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The Country Register of Colorado & New Mexico, Inc™

November/December 2026

The Country Register is published bi-monthly.

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Address: The Country Register, 11250 Glen Canyon Drive, Peyton, CO 80831

1 Year Subscription Rate (6 issues): $18 Single Copy: $3

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Pieces From My Heart

by Jan Keller

A Dream Come True

The May/June 2003 edition of ***The Country Register*** was a drean come true when I published my first edition of the paper.

Due to the increasing decline in check usage, I was laid off from my position as marketing copywriter from a direct to consumer check publishing company. Part of my severance package was private counseling to assist in determining my next persuit. At one of our meetings, I was asked, "What would be your dream job?"

Even though I had previously submitted articles and had a presence in this and other editions, without a pause I replied, "To publish the Colorado edition of ***The Country Register***, but it already has a publiher."

It was several months later, right around noon, my telephone rang. On the other end of the call I heard the publisher say, "It is with fear and trepidation that I ask if you would be interested in buying the Colorado edition?"

Dumbfounded, I simply sat down!

My husband and I discussed the situation and decided to proceed.

A few years later I acquired the New Mexico edition and merged them together.

Now, nearly a quarter of a century later, I am announcing, with the arrival of 2027, my daughter-in-law, Kim Keller who has successfully been publishing her Minnesota edition of ***The Country Register*** for several years, will also be taking over the day-to-day management of the Colorado/New Mexico edition of ***The Country Register***, while I remain involved behind the scenes. Our goal is to make this transition as smooth as possible—for both our readers and advertisers.

I've truly appreciated the opportunity to make so many readers and friends who faithfully followed me through this publication and the advertisers and who steadfastly supported this paper to made my dream possible!

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Jan shares other pieces of her life in her books, *Pieces From My Crazy Quilt*, and *The Tie That Binds* These books can be ordered by calling 719-866-8570, or writing: Black Sheep Books, 11250 Glen Canyon Drive, Peyton, CO 80831



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A Cup of Tea with Lydia

by Lydia E. Harris



Gifts add joy to this holly–jolly season. I love to give and receive them. But over the years, I've learned gifts from our hearts and hands are often cherished longer than those from our wallets.

When I think back to my childhood Christmases, I remember only a few of the presents I received. What I do remember is the joy of the season and the love and warmth in my childhood home. And it's that kind of love, joy, and warmth I'd like to give others this Christmas through shared experiences.

What gifts of time or experiences could we give to create memories beyond the holiday season?

For children or grandchildren, consider making something together or teaching them new skills (and of course, sipping tea while you do so). We all have unique interests and abilities we can share.

My grandchildren like to cook with "Grandma Tea" (that's me). In early December, we bake and decorate cutout nativity cookies together. This year even two–year–old Owen can join the fun. After the cookies are baked, we have a "milk party," pouring milk from a child–sized teapot into small teacups. When my grandchildren are grown, I think they'll remember our cookie–baking tradition longer than the toys we bought them.

Or how about giving a coupon for a shared experience? I sewed child–sized aprons with two of my grandchildren. Four–year–old Clara sat beside me while we sewed her apron from cute fabric patterned with dolls and teapots. She purposely pushed the foot pedal too fast to startle me and then giggled. Memories!

Do you enjoy serving tea? Perhaps you know a teen or adult who would appreciate a lesson on how to brew tea, bake scones, or plan a tea party. We can "gift" others by passing on this gracious tradition from generation to generation.

Sipping tea together at a tearoom makes a wonderful gift. What friendships could you nurture with a tearoom gift certificate? My husband often gives me a coupon for a tearoom outing. It's more fun to blend our lives over a pot of tea than to receive a new blender. For an early gift, visit a tearoom in December when the shops are decked with Christmas decor. To locate tearooms in your area, check www.teamap.com.

Even though shared experiences often stay in the hearts of the giver and receiver longer than purchased gifts, they may not suit everyone on your list. So how about a tea–related calendar or magazine subscription to enjoy all year? For those who have everything, taste–TEA gifts make a good choice. Create your own gift baskets with tea, goodies, and a cup and saucer. Or add a tea book or a Christmas teapot.

If you bake, try the delicious Holiday Shortbread recipe I've included, and give some as gifts along with a Christmas tea blend. Many tea shops and tea companies carry holiday varie–TEAS. Package the tea and shortbread with a fun note such as: "God bless you, and God bless me. God bless our Christmas with shortbread and tea!"

Gifts that mean the most don't need to cost the most. I didn't grow up in a wealthy home, but my memories are rich because of the love we shared. And it's love–filled, cherished memories I want to create this Christmas with gifts from my hands and heart.

I'm ready to pour a cuppa' peppermint tea and make my list of heartfelt gifts for others. Won't you join me?

"The heart of the giver makes the gift dear and precious." ~*Martin Luther*

Lydia E. Harris, M.A., is a home economist and freelance writer who enjoys serving tea to family and friends in Seattle, Wash. © 2007 Lydia E. Harris. Used with permission. No reprint without the author's permission. Contact her at: LydiaHarris@Qwest.net.

From Lydia's Recipe File: HOLIDAY SHORTBREAD*

CREAM TOGETHER:
1 cup butter, softened 1/4 cup brown sugar
BLEND IN:
2 cups flour
Spread into a greased 9 x 9 inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes.
COMBINE:
1 1/3 cups flaked coconut 1/3 cup golden raisins
1/2 cup mixed red and green candied cherries, cut in half
1/3 cup candied pineapple chunks, cut in half
(Or substitute 8 ozs. candied cherry–pineapple mix for cherries and pineapple)
1/3 cup chopped walnuts (Or substitute almonds, pecans, cashews)
1 cup sweetened condensed milk
Spread over shortbread and bake an additional 30–35 minutes or until golden brown. Cool. If desired, dust with powdered sugar. Cut into small squares. Makes 2–3 dozen cookies.

*Adapted from *Christmas at Home with Mary & Martha: Dishin' Up Desserts & Hope*

Life on My Farm

by Donna Jo Copeland

Pockets Filled with Thankfulness



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, 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 goats and sheep. Fresh eggs from my hens. A very full pocket.

