



No. 298

December 2017



Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY



“Don’t Ever Leave Me”

There was a small Christmas tree in the middle of the table, decorated with bits of tinsel and foil. Sitting in front of the tree was the old couple holding hands and singing Christmas carols. Every few minutes the lady would hesitate and her husband would patiently coax her on the words.

Though Christmas was still several days away, remnants of wrapping paper were scattered about the table where the woman had opened her presents.

She lifted her face to him and he kissed her on her cheek.

Also in this issue: **A Christmas Angel**

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Domie Lewter
Mae Lewter

"Don't Ever Leave Me"

by Tom Carney

Will Kendricks, hidden by the thick underbrush, sat patiently watching the scene in front of him. Across the small clearing with the Tennessee River flowing in the background, an old man dressed in faded overalls was chopping wood. Every few minutes he would glance at the shotgun leaning against a nearby tree. A few feet from him was his wife, rocking slowly back and forth in a rocking chair.

It could have been some rustic scene from an old Norman Rockwell painting had it not been for the length of rope tied to the woman's leg. Frequently she would get up and walk towards the woods, only to be brought up short by the rope. The old man would go over and talk to the woman and then, taking her by her hand, would gently lead her back to the rocker.

Suddenly the old man froze, looking straight at the woods where Kendricks was hiding. Grabbing his shotgun, the man began yelling loudly, ordering the unseen intruder off the land.

After firing a shot in the air as a warning, he ran to where his wife was sitting, and untying the rope, hurriedly led her into the house.

"He's crazy," thought Kendricks as he fled the woods. "He's absolutely crazy!"

Walking back to the road where his truck was parked, Kendricks began thinking about the events that had led to this bizarre confrontation.

Since the beginning of time the Tennessee River had been a wild untamed waterway stretching from the Smoky Mountains, down through northern Alabama and up to the Ohio River. While the river provided food and transportation for the early settlers, it also became a curse for people living too close to it during the flood seasons. Rising flood waters devastated farm lands and often made travel on the river impossible.

In one memorable winter in the early 1900s, the Tennessee River near Decatur, Alabama, had swollen to a width of almost a mile.

As part of his New Deal in the early 1930s Franklin Delano Roosevelt began construction of a series of dams throughout the entire length of the river to provide flood control and also generate a cheap source of electricity. For a region of the country in the midst of the greatest economic Depression it had ever known, the influx of jobs provided the only hope of survival for countless people.

"It takes 65,000 errors before you are qualified to make a rocket."

Wernher von Braun



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In 1932, even before the location of Guntersville Dam was announced, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) began making plans to purchase the lands adjacent to the river. Though many landowners vigorously fought the idea of moving, they realized they had no other choice. Either they took what the TVA offered them, or their land would be taken by court action.

Much of the land was occupied by sharecroppers and arrangements were made to find other landowners who needed farm hands, with the TVA often providing trucks to move the families.

By 1935, the TVA had acquired title to enough land, and construction of the Guntersville Dam was started. This was the largest construction project ever attempted in the valley. An entire town was built to house the thousands of workers employed on the project.

The village, known as "Dam Town," was built on the north side of the present dam and consisted of nearly a hundred buildings, complete with mess hall, hospital, school and barracks.

Within a few short months, Dam Town had become a large community with its own stores and police force (hired by the TVA).

The coordinators in Washington had planned for everything, or so they thought.

Even before Dam Town was completed, the project began running into trouble. Although the landowners had been paid for their land, and the sharecroppers had been relocated to other farms, no one had given thought to the old people.

In a custom dating from Medieval times in Europe, landowners normally let longtime employees remain on the land after they got too old to work. Much of the riverbank was worthless for planting so if an old couple built a shanty and took up residence, the landowners simply looked the other way.

Removing these people from land they were squatting on was proving a daunting challenge for the TVA.

At first, officials visited each of the families, trying to reason with them.

"We ain't got no other place to go," most of the people would

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reply.

The TVA officials had no answer. Unless the old folks had some sort of income, or relatives to take them in, the only alternative for them was the county poor house.

