you muddle your way through. With a smile on your face, whenever someone asks, "How are you doing?" You always answer, "Fine, just fine". Even though your heart is aching and you wish things would be the way they used to be even a few years ago - you carry on.

Why is this time of the year so difficult? Could it be that this is a time when families gather together to relive the old family traditions, such as decorating the Christmas tree after going out to the tree farm to cut it. Or baking cookies and other holiday treats. Whatever the traditions might be, along with them come memories. And these are the memories that open the floodgates to a river of sadness. For if you have ever lost a loved one, memories are all that you have. And so, as you look around the table and see an empty chair, or hear a particular Christmas song on TV, flashes of memories come forth leaving you filled with sadness. It does not matter if this is your first Christmas without that special someone or your 20th, memories of those you held dear will produce heartache. But as you recall those times, perhaps you will soon find a happiness knowing that you shared your love with a very special person, and how fortunate you were to have had, that privilege whether it was for a short while or for decades.

Life goes on, and yes, we wish things could stay the same throughout our journey, but that unfortunately is not the way it works. Instead, we have to release our expectations of what Christmas's past was like, and form new memories by dwelling on the goodness that we have sharing our love with others. For it is then, that you can believe that while Christmas celebrations will never be the same, it can be good again. Merry Christmas!

- © Janet Young is a Certified Tea and Etiquette Consultant, Co-Founder of Mid-Atlantic Tea Business Association, and prior owner of Over The Teacup

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Those Were The Days!

by Jay Mark

Celebrating an "Ornamental" Christmas

The cooler weather recently heralds the approaching season of holidays. Thanksgiving is almost here, while Christmas is just around the corner.

So, as you begin to dig out your holiday decorations, in the spirit of that holiday, we address a popular area of collecting - Christmas tree ornaments. While, it's definitely not a chicken or egg thing, we know for sure what came first. Without a doubt, it was the Christmas tree.

For many millennia, trees have been revered and worshipped by numerous cultures as symbols of eternal life, or conversely as a means of keeping away evil. But, for most of the modern traditions we observe, we primarily owe thanks to the Germans. It is generally believed that by the 16th century, Germans began the custom of bringing evergreen trees into homes and decorated them.

It is also understood that the dangerous practice of installing lighted candles on tree branches was conceived by Martin Luther, inspired by starlight twinkling through evergreen branches. Of course, we wonder how many house fires that ritual engendered.

Along with Luther's candles, more were needed for the trees. So, by the 1600's Germans began introducing homemade ornaments, like gingerbread, tinsel, wafers, straw, thread, nuts, paper, lace and silver tinsel, along with apples, nuts and berries.

It wasn't until the 19th century, a gentleman by the name of Hans Griener, a glass blower by trade, began blowing glass ornaments initially in the shapes of the fruits hung in the trees. Later, they became more like we see today.

In America, the idea of decorated trees came much later, in the 19th century. Probably more inspired by the English, who began decorating trees in the late-1840s, than the Germans.

By the 1890's the American holiday tree ornamentation had become an elaborate affair migrating from just a tabletop tree to a much larger floor-standing evergreen.

When electricity could replace Luther's candles, inventors began inventing. Although the initial patent for an electric Christmas tree light was filed in 1882, it wasn't until 1901 when General Electric introduced the first holiday lights.

For obvious reasons, Christmas memorabilia is a popular year-round genre for collectors. Ornaments are found in a variety of materials including glass, ceramic, paper, fabric, metal and plastic. Electric lights are desirable along with tree stands and decorative tops. Christmas cards and candy containers are also highly prized. The changing image of Santa Claus has kept collectors busy looking for an elusive undiscovered design.

That led to one more tradition that shouldn't be overlooked - Father Christmas - jolly, old Santa himself. The introduction to the standard-bearer of the holiday dates back to Nicholas of Myra, now present-day Turkey. He was a devout Christian who devoted his life in the Fourth Century to ministering to the poor, particularly children. After his death in 343 BC, Nicholas became the patron Saint of children and sailors. His Sainthood was initially recognized in Russia, Sicily and Greece. 16th century Dutch children believed that if they left their wooden shoes by the hearth "Sint Nikolaas" would fill them with treats.

That's how St. Nicholas, an English corruption of the Dutch name for a tall, lanky, bearded, stern, gentleman clad in long robes, first became a symbol of Christmas. Today, the man we think of Santa Claus - an English interpretation of the Dutch nickname Sint Nikolaas, was created by Clement C. Moore with his classic poem, A Visit from St. Nick, later retitled A Night Before Christmas.

Moore's written description of Santa was brought to life in 1879 by noted political cartoonist Thomas Nast who transformed the traditional thin, stern, authoritarian figure into Moore's, "... jolly old elf whose belly shook like a bowlful of jelly."

What about Values: Because of the abundance of antique ornaments used over the years that are often hidden away in storage boxes, prices, except for extreme examples, generally remain quite affordable (Under \$20). But always be very careful from whom you make a purchase. Many ornaments and figures are knock-offs of historic pieces. Many are made of plastic. Even reproduction glass ornaments have entered the market. New glass is generally much lighter than the originals.