In another pocket I will carry my family and 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, streams, 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 are 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 and fill your own pockets of thankfulness.

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

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.

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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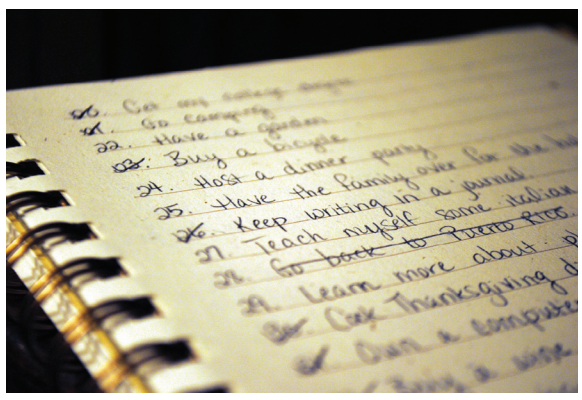
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Life Without "Buckets"

By Barbara Kalkis

Sudden flashes of enlightenment are so common that we even have a term for them. They're called "Ah-Hah!" moments. However, I find that some of my instant insights are more like "Huh??" moments. I realized this flaw a few years ago when I had the brilliant idea that my friend and I should attend a cowgirls-only weekend at a guest ranch.



Since the only horses we had ever ridden were actually ponies at summer fairs and we were just tots at the time, and we're both city people, you may ask, "How did you ever get this idea into your head?" Easy. It seemed like a good idea at the time. One of those "ah-hah" thoughts that should have been a "huh?" My other defense is that my friend agreed to it.

The ranch owners agreed to our desire to stay behind as all the other women climbed into the saddle every morning. While they cantered off for the day's excursion we hiked, explored the area (in the car) and lazed away afternoons reading and chatting. In the evenings, we enjoyed conversations with the "cowgirls" over delicious dinners and homemade pies. Stunning scenery, perfect weather, peaceful days and star-filled nights made the entire experience idyllic. Or so I thought.

Checking out at the end of the weekend, I told the cashier that I would return sometime. Then the "Huh??" moment arrived. As my friend completed her transaction, the cashier extended a warm invitation to return. I expected the same response I had given. Instead, she laughed airily and replied, "Oh no! I have too many other trips on my bucket list to ever return here."

I turned to see the cashier looking stunned and realized that I had the same look on my face. But for different reasons. The cashier was clearly shocked at my friend's rebuff. Me too, but I was more shocked to hear the term, "bucket list" outside of a movie. Was I missing some important life requirement? Should I keep a list of my hopes and dreams as if they are items to be completed and checked off in order to move on to new adventures?

What's in Your Bucket? Lists or Goals?

It's great to have lists of things to do. We all have them, but lists are different than goals. Lists are tasks to be checked off. Goals are dreams that have a completion date attached to them. That is their beauty. Goals can be fulfilled at home or any place we choose. They are priorities for any time of the year.

Crafters are spontaneous thinkers, idea people. We fill our lives with art that we've created and with stashes that will become something at some point in time. As each season unfolds with its own palette of colors and life happenings, crafters see the potential to create new beauty. It doesn't require a trip to see potential. Contentment and joy are not list items.

That's not a "huh?" realization. It's the "ah-hah!" moment to cherish.

©Barbara Kalkis. Barbara is a high-tech marketer and public relations consultant, but her first loves are teaching and writing. She's the author of Little Ditties for Every Day: A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm. Contact her at BarbaraKalkis01@gmail.com.

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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.

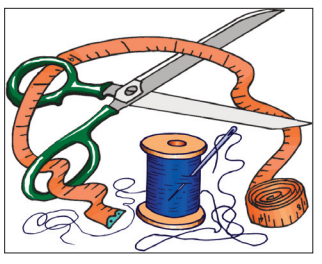
Sewing machines are relatively light compared to cars, and I can keep a whole bunch of them around without the neighbors complaining. Or more importantly perhaps without Kerri complaining. (I should put in a disclaimer here-Kerri is absolutely accommodating to my many and varied projects. She is not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

Lemon Cheese Cake Mug Recipe

Ingredients:
- 1/2 cup lemon cake mix
- 1/2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp vanilla yogurt
- 3 tbsp water
- 1oz cream cheese
- Whipped cream for topping
- Lemon zest for topping

Directions:
1. Mix cake mix, oil, yogurt and water in mug.
2. Push cream cheese block into the center.
3. Microwave on high for 2 1/2 minutes.
4. Top with whipped cream and lemon zest.



Recipe by The Bitter Side of Sweet

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.

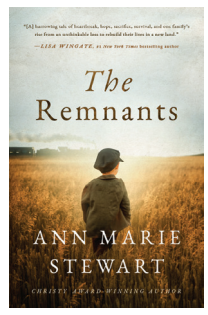
If I had to guess, I'd say she cost less than a dollar back in the 1950s. Her value today? Priceless!

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: www.beckyvanvleet.com.

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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.

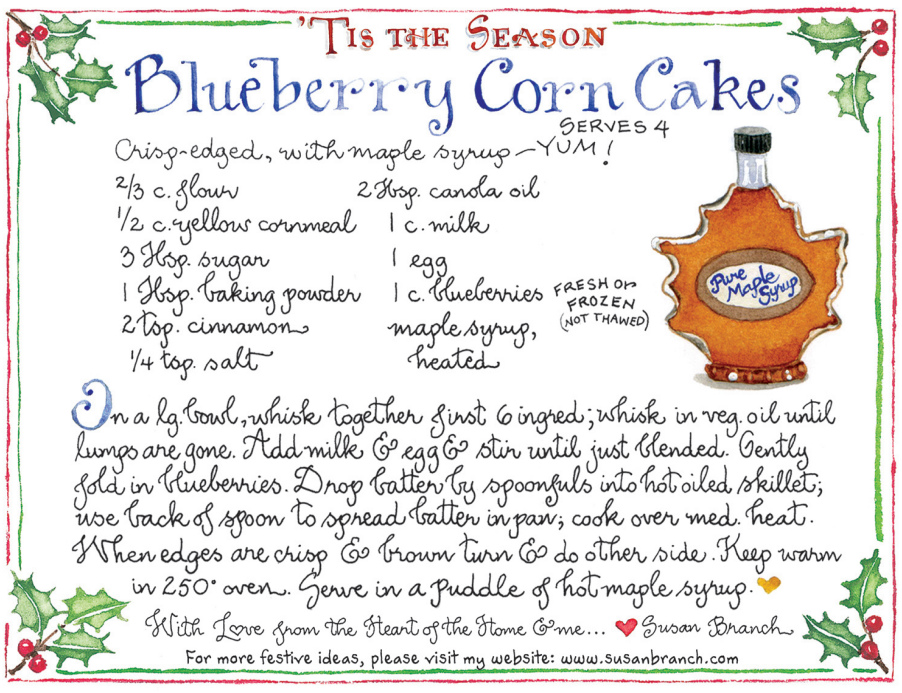
And I knew exactly when I was done. When my life investment meant a book launch for a novel that was passionate, exciting, terribly applicable to the present day, and tied up with historical moments.