The TVA next tried to get the local authorities involved but the Sheriff, after being made aware of the old people's plight, refused. He pointed out to the TVA boys that it was "Gov'ment land" and he had no jurisdiction there.

In a few instances the TVA tried to use its own police force to forcefully evict the people. But after one case where they were met with gunfire, the ensuing negative publicity made them back off.

Next they tried to force the people to move by more peaceful means.

For many of these country people, with no way to travel to town, the rolling store was their only way to purchase supplies. The TVA police visited the rolling store owners and told them if they continued selling to the squatters they would be forbidden to sell their products at Dam Town or any of the other construction sites. Faced with the possibility of losing a major part of their income, the rolling store operators reluctantly agreed.

By 1937, only a handful of squatters remained. Progress on the dam had reached a point where it was imperative the people be moved, otherwise the whole project would be thrown behind schedule.

Will Kendricks had worked on the Norris Dam project in Tennessee and while there he had established a reputation for

being able to solve problems in difficult situations. In one case where a family refused to move, Kendricks was able to win the family's trust and discovered they had a brother who lived in Chicago. After contacting the brother, he put the family in his car and drove them to Chicago.

Kendricks had rightfully guessed the family did not have the money for bus tickets and would not accept charity.

When Kendricks arrived in Dam Town he first asked for a list of all the families remaining. Next he asked for a list of all the employees who might know the families. By questioning the employees he was able to get a fairly good idea of the different situations and backgrounds.

Most of the cases were fairly typical of what he had dealt with before; poor elderly people who had no place to turn. Only

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"Lately I've been thinking alot about the Hereafter. I go to get something, then wonder what I'm here after."

Neil Keith

one name, Moses Lamn, seemed to be different.

"He's crazy!" one of the workers exclaimed after being questioned. "I was just walking through the woods when he appeared and started yelling and waving his gun!"

Immediately a chorus of voices spoke up as other workers recalled meeting the old man. "He keeps his wife tied up all the time and won't let her out of his sight," one man said. "She seems all right but she stays in the house most of the time and no one's ever talked to her."

From the little information available, Kendricks determined the couple were in their late eighties. They had moved to the riverbank about a dozen years before and had subsisted by growing a small garden and fishing in the river. At first the couple were friendly with their neighbors but as time went on, they cut off all contact. By the time the TVA began purchasing the land no one dared approach the old man for fear of being met with a shotgun.

Early the next morning Kendricks drove to where the trail leading to Lamn's house began.

After parking his truck on the edge of the road he began slowly walking up the narrow path, not knowing what to expect.

Reaching the edge of the clearing where he saw Lamn chopping firewood, Kendricks stopped. Not wanting to startle the old man, he called out in a loud voice: "Mr. Lamn, my name is Will Kendricks and I need to talk to you!"

Immediately the old man dropped his ax and grabbed the shotgun lying nearby. "Get out of here!" he yelled. After firing a shot into the air he ran to where his wife was sitting and after untying her, led her inside the house.

Lamn's actions only confirmed what Kendricks had already been told. The old man was probably a mental case.

Several days later Kendricks drove to Huntsville to talk to the Probate Judge. After explaining the situation, Kendricks asked for advice.

"Well," the judge replied in the slow Southern drawl that seemed to be typical of Southern judges. "There ain't much we can do. We can't make the old man go to the county poor farm

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if he doesn't want to. And if he's able to take care of himself and hasn't actually hurt anyone, we can't have him committed to a mental institution. There ain't no law against being eccentric or even tying your wife up if she don't complain!"

"It would be better," he continued, "if the woman was nuts. Then you could have her committed and the old man would probably leave of his own accord."

Kendricks returned to Dam Town and met with the project supervisors where he relayed what the judge had told him.

The news was met with a stony silence. The dam was nearing completion and in a few weeks the whole area would be flooded.

"You have ten days," one of the supervisors told Kendricks. "The day after Christmas we're sending our men in there to tear the house down!"

The next morning Kendricks returned to Lamn's cabin. Again he was met with shotgun blasts in the air and loud yelling. And again he retreated to the safety of the nearby woods.

