The Florida Register

Your Statewide Guide to Premier Shopping and Events

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The Florida Register

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Just A Note...

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 – using our publication as your guide. 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!


David, Amy, Rachel & Grace

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 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. We are always looking for new shops to add to our list of great advertisers.

Nine of our family just gathered for a Fall beach escape and we had a blast. We definitely passed along our love of travel to Rachel and Grace. Every time I turn around, they are planning a trip to somewhere or to go see someone. November and December will be busy months for our family, and I know for our readers probably too. I like to make sure to remember to enjoy these upcoming family gatherings, special events and so much more that November and December bring.

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

Shows and Events

Facebook Live or App Events

Mondays 3:30 pm ..... Quilted Twins (pg. 13)
Mondays 7:30 pm ..... The Quilted Dragonfly (pg. 16)
Mon-Sat 5:30 pm ..... Quilts and Lace (pg. 23)
Tuesdays 6 pm ..... Inspire Quilting & Sewing (pg. 14)
Wednesdays 7 pm ..... Crafty Quilters (pg. 16)
Fridays 3:30 pm ..... Quilted Twins (pg. 13)

November

1-30 ..... Bolted Batiks Sale at Meg's Quilt Cottage in Sebring (pg. 16)
1-Dec 31 ..... Floor Model Sales Event at Quilts and Lace in Melbourne (pg. 23)
3-4 ..... Beach Potato Embroidery Special Event at Beyond the Stitches in Crystal River (pg. 6)
12-13 ..... 13th Anniversary Celebration at Pam's Fabric Nook in Port St. Lucie (pg. 24)
12-14 ..... Holiday Open House at Beyond the Stitches in Crystal River (pg. 6)
13-14 ..... Visit Village Quilt Shop at the Fantastic Quilt Show at Venetian Center in Leesburg (pg. 7)
13-14 ..... 43rd Annual Fantastic Quilt Show by Lake County Quilters Guild in Leesburg (pg. 9)
14 ..... Janome New Machine Launch & Open House at Quilts and Lace in Melbourne (pg. 23)
20-21 ..... 2026 Annual Arts & Crafts Holiday Show by Creative Crafts Guild in Palm Harbor (pg. 18)
21 ..... Early Small Business Saturday Sale at Oceans of Thread in DeLand (pg. 11)
23-30 ..... Black Friday Shopping Sale at Quilts and Lace in Melbourne (pg. 23)
27-28 ..... Black Fri & Small Business Sat Sales at Beyond the Stitches in Crystal River (pg. 6)
27-28 ..... Black Fri & Small Business Sat Sales at Scrap & Sew in Lutz (pg. 17)
27-28 ..... Colorful Friday & Small Business Saturday Sales at Quilt A Bit in Greenacres (pg. 24)
27-28, 30 ..... Mystery Sale at Margie's Sew Much Fun in Crestview (pg. 3)
28 ..... 4th Annual Holiday Bazaar by Lanark Village Wandering Star Quilters in Carrabelle (pg. 4)

December

1-20 ..... Super Savings on Brother Machines Event at Nana's Quilt Shop in Brooksville (pg. 7)
3-5 ..... Tent Sale at Meg's Quilt Cottage in Sebring (pg. 16)
5 ..... Tool Time at Margie's Sew Much Fun in Crestview (pg. 3)
5 ..... Happy Holidays/Customer Appreciation Party & Sale at Quilts and Lace in Melbourne (pg. 23)
11-12 ..... Free Motion Ruler Work Class (virtual) at Quilts and Lace in Melbourne (pg. 23)
26, 28-29 ..... Super Clearance Sale at Quilt A Bit in Greenacres (pg. 24)
29-30 ..... Year End Sale at Nana's Quilt Shop in Brooksville (pg. 7)

January 2027

14-17 ... Annual Meeting & Show by Florida State Button Society in Daytona Beach Shores (pg. 22)
16-23 ..... Visit the participating shops during the North Florida Shop Hop (pg. 22)
22-23 ..... Visit Village Quilt Shop at the Showcase of Quilts at two locations in The Villages (pg. 7)
22-23 ... Showcase of Quilts by Quilting Guild of the Villages at two locations in The Villages (pg. 8)

February 2027

4-7 ..... StampFest Crop, Classes and Show by StampFest in Clearwater (pg. 18)
5-6 ..... Kaleidoscope of Color Quilt Show by Highlands County Quilt Guild in Lake Placid (pg. 16)
5-6 ..... Vero Beach Quilt Show by Vero Beach Quilt Guild in Vero Beach (pg. 23)
12-13 ..... Quilt of Many Colors Quilt Show by Belleview Busy Bee Quilters in Ocala (pg. 6)
13 ..... 13th Annual Airing of the Quilts at Maxine Barritt Park in Venice (pg. 19)
26-27 ..... Quilts from the Heart Quilt Show by St. Andrew Bay Quilters Guild in Panama City (pg. 4)

events continued on page 3

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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.

Moms Cranberry Salad – A real favorite

submitted by Donna Jo Copeland, farmeress

Fresh cranberries (1/2 pound.)
Apples (1 cup, chopped.)
Celery (1 cup, diced.)
Sugar (1 cup)Water (2 cups)
Nuts (1/2 cup, chopped.)
Salt (1 teaspoon)
Baking soda (1/8 teaspoon)
Raspberry Jell-O (1 small box)
Miniature marshmallows (1/2 bag.)

Boil
1/2 pound of fresh cranberries, 1 t. Salt in 2 cups of water for 10 minutes. Add 1/8t. Baking soda. Stir well.
Add
1 cup sugar and 1 small box of raspberry jello. Stir until dissolved. Add half a bag of miniature marshmallows, stir until they are nearly dissolved.
Add
1 cup chopped apples, 1 cup diced celery, 1/2 cup chopped nuts. Stir well Pour into a 9x9 square dish, refrigerate 4 hours until set.
Awesome!

Broccoli Salad

submitted by Juleann Lattimer

Broccoli Florets (fresh.)
1 head cauliflower florets
1/2 red onion, sliced
Grape tomatoes, whole
1 can black olives, sliced

Dressing:
2/3 cup oil
1/4 cup white vinegar
1 packet Hidden Valley Ranch dressing mix

Directions:
Put dressing ingredients in shaker. Shake well. Pour over vegetables; chill at least 2 hours before serving.

March 2027

20 ..... Suwannee Valley Quilt and Artisan Festival by Gilchrist County Chamber in Trenton (pg. 6)

April 2027

2-3 ..... 12th Annual Quilts by the River with Miss D's Quilts in Palatka (pg. 21)
24 .... 5th Annual Airing of the Quilts by Lanark Village Wandering Star Quilters in Carrabelle (pg. 4)

Writing From Life

by Jeanette Lukowski



Fabric Postcards

Texting with a quilt friend recently, I identified a new reason I love the quilt store fabric shop hop.

My "selective memory" hangs onto the details of where or how I acquired much of the fabric in my stash. "This piece," I might say to someone as I pull it out of the storage box, "came from this cute little white shop in ____, and this fabric (referring to another piece I'm pairing the first fabric with) was something I picked up at quilt guild in ____."

Never mind how long these fabrics have been stored in the stash. For instance, I was working on a cute little wall hanging for an engagement party in July. The design had me recalling some mosquito fabric I had purchased during a shop hop. Knowing how I began organizing my fabric stash during COVID, I quickly checked the shop hop website for that state—and found out it would be in the 2016 box.

There, you see, is part of the fun I get from participating in fabric shop hops. Lured by the incentive of quilting related prizes to be gained when completing a specific set of stores, I typically begin the hop on my couch as I research the corresponding internet web page. A list is created, prioritizing which region(s) to visit based on the completion-prize.

When the shop hop begins, I pop into the most local shop to confirm which stores are participating based on the official passport (printed list of shops).

After that, I begin planning a route. Stacking reasons for traveling in any direction are considered; weather is another aspect. Since the passport materials stay in my car for the duration of the shop hop, spontaneity still exists—but planning is arguably more fuel-efficient. I know shop hopping means a commitment of time, as well; a long-weekend hop is definitely more intense than a two-month-long hop; driving distances need to be considered as well.

Did our forebears consider time and distance when they set off for opportunities "out West," way back when? Thinking about the history of quilting—and the many quilters who passed this craft along so people like me can hop into our cars to chase fabric—I think about the threads which connect us.

Before the introduction of so much technology, postcards were purchased and dashed off with brief messages to friends and loved ones. Messages like "Wish you were here," and "We had such a fun day here today!" filled people's mailboxes around the world.

In a similar fashion, I am reminded of trips taken when I pull fabric out of my stash. The cute little white shop…the interesting ways hay is cut when harvested. (Round bails, square bails, or little haystacks the Amish still create by hand.) The fabrics I purchased along the way remind me of those sights.

This year, some quilter shared their travel-postcards at the state's quilt show: Snapshots of trips taken over a decade, celebrated in fabric form!

© Jeanette Lukowski, 2026. Jeanette is a mother, grandmother, teacher, and author who lives in Alexandria, MN. She is inspired by the lives of strong women. Her email address is: writingfromlife@yahoo.com

Carrabelle, DeFuniak Springs, Havana, Marianna, Panama City plus Alabama and Longarm

St. Andrew Bay Quilter's Guild presents their
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Visit our website for meeting times.
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Lanark Village Wandering Star Quilters
--------- Upcoming Events ---------
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Sat., April 24, 2027: 5th Annual Airing of the Quilts, George Sands Park in Carrabelle
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Life on My Wee Farm

Pockets Filled with Thankfulness

by Donna Jo Copeland, farmeress

A year like no other, 2026. As I sit at my old kitchen table in my crumbling farmhouse, sipping tea, munching on homemade bread and peach jam, I try to remember to be thankful. Good lord yes, I'm scared! Barely getting by.

I take a deep breath, fold my hands, call up my ancestors. Centering on their strength, their resolve, their love, their faith in tomorrow.

A vision of my grandmother's apron pocket comes to mind. I never knew exactly what she kept in there...clean hankie, horehound candy, keys. Often during the day, I would see her, hand in that pocket, far off look in her eyes. I think now she must have been giving thanks, maybe praying, maybe remembering.

So, I shall sum up the year in pockets.

In one pocket I will put those most dear to me, my animals. They sustain me. Give me reason to rise in the morning, bringing me smiles, ready for feed and hugs. The companionship of my cats and dog. The wonderful wools from my bunny's goats and sheep. Fresh eggs from my hens. A very full pocket.

In another pocket I will carry my family, my kin. Their strength and love. Promise of generations and adventure. An odd assortment of personalities but they are mine.

My health and love of fiber and hard work go into another pocket. So thankful I am able to care for my animals, pursue my fiber work, somehow keep body and soul together. Glad I rise with a smile on my face no matter how hard the day ahead.

Another pocket is for my realm, my wee farm. The wonders of trees, plants, stream, rocks and fertile soil. The hum of bees. Birds. Wild things. Dragonflies in my garden, fireflies in the summer nights. Hoar frost on fence lines. Diamonds in the dew. A place untouched by chemicals and little technology.

In another pocket I must put my love of reading, my quest to learn history, to find out why and how. Books to keep me company on sleepless nights. Stories to wander in on summer afternoons. Knowledge of the ages, printed on paper, bound up with the stuff of life.

Friends should have a pocket for they are dear to me. Some wander in and out of my life. Others always there. I rely on their listening, help, love and loyalty. I don't judge them, ask only understanding for I am a feral crone.

A pocket must be for our country. What it was and will be again. Change is inevitable but we have lost sight of compassion and respect. I am thankful there are still people who hold to morals and honor. May we gain ground in the coming year, thankful for our aged history.

And being a farm child, farmers must have a special pocket of thankfulness. I can feel their fear, disappointment. Please let them gather strength, resolve, our support. I am so thankful for them, large and small, family farms. The farmers made and still keep this country. The greedy who abuse them can go to compost.

In another pocket I have to put those who protect us...soldiers, policemen, firemen. The everyday heroes. I'm thankful they feel led to serve, help us, one another. May they stand tall with honor.

My heavens my pockets are full. I have much to be thankful for as the year ends. And as Christmas approaches, I have Christmas wishes. Those I won't list here. You make your own list, fill your own pockets of thankfulness.

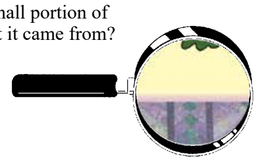
Let's be a little kinder, less judgmental, gentler, more caring, more loving. Sharing. Peace and blessings.

© 2026 - Donna Jo Copeland writes from her farm, Breezy Manor, Mooresville, Indiana where she tends her flock and creates art from the wool. Being the 14th generation of farm owner/operator, Donna Jo brings alive the struggles of farm life.

Can You Find This Ad?

Pictured in the magnifying glass is a small portion of one of our ads. Can you find the ad that it came from?

If so, fill in the form below and send it to us at: PO Box 2419, Cumming, GA 30028 or email the info below to canyoufindthis@theregisterweb.com



Advertiser's Name_____ Page #:___

My Name _____

My City/State _____

One person will be drawn from the correct entries to be named as the winner in next issue.

The correct entry drawn from last issue was from Barbara Mahoney of St. Augustine.

Keystone Heights, Lake City, Live Oak and Online

Emma's Sewing Studio
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Win A $25 Gift Certificate

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The drawing will be made prior to the next issue. The winner will be emailed 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 Andrea Molloy. Andrea will receive a gift certificate to spend at *Sweet Time Quilting* in Sebastian. She enjoys this shop because the "customer service is stellar." Congratulations Andrea!

The Florida Register Gift Certificate Entry Form

ALL ITEMS MUST BE COMPLETED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PRIZE DRAWING

Name _____

Street _____ City _____ State ___ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

My favorite advertiser in this issue is: _____

I enjoy visiting this shop because: _____

Please tell us about a local business you'd like to see advertising in *The Florida Register*.

_____

_____

The Holiday Hustle

by Barbara Kalkis



There is no season more intense than the final 92 days of the year. Surely, no one escapes the speed with which the days fly by, like geese honking farewell as they race toward warm weather.

Businesses understand the fourth-quarter, Q4, months are the final push to lure customers, raise annual sales, and post earnings revenue "in the black". Artisans know these days culminate a year of sewing, painting, quilting, knitting, crocheting, making, baking, creating the unique items they will sell before December 31st.

The last quarter begins with sunflower bouquets and brightly colored leaves, corn stalks and pumpkins, craft fairs and harvest festivals. We then pivot to Jack O'Lanterns, ghosts, witches, black cats, scare crows and Halloween candies for one fun-filled night. The next day, everything orange and black is tossed back into storge to make way for Thanksgiving. Pumpkins lose their scary smiling faces and become fancy décor items in shades of white, sedate sage, and – aptly named – pumpkin orange. To live the moment to the max, decorations set the scene for traditional turkey dinner with all the trimmings of stuffing, sweet potatoes, corn, green beans, cranberry sauce – whole or jellied, and – what else? Pies! With leftovers stored, we take advantage of Black Friday sales. And that begins the final seasonal crunch.

Our homes become the setting for poinsettias, wreaths, bayberry candles, greeting cards and photos (if one is fortunate), train sets, gaily wrapped secret packages, outdoor light displays, and the tree in a place of honor, glittering with decorations.

I think we cram the most energy and effort into making this fourth season memorable. Every one of our five senses seems to be heightened: **feeling** the morning chill, **smelling** pine-scented trees and wreaths, **gobbling** down fresh-baked cookies and milk, **seeing** homes sparkle with decorations, **listening** to holiday music.

I believe in a sixth sense that is our **emotions.** When I recall Christmases growing up. I think of our family adventure of driving to a farm to find our special tree.

We would jauntily set off in the snow to find the perfect tree. The "winner" had to be approved by all, so this process was time-consuming. Too small. Too tall, Too skinny. Too "fat" for my father's flimsy saw. Too "bushy" for my mother's dangling ornaments. Too full to push through the back door.

After a thorough search of the woods, we would find the winner. Primarily, because we were all exhausted from trudging through the snow and were as cold as popsicles. Finding our way back to the barn – which some years seemed to an iffy thing (my parents were city people) – we slogged into the barn and rushed to warm ourselves with cocoa and hot apple cider. Satisfied that the main seasonal purchase was accomplished, we'd arrive home to waiting lights and a warming fire.