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?

Go to my website and check out the Book Trailer: www.AnnMarieStewart.com. If that's a book that resonates with you, please consider purchasing it on Amazon on October 26, 2026.



Why Do Leaves Change Color?

by Colleen Gust

As autumn sweeps in, summer trees trade their greens for a dazzling display of reds, oranges, and yellows. This annual transformation is more than just a visual treat—it's a fascinating process rooted in plant biology.

Leaves owe their green color to chlorophyll, the molecule responsible for photosynthesis. As daylight shortens and temperatures drop in fall, trees begin to shut down food production, causing chlorophyll to break down. With the green pigment fading, other pigments—carotenoids and anthocyanins—emerge. Carotenoids, present all summer but masked by chlorophyll, reveal brilliant yellows and oranges.



The story of the red hues, produced by anthocyanins, is more mysterious. Unlike carotenoids, anthocyanins are manufactured by some trees in the fall, just as the leaf is about to be shed. Interestingly, this process requires energy at a time when the tree is preparing for dormancy. Scientists are still not entirely sure why trees expend valuable resources to make these red pigments. Theories abound: some suggest the red acts as a sunscreen, protecting leaves from excess sunlight and allowing more nutrients to be reabsorbed before the leaf drops; others think it deters pests or signals unpalatability to insects.

Beyond their beauty, fallen leaves have numerous practical uses. In gardens, you can shred them to create nutrient-rich mulch or add them to compost bins, enriching soil for the next growing season. Leaves also make excellent insulation material for tender plants, protecting roots from winter frost. Wildlife benefits too—many insects and small animals use leaf litter as habitat or a food source during colder months. Creative projects abound as well: leaves can be pressed for art, used in natural dyeing, or incorporated into autumn-themed crafts.

So, while filling pumpkin-shaped leaf sacks is a fun tradition, the humble autumn leaf offers much more—both in ecological value and creative potential. The colors of fall are not just a fleeting wonder, but part of a rich natural cycle that benefits gardens, wildlife, and humans alike.

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).

If you enjoy reading articles from the Wit and Wisdom Writers such as Cheryl, you may also enjoy the books authored by the group. Contact the authors at:witandwisdomwriters@gmail.com.

Broccoli Salad

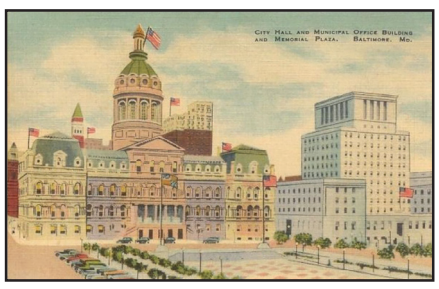
submitted by Juleann Lattimer



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



On this day in History

November 1, 1800: President John Adams, in the last year of his only term as president, moved into the newly constructed President's House, the original name for what is known today as the White House. Adams had been living in temporary digs at Tunnicliffe's City Hotel near the half-finished Capitol building since June 1800, when the federal government was moved from Philadelphia to the new capital city of Washington, D.C. John and Abigail Adams lived in what she called "the great castle" for only five months. Shortly after they moved in, Thomas Jefferson defeated Adams in his bid for re-election.

December 30, 1903: A fire in the Iroquois Theater in Chicago, Illinois, kills more than 600 people. It was the deadliest theater fire in U.S. history. Blocked fire exits and the lack of a fire-safety plan caused most of the deaths.During the matinee performance 27 of the theater's 30 exits were locked. One of the calcium lights seemed to have sparked a fire backstage. The cluttered area was full of fire fuel–wooden stage props and oily rags. When the actors became aware of the fire, they scattered backstage. An asbestos curtain was to be lowered that would confine the fire but when it wouldn't come fully down, a panic began. It later turned out to be made of paper so it wouldn't have helped in any case. Soon, all the lights inside the theater went out and there were stampedes near the open exits. When the back door was opened, the shift of air caused a fireball to roar through the backstage area. Most of the 591 people who died were seated in the balconies. There were no fire escapes or ladders to assist them and some took their chances and jumped. The bodies were piled six deep near the narrow balcony exits. In fact, some people were knocked down by the falling bodies and were eventually pulled out alive from under burned victims.

Information found on www.history.com

Preserving Your Family's Heritage

by Patty Legg Duncan

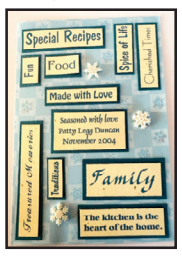
In 2002, my sister and I began a heartfelt journey to uncover and preserve our family's history. For over 20 years, we dedicated ourselves to collecting stories passed down through the generations, recording important dates and creating a life history scrapbook that celebrates both our paternal and maternal roots.



In 2004, I enrolled in a class at my favorite local scrapbook store to create a scrapbook of recipes. Each week, the instructor provided themed materials for us to design pages featuring the week's recipes. Each used a 8.5" x 5.5" pieces of colorful card-stock as the base, and after class, we would slide our completed recipe cards into plastic sleeves in our notebooks.



As the class progressed, the teacher invited us to submit our favorite recipes. She would then transform them into beautifully designed pages, complete with themed embellishments, for our upcoming classes. Inspired by this creative process, I decided to preserve our family's cherished recipes by making personalized cook-books as Christmas gifts for my sisters and daughters. Thus, the "Legg Family Recipe Book" was born.





Each book began with a custom-designed title page and divider cards for different sections. I created recipe cards for our family favorites – appetizers, sides, entrees, snacks, and desserts. Many of the cards included are not just the recipes, but also the family stories behind them. For example, tucked into the pocket with my mom's Easter Deviled Egg recipe is a funny family anecdote that adds sentimental value to that recipe.

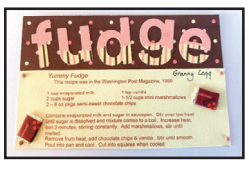
Over the next five years, I continued to craft new recipe cards for birthdays and holidays and gifted them to each family for their book. I even created two additional books for a social club I belong to, compiling favorite recipes from fellow members. We raffled these off as part of our fundraising efforts.

In total, I have created five recipe scrapbooks each containing over two hundred treasured recipes. They now sit proudly on my bookshelf, nestling among my other cookbooks.





These recipe scrapbooks have become more than just collections of meals, they are vibrant, creative keepsakes that preserve the flavors and stories of our family's heritage. They serve as a delicious reminder that food is more than sustenance, it is a connection to our past and a gift to future generations.



Patty enjoys family history and genealogy as a hobby, small town history, and photography. She is also an avid scrapbooker and digital storybook maker. She lives in Glendale, AZ, where she spends a lot of time spoiling her grandchildren. Patty works in the sales department for The Country Registers of Arizona/California, Carolinas/Tennessee, Nebraska, and Oregon/Washington/Idaho.

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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 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, scarecrows and Halloween treats for one fun-filled night. The next day, everything orange and black is tossed back into storage 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, out-door 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 pine 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 kitchen 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 92 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 black night 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

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Three Steps to Holiday Organization

by Julie Pirtle



The sugarplums are about to dance and the mistletoe will soon be hung. Before the holiday season is completely making you crazy, take some time now to do some pre-season organizing. You will thank yourself in December!

STEP ONE: PURGE!

Christmas decorations have a strong emotional pull and it is my experience (both personally and professionally) that they are difficult to let go of. So we stack up the boxes, work around them throughout the year and pick through them the following season! STOP THE MADNESS!

Pull all of your Christmas storage boxes out, even the ones that you didn't crack open last year. If you didn't use it in your holiday décor then, chances are you won't this year either. Inspect each item and ask yourself how long it has been since you used it. Let it go if:

- It has been more than two years since you used it.
- Sentimental value? Only keeping it because of a memory attachment? Take a picture of these items and donate them. You can use the pictures to make a framed collage to hang on the wall each season. (Use a multi picture matted frame for fast and easy results!)
- Can't give it away because it was a gift (and it NEVER suited your tastes)? Yes, you CAN. Nobody ever elected you to be the keeper of all things. Filling your space (and this includes storage space) with items that have no meaning to you only fills your life with clutter. Your space is sacred. Fill it wisely.
- "I might use it someday." Someday is here and you didn't use it. (Just sayin'.)

Now you can take all of those past treasures and donate them to your favorite charity. Do it before January 1 and you can even claim it on your taxes!

STEP TWO: PACK IT UP!

Are you feeling accomplished yet? You should! Pat yourself on the back for all of the items you have let go of and all of the space you are creating in your life. Here are some tips for packing up the items you are keeping to make them ready for the upcoming season:

- When choosing storage for Christmas items, try using red or green plastic bins. Seeing the red/green containers provides instant visual recognition. If you don't have colored containers, use a roll of green duct tape to make a label on each bin.
- Label each box with the area that the decorations came from. For example, pack everything for the tree in one box and everything that decorates the mantle in another. You will thank yourself this year as it makes it easy to decorate a bit at a time without having to sort through every box to decorate one space!
- Include your Christmas DVDs and CDs when packing. Since they are seasonal items, there is no need to keep them in space that you use year round.
- As you pack, make a list of items that you might need to purchase (i.e. new lights, replacement bulbs, new linens, etc.). This makes the pre-Christmas sales much easier to shop. Just like grocery shopping with a list, you can save money if you only shop for what you have written down!

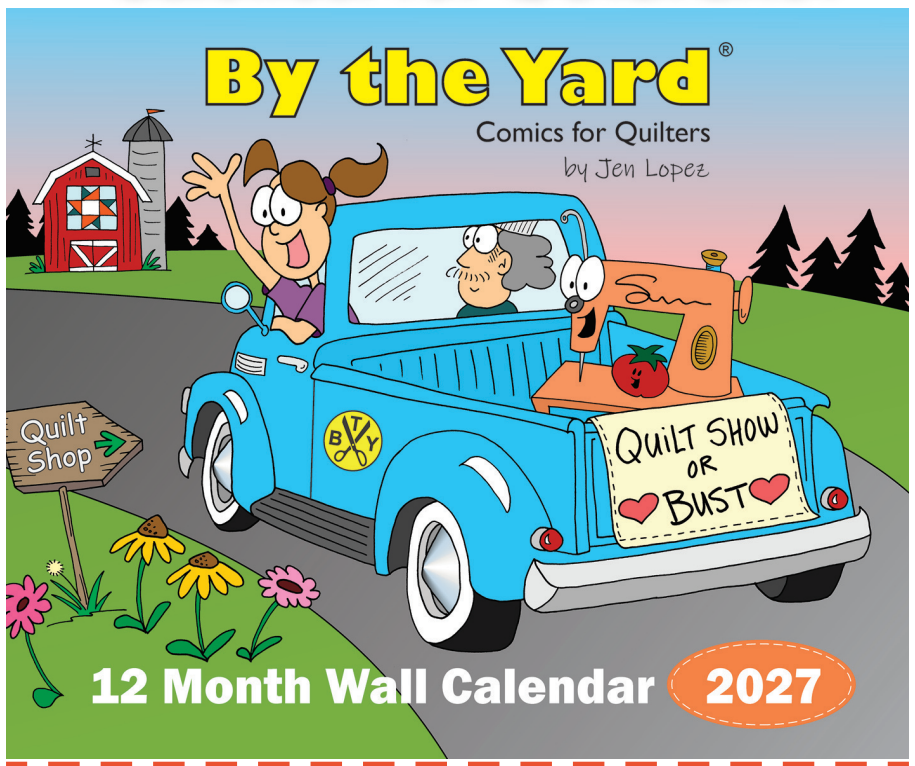
STEP THREE: CONTROL CHRISTMAS CARD CHAOS!