Every day Kendricks traveled to the cabin and every day was a repetition of the previous day. After about a week, and with

time running out, he decided on a bolder course of action. He had noticed that Lamn always fired the shotgun in the air, rather than at him, so hopefully, the old man did not have any real intentions of hurting him.

Boldly, and without yelling to announce his presence first, Kendricks walked into the clearing to within a few steps of where the old man was working.

Sensing Kendricks' presence, the old man whirled around to where his shotgun was lying and while screaming at the top of his lungs, fired a shot into the air.

Though scared to death, Kendricks stood still, refusing to run.

Quickly the old man reloaded his shotgun and fired another shot. Kendricks remained motionless.

Realizing Kendricks was not going to run away, Lamn paused and looked at the young man intently.

"You don't scare easy, do you?"

Though petrified with fear, Kendricks was determined to stand his ground. "Look," he said. "All I want is to do my job and go home for Christmas. I don't want to hurt you or any-





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one else."

Trying desperately to keep the conversation going, Kendricks asked for a drink of water. Reluctantly, the old man led him to the porch and gave him a glass jar full of cold water.

While drinking the water and looking around Kendricks' glance fell on the old woman sitting at the other end of the porch. The first thing that captured his attention was the length of rope tied to her wrist and the other end tied securely to the porch railing. She was rocking back and forth slowly and seemed to be cuddling a doll made from corn shucks.

Suddenly, Kendricks wheeled around and looked at Lamn. "She has Alzheimer's disease, doesn't she?"

Kendricks had helped care for his grandmother who suffered from Alzheimer's and he recognized the symptoms.

"She's just having a bad day," Lamn reluctantly replied. No-

ting Kendricks looking at the rope he explained, "If I don't do that she might wander off while I'm doing the chores."

Slowly the reality of the situation dawned on Kendricks. It was not the old man who had mental problems, but his wife. The man had been scaring people off the place to keep them from knowing. If the authorities had known, they would have had her committed.

Having gained a certain amount of the old man's trust, Kendricks began explaining why he was there. Another week, he explained, the whole place would be under water.

After listening to the young man talk for almost 30 minutes, the old man summed up his situation in several words.

"Ain't got no place to go. If I go to the poor house they will have her committed. We been together for almost seventy years and I ain't gonna let them put her in some place by herself."

"Please don't tell anyone," the old man begged with tears in his eyes.

Sleep was impossible for Kendricks that night as he lay in bed trying to decide what to do. He could go to town in the morning and get a judge to commit the woman and then her husband would have no reason to stay on the land. She couldn't take care of herself and her husband wouldn't be able to after they were evicted. Another possibility was to simply say nothing and let the TVA forcibly evict them. Deep down in his heart, Kendricks knew that neither one was a real choice.

Giving up on trying to sleep, Kendricks decided to get dressed and drive back to the old couple's cabin. "There has to be another way," he kept telling himself.

As he approached the cabin the first thing he noticed was the faint sound of Christmas caroling coming from inside. Quietly

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he made his way to the window and looked in.

There was a small Christmas tree in the middle of the table, decorated with bits of tinsel and foil. Sitting in front of the tree was the old couple holding hands and singing Christmas carols he had first heard on approaching the cabin. Every little bit the lady would hesitate and her husband would patiently coax her on the words.

Though Christmas was still several days away, remnants of wrapping paper were scattered about the table where the woman had opened her presents. She lifted her face to him and he kissed her on her cheek.

Unwilling to interrupt the peaceful scene, Kendricks left.

Early next morning as the heavy fog was still rolling across the Tennessee River, the peaceful quiet of Dam Town was interrupted by the loud ringing of a bell. "Fire," men shouted, "The Lamn place is on fire!"

Hurriedly getting dressed, Kendricks joined the men rushing out to the scene. By the time he arrived the fire had been extinguished, though it had completely gutted the rear of the house. After making sure the old couple had not been caught in the blaze, he began looking around the clearing for them.

They were nowhere to be found.

Although a search party was organized and spent two days in the nearby hills, no trace of the old couple was ever found.