It's easy to romanticize these last days of the year, but they are truly memorable. In all other seasons, there are special holidays, but those last 91 days cram the most work, memories, emotions, scents, and feelings of putting an imaginary "bow" on the gift that is life.

When I was young, I used to stand at my bedroom window and look out into the night, trying to spot Santa Claus entering the neighborhood. Now I stand at my window and look out at the blnight and feel the contentment of a year that delivered all kinds of events, but which ended once again in the gift that Life gives us every day. However you have raced from Autumn to Halloween to Thanksgiving to Christmas to the new year, Celebrate!

©Barbara Kalkis, 2026. Barbara is a marketing consultant, teacher, and author of "Little Ditties for Every Day: A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm." Contact her at BarbaraKalkis@gmail.com.

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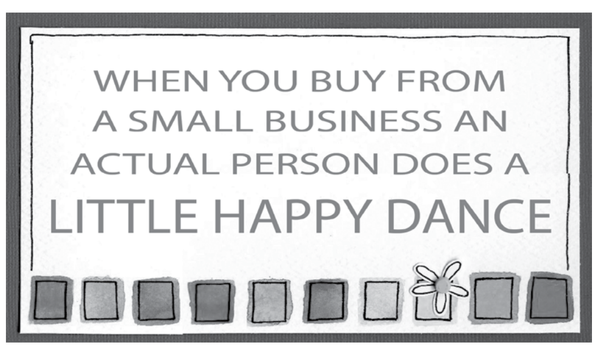
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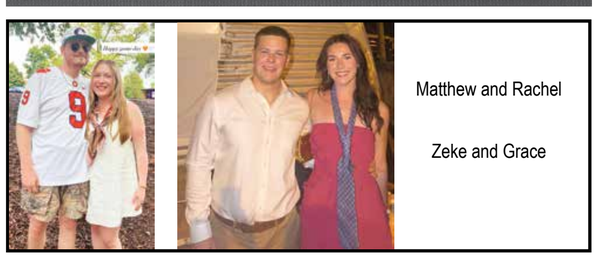
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Matthew and Rachel

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Building Harmony

by Jeff Cappis

Christmas: The Big Show

There is nothing like children at Christmas is there? Most of us were kids once so we recognize the wonder in their eyes.

My neighbor Ned has four of the cutest children you've ever met. Three girls and a boy. The oldest, Mandy is five and a half. She's followed by Sandy and Candy. The boy, Randy, is the youngest at two and a half years. Ned and his wife Wendy seem to crank them out like clockwork. They maybe a little lazy when it comes to naming their children, but they really are good parents.

Last Christmas they decided to make a video for the children's grandparents and it was a success. They sang "Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer" as they danced around each other and did a little skit. At the very end Randy sang the high note for the big finish. Cute as heck.

Ned wondered why stop there. So, he taught. them "Jingle Bells." Again, they danced around each other and Randy hit the last high note. They were naturals, and when it comes to his children, Ned is a proud father.

One day he met his neighbor Renee on the road and they both stopped to have a friendly chat. Renee asked Ned about his children. Ned beamed and talked about how talented they are. He even showed Renee the video of them singing on his cel phone.

Renee thought they were cute as the dickens. "You know," he said to Ned, "There are a few of us on our road who have nothing to do this Christmas Eve. I was going to have them over for some Christmas cheer. Do you think the kids could do their songs?"

"Sure," Ned smiled. That would be fun." And so, it began. Ned's children were sort of "booked" for Christmas Eve. Ned even taught them to sing "Silent night" in case everyone liked hearing the first two. They were great. Ned even recorded them and put the videos up on his internet page.

For his part, Renee went about inviting a few of the neighbors and even told them about Ned's kids. He got a great reaction and word started to spread up and down the road about the kids and this party. Renee was pleased. He's a neighborly guy so more's the merrier. Meanwhile, Ned's videos went viral in the neighborhood.

A few neighbors asked to bring their own children so Renee got the idea they could hand out presents to the kids as well. Better yet- he could be Santa Clause! (It's important to note that Renee is a six-foot-three, sturdily built man and an ex-French air force pilot with blue eyes and an accent).

Renee's small get together of about 6 people grew to a Christmas party of 40 people and he was beginning to wonder if they would fit in his house. When another 5 people asked to come, he booked the old fire hall down the road. Now this was becoming a community party and everyone wanted to see these cute kids perform their Christmas songs.

Ned was thrilled. The kids made a game of it and practiced singing their three songs over and over. They got it down perfectly. Ned even made some paper cut out Christmas trees to hang as a backdrop. Wendy made them some simple costumes. Mandy wanted to be a duck; Sandy was a kitty; Candy was an elf; and Randy wanted to be a dinosaur. (Wendy actually made him a puppy costume, but she told him it was a dinosaur. He couldn't tell the difference).

Renee decided to build a small stage so everyone could see the kids. Then he hung a couple of sheets for curtains. One of the neighbors, Stanley, offered to do a little juggling as a warm up act. Everything was set.

On Christmas Eve at precisely 6:00, the doors opened and people began coming in. The fire hall was warm and comfortable. Earlier Renee had laid out a table with coffee, cookies and juices. At this moment though, he was dressed as Santa sitting on a chair in the corner with a small pile of presents. Waiting for the first child.

The rest of us were milling around getting caught up with our friends. It was a very good time. Most of us hadn't talked in months or even years.

Renee got his first child. They put little Jimmy on his right knee. "What's your name?." Jimmy smiled then peed on his leg. Renee gave him a present and handed him back to his mother.

Behind the sheets Ned was putting up the paper cut out Christmas trees while Wendy put the costumes on the kids. They were excited. Randy stomped around like a dinosaur. Stanley had gathered up his rubber juggling balls and was waiting off stage.

After Renee tried drying his pant leg, he sat back down and motioned for the next child. Little Emily. She was two. "Ho, ho, ho. What would you like for Christmas little Emily?" Emily looked up at him with her big blue eyes and threw up in his beard.

Seeing this from across the room, I commented to my wife Cathy that Renee didn't look like he was having a good time. Behind the curtain Ned and company were almost set. Stanley had a drink while he waited. By now we were all into the Christmas cheer.

Again, Renee sat down (without his beard) and motioned for the next child. His name was Timmy. Timmy was four. Timmy had a cold. They put him down on Renee's left knee. "I see you've been a good boy this year Timmy," he said as he handed Timmy a present. Timmy sneezed in Renee's unbearded face. Renee looked at his assistant. "Jeez! How many more kids have we got?"

It was finally show time. The lights went low throughout the community hall except for the small stage with the sheet curtains. Renee stood in front of the stage (without his pants and beard) and introduced Stan the juggling man.

Stan took to the little bit of stage he had in front of the sheets. The space was tight and his juggling was off. Every third rubber ball bounced into the audience. Every time someone would toss it back. This really messed up his routine. Eventually someone tossed the ball back and beaned him right on the forehead. He fell off the stage. The sheets behind him came down revealing the kids.

A duck, a kitty, an elf and a dog who thinks he's a dinosaur.

The girls were okay and began their song and dance. They were in their glory. Randy though, (who'd never seen so many people) got stiff. He stuck his finger up his nose and put his thumb in his mouth. Then he just stared at the audience.

They got through "Rudolf" okay. The girls were having a great time. They kind of forgot the words sometimes and invented a new key but everybody clapped. Then came "Jingle Bells." Much the same but even more adorable. Finally, "Silent Night."

The girls held hands and sang it in the nicest voices they had. At one point Candy got tangled in the sheets and fell down. The other two danced around her. Smart phones were recording everywhere. We were touched.

When it came to the big finish, Randy pulled his finger out of his nose and gave off what can only be described as- a banshee scream. It even startled Randy. His finger went back up his nose, just as the paper Christmas trees peeled off the wall behind him.

The stage lights went down and the house lights came up. The kids got a standing ovation on a somewhat unforgettable Christmas Eve. Ned and Wendy were the proudest of all.

Renee changed his clothes.

There is nothing like children at Christmas is there? May the child in you will always treasure the season. Merry Christmas from Harmony Acres.

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About The Cover Artist

Nicole DeCamp



Nicole DeCamp grew up in a house full of her parent's creativity. Beds were warmed by the handmade quilts made by her mother and items such as furniture and stained glass made by her father. Someone was always creating. Nicole started as an artist at the age of 5, when her father sat her in a chair at their family-owned restaurant and allowed her to sell her work to the customers for 10 cents. Her elementary school friends would also pay her a small fee to draw pictures for them while on the playground during recess. It was during that time that Nicole knew what she wanted to do with her life...make her living by creating art and have her own business.

She graduated from Indiana University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in graphic design and started her career as a graphic designer in the advertising industry. She spent 7 years creating websites and print related materials for large, nationally recognized clients but as an experienced artist as well, she missed drawing and painting.

As a result, Nicole transitioned and received her master's degree in Drawing and then spent 13 years designing and illustrating products for an international party supply retailer while starting her art licensing journey as a side business. In 2017 the talent, confidence and experience she developed there allowed her to branch out into having her own full time freelance design and art licensing business, ND Art and Design. She has created art for a wide range of retail products including decorative gift boxes, partyware, ceramics, fabrics and garden flags and much more.

Her work has also been featured on television and published in magazines including Food Network, People, Party and Paper, Total Licensing and Giftware News to name a few.

To view Nicole's art prints, go to www.PennyLaneFineArt.com.

The Villages

DREAMS DO COME TRUE

by Janet Young



Dashing through the snow, in a one-horse open sleigh, those are the words to a well-known Christmas song - Jingle Bells, written in 1857 by James Lord Piedmont. This song was not intended to be a Christmas song. In fact, it was first sung in a Thanksgiving church service. Piedmont wanted it to be a lively tune that celebrated sleigh racing. Before long, it soon appeared as a Christmas song even though it never mentioned Santa, reindeer, snowmen, or any other secular symbols of the holiday. So, why did I start this article referencing Jingle Bells? Let's begin.

When my mother was growing up, it had been her life-long dream to go on a one-horse open-sleigh ride. This was a secret I never knew about until one day, she happened to mention how she wished she would have had the chance go on that ride. By now she was in her eighties, and her chances of ever having that wish come true was slowly diminishing.

That is, until one November day I happened upon a local newspaper that talked about a local fire station hosting a Christmas Open House replete with Santa, crafts, entertainment, and last but not least one-horse open sleigh rides.

My immediate thought was how would they be able to do this. The event was to be in early December. However, in Central Pennsylvania the chances of having snow, was so unpredictable, especially since there was no weather forecast predicting snow.

As the date approached, excitement was cautiously building because I still did not know how they were going to do this. We entered the fire station, and were amazed by all the festivities. We listened to the various chorale groups. And before long the big moment arrived.

It was a cold winter night, so my husband stayed inside with my mother while I went outside to wait in line. Before long, it was our turn to get in the sleigh. We bundled up in a cozy warm blanket and off we went around the grounds of the fire station.

How did we do this when there was no snow on the ground? Well, due to the ingenuity of a kind soul, we were transported in the sleigh that had wheels placed on a platform that the sleigh could safely and comfortably rest upon. And yes, it was driven by two horses.

While this may not seem like such an idyllic sleigh ride, let me tell you, in the darkness of the night, you would have never known you were not flying over the hills of snow. There was magic in the air that night. And, all because my 85-year-old mother had finally realized her childhood dream. With a smile on her face, and my heart filled with love, I knew that this would be a night she would forever cherish.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

© Janet Young is a Certified Tea and Etiquette Consultant, Co-Founder of Mid-Atlantic Tea

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submitted by Janet M. Bair

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1 tsp salt
2 tsp sugar
2 Tablespoons butter

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The night before, *grease a 2 quart casserole dish. Add one package of Copes Dried Sweet Corn. Add 1 cup milk and 1 tiny can evaporated milk. Soak overnight.*
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A Cup of Tea with Lydia

Holiday Gingerbread Teatimes

by Lydia E. Harris

"Run, run, as fast as you can! You can't catch me; I'm the gingerbread man!"

What could be more inviting than the spicy aroma of gingerbread baking? Since young and old savor gingerbread, let's capture the gingerbread man and plan a fun and festive holiday par-TEA or two!

Children's Gingerbread Tea

When I learned the family temporarily staying next door bought a home in my son's neighborhood, I invited them along with my son's family for a gingerbread tea party. The dads were at work and already knew each other from childhood, but the moms and five children (ages 10 to 17) came in order to get acquainted. It was a sunny day, so I hosted the tea outdoors on our deck.



The deck looked festive with red and green fabrics draped over the railing and tied with sashes. A tablecloth with gingerbread men and teapot designs offered a cheery welcome. Red plates, Christmas teacups and felt gingerbread men added to the decor.

My grandkids' new Havanese puppy, Paisley Mae, also joined the outdoor party. She made a good icebreaker for the kids as they played with her in the backyard before teatime. Then Paisley joined us on the deck in her crate.

We started our teatime with a blessing. Then we enjoyed scones and toppings, fresh fruit, strawberry soup, individual bottles of sparkling cider, and herbal tea. Our guests chose Davidson's Children's Tea, a fruity herbal blend, and my family enjoyed their usual Celestial Seasonings Country Peach Passion.

Next, it was time to decorate and nibble gingerbread cookies. I had baked our family's favorite gingerbread (recipe on pg 14). Using three different-sized cookie cutters, I made enough gingerbread people so each person could have a family: a dad, mom and two kids. Since both families have dogs, I also placed a Scottie dog (Walkers Shortbread) on each plate.

The neighbor mom brought five small piping bags of homemade cream cheese frosting—one for each child. While they expressed their creativi-TEA with the frosting and sprinkles, I read the "Gingerbread Man" tale aloud. And then, just like the story ends, soon it was "snip, snap"—and the cookies were eaten. But those that got away whole were taken home to enjoy later.

This turned out to be a fun get-acquainted teatime. My daughter-in-law emailed, "Thanks for hosting a fabulous holiday tea. It was good for the kids to meet our new neighbors!" Whether you have new neighbors or not, hosting a holiday gingerbread tea makes a fun par-TEA.

Gentleman's Gingerbread Tea

Children aren't the only ones who love tea and gingerbread. Yes, real men take tea. Sipping tea by the fire makes fall and winter days feel warm and cozy.

My husband, Milt, enjoyed his gingerbread tea as he sat in his favorite burgundy recliner in the living room. I set a wooden tray with gingerbread cake and whipped cream on his lap. He had a choice of three toppings: applesauce, apricot jam, and lemon curd. He sampled all three—but lemon was his favorite. I preferred the apricot jam for an accent. Orange marmalade would taste good too.

Apricot tea tasted just right with the gingerbread cake. If you don't have apricot tea, you could add a splash of apricot nectar to black tea. Chai tea or an

continued on page 16

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DeLand, Deltona

The Sewing Machines Are Out!!

by Wayne M. Bosman

The sewing machines are out! This is something that happens fitfully here. Kerri is the one who sews at our house, so when they appear, something important is afoot.

We have a lot of sewing machines. Most of them are mine, but those rarely get used. After 49 years as a mechanic I retired- mostly. It would have been really hard after a lifetime of fixing things to just stop cold turkey.

Sewing machines are relatively light compared to cars, and I can keep a whole bunch of them around without the neighbors complaining. Or more importantly perhaps without Kerri complaining. (I should put in a disclaimer here-Kerri is absolutely accommodating to my many and varied projects. She is not the complaining type. Our neighbors are nice too.)

At any rate, I found that I have an affinity for sewing machines, especially ones about my age. I seem to be a magnet for broken sewing machines that need a little TLC. I buy them, fix them and then give them away to someone who will use them. Not a very good business model, but it keeps me off the streets.

Kerri has only two sewing machines that she works with. One was her mother's Singer 401a. It is the machine she learned on. Every time she sits down to use it she remembers her mother, and it is her belief and intent that some of her mother's love goes into whatever she sews on it. The other machine was my mother's Kenmore 158. The belief is the same. Both machines give her a lot of joy when she uses them. She likes to imagine the previous owners looking over her shoulder while she makes things for the next generation.

Kerri uses sewing machines, I just fix them occasionally. She doesn't sew professionally, she makes things. It is her internal belief that taking the time to hand make something for each of the grandchildren every year lets them know that they are loved. They still get the flavor-of-the-month toy or a gift card that will let them get what they want. That is all well and good, but to make something one of a kind consciously aimed at them individually has a special meaning for her. It is love made manifest.

Of course, sometimes the handmade item will miss the mark. Children are inscrutable and constantly changing, but in the attempt a message is sent. The message goes beyond the usability of the item. The message says "I love you. I see you and am doing my best to support you from afar." If the item goes quickly to the back of the bottom drawer, as sometimes happens, so be it. The message is sent anyway.

But more often, the little handmade item gets used. The pillowcase made of fabric that has scenes of the child's favorite things ends up on the bed. The useful canvas bag that might be just the right size for taking things to the beach is exactly that. The crocheted hats and sweaters get worn and become favorites.

So there is an excitement in the house, and some anticipation as this year's Christmas gifts take shape. Kerri starts this process shortly after Christmas every year, but there is inevitably an acceleration as zero hour approaches.

There are new additions to the list of recipients and last minute inspirations as the children evolve. It is our sadness that Mom is no longer on the list. She passed last year at 104. She didn't need anything before and she definitely doesn't need anything now, at least nothing that can be made on a sewing machine.

We won't be eating at the kitchen table for a few days. Three sewing machines and tools have taken over.

Wayne M. Bosman is a retired auto mechanic living in Cape Carteret, NC.

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More Than a Tree Topper

by Becky Van Vleet

Every year the same angel takes her place at the top of our Christmas tree. She's made of plastic, more than seventy years old, and a little worse for wear. She still lights up, though her outdated cord is crinkly and twisted. I'm amazed she still works.

But to me, she's far more than an old tree topper. She's a piece of my childhood.



When I was growing up, we always had a real Christmas tree, and decorating it was a family affair. My sisters and I helped hang the ornaments, Mother supervised with a camera in hand, and Daddy tackled the silver icicles. Those slippery strands seemed to cling to his fingers more readily than to the branches. He'd fling them toward the tree, sending plenty to the floor along the way. Getting them to let go of his fingers was half the battle—and part of the fun.

Our tree also held those wonderful bubbling candle lights. Once they warmed up, we watched the bubbles rise inside them. Then, when the decorating was nearly finished, Daddy would place our angel on the highest branch and plug her in. Only then did our tree feel complete.

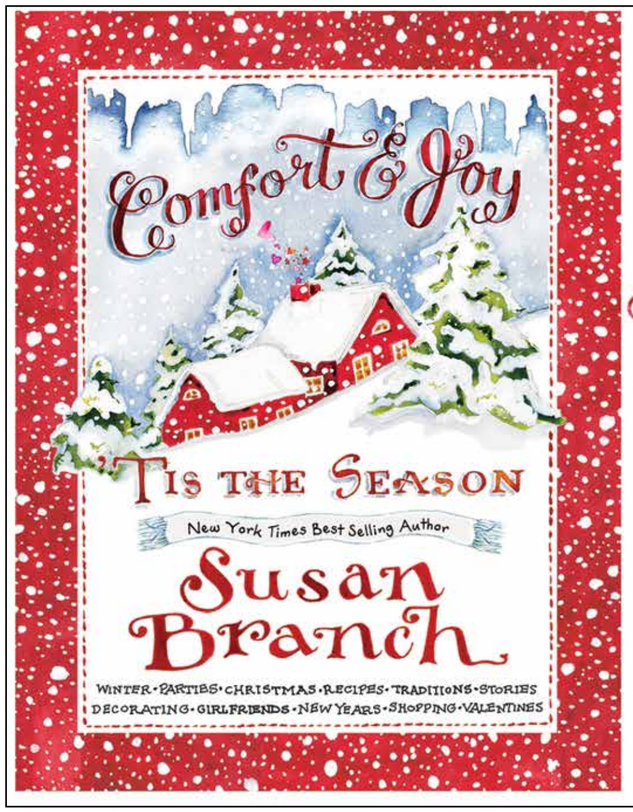
As a little girl, I loved gazing up at her. I imagined she was singing Christmas carols just to me. She was beautiful. Angelic.

Years later, after I had a family of my own, my father passed the angel topper along to me. I was thrilled. Since then, we've placed her gingerly atop our own Christmas trees, carrying a little of my childhood into each Christmas.

These days, as our grandchildren enjoy Angelina, the name we've given her, one of her wings is broken and held together with Scotch tape. But when I look at her, I still see the angel of my childhood—and I remember Daddy placing her on top of the tree.

If I had to guess, I'd say she cost less than a dollar back in the 1950s. Her value today? Priceless!

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:



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From Lydia's Recipe File: Grandma Tea's Gingerbread Cookies

Crisp, spicy, and yummy.



Cream together:
- 1 cup butter or margarine
- 1 1/2 cups sugar

Add and beat until light and fluffy:
- 1 egg

Add and mix well:
- 2 tablespoons dark corn syrup
- 1 tablespoon finely grated orange peel

Sift together and stir into creamed mixture:
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Chill dough if too soft. Roll dough 1/4-inch thick between two pieces of waxed paper. Cut into desired shapes. Place 1-inch apart on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes until lightly browned. Cool one minute before removing from baking sheet. Cool. Decorate, if desired. Makes 2 dozen large cookies or more if they are medium-sized or small.

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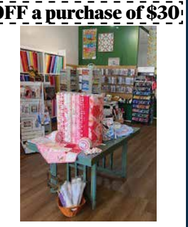
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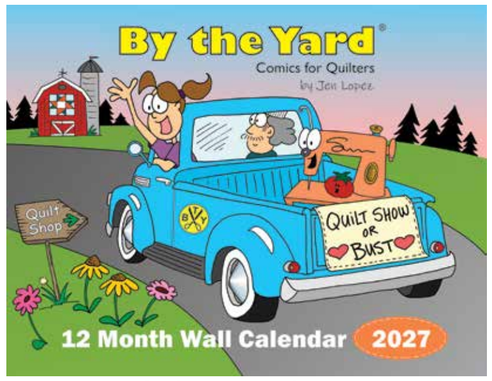
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Gingerbread Tea. cont. from page 9

orange spice tea would be delicious as well.

I often join my husband for tea. We sit on the sofa, turn on music and enjoy a lady and gentleman's tea together. When the tea and treats are gone, sweet memories linger.

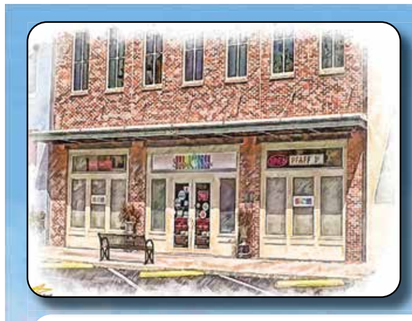
Why not put on your favorite carols, brew a pot of tea and create sweet and spicy memories with gingerbread teatimes? You'll be glad you did. Merry Christmas!

Lydia E. Harris is a tea enthusiast, grandmother, and author of Preparing My Heart for Grandparenting, In the Kitchen with Grandma: Stirring Up Tasty Memories Together, and GRAND Moments: Devotions Inspired by Grandkids. All are available on Amazon or can be ordered from bookstores.



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Clutter Happens

Holiday Traditions of Love

by Julie Pirtle

As I get older, the holiday season becomes more cherished. Memories of past gatherings grow sweeter.

Anticipation of being with loved ones again grows dearer.

I think reflection this time of year is common for many. It's difficult to not think about those who are no longer with us. Their laughter and joy live in our hearts. Looking at pictures around the tree and feeling the warmth that was shared by all is palpable when thinking about their absence.

It is interesting to note that for me, most of my memories are based on the family traditions that many of those same people shared with me. The continuation of those traditions is what keeps them part of our holiday joy.

Being of Norwegian descent, I can recall numerous seasons filled with Lefsa making. (If you aren't familiar with this yummy dish, just picture a soft fluffy tortilla made with riced potatoes.)

I can see it like it was yesterday. Grandma rolling out the round dough between white floured feed sack towels and Grandpa making sure they were cooked just right. Grandma loved sharing them with us as they came off the griddle. Topped with butter and homemade raspberry jam or cinnamon and sugar, they were equally delightful.

My Great Grandmother always made simple sugar cookies with colored frosting. Her daughter (my Grandma) continued the tradition, using the same tarnished metal cookie cutters with faded green and red wood handles.

It was always exciting as a kid to see Grandma walk into the house with a box full of those cookies. Angels, trees, bells, Santa…all ready for the taking! I am delighted to say that the tradition is still carried on, even through my own daughter. Five generations of women lovingly keeping the tradition safe.

Also being of German descent, we always opened gifts for each other on Christmas Eve. However, dinner came first and it was usually a Paste (pass-tee) made with potatoes, beef, onions and pie crust. Another tradition from the Norwegian side of the family.

Paste was made in my grandmother's family back in the 20's-30's. They were poor, and it was made out of necessity. They always had flour and lard for the crust and potatoes and onions for the filling. Grandma shared that meat was a luxury and was not often included. Yet, as a modern family, we thought it was such a treat.

Stockings were always filled by Santa and dispersed on Christmas morning. It started out as something for the children but morphed over the years to include the adults in the family as well. The items in the adult stockings sometimes had a joke involved and perhaps a lottery ticket or two!

I am blessed to have many photos of Christmas past. I am most grateful for a photo we took on my brother's long second floor staircase almost three years ago. My parents are on the bottom of the stairs. Behind them are each of us kids with their spouses, children and grandchildren. All seated and smiling. It was the last picture we would be able to take like that.

I watch the next generation of our family carrying out many of the same traditions that they grew up with. It warms my heart and I am proud to have been part of the history they carry on.

With all the traditions (some conscious and perhaps just by habit), it makes me wonder who started them and why? Were they done by necessity? Do they date back further than I even realize? Sadly, the people that could help me with those questions can no longer answer.

This year as your family begins to celebrate together, take a moment to discuss the traditional things your family participates in. Ask the elders if they know more about the start of them. Take a moment to document the answers to be able to share with the generations that follow.

Life is difficult and stressful for many now. Let's all make a promise to bask in the glow of the season and the love we have for each other.

C'mon! We've got this. I know we do.

Julie Pirtle is a Professional Organizer and owner/operator of Clutter Happens in Mesa, AZ. She also works with clients nationally through Video Consultations. The Clutter-Challenged can reach her at clutterhappens@gmail.com, on Facebook:/clutterhappens or her website www.clutterhappens.com.

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Palatka

Thanksgiving and Christmas: A Time to Savor

by Nancy J. Nash



My favorite food at Thanksgiving dinner is the dressing, made with down-to-earth bread and onions playing host to a variety of interesting and exotic herbs. Much as I love pumpkin pie, it is the warm, savory taste of dressing that lingers on my tongue and satisfies my palate.

The word savory is related to savor, which bears the connotation of lingering over food we are enjoying. (dictionary.cambridge.org). As I recall from my scattered research, it harks back many centuries to a root word that means to taste or perceive. (I wish I could find that internet entry again!). Savoring extends beyond our favorite meals and can apply to something as simple as quiet moments spent watching a sunset.

The end-of-year holidays get a bad rap for being overly busy. That reputation is not undeserved, but I wonder whether intentionally savoring the season would make a difference. What if we lingered over our holiday "comfort food," grateful for the opportunity to once again gather with family and friends? What if we listened more closely to the stories being told around the table?

I remember my father and his brother sitting around a wide oak table and reminiscing about their travels in Vermont. They told about their experiences scouting for trees for their father's Christmas business. Many were the people they met on farms and in small towns. One elderly man, a highly respected state official, had been visited one night by a lone man who had just been released from jail. Family members warned against their meeting - it could lead to vengeance and violence. But the ex-convict had only come to thank the older man for an act of kindness years earlier, possible the only significant act of kindness he had known.

Another reminiscence we heard involved an elderly farmer who declined to sell a grove of trees to my father. Since the farmer was quite poor, Dad was puzzled - until he spoke with a local who explained that the elderly man had a purpose for them. During the year, some of the townspeople provided meals for him and his crippled, bedridden wife. He could not afford to pay them. To thank them, he let each family cut a tree from his woodlot to decorate their parlor at Christmastime. My father added that the elderly farmer had the kindest eyes he ever saw.

To me as a child, such stories revealed the secrets of people's hearts. I was struck by the generosity and sacrifices of the rather impoverished Vermont farmers. These qualities were precious - and called out to be contemplated and savored.

Savoring stories of Christmas makes the holiday season more restful and deepens its meaning. I think of the 2000-year-old narrative about stars and shepherds and angels watching in the night. At the heart of it is a baby born into poverty and laid to rest, incongruously, in a bed of hay, his eyes already sparkling with a pure and profound love that has lasted down through the centuries and does not end.

Copyright 2026 Nancy J. Nash. Nancy is the author of Mama's Books: An Oregon Trail Story *and* Little Rooster's Christmas Eve, *both available at amazon.com. She holds a B.A. in English composition from Mount Holyoke College and an M.F.A. in Writing for Children from Simmons College. She may be reached at tradit2@verizon.net.*

Back Porch Break

by Nancy Brummett

Friendships and "Furships"



How would we get through life without our friends—or the fur friends we love so much? Several friends have had to say goodbye to special fur companions recently and my heart goes out to them. Their holidays will be sad without a lab lurking under the Thanksgiving table waiting for a bit of turkey to fall on the floor, or without a playful cat pouncing on giftwrap and ribbons on Christmas morning.

I remember so well the year we had to say goodbye to our sweet cat, Molly. I never realized how much her meows—with different intonations for each communication—had become such a part of the soundtrack of our lives. The silence was deafening.

Her physical absence was agonizing, too. She wasn't by the door asking to go out on the deck. She wasn't getting me up to feed her, or sitting on my lap early in the morning as I had my quiet time. She was simply gone, and we missed our fur friend.

When we lose a pet the human friendships we have mean more than ever, however! Those friends with pets, or who have been loved by pets in the past, truly know the pain of losing a fur friend who was part of the rhythm of daily life. The first day Molly was gone a neighbor stopped by with a card, a bottle of wine, and the time to just sit and talk about Molly for a bit. A true friend.

Messages from friends on Facebook were so kind: "My heart breaks for you." "She was such a sweet kitty." "I'm so very sorry for your loss." Please know that *I know firsthand* that losing a pet doesn't compare to losing a loved one. But it is a loss nonetheless, and it's so sweet when friends come alongside to acknowledge it. A friend from afar texted, "Many, many of my best friends have had fur, and many of my best memories are of them. I'm sorry you have lost your friend. You'll have your memories forever." So true.

The phone calls that included laughter, the notes and cards that came in the mail, the friend who invited me over for some sympathy licks from her dog, all of it helped as we were grieving. And all of it underscored the fact that we need one another.

It didn't surprise me to read that a book by science journalist Lydia Denworth, ***Friendship: The Evolution, Biology, and Extraordinary Power of Life's Fundamental Bond***, includes research proving that friendship is not only good for our emotional health but for our physical health as well. Bottom line: People with at least one good friend tend to live longer, happier lives. No surprise, but good to have the scientific confirmation.

So cherish your human friends and your fur friends this holiday season—nurture your friendships and your "furships." Give of yourself generously, and you will be so very blessed in return.

My friendship with Jan Keller, publisher of the Colorado and New Mexico Country Register, led to my contributing a column to Country Register newspapers since 2008! I'm so grateful to have had this opportunity, but the time has come for me to move on. If you've enjoyed reading Back Porch Break all these years, please consider subscribing to my monthly blog by going to my website at www.nancyparkerbrummett.com. It's FREE and will give us a chance to stay in touch. God bless.

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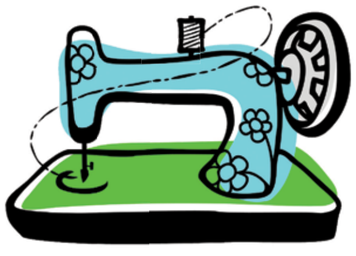
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KISSed Quilts
Coral Carnival – My 2nd Signature Collection

by Marlene Oddie

So honored to be asked to select another signature collection with Island Batik/ Lumin Fabrics. This very colorful collection takes inspiration from a carnival by the sea. I grew up on the Monterey Bay and there is an amusement park in Santa Cruz, California. As I considered patterns to feature the collection, these were the types of images that inspired me. Here are the five designs I put together with the collection.
(l-r: Aquarium, Dangling Diamonds, Coral School, Sea Dance and Carnival BOM).



Aquarium is 2.5" strip and 5" stamp friendly, uses the Accuquilt Sea Life Medley Die to create the applique shapes and embroidery designs and Wonderfil's Instant Applique made it super simple to position. Dangling Diamonds is 10" stack friendly and uses the Boondoggle Rulers. Coral School uses the EZPiecing leave-in foundations, simplifying this detailed block piecing. Sea Dance is a fun variation of a snail-trail block. Carnival BOM is a 10 step pattern –pre-order it now to start in January 2027. Find these patterns, pre-cuts and kits on my website.

KISSED QUILTS

Marlene Oddie, of Grand Coulee, WA, is an engineer by training, a project manager by profession, and a quilter by passion. At her quilt shop, KISSed Quilts, she quilts for hire on a Gammill Optimum Plus and especially enjoys designing quilts and helping create meaningful keepsakes. Fabrics, patterns, kits, and templates are available at kissedquilts.com. Follow Marlene's adventures on Facebook and Instagram.

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The Case of the Missing Christmas Craft

by Janet M. Bair

Last fall I found a very intriguing quilt pattern called "Shadowbox" that I wanted to try. I decided that I would make it into a Christmas wall hanging rather than a whole quilt. Struggling to understand the directions, I set the bag of material and pattern aside in the spare bedroom where I sew. When I started to clean for Thanksgiving company, I put the partially started project in a "safe place."

After Thanksgiving when all our family had returned to their homes in North Carolina and Florida, I looked for my Christmas craft. There were still a few weeks before Christmas, so I figured I could finish it. It was nowhere to be found! I hunted through all of my fabric twice, organizing fabric as I went. Since I only began quilting four years ago, I don't have that much fabric accumulated.

I continued to look for the gallon size clear plastic bag of fabric over the course of the year. Never found it. I am usually very organized so I knew it was in our small house but I was puzzled as to where. Long after Christmas passed, in June I decided to do a massive house clean of our attic and basement.

In my sewing room, I looked inside a box of my husband's old computer items and we decided it was time to get rid of outdated computer discs. As I emptied the heavy box to move it out of the room, I finally spotted my Christmas craft bag! It had slipped behind the heavy box and was squashed next to the bookcase, out of sight. I had searched that area several times before to no avail.

I am very happy to have my bag of Christmas fabric back again because there are some lovely pieces just waiting to be made into something beautiful. I guess my advice is—never stop searching--and it always pays to clean.

The experience of finally finding my special project made me wonder if this was how the wise men felt when they came to the end of their search for the newborn king. The star had guided them for months and they joyfully worshiped the Messiah with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Though they left poorer, their hearts were richer for having made the long journey to see the newborn king, Jesus. May we all experience that special joy this holiday season. Now that my mystery is solved, I hope that I can finish my Christmas wall hanging soon!

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



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Those Were The Days!

Celebrating an "Ornamental" Christmas

by Jay Mark

Finally, after a record-setting, searing summer, fall has gratefully arrived. The cooler weather 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 ornamentations, 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 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.

SOME GOOD BOOKS: There are many books and online sites devoted to Christmas collecting. These titles are just examples that can provide a wealth of information: *Christmas Collectibles* by Margaret and Tom Whitmyer; *Christmas Collectibles* by Lisa & Dick Smith; *Christmas Past* by Robert Brenner; *Christmas Ornaments, Lights ana Decorations*, by George Johnson; and *Vintage American-Made Glass Christmas Ornaments: Shiny Brites, Frankes, Premiers, and More* by Jody Pritzl and Alex Zeeza.

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@twtdbooks.com

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Easy Fancy Pink Fruit Salad

submitted by Judy Sharer, historical romance writer

- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 12-ounce container whipped topping
- 1 15-20-ounce can cherry pie filling
- 1 15-ounce can crushed pineapple, well drained
- 1 15-ounce can mandarin oranges, well drained
- **Optional:** 1/2 Cup chopped walnuts, 1/2 Cup Shredded Coconut

Directions:

Stir together the condensed milk and whipped topping. Fold in the cherry pie filling and then the pineapple and oranges. Add optional items if wanted. Refrigerate at least 4 hours prior to serving.

Makes 12 – 14 servings

The Myth of the Perfect First Quilt

by Steve Baker

There is a quiet little myth that follows a lot of beginner quilters into the sewing room. It says your first quilt should be beautiful. It says your seams should line up, your points should behave, your borders should lie flat, your binding should turn the corners perfectly, and the finished quilt should look like something worthy of a magazine photo. Goodness, that is a lot to ask from a first quilt!

Your first quilt is not supposed to be a masterpiece. It is supposed to be a beginning. It is where your hands learn what your eyes have been admiring. It is where fabric stops being pretty folded yardage and becomes something you cut, stitched, pressed, trimmed, layered, quilted, and finished. That matters.

It is easy to compare your first quilt to the beautiful quilts you see online, at quilt shows, in shops, or in the hands of makers who have been quilting for decades. But those quilts carry years of practice, mistakes, lessons, shortcuts, tools, and experience.

Your first quilt carries something different. It carries courage. It carries the moment you decide to try. And it carries every little pause where you wondered, "Am I doing this right?" and kept going anyway. Your first quilt is not a final exam. It is a teacher.

It will teach you things no video, pattern, or tutorial can fully explain until the learning moves through your own hands. You will discover how fabric shifts while you sew, why a consistent quarter-inch seam matters, and what pressing can do for a block. You will learn that accurate cutting matters, but so does relaxing your shoulders and giving yourself permission to be new.

Some of those lessons will arrive disguised as mistakes, and no, you won't like those parts. A seam may not line up. A point may disappear. One block may somehow end up smaller than all the others. Your quilting stitches may wander. Your binding corner may look less like a miter and more like a tiny fabric argument. That does not mean you are bad at quilting. It means you are quilting.

I will be honest. As a bit of a perfectionist, making my first quilt was an exciting undertaking, but it was also a humbling reminder that learning a new skill can be far more frustrating than I care to admit.

There was a great deal of self-talk happening that people do not usually share. I congratulated myself on the wins when the points aligned, but when they did not, I could be brutal, degrading, and downright punishing with myself. I was arguing with myself instead of being the patient teacher and willing learner I would have been for someone else. That was not fair to me.

Somewhere along the way, I realized I was learning more than how to make a quilt. I was learning how to give myself grace, which may have been the most important lesson of all.

Looking back, I also understand that every mistake taught me why the proper techniques matter. Without those mistakes, I am not sure I could have fully understood how all the pieces of the process work together.

I laugh about it now, but I resisted being exact with my seam allowance because I was convinced, "It will come out in the end." I resisted all that starching and pressing because surely that would come out in the end too. I resisted picking up the seam ripper because somehow that felt like admitting defeat. And I measured once and cut once until buying more fabric finally convinced me there might be something to that old saying about measuring twice.

In the end, I truly understood why things are done the way they are done.

Most of those realizations came slowly, often in the quieter moments after a day of sewing was over, when I had finally stopped berating myself over my perceived shortcomings and my blood pressure had returned to something resembling normal. This was supposed to be fun. And eventually, it was.

Over the weeks that followed, the skills improved. My thoughts became gentler and more forgiving. The inner critic still had plenty to say, but I became much better at deciding how much attention he deserved.

And somewhere along the way, a love for the craft came over the horizon like a beautiful rising sun. I was quilting. It was not perfect. But it was beautiful.

That experience also taught me something else: part of becoming a quilter is learning which things truly need to be fixed and which things are simply the quilt's "personality traits."

A weak seam? Fix it. A block sewn incorrectly in a way that will affect the quilt? Fix it. A slightly imperfect point or a quilting line that took the scenic route? Maybe let that one live.

Your first quilt will probably have a few personality traits. Let it.

One of the most important things your first quilt can teach you is the value of finishing. You can learn far more from completing one imperfect quilt than from abandoning three because they were not flawless.

Care and perfection are not the same thing. Care says, "I will do my best with what I know right now." Perfection says, "My best does not count unless nothing goes wrong." Choose care.

Measure carefully. Cut thoughtfully. Sew patiently. Press with intention and be generous with the spray starch. Ask questions. Pick up the seam ripper when you need it. Fix what truly needs fixing. Mr. Seam Ripper is actually your friend, and not the tormentor with an unusually sharp, pointy finger. Learn to love him.

Then keep going.

Someday, after you have made more quilts, learned more techniques, and collected a few favorite tools, you may look back at that first quilt and notice every uneven seam and wandering corner. But you may also see something far more important. You may see the moment you became a quilter.

So, make the quilt. Make it with curiosity instead of fear. Make it with care instead of pressure. Let it carry the evidence of learning.

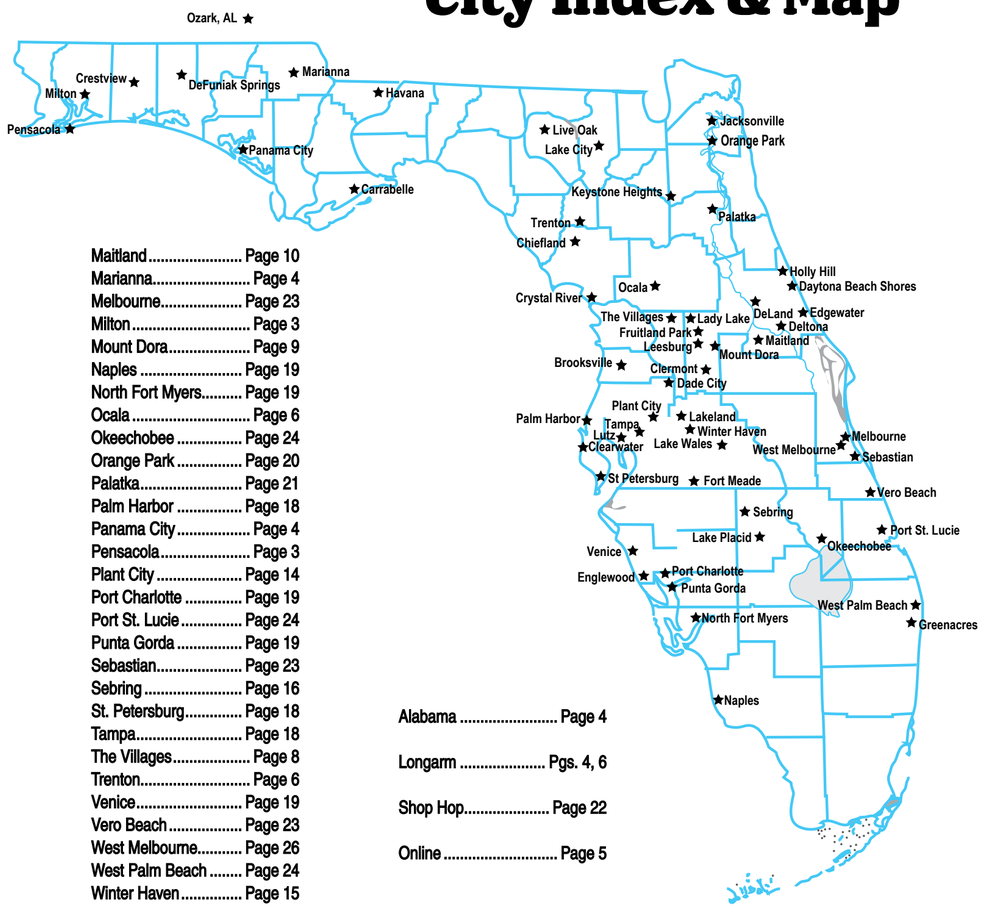
Your first quilt does not need to be perfect to be precious. It only needs to be made. And when you make that final stitch, you will have something far more valuable than a flawless quilt.

You will have proof that you began.

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.



City Index & Map



Brooksville ..... Page 7
Carrabelle ..... Page 4
Chiefland ..... Page 6
Clearwater ..... Page 18
Clermont ..... Page 12
Crestview ..... Page 3
Crystal River ..... Page 6
Dade City ..... Page 13
Daytona Beach Shores Page 22
DeFuniak Springs ..... Page 4
DeLand ..... Page 11
Deltona ..... Page 11
Edgewater ..... Page 22
Englewood ..... Page 19
Fort Meade ..... Page 15
Fruitland Park ..... Page 7
Greenacres ..... Page 24
Havana ..... Page 4
Holly Hill ..... Page 22
Jacksonville ..... Page 20
Keystone Heights ..... Page 5
Lady Lake ..... Pgs. 7, 10
Lake City ..... Page 5
Lake Placid ..... Page 16
Lake Wales ..... Page 15
Lakeland ..... Page 14
Leesburg ..... Page 9
Live Oak ..... Page 5
Lutz ..... Page 17
Maitland ..... Page 10
Marianna ..... Page 4
Melbourne ..... Page 23
Milton ..... Page 3
Mount Dora ..... Page 9
Naples ..... Page 19
North Fort Myers ..... Page 19
Ocala ..... Page 6
Okeechobee ..... Page 24
Orange Park ..... Page 20
Palatka ..... Page 21
Palm Harbor ..... Page 18
Panama City ..... Page 4
Pensacola ..... Page 3
Plant City ..... Page 14
Port Charlotte ..... Page 19
Port St. Lucie ..... Page 24
Punta Gorda ..... Page 19
Sebastian ..... Page 23
Sebring ..... Page 16
St. Petersburg ..... Page 18
Tampa ..... Page 18
The Villages ..... Page 8
Trenton ..... Page 6
Venice ..... Page 19
Vero Beach ..... Page 23
West Melbourne ..... Page 26
West Palm Beach ..... Page 24
Winter Haven ..... Page 15

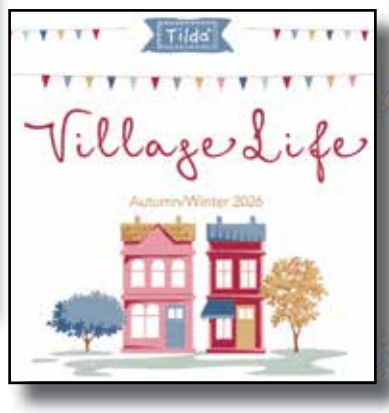
Alabama ..... Page 4
Longarm ..... Pgs. 4, 6
Shop Hop ..... Page 22
Online ..... Page 5

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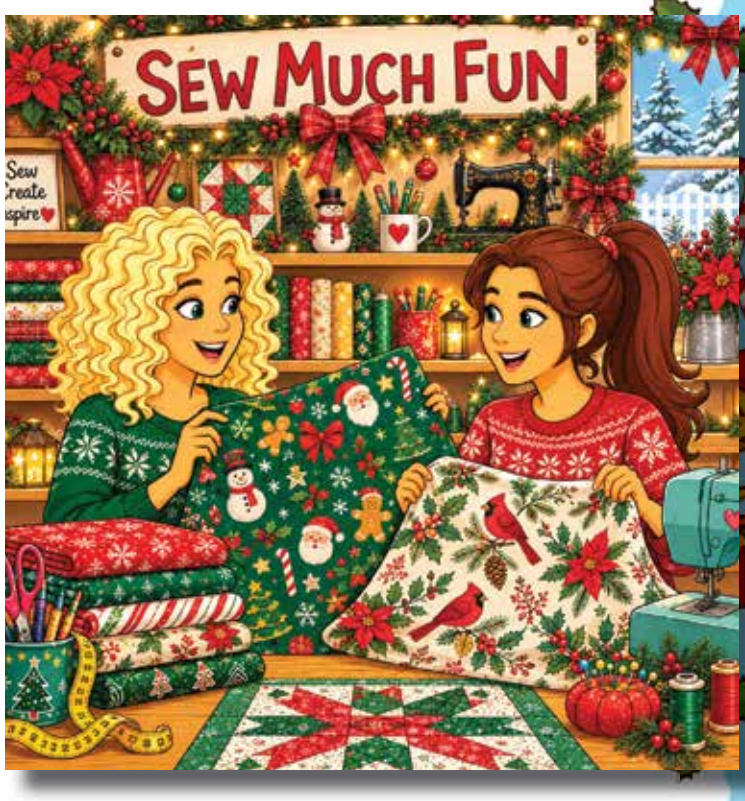


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