Grab a cup of coffee or tea and sit down with the stack of cards and envelopes that you have stacked up on the desk. (Yes. I know they are there!) Take a bit of time to upgrade your address book and take note of any changes in family members (births, deaths, divorces). Almost all clients I have worked with have a pile of cards that they are saving to "get addresses off of." Those piles get shifted and shoved around all year long. I say do it now and be done with it!

I hope these tips will help you jumpstart your Holiday Season. Let's make it work—before the "clutter happens!"

Julie Pirtle is Owner /Operator of Clutter Happens in Mesa, AZ

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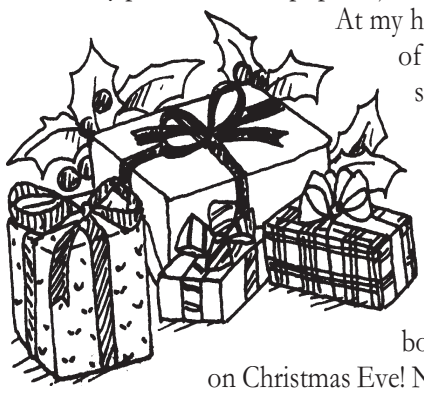
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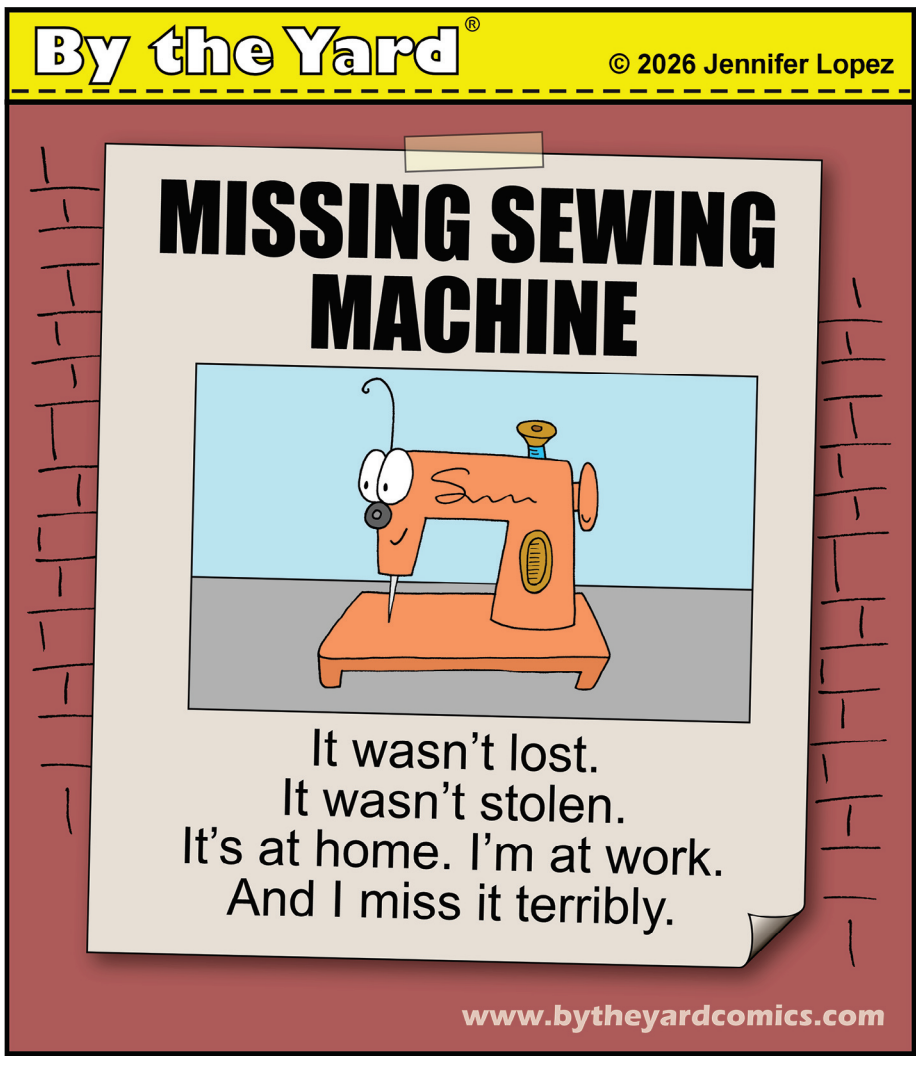
Do you love beautifully wrapped packages under your tree? Most of us do, but we usually put this not-so-popular job off until we absolutely have to get it done.



At my house, finding a pair of scissors and a roll of tape can be a challenge, let alone making sure I have boxes, wrapping paper, bows and tags. And that doesn't even include those cute little package embellishments that all of the gifts in the magazines have. Now I know what you're thinking, sure they look cute and seem like a fun idea until you're looking in your child's craft box for a pair of scissors to wrap presents on Christmas Eve! Not this year, I assure you. You'll be wrapping like a pro in no time with just a little planning ahead. First of all, if you bought wrapping paper and tags on clearance after the holidays last year, this is the time to find it. If you didn't, pick up a few rolls whenever you see a sale. Don't worry if you buy too much, the holidays come around every year! Then, every time you buy a gift, ask if the shop has gift boxes. Many stores give them away! Now, find a spot that's a little out of the way, if possible, and stack the boxes and gift wrap in a corner close by. Last, get a small shopping bag or used gift bag from your stash (the handled kind) and put in scissors, a couple rolls of tape, a pen, gift tags, and an envelope for any receipts or tags you find in your shopping bags. Put your bag with your paper and boxes and when you are ready to wrap, your wrap is ready for you!

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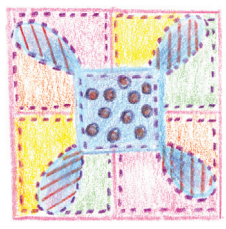
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Writing From Life

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.

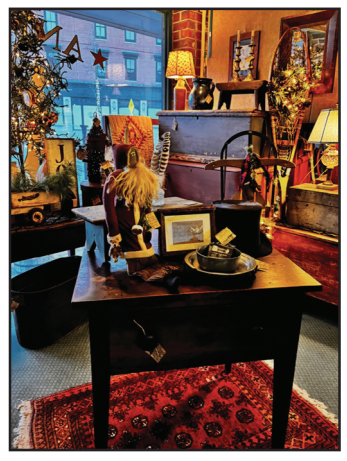
In a similar fashion, I am reminded of trips taken when I pull fabric out of my stash. The cute little white shop...the interesting ways hay is cut when harvested. (Round bails, square bails, or little haystacks the Amish still create by hand.) The fabrics I purchased along the way remind me of those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

Become Inspired

by Annice Bradley 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

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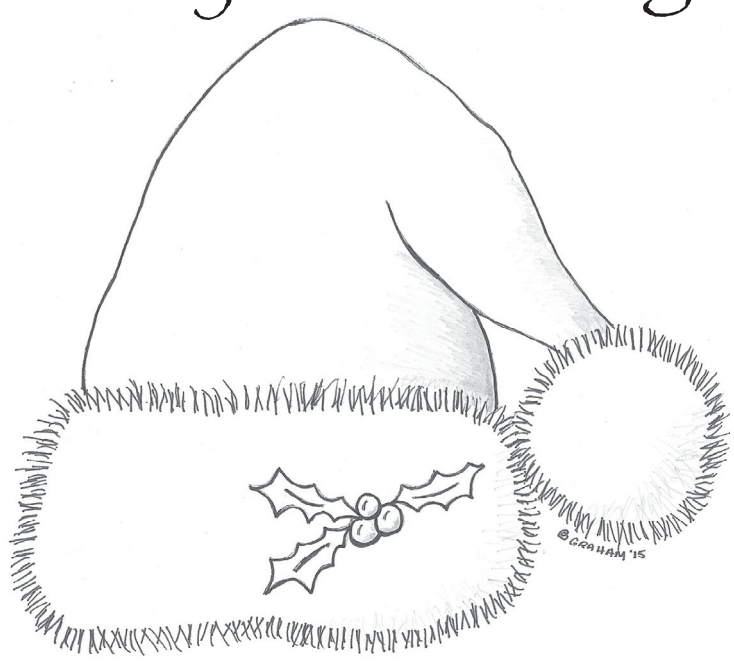
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Santa's Cap

This pattern is free for you to use. Please give the artist credit. Not for commercial use. Enlarge this pattern to your desired size. This quick pattern can be appliqued, needlepunched, hooked or even painted. It would be great to repeat as a border. Have fun!

Designed by Kathy Graham

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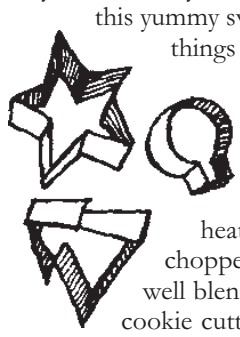
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Cookie Cutter Candy

We all have people in our lives that do little things for us all year long. The sweet lady at the library, the bus driver, the newspaper boy — any of them would like this yummy sweet treat you can make to hand out to those who do sweet things for you! Wash and dry approximately 10-12 plastic holiday cookie cutters (the number of candies this recipe yields will ultimately depend on the size of your cookie cutters). I use 3" x 1 1/2" candy canes. Place cookie cutters on a waxed-paper lined cookie sheet. In a heavy sauce pan, melt 3 7 oz. milk chocolate candy bars with almonds over low heat. Stir in 1/3 c. coconut, 1/3 c. mini marshmallows, 1/3 c. chopped candied cherries and 1/4 c. raisins. Stir until mixture is well blended. Remove from heat and spoon chocolate mixture into cookie cutters. Chill baking sheet in refrigerator 1 hour. Store in air-tight container in refrigerator. When ready to gift, place cookie cutter in cellophane bag and tie with red and green curling ribbon.



©Susan Tipsord

Eggnog French Toast in a Mug



- 1 slice of bread, cubed (preferably day-old)
- 1/4 cup eggnog
- 1 egg
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp vanilla extract
- (optional) powdered sugar and maple syrup

1. Whisk together the eggnog, egg, cinnamon and vanilla extract.
2. Add the cubed bread.
3. Stir until the pieces are soaked in the mixture.
4. Microwave on high for 1 to 1 1/2 minutes or until the egg mixture is fully cooked and the bread is soft and custardy.
5. Let it cook for a minute.
6. Sprinkle with powdered sugar and drizzle with maple syrup.

Recipe by Simplify



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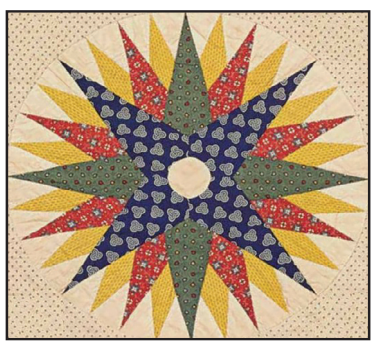
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The Mariner's Compass Quilt Pattern

by Rachel Grecco



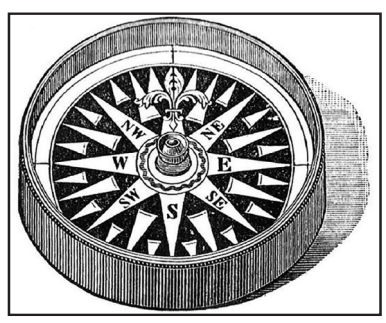
During the early to mid-1800s, Mariner's Compass quilt patterns were very popular. According to Quilt Historian Barbara Brackman, they were among the earliest named quilting designs in America. These quilt blocks are quite intricate and require skill in setting them together so that they lay flat. Other names for this type of quilt block include Rising Sun, Sunburst, Chips and Whetstones, and Sunrise.

Instead of originating from a square design, Mariner's Compass quilts are created from a circle with radiating points. The number of radiating points and designs vary, but they usually contain from sixteen to thirty-two radiating points or rays. This quilt pattern may have originated in 18th Century England, with the earliest documented Mariner's Compass style of quilt found in Britain. It is not known whether this quilt was actually called a Mariner's Compass, as documentation accompanying it showed a date of 1726, but did not include a name.

Although the exact design source is not currently known, it is highly possible that these types of quilts have their origins in the wind rose, a meteorological and nautical design element that is often found on compasses, maps, and monuments.

Maps and nautical charts often included a compass rose for displaying the orientation of cardinal directions, as well as their intermediate points. Sometimes called wind rose or Rose of the Winds, the compass rose is found in almost all navigational systems, including nautical charts, non-directional beacons, omnidirectional range systems, and global positioning systems.

The wind rose, along with the similarly designed compass star, was very ornate. At a time when sailors heavily depended on the wind for navigation, the wind rose was used to show cardinal directions—east, west, south and north—as well as intermediate directions. They contained from four to thirty-two points and were featured on charts and maps from as early as the 1300s.



Early American quilts with the mariner's compass style of design were most often found near the Atlantic Coast where the shipping and fishing industries were centered, thus giving credence to the idea that the nautical wind rose was used as inspiration for the quilt block.

The skill level required to create a quilt block resembling a wind rose increases depending on how many points the block contains. The more points a block has, the harder it becomes to piece each sharp point.

Today, the Mariner's Compass style of quilt block can be created using paper piecing methods, making it much easier to construct than those made by hand in the 19th Century.

Rachel Greco owns Grandma's Attic, a traditional quilt shop and a large on-line store in Dallas, Oregon. She has written several books and patterns and runs Grandma's Quilt Club, a monthly quilt class where participants collect quilt blocks, learn about quilt history, and make new friends. Learn more at https://grandmasatticquilting.com.



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.

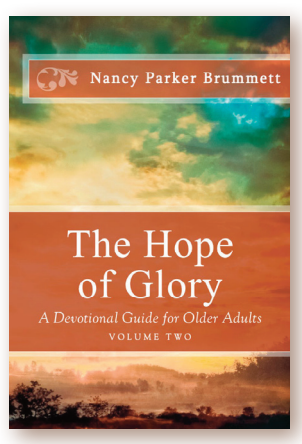
Messages from friends on Facebook were so kind: "My heart breaks for you." "She was such a sweet kitty." "I'm so very sorry for your loss." Please know that *I know firsthand* that losing a pet doesn't compare to losing a loved one. But it is a loss nonetheless, and it's so sweet when friends come alongside 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.

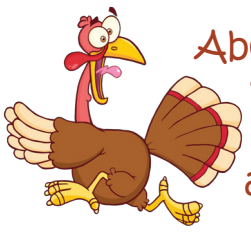
It didn't surprise me to read that a book by science journalist Lydia Denworth, ***Friendship: The Evolution, Biology, and Extraordinary Power of Life's Fundamental Bond***, includes research proving that friendship is not only good for our emotional health but for our physical health as well. Bottom 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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About 46 million turkeys are cooked for Thanksgiving each year!
On Christmas, 22 million families host an encore with yet another turkey!

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.

Makes 12 – 14 servings

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KISSed Quilts

by Marlene Oddie

Labeling Your Quilt

When you get to the very last step of your quilt, it might be easy to forget or not bother, but what happens to a cherished quilt when one day you are gone and the recipient's child is wondering where the quilt came from? Have you seen beautiful quilts at the local thrift shop, cast away by a family member who may not understand the sentiment behind the quilt?

Early on in my quilting journey, it was explained to me that a label on a quilt is a fundamental part of documenting this craft. These quilts can generally last longer than our lifetime, so having the information about the quilt attached to it with a label is the simplest way we can keep track of its origin. You might find other unique details at https://marketplace.unl.edu/iqm/fabrics/quilt-label.html.

So, what should be in a label? When I'm doing sample quilts, I often include more technical specifics that help those who will be working with the samples –i.e., the fabric collection used, sizing and batting content. But in general, labels should include:



Name of the quilt - yes name it, make it fun, tie it into the sentiment of the reason the quilt was made.

What is the reasoning for making the quilt or gifting the quilt - refer to the occasion in which it is being given or created.

Is it based on someone's published pattern? If so, what is the name of the pattern and who designed/published it?

Who pieced it? - Probably you, so print your name or sign it.

Who quilted it? - If it is you, then you might want to combine with the item before and this one just by saying Made by - you're doing it all. But if you Quilt for Hire or had someone else do the quilting, it is appropriate to recognize their contribution to the quilt.

Location and Date - You can be as specific or not with this but given it a general location (I do the quilting in Grand Coulee) and at least the year should be sufficient. If it is on a special occasion, you might include a specific date closer to the top and disregard the year shown here at the bottom.

As a long-arm machine quilter for hire I am willing to create labels such as the example shown here using my inkjet printer and I sign them where my name is shown. These can be printed on pre-treated fabric that is iron-on or sew-in or use Bubble Jet Set 2000 to pre-treat your own fabric and then fix the printing with Bubble Jet Rinse before drying and sewing the label onto the quilt back. There are pre-printed styled labels that you can easily write on with a fabric pen the information you deem appropriate. You might also machine embroider a label or have pre-printed/woven signature labels/ribbons that you can sew into the binding giving it at least some connection to the maker. Labels should be adhered in the lower left corner if facing the back or peel back the lower right corner when facing the front.

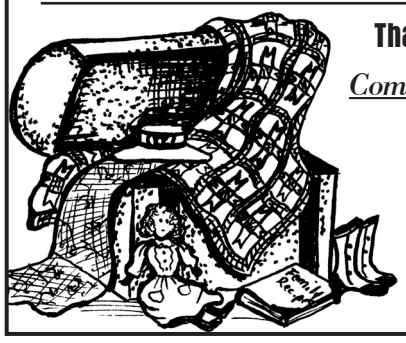
May your quilt's label be the connection to the legacy you have left behind.

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

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Recipe Word Search

Search for the underlined words in the recipe in the word search below!

Eggnog Cheesecake
recipe from Food & Wine

Crust
- Cooking spray
- 2 cups gingersnap crumbs
- 1/2 cup finely chopped pecans
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tbsp melted butter
- 1 tbsp granulated sugar
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt

Filling
- 3 (8oz) packages cream cheese (room temp)
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1 cup refrigerated eggnog
- 2 tbsp all-purposed flour
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg

Toppings:
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 3 tbsp powdered sugar
- 2 tsp bourbon

Instructions:

Prepare the crust:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly coat a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray; set aside. Stir together gingersnap crumbs, pecans, melted butter, sugar, and salt in a medium bowl until evenly combined. Press into bottom and 1 1/2 inches up sides of prepared springform pan. Bake in preheated oven until light golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack, and let cool completely, about 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 325°F.

Prepare the filling:

Beat cream cheese with a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on medium speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beating until each is combined. Add brown sugar, eggnog, flour, vanilla, salt, and nutmeg, beating until just combined, about 2 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides of bowl as needed. Pour into prepared crust. Gently tap springform pan on counter 3 to 5 times to release air bubbles. Bake at 325°F for 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 250°F (do not remove cheesecake from oven), and bake at 250°F for 45 minutes. Turn oven off (keep door closed); let cheesecake stand in oven for 45 minutes. Remove cheesecake from oven (center of cheesecake should be almost set and jiggle slightly); let cool on a wire rack until room temperature, about 2 hours. Cover cheesecake, and chill until cold, about 6 hours. Run a knife around outer edges of cheesecake to loosen from sides of springform pan; remove sides of springform pan. Beat heavy cream, powdered sugar, and bourbon in a large bowl with an electric mixer on high speed until stiff peaks form, about 2 minutes. Dollop whipped cream evenly over chilled cheesecake. Garnish with additional nutmeg, and serve. Store cheesecake in an airtight container or wrapped in plastic wrap in refrigerater for up to 3 days.

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Free Pattern

For more fun and creative inspiration visit:
www.JacquelynneSteves.com



Free Embroidery Pattern – May not be sold or used for commercial purposes. Use this pattern for embroidery, wool applique, punch needle or rug hooking, painted projects or whatever your imagination can dream up! Reduce or enlarge pattern as desired.

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

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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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.

The Day I Learned the Truth about Santa Claus



by Kerri Habben

When the little things of the world catch up with us, we cease to sense our truest dreams. Therein lies the tragedy of relinquishing our best selves without any real resistance.

Which is when Santa Claus, Father Christmas, or St. Nicholas becomes a healer of sorts. Absurdly it is easier to write a letter to an imaginary man in a red suit with elves and flying reindeer than it is to confess that we have lost part of ourselves in the details of our lives.

I understand that Santa Claus is a secular part of Christmas. Yet Santa's story has a universal quality to it. He gives to every child, everywhere. All he asks is if you've been a good girl or boy this year. Which means that a sincere heart and kind actions matter most to him. His philosophy brings the Golden Rule to life before our very eyes.

Pure joy is an affirming emotion to witness in someone of any age. In a child there is precious and refreshing innocence to it. When someone more immersed in the light and dark of our world retains that particular essence and it shines from within them, it is achingly, enduringly beautiful. It doesn't necessarily mean that life was always kind to them; instead the exact opposite could be true. It simply means that they found a way to hold onto what many others gradually lose. Perhaps joy becomes an even greater treasure when we've experienced or imagined how empty life would be without it.

If we can extend our imagination as we did when we were children, in taking that leap of faith we remember how to dream with a youthful spirit. We may also yet find our better selves through giving and sharing with each other. In that essence I offer the following poem, originally published in an anthology entitled Looking For Santa.

I hope that whatever holiday your heart embraces, this poem adds joy to this season and a smile to your face.

TO DANCE WITH SANTA

Twas some time before Christmas,
late in Oktoberfest to be exact,
when as the strains of a waltz swirled,
I waited wistful and weary
beside a river journeying on its way.

Suddenly inside, the song shifted-
the simmering sound of Patsy Cline's Crazy
shimmered through the doorway,
showering me with its unabridged lament.

Who should appear,
as I pondered imponderables,
but Santa Claus, dressed all in red
from head to toe like a true Father Christmas.
"Perhaps you would dance with me,"
offered he, gently and quietly.

From around myself, I unwrapped my arms,
stepped away from the night and the chill
toward the light and Santa himself.
I let the water carry my doubt away
as accepted Santa's white-gloved hand.

As we danced, I remembered how to dream.

The next evening I saw Santa once more.
He, kindly helping to clean tables,
was dressed from head to toe
in cap and overalls.

And the truth—
after all I'd heard speculation over the years-
washed over me.
Now I knew.

Even Santa has to take his suit to the
cleaners every once in awhile.

Kerri Habben is a writer, photographer, and crochet instructor living in Raleigh, NC. An avid crocheter and knitter, she learned these skills from her grandmother and mother. She donates many of her yarn creations to those in need. Kerri has gathered a decade of essays she is working to publish. She can be reached at 913jeeves@gmail.com.





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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.*

Dreams Do Come True

by Janet Young



"Dashing through the snow, in a one-horse open sleigh," those are the words to the well-known Christmas song ***Jingle Bells***, written in 1857 by James Lord Piedmont. This song was not intended to be a Christmas song. It was first sung in a Thanksgiving church service. Piedmont wanted it to be a lively tune celebrating sleigh racing. Before long, it 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 refering to ***Jingle Bells***? Lets 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 until one day when she happened to mention how she wished for the chance to go on such a ride. By now she was in her eighties, and her chance of ever having that wish come true was slowly diminishing.

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

My immediate thought was how would they be able to do this. The event was to be early in December. In Central Pennsylvania the chances of having snow was 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 could 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 wasn't any snow on the ground? Well, due to the ingenuity of a kind soul, we were transported in the sleigh with wheels placed on a platform so the sleigh could rest upon it safely and comfortably. 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 hills of snow!

There was magic in the air that night—all because my 85-year-old mother finally realized her childhood dream. With a smile on her face and my heart filled with love, I knew this would be a night she would forever cherish!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Janet Young is a Certified Tea and Etiquette Consultant, Co-Founder o Mid-Atlantic Tea Business Association.