-©Virtually an antique himself, if not a collectible, Jay Mark, has more than a half-century experience in the antiques business. He is proprietor of Those Were The Days!, an online specialty bookstore. A recognized historian, he also teaches, lectures and frequently writes about antiques and history. Reach him at jaymark@twtbooks.com

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Our Mothers' Sewing Machines

by Kerri Habben Bosman

In 1960, my mom purchased a Singer Slant-o-matic sewing machine. She was 22 years old, and she had learned to sew from our Aunt Wilma. My mom used that machine for the rest of her life, and it served her well. Until recently, that Singer was the only machine I had sewn on, except for when I took sewing in school.

Whenever I use it, I see so much more than metal and dials. My mom is sitting at the dining room table sewing Santa hats for my entire first grade class because we were singing Christmas carols at McDonalds. There was the lined red cape when I was Little Red Riding Hood for Halloween, and the cat costume with the tail that took forever to stuff. There were sundresses with fabric I got to choose myself, ruffled pillows made for my bed, and pleated skirt for dress wear as young teenager.

Watching my mother sew inspired me to do the same thing. Teaching me, she was patient and supportive enough to make me love to sew. She was always honest, telling me what I had done correctly and what needed fixing. She'd guide me through a repair, but I had to do it myself. This didn't always make sense to me when I was young. Sometimes I grumbled, "It would be so much easier if you did this." And she would answer, "But if I did, you'd never learn." Thus, I learned.

During our summer visit with my mother-in-law in Wisconsin, we talked about sewing. Her original sewing machine, a motorized treadle, is still up in her attic. Mom's 103 year old eyes lit up as she remembered how her mother had patterns and fabric spread out across the table. And my husband, Wayne, recalled how Mom used to do the exact same thing.

It has been some time now since Mom has sewn. She quite happily gave us her 1972 Kenmore sewing machine because she knew that it would hum and create once again. We call that machine Mom's and now the Singer is mine.

Over the years, I have made dresses, aprons, pillowcases, and tablecloths. Since Wayne's family became my family, every Christmas they all receive a handmade gift. That means about 18 presents, and I start them in mid-August. Usually I hand-sew simply because I like putting the extra love into them. But with Mom's machine newly ours, I was inspired. I wanted to get to know her sewing machine.

It now lives at one end of our kitchen table. I also pulled out the Singer, which we set up in the living room. Between the two of them, all of my sewn holiday gifts were completed by the end of September. It helped that a local fabric store was having a major clearance sale with a wonderful selection. I took it as a sign that it was time to sew a lot. I figured out which machine I preferred for specific parts of a project. The best part was telling Mom that presents for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren were all made on her sewing machine.

Our mothers made themselves lined suits and dresses, decorated their homes, and sewed special things for their children. Where my mom made me a Little Red Riding Hood cape, Mom made Wayne and his brothers cowboy shirts. There were doll clothes for my sister-in-law that Mom sewed at night so Linda would be surprised.

Our mothers may have sewn partially because it was relaxing and resourceful. It was a skill most women learned in their generations. But it was also far more than that. They sewed for the same reason I do. Because it says "I love you," without ever saying a word.

-© 2024 Kerri Habben Bosman is a writer living in Cape Carteret, NC. She can be reached at 913jeves@gmail.com.



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City Index & Map

City Index & Map
Anthony Page 26
Brooksville Page 17
Chiefland Page 6
Clearwater Page 20
Clermont Page 14
Crestview Page 5
Crystal River Page 6
Dade City Pgs. 13, 14
Daytona Beach Page 28
DeFuniak Springs Page 5
DeLand Page 9
Edgewater Page 28
Englewood Page 21
Fruitland Park Page 8
Greenacres Page 30
Holiday Page 20
Holly Hill Page 28
Jacksonville Page 25
Keystone Heights Page 26
Labelle Page 23
Lady Lake Pgs. 7, 10
Lake City Page 6
Lake Placid Page 16
Lakeland Page 14
Lakewood Ranch Page 20
Leesburg Page 8
Lutz Pgs. 18, 19
Maitland Page 10
Marianna Page 5
Mary Esther Page 4
Melbourne Page 29
Milton Page 4
Mount Dora Page 12
Ocala Page 6
Orange Park Page 25
Oxford Page 8
Palatka Page 27
Palmetto Page 20
Panama City Page 4
Pensacola Page 4
Plant City Page 17
Port Charlotte Page 23
Port St. Lucie Page 30
Punta Gorda Page 22
Rotonda West Page 21
Sebastian Page 29
Sebring Page 16
St. Peterburg Page 20
Tamarac Page 30
Tampa Page 18
The Villages Page 7
Trenton Page 6
Venice Page 21
Vero Beach Page 29
West Melbourne Page 32
West Palm Beach Page 30
Winter Haven Page 15
Alabama Page 5
Online Page 29
Shop Hop Pgs. 3, 11, 24



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