Later on in the week, Kendricks made one final trip to the site of the burnt-out cabin. While walking around the clearing his attention was drawn to a nearby rock. Lying next to it and wrapped in cloth were several old, faded photographs of the Lamns along with their marriage certificate from almost three quarters of a century earlier.

Kendricks sensed that these

things had been placed there on purpose, to make sure someone would find them, and maybe remember who they were.

As he stood looking at the old photographs, he became aware of a faint and soothing sound coming from the nearby hills. The sound seemed to permeate the clearing, finding its way into every corner and dark crevice. Maybe it was just the wind, or maybe it was his imagination, but Kendricks later swore, that just for a second, he heard what surely sounded like Christmas carols.

Years later when Will Kendricks was asked about their fate, he simply replied, "They stayed together. He loved her so completely. He never left her."





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CHRISTMAS 1954

by Austin Miller

Nineteen fifty-four was a lean year for our family. It was one of the hottest and driest summers on record. When it did rain it was at the wrong time or too late for the cotton crop. With two mules and a two-horse wagon, we were farming and trying to make a living on twenty acres of cotton. About twelve acres was our own and we rented another eight from Mr. Will Thomas. Mr. Will's property bordered what is now Norfolk Southern railroad and Dug Hill Road.

That year, due to the drought, we made only six bales of cotton. This did not bring near enough money to pay what we owed the bank not to mention what we needed to live on for the next year. The cotton was so knotty and opened so slowly that it took Daddy, my brother Berns and I all fall to get it picked. To his great credit, Berns who was only eight, worked like a grown person without complaining. Even though he was five years younger, he beat me at the scales every time. This brought me much grief from Daddy and considerable gloating from Berns.

Around Thanksgiving, we finally got the very last of the crop gathered. That's when Mama told us, "there wasn't going to be much Christmas this year." An obvious conclusion but hearing it from her brought the stark


"Last year we couldn't win at home and we were losing on the road. My failure as a coach was that I couldn't think of any place else to play."

Harry Neale, Hockey Coach

reality of it home. Christmas was my favorite time of the year and I usually looked forward to it for weeks before, but in the late fall and early winter of 1954, I just wanted it to come and go.

In the last part of 1954 and most of 1955 we qualified for commodities. This was surplus food given to needy families by the government. Each eligible family came to a designated location and got a monthly ration of cheese, beans, rice and canned meat. Some said the meat was horse meat but that was not the case. We enjoyed and needed the food but having to get it was a hard pill to swallow. What made it so bad was they gave it out at Central School and all the other kids and teachers knew that I was so poor that my family had to get commodities. It may not have been true but I felt everybody was looking down on us and I took it as a personal affront.

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When Christmas came it was not as bad as I expected. Using money she had saved from selling butter and eggs, Mama went to the store on Christmas Eve and bought some loaf bread, sandwich spread, apples, oranges and a little candy. This brightened all our spirits considerably.

On Christmas day she killed a big fat rooster and made chicken sandwiches for lunch. We all ate until we were stuffed. Even now, I consider it one of the most delicious meals I ever ate. But the best part came when we finished eating. Daddy announced that he was selling the mules and buying a tractor. To me, getting rid of those cantankerous old mules was reason enough to celebrate. He told us he had rented more land and gotten a loan from the FHA. He said the loan would cover our debt to the bank and give us enough to live on until we raised a new crop.

The Christmas that had seemed so bleak beforehand had taken a most pleasant turn. Things started getting better right away and when the 1955 crop came in we quit getting commodities.

After that Christmas we were still poor but our family had turned a corner. There are two kinds of poverty; one is poverty of the spirit, the other is financial poverty. Poverty of the spirit is the worst.

The Christmas of 1954 certainly took away some of the poverty of my spirit.

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Theft at Walgreen's

by John Michael Hampton

Finishing the last of the ice cream, the man left the dish on the counter and stood to go to the rest room. Little did he know that this dish of ice cream was going to be his last taste of freedom for a long time.

My grandmother, Annie Jackson, worked at the Walgreens Drug Store in downtown Huntsville during the early 1950s. Like many other drug stores of the era, this Walgreens had a lunch counter and a soda fountain to serve breakfast, lunch, dinner and treats to drug store customers and other workers and residents of the area.

She had worked there for several years when the incident that I am writing about occurred. By the time of the incident, she had worked her way up to assistant manager of the lunch counter in the store and was also in charge of the soda fountain.

There was a man who came in everyday to the drugstore. This man would order a banana split, which was twenty-five cents at the time. He would eat the banana split at the counter, leave the dish on the counter, and go to the rest room. He would take the ticket for the banana split to the rest room with him and dispose of it, such that when he came out, there was no ticket for him to take up front to the drug store cashier.

My mom started watching him closely when she noticed that there was no money or tickets being returned to the soda fountain for his banana splits. She saw what was going on after about three days of observing the customer. She knew that she had to be ready to accuse him once she had evidence to have him arrested.

She knew what time each day that the customer came into the store, so she had a Huntsville Police officer waiting in the store, but not where the officer could be seen, when the customer arrived the next day. He went through his normal routine of eating the banana split, then he left the dish on the counter. He stood, grabbing the ticket, making his way toward the rest room.

When he exited the rest room, the officer followed at a distance until the customer passed the cashier, preparing to exit the store.

At this point, the officer approached the man, and asked for the ticket for the banana split. When the customer could not produce the ticket in question, the officer arrested him for theft and took him to jail.

The customer ended up getting three years in county jail for the theft of the banana splits. My grandmother continued working at the lunch counter for another year, until she married and moved to Nashville.

The Walgreens Drug Store no longer exists in downtown Huntsville. It has been replaced by a more modern Walgreens on Governors' Drive that does not have a lunch counter. However, this story still exists of a time when my grandmother showed a customer that crime does not pay, and the taste of stolen ice cream can lead to hard times.

"Wherever he went the man carried a camera hardly bigger than a watch and also a tiny sound-recording device, so that anything he saw or heard during the day he could conveniently remember by mechanical means."

-Arthur Train, "Predictions: Fifty Years from now in 1988," Harper's, 1938

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My First Christmas in Heaven

Anon

I see the countless Christmas trees around the world below
With tiny lights, like Heaven's stars, reflecting on the snow.

The sight is so spectacular, please wipe away the tear
For I am spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.
I hear the many Christmas songs that people hold so dear
But the sounds of music can't compare with the Christmas
choir up here.

I have no words to tell you, the joy their voices bring,
For it is beyond description, to hear the angels sing.
I know how much you miss me, I see the pain inside your
heart

But I am not so far away, we really aren't apart.
So be happy for me, dear ones, you know I hold you dear
And be glad I'm spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this
year.

I sent you each a special gift from my heavenly home above,
I sent you each a memory of my undying love.

After all, love is a gift more precious than pure gold
It was always most important in the stories Jesus told.
Please love and keep each other, as my Father said to do,
For I can't count the blessing or love he has for each of you.

So have a Merry Christmas and wipe away that tear
Remember I am spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this
year.

*In loving memory of Mrs. Annelie Owens, who went to Heaven on
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We've Got Your Goat

by David Hardwick

I will never forget the 1953 Huntsville Christmas Parade. We were eager to enter our newly acquired Goat & Wagon. Brother Joel age 8, myself age 10, and from Morgan County our 9 year old cousin Sandra Hardwick (now Dr. Sandra SimsdeGraffenried), from Morgan County, would also take part in this Parade.

My father and mother (Dr. George Hardwick & Doris Hardwick) had purchased ten acres at the corner of Meridian Street & Quietdale from Max Luther earlier that summer. On it they had just built our new home & a very nice barn. These ten acres were just north of Huntsville's then city limits. The New Lee High School is presently located on this property that they took from me.

On this mini-farm, I was feeding our nine Hereford steers. I fed them before & after school each day to earn money for college. We also had Bob, a highly trained cattle horse Granddaddy Charles Hardwick had given me after I had polio at age seven. Bob and my nine steers had gained local celebrity status around town for watching Woody's Drive-In movies. As soon as the movie started every night, they would all line up, side by side along our fence and watch until the movie ended. We were also raