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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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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

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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 Business Association, and prior owner of Over The Teacup

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.

(story continues on next page)

(story continued from previous page)

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.

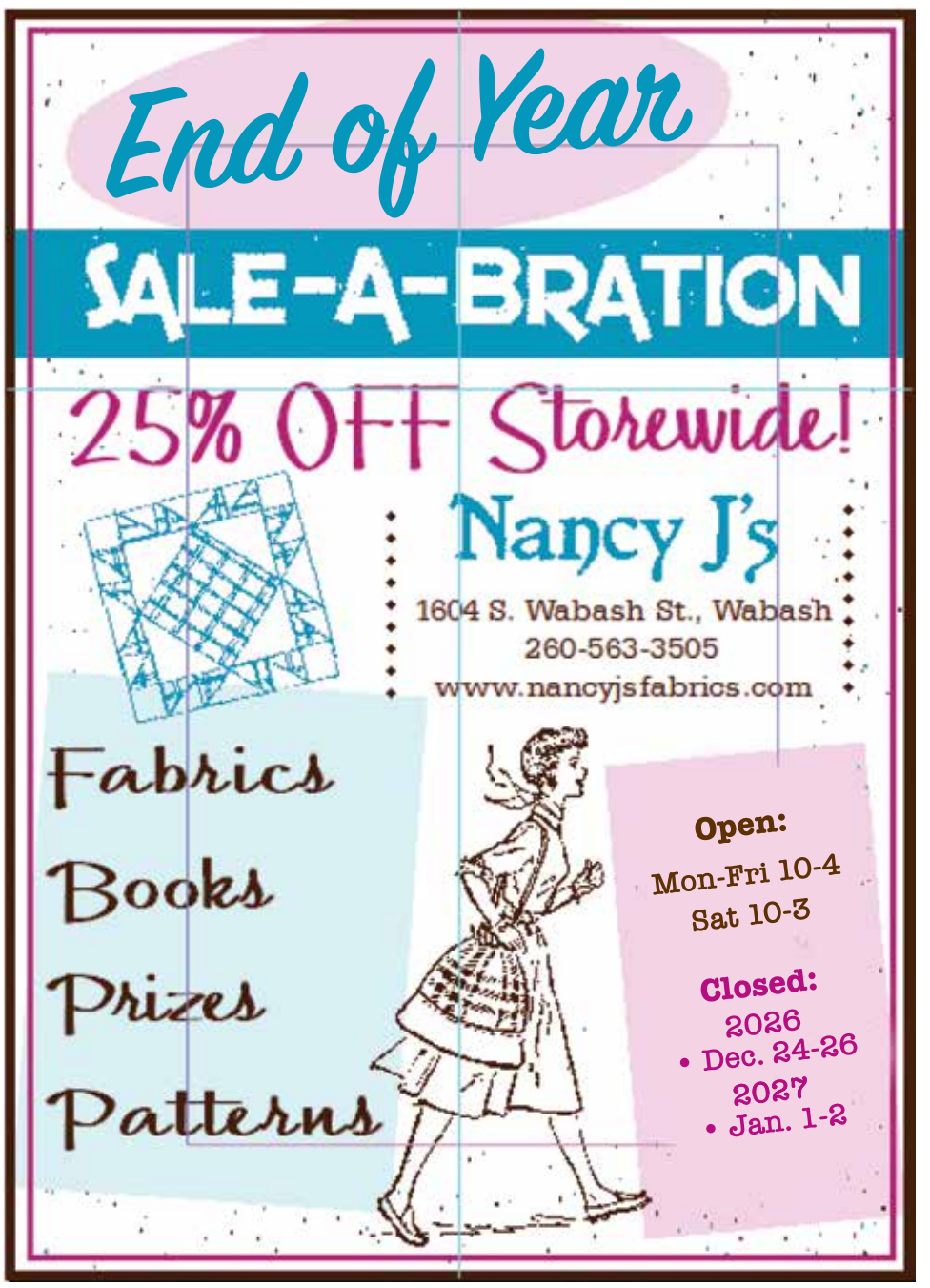
In another pocket I have to put those who protect us...soldiers, policemen, firemen. The everyday heroes. I'm thankful they feel led to serve, help us, one another. May they stand tall with honor.

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.







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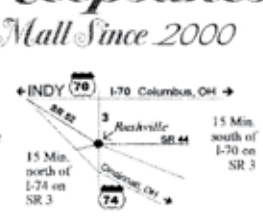






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Those Were The Days!

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 and 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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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!

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Yorkshire Pudding – Gracie Tenant's recipe

submitted by Sharon Atkinson

3/4 cup shifted flou
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup of milk
2 eggs
1 tsp salt
2 tsp sugar
2 Tablespoons butter



Directions:
Put flour and salt in a bowl. Add enough milk to make like heavy cream. In another bowl beat eggs until thick, add remaining milk. Combine the two mixtures and beat until large bubbles appear on the surface. Let stand one hour. Put hot fat into pan or muffin tins. Pour in mixture.

Bake 20 minutes at 425 degrees.

Clutter Happens

Markets, Spice and Everything Nice!

by Julie Pirtle

It's the most wonderful time of the year. The scents of cinnamon and peppermint waft through the air. Pumpkin spice is abundant. But…the most abundant thing about this year is the wonderful number of Holiday Markets around every corner!

Those of us who are "artsy" (and if you are reading this, you are!) love markets. It's so satisfying to walk through the aisles and discover the treasures presented by so many talented makers and collectors.

Are you a closet creator? Do you enjoy doing your craft /hobby but never know what to do with the end result? Perhaps you should consider that YOU could be sharing your passion at those same markets AND be making money at it as well!

Participating in a market is not a difficult process. With a bit of planning and research, you could be up and running in no time. Here are a few tips to get you started!

Social media is one of the easiest ways to find a list of upcoming markets and bazaars in your area. With that list in hand, start contacting the event coordinators. You'll want to ask the space size, are tables and chairs provided and how many vendors have already signed up. If it's a month before the event and there are only 8 spaces of 30 filled, it probably will not bring the attendance you need to be successful.

Most importantly, you will need to find out what the fee is for participating. If you have big ticket items, you can justify the larger events that charge upwards of $100 for the weekend. However, if you have lower priced items, a smaller event is best for you. Churches, Senior Centers and Fraternity Groups put on great events that have less vendors but usually charge $20-30 to participate.

To apply, you may be asked to provide details as well as pictures of your wares. Be sure to take appealing shots of your items as you are being vetted for quality as well as determining if you will fit in with the vendors already signed up.

When preparing for your event, provide yourself with enough time to create and gather what you plan to sell. Make sure your items are customer proof. Bag up items that will not withstand being handled (example: greeting cards should be in protective sleeves).

Pricing is important. Consider both your time and materials when determining the cost of your wares and don't sell yourself short. Refrain from pricing items that are not rounded to the nearest dollar. You will not want to be dealing with coins!

Keep in mind that there will always be that one person that will comment that your prices are too high. Chances are, they have never created a thing in their life and have no idea what it takes. Be thick skinned and believe in your creativity. Other crafters who see your items will appreciate your skill!

(story continues on p. 10)

KISSed Quilts

Coral Carnival – My 2nd Signature Collection

by Marlene Oddie

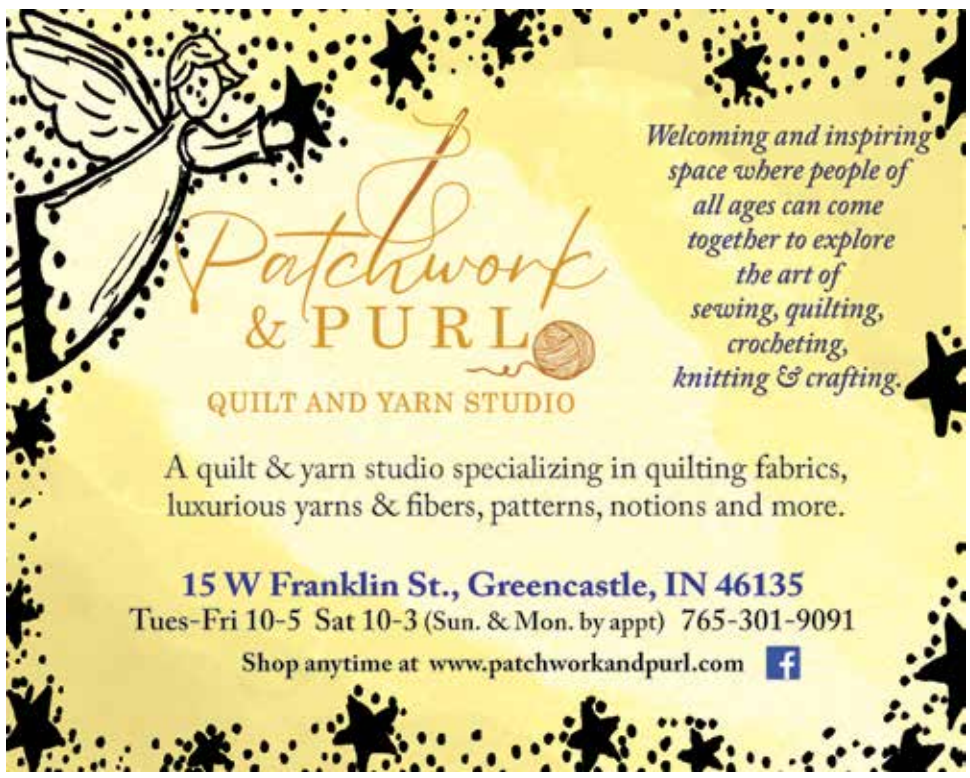
So honored to be asked to select another signature collection with Island Batik/ Lumin Fabrics. This very colorful collection takes inspiration from a carnival by the sea. I grew up on the Monterey Bay and there is an amusement park in Santa Cruz, California. As I considered patterns to feature the collection, 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.

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.



MIDDLEBURY - PLYMOUTH - SHIPSHEWANA







(story continued from p. 8)

If the event does not provide tables and chairs, make sure to bring your own. Other items to consider are table covers, a money belt (filled with bills to give change), various bags to put purchases in, business cards, a tablet/pen and a candy dish to help draw people to your table.

Marketing is important. Blast your social media with news of your upcoming event. Notify customers that have purchased from you before.

Marketing the day of the event is just as important. I worked in sales most of my life. The best tip I was ever given was to "not give without taking." That sounds terrible, but it simply means that if you give a business card or a brochure to someone, get their contact information in return! This allows you to follow up after the event.

Having a clipboard with a customer sign-up sheet is imperative. You will be able to utilize the information you collect to create a contact list that can be used to announce new products or other events you will take part in. It's ok to get it "started" by adding a few names and emails of friends and family. People are more likely to add their info to a sheet that is not blank.

I hope this has you thinking that it's time to take the next step with your craft! Be brave. Put it all out there and see what happens. You've got this. I know you do!

Julie Pirtle lives in Eagle Point, Oregon. She is a Professional Organizer and owner/ operator of Clutter Happens. 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

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.*

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The Work of a Lifetime

by Ann Marie Stewart



Over forty years ago my dad encouraged me to document my mom's parents' escape from Russia. I was only 19. What did I know about writing a book? About research? About investigating how Grandpa and Grandma could leave a child behind for their own freedom?

I interviewed, I wrote, I read it to my grandparents, I revised it and I pressed on. "Yah dats yoost vhat happent," my grandpa would say.

In 1986 I sent the manuscript to publishers and editors. One replied, "I would encourage you to take time, possibly several years, to write this biography. The world is full of 'lightweight' biographies explaining lives that are famous, or that have some adversity, or whatever—and they are nothing more than that. I am not asking for some book that will be immortal but passionate, exciting, something that stirs my blood, something with a world view, something like Tolstoy who understood that personal fates were tied up with historical moments."

Life happened. I taught junior high and read the rough draft to eager Language Arts students. I brought my grandparents in for show and tell. I took more and more writing classes and went to graduate school for a degree in Film and Television. I wrote a screenplay of the novel. The book was always there.

I married and became a mom and had to reconsider my grandparents' choice. Could I leave one child behind to save another?

I wrote two other novels which featured three-year-old boys estranged from their parents. Was I trying to right history? I wrote four other Christian books. Meanwhile, I kept plugging along with this untitled book.

Over and over I told the story to captivated audiences. "Do they ever get reunited with their three-year-old?" I was always asked.

I wrote it in third person multiple perspective, I changed it to first person. I added an author's note at the beginning, I changed the first chapter, I divided it into four quarters. I added an afterward. I debated whether to market it as a memoir, narrative fiction, or historical fiction.

"How is the book going?" elderly relatives nervously inquired. My mother and her siblings wanted to hold the story in their hands before they left this earth. After all, it was based on their parents. "When will it be finished?"

That was a good question. When *would* it be finished? Now in my 60's, I had to finish it. But when would I know that it was really all that it could be? When would it be the novel that the publisher asked for? *Passionate, exciting, something that stirs my blood, something with a world view, something like Tolstoy who understood that personal fates were tied up with historical moments.*

Historical moments changed the world. Crimea. Ukraine. Russia. Refugees. Immigration.

And I knew exactly when I was done. When my life investment meant a book launch for a novel that was passionate, exciting, terribly applicable to the present day, and tied up with historical moments.

You see, my personal fate was tied up with those historical moments. Out of the 17,000 Germans trapped in Russia in 1929, 5,769 escaped to various countries. Only four came to America. That was my family. That is my story. That is why I can live on a peaceful farm in Virginia. That is why I can have a life of freedom and the ability to worship the Lord.

You have been reading my life raising two daughters and a whole lot of sheep. Perhaps you have read my other novels or Bible studies.

Could I ask you to do something?

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Holiday Traditions in America

Winter in the United States brings a unique tapestry of celebrations, reflecting the country's diverse cultural roots. From late November through the beginning of January, American neighborhoods transform into vibrant displays of lights, festive music, and community gatherings. While many of these customs originated in Europe, Africa, and indigenous cultures, they have evolved into uniquely American traditions that bring families and communities together.

The Spark of the Season: Thanksgiving and Parades

The American holiday season officially kicks off on the fourth Thursday of November with Thanksgiving. This uniquely North American holiday centers on gratitude, family reunions, and a massive feast. The traditional menu almost always includes roasted turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

Before the feast begins, millions of Americans tune in to watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. Featuring massive helium balloons of popular cartoon characters, elaborate floats, and marching bands, the parade concludes with the arrival of Santa Claus. This symbolic moment signals the official start of the Christmas shopping and decorating season.

Illuminating the Dark: Christmas and Hanukkah Displays

As December approaches, American towns and cities undergo a dramatic visual transformation. One of the most widespread traditions is decorating the exterior of homes. Families spend weekends stringing thousands of colorful LED lights along rooflines, wrapping them around trees, and placing inflatable holiday characters on lawns. In many cities, entire neighborhoods coordinate to create massive light displays that draw spectators from miles away.

Inside the home, the centerpiece of Christmas celebrations is the Christmas tree, typically a live pine or fir tree, or a realistic artificial version. Families gather to decorate the tree with ornaments collected over generations, topped with a star or an angel.

For Jewish-American families, the eight-day festival of Hanukkah brings a different kind of light. Families gather nightly to light the menorah, adding one candle each evening. Traditional foods fried in oil, such as latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly donuts), are enjoyed to commemorate the miracle of the oil in the Temple. Children often play a game called dreidel, spinning a four-sided top to win chocolate coins known as gelt.

Cultural Reflections: Kwanzaa and Las Posadas

America's multicultural identity shines through in celebrations like Kwanzaa, created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga. Observed from December 26 to January 1, Kwanzaa honors African-American heritage and culture. Families gather around a seven-branched candelabra called a Kinara to light candles representing the Nguzo Saba, or Seven Principles, which include unity, self-determination, and creativity. The celebration features traditional music, poetry readings, and a large feast called the Karamu on December 31.

In many Hispanic-American communities, the tradition of Las Posadas is central to the season. Running from December 16 to 24, this neighborhood procession reenacts Mary and Joseph's search for shelter in Bethlehem. Participants march through the streets singing traditional songs, stopping at designated houses to ask for lodging. The evening ends with community prayers, festive food like tamales and churros, and children breaking open star-shaped piñatas.

Festive Foods and Community Spirits

Food plays a vital role in connecting American holiday traditions. Beyond the formal dinners, Americans love baking holiday cookies. Gingerbread men, sugar cookies shaped like stars and trees, and peppermint bark are baked in large quantities and shared with neighbors, coworkers, and friends during "cookie exchanges." To wash it down, eggnog—a rich, creamy dairy beverage spiced with nutmeg—is a seasonal staple.

Gift-giving is another cornerstone of the season, extending beyond immediate family. Many workplaces and friend groups host "White Elephant" or "Secret Santa" gift exchanges, emphasizing humor and camaraderie over expensive presents. Charitable giving also peaks during this time, with millions of Americans volunteering at food banks or donating toys to families in need.

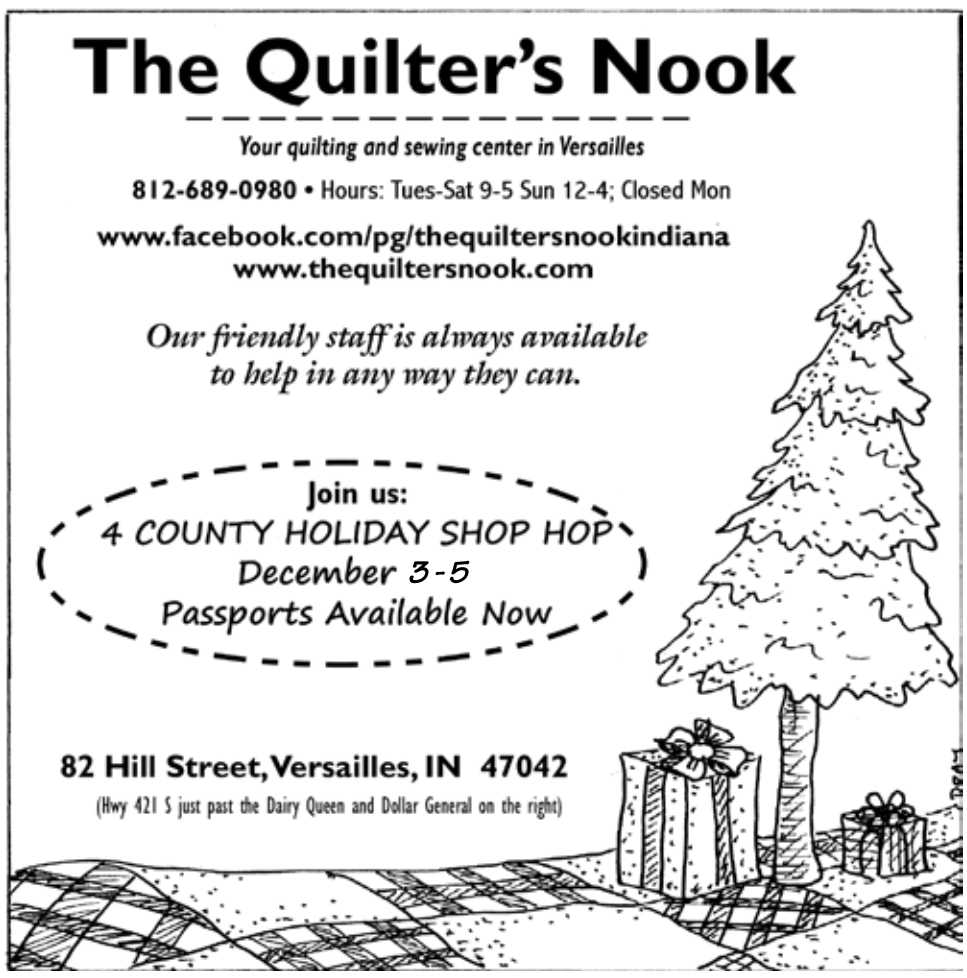
Ringing in the New Year

The marathon of holidays culminates on December 31 with New Year's Eve. While many host private parties or attend formal galas, the quintessential American tradition is watching the Times Square Ball Drop in New York City. Whether standing in the freezing crowd or watching live on television, millions count down the final seconds of the year as a massive crystal ball descends, erupting into a celebration of fireworks, confetti, and the singing of "Auld Lang Syne."

Ultimately, American holiday traditions are defined by their ability to blend individual heritage with shared national customs, creating a season focused entirely on warmth, generosity, and togetherness.







Crafting Your Perfect Thanksgiving Centerpiece and Execution Plan

Crafting your perfect Thanksgiving centerpiece and execution plan requires balancing culinary ambition with realistic kitchen logistics. The ideal feast isn't just about roasting a spectacular turkey; it is about choosing the right menu components that complement one another and timing your kitchen workflow so you can actually enjoy the holiday. By carefully assessing your guest count, dietary needs, and oven space, you can design a seamless Thanksgiving experience from grocery shopping to the final slice of pie.

Selecting the Right Menu and Turkey Size

The foundation of any successful Thanksgiving meal is selecting the correct bird and scaling your side dishes accordingly. As a general rule of thumb, plan for **1 to 1.5 pounds of turkey per guest.** If you want plenty of leftover sandwiches the next day, lean closer to 1.5 or even 2 pounds per person. For smaller gatherings of four to six people, a whole turkey can be overwhelming; consider a bone-in turkey breast or a roasted chicken instead.

When planning the rest of the menu, aim for balance. If your turkey is rich and savory, ensure your sides offer contrasting textures and flavors. A well-rounded menu should feature:

- **One main protein** (such as a classic herb-roasted turkey)
- **Two starches** (one creamy, like mashed potatoes, and one textured, like stuffing)
- **Two vegetable sides** (one green and vibrant, like roasted brussels sprouts, and one sweet or earthy, like glazed carrots)

(story continues on p. 15)

(story continued from p. 14)

- **Two to three conditional components** (gravy, cranberry sauce, and dinner rolls)
- **One or two desserts** (traditionally pumpkin, pecan, or apple pie)

The Thanksgiving Menu Plan

Here is a curated, elegant, and crowd-pleasing menu designed for eight to ten guests. It hits all the traditional high notes while keeping kitchen logistics manageable.

- **The Centerpiece:** Herb and Butter Roasted Turkey with Traditional Gravy
- **The Starches:** Garlic Mashed Potatoes and Classic Herb Stuffing (Sausage Optional)
- **The Greens & Veggies:** Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Balsamic Glaze and Maple-Glazed Carrots
- **The Essentials:** Homemade Spiced Cranberry Sauce and Flaky Dinner Rolls
- **The Grand Finale:** Classic Pumpkin Pie with Spiced Whipped Cream

The Execution Timeline: A Stress-Free Strategy

The secret to a relaxed Thanksgiving is maximizing the work you do before Thursday morning. Oven space is your most valuable commodity, so your strategy should rely on dishes that can be made ahead of time or served at room temperature.

Three Days Before (Monday)

If you bought a frozen turkey, begin thawing it in the refrigerator now. A safe thaw requires roughly 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds of bird.

Two Days Before (Tuesday)

Bake your pumpkin pie today. Pumpkin pie texturally benefits from cooling completely and chilling in the refrigerator overnight to set. You can also make your cranberry sauce today; its flavors will deepen over 48 hours, and it can be served chilled or at room temperature.

One Day Before (Wednesday)

Chop all your vegetables, cube your bread for the stuffing, and store them in airtight containers. You can assemble the stuffing casserole today, cover it, and keep it in the fridge unbaked. Peel and chop your potatoes, storing them completely submerged in a bowl of water in the refrigerator so they do not brown.

Thanksgiving Day (Thursday)

- **6 Hours Before Dinner:** Take the turkey out of the refrigerator to take the chill off. Preheat your oven.
- **4 Hours Before Dinner:** Put the turkey in the oven. Roast until a thermometer reads 165°F (74°C) in the thickest part of the thigh.
- **1 Hour Before Dinner:** Remove the turkey from the oven. Let it rest for at least 30 to 45 minutes. This step is critical; it keeps the meat juicy and frees up your oven.
- **During the Rest Window:** Turn the oven up to 400°F (204°C). Pop in your pre-assembled stuffing and your vegetable sides to roast. Boil and mash your potatoes on the stovetop, and use the turkey pan drippings to whisk together a fresh gravy.

By the time the turkey is carved, your sides will emerge hot and crisp from the oven, resulting in a perfectly coordinated, memorable holiday dinner.

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

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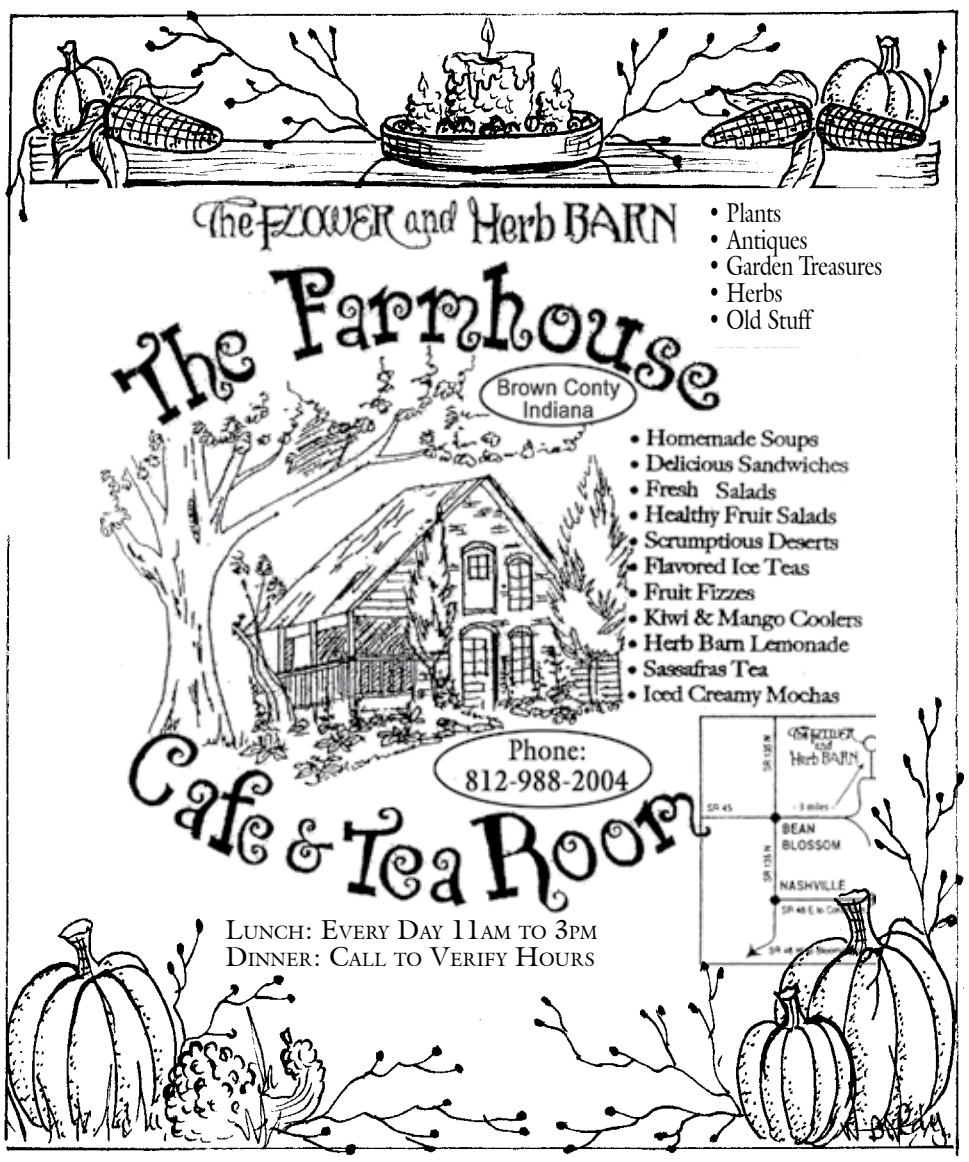


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METAMORA

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.





The Art of Writing a Christmas Letter

by Judy Sharer

Did you know there is an art to writing a Christmas letter? At least when I was young and still writing letters to Santa Claus there was a method in my wording. I'd always start with the toy or item I wanted the most. Notice, I said toy or item. As I grew older my list changed from all toys to more grown-up necessities.

Instead of trying to explain in detail, I'll share one of my letters to Santa as best as I can remember.

Dear Santa,

I hope you and Mrs. Claus are doing well and that all the elves and reindeers have had a good year also. I am well. I caught the chickenpox in June during summer vacation, so I didn't get to miss any days of school like my best friend Lorie. She got to miss almost four weeks, but she still had to do all the work. I guess having them during vacation was OK.

I plan to watch as many Christmas specials as I can fit into my schedule. I know the elves are busy making presents and I am busy making some presents for my family too. Grandma let me use some of the buttons in her button tin and I am gluing them onto picture frames to give to all my aunts and uncles. Mom said I can give the frame to both of them with my school picture inside. I think they will be all right with one gift for both of them. At least I hope so.

This year I have a few things I really would like. The number one thing is a camera with film and flash bulbs. If you can bring me the camera, feel free to mention the film and flash bulbs to my parents and other family members. You can never have too much film. And don't worry I'll act surprised when I open their packages. Next, I'd like a Spirograph. Not a Spirotot for ages 3-7. I feel I am old enough to handle the bigger set with more designs. This way I won't have to ask for the larger version later. I'll already have it and know how to use it. I would also like a few new books to read. As you know, Santa, mysteries are my favorite. And I'd like some blue and green yarn to knit a new hat that I saw on one of the girls at school. I asked, and Grandma already said she'd help me make it. Did I mention I wanted a camera and film? I can make do without as many flash bulbs, but the camera and film are very very important. Well, that's it for my list this year. Thank you for reading my letter and after the new year look for a thank you note that Mom makes me write to everyone after Christmas.

I wish you and Mrs. Claus a wonderful holiday. Don't eat too many cookies before you get to my house, because I'm making chocolate chip cookies just for you. If you can't eat them all, you can take them home to share with Mrs. Claus. I'll understand.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!
Sincerely,
your friend
Judy Sharer

Now that's a well composed letter to Santa! And yes, I did get a camera and plenty of film for Christmas that year.

Judy Sharer is the author of a wholesome historical romance four-book series set in Kansas during the 1850s and 60s titled A Plains Life. *Her newly released spicy historical romance novel titled Secrets in Room Four is set in a small town in northwestern PA, post-civil war. All are published by The Wild Rose Press and available wherever online books and eBooks are sold.* A Plains Life *series has a thread of quilting that runs through the sweet family saga story. Visit judysharer.com for more details.*

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.

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MADISON

Building Harmony

A Cold and Furry Night

by Jeff Cappis

It was one of those stormy Friday nights. The rain was driving down and lightening was flashing constantly all around, Cathy and I were intrigued by the storm as the thunder rattled our house. Our dog Waldo didn't take it quite so easily though. He either tried to find a place to hide, (like behind a toilet) or huddled close to us when the thunder clapped. We had to keep an eye on him so he didn't piddle on the floor in fear. That was fine with him. He liked to stay close.

Later on that night Cathy grew tired and went to bed but I was still watching the storm. Something about these storms draws me to them. There is a smell to the rain and the sound of it driving down. The flash of light and eventual boom. Wow. I decided to step outside to experience it first hand.

There is a good spot for this just outside the garage door. The eves protected me (barely) from the rain and I got a good view of nature's fury. The trees on our property were whipping around with the wind. I was in awe. Then I heard the door close behind me and latch.

I was locked out. Drat. I considered ringing the doorbell but this would mean waking up Cathy. After careful consideration I looked for another option.

At least I was mostly protected under that eve for the moment and the show was spectacular. Every time the forest lit up, I could see every leaf and every blade of grass for just an instant. Between lightning flashes, the forest was mostly dark, except for a small solar light some forty feet away.

Boom! Cool! Flash! Wow! Boom..... This was going on for a while when I noticed something out of the corner of my eye. Something moved in front of that solar light. It cast a silhouette towards me through the mist.

In the brief flashes of light, I could see it was close to the ground with spiky wet fur violently shaking off water. Between the flashes it let out a horrible howl. Then the forest would go dark again.

Still I could tell through that faint shadow in the mist, that it was getting bigger, or closer. I was blinded by another lightening flash. Again, darkness and a sinister howl.

Now I could hear it panting. It even let out an occasional snort. I tried the door. Still locked. I dare not move or make a noise. Perhaps it hadn't seen me. With the rain driving down, the wind a few blinding flashes, the immediate booms and all that howling I was getting pretty unhinged.

Now I could smell whatever it was and it was rank and close by. There were noises all around and I wasn't sure what to trust.

Suddenly it leapt at me... knocking me to the ground hard. I could feel its weight as it landed on me and even more: it's claws on my chest! It growled and howled. It drooled on my face as it came ever closer.

In the lightning flashes I could see its spiked wet fur and its teeth up close. Its breath stank. It gave out one last howl as I prepared to lose my entire face and then...It licked me.

Then it wagged its tail. What? After a moment my heart settled down. Turns out Waldo had sneaked outside with me and got lost in the rain. He was wet, lost and scared but more than happy to find me. He tried to lick my entire face off. Things went from scary to just kind of gross.

The door stayed locked so we hung out under that eve and watched the storm. Waldo even started to enjoy it. He was soaked, but we had fun.

All of this made me wonder: Why do dogs smell when they get wet?

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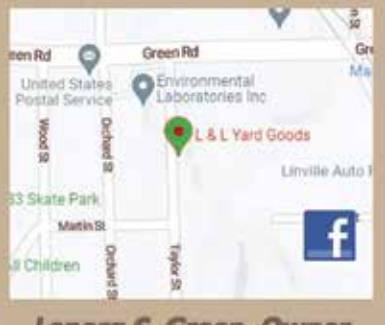
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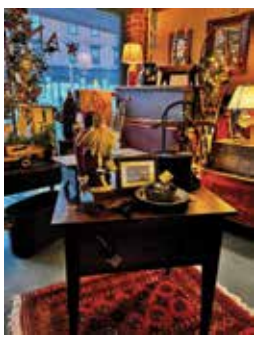
Become Inspired

Decorating, Entertaining and Living in the Early American Style

by Annice Rockwell

Anticipating the Wonder

Often one of the most anticipated times of the year, the holiday season is filled with plentiful opportunities to create spaces that welcome and inspire. With themed gatherings planned for family and friends, we often feel a great sense of anticipation to share our creativity and to beautifully transform our homes to suit the season of celebration.



Charming Authenticity

In order to design a seasonal space we can often use some of our favorite classic antiques accented by elements of nature to surround us with charming authenticity. An antique lift-top mule chest in early red paint can be heightened and enhanced by stacking a smaller antique box in blue on top. Nestling boughs of evergreen between a primitive trencher and a blue decorated stoneware jug adds a balancing touch of nature to our vignette.

Antique sleds that radiantly reveal their use from age can be adorned with a spray of fresh hemlock, red berries and twinkling white lights to brighten the corner of the hearth. Centerpieces created by using a large divided carrier filled with greens and cones can feature a glass chimney to hold an antique hogscraper or one of our favorite scented country candles like "Orange Clove Pomander" or "Balsam Christmastide."

Early punched tin lighting that has come to represent tradition and comfort can be used to cast the beautiful play of light it was intended to create. Petite cedar trees in various sizes can be placed in crocks, firkins, early kegs or baskets to enliven a seating area or even brighten a

country bathroom. Handmade country stockings fashioned from woven coverlets in bright red can be filled with greens and hung on our mantel or an interior door to add texture and color to our rooms.

Embracing the Magic

One of the blessings of the holidays is planning a festive night out with friends to take in the sights and sounds of Christmas. Main streets of small towns become magical and unusually alive on an Open House Night when storefront windows gleam with the glow of Christmas. Through the front windows we can see freshly decorated inviting displays of antiques, textiles, scented candles and decorations that deeply appeal to our country style. As we enter these local shops the music of the dulcimer plays traditional tunes while we take in a cup of hot mulled cider while we browse. We know that the hand-selected purchases we make are even more special because they are local and support the shops that provide us with a sense of genuine connection.

After finding the perfect treasures to give as gifts or the ideal antique to enhance our displays, we can visit a local restaurant that promises to be a memorable part of our night. Taking time to plan a festive, local night out is time well-spent as we share in the abundant blessings of giving.

This season, enjoy the anticipation of creating magic. Transform your home to include the splendor of a country Christmas. Spend a treasured evening with friends embracing the sense of wonder that this spectacular season always brings.

Annice Bradley Rockwell is an educator and owner of Pomfret Antiques. She is currently working on her book, New England Girl. NewEnglandGirl2012@hotmail.com

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.





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Wit & Wisdom

It's That Time Again!

by Juleann Lattimer

The days are getting shorter, the trees are getting barer, and the weather is getting colder. And if that weren't enough to remind me that the holidays are just around the corner, the stores are displaying Christmas decorations and it's not even Halloween.

When my children were young it was a red-letter day when the Christmas catalog arrived in the mailbox (remember those?) They spent hours poring over each page, with their greedy little fingers pointing, "I want this and this and this." By the middle of December that catalog looked like it had been run through a paper shredder. It wouldn't have even been good for use in the privy!

Oh how their eyes twinkled with excitement and anticipation and trust. They were excited knowing that Christmas would soon arrive. They anticipated lots of good things, and they trusted their loving parents to give them all the toys they had chosen.

That never happened. Many toys they chose were not age-appropriate, too expensive, and some I just didn't like. We chose the ones we could afford and those we liked – not always the ones they had pointed to in the catalog, because we loved them and knew better than they what was best for them.

And that's exactly how my loving heavenly Father answers my requests. When I say, "I want this and this and this to happen this way," He often doesn't give me my desires. But He always gives me what He knows is best for me.

So, like my little children on Christmas morning, I will delight in all the wonderful gifts given, which far eclipse those that a wise and loving Father has withheld.

If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him. (Matt.7:11).

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.

Pennsylvania Dutch Dried Corn

submitted by Janet M. Bair



1 package of Copes Dried Sweet Corn (available on Amazon)
1 cup milk
1 tiny can evaporated milk (If you don't have evaporated milk, use a half cup more of regular milk.)
1 tsp salt
2 tsp sugar
2 Tablespoons butter

Directions:
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.*
The next day, *remove dish from fridge early to let it warm up before putting it into the oven. Add: 1 tsp salt, 2 tsp sugar and 2 Tablespoons butter. Cover with foil.*

Bake at 350 about 45 minutes

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Those Were The Days!

Taking a Panoramic View
Looking at it from a Wide-Angle Lens

by Jay Mark

Full and honest confession. From my earliest days, I have always been captivated by photography. Based on my age, which I am not revealing, I have used nearly every photographic format – from the classic Speed Graphic, to the Argus C3 35 mm camera, to the single lens reflex, to digital cameras.

For the most part, I have seen it all. Gigantic advancements and improvements. Oh, I almost forgot - the digital phone camera. Like many, I wasn't comfortable with radical changes - only to humbly and fully embrace it over time.

It's not unlike aviation. Think of it. In a century-and-a-quarter we've observed a machine that could barely hang on to a few feet above the earth, to today where a whole community it would seem, can soar through the air for endless hours from one side of the planet to the other side. Photographically, cameras have gone from cumbersome one shot at a time that had to wait for the darkroom to see what was shot. Now, we can take 100s of photos at once. And view them instantly.

What brought all this to mind was my recent discovery of an unusually undated, panoramic photographic postcard. On its 3 ½ x11" length, are depicted 22 people that appear to be early 20th century college students. That got me thinking about the challenges early photographers faced when attempting to take wide-angle, panoramic pictures.

Printed on the back of the card was a valuable clue as to how this remarkable image was accomplished. It reads *"Al-Vista" Multiscope and Film Company, Burlington, Wisconsin.* It told me that that company that manufactured the camera, also produced the film and paper.

In the time after George Eastman introduced his roll-film Kodak camera in 1888, amateur photography exploded. That provided opportunities to develop specialty cameras. In 1896, Peter Nickolaus Angston, a German inventor living in Burlington, Wisconsin, devised a camera with the capability of shooting 160° wide-angle, panoramic photographs.

He began selling them in Chicago. But soon, his patent was purchased by four Burlington businessmen, who organized the Multiscope & Film Company that by 1901 was marketing Angston's camera under the Al-Vista name.

The camera was a boxy device clad in textured black leather, resembling other cameras of the day. Except where a lens, shutter and bellows would be was a large opening that featured a lens attached to a leather bellow folded into a narrow case.

When activated, the motor-driven lens would scan the image across film held across a curved back. (Animations of the process can be found on YouTube). Amateurs now had their own wide-angle camera. But at a cost. The most expensive was priced at $45 in 1908. That's over $1600 today. Nearly the cost of the new folding iPhone Duo. And other phones that have a panorama mode, which takes all the hassle out of wide-angle photography.

For a brief period, to expand the camera's use, the Multiscope and Film Co. produced a changing front camera that could replace the wide-angle format mechanism and accommodate a conventional lens and bellows. But the steep price virtually assured the camera couldn't keep up with the competition. After 17 years, the company finally folded, so to speak, leaving a unique camera in the dustbin of history.

Because of their rarity, very few Al-Vista's come on the market making their value high. Cameras in functioning condition will begin at over $1000, rising to over $2000.

Virtually an antique himself, or maybe a "collectible," Jay Mark, has more than a half-century experience in the antiques business. He owns Those Were The Days!, an online specialty bookstore. A recognized historian, he also teaches, lectures and writes about antiques and history. Reach him at jaymarkhistorian@gmail.com.

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An odd c1908 photographic, panoramic postcard started a search for how it was made.



The manufacturer's imprint, upper right, pointed to the discovery of the circa 1908 Al-Vista panorama camera that took the photo.



The ultimate Al-Vista camera was the No.5-F that featured changeable fronts, different size "fan blades" (lower center) that adjusted speed, and case. Photo: Rob Niederman antiquewoodcameras.com





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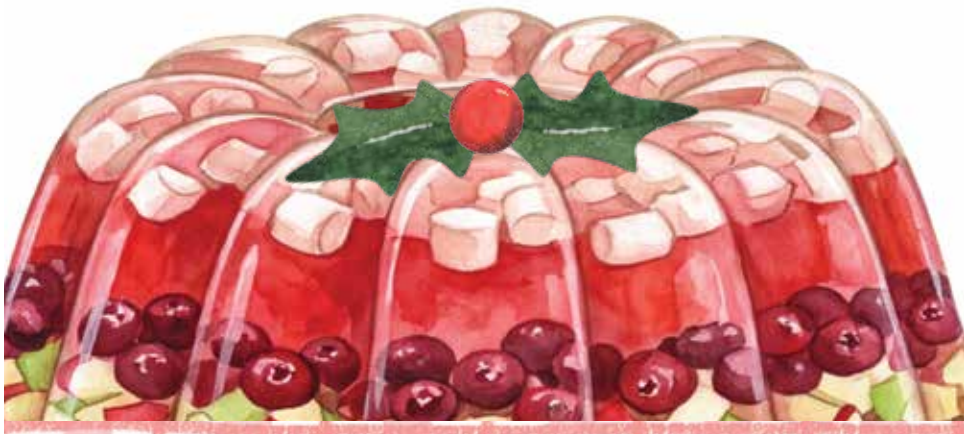
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Moms Cranberry Salad – A real favorite

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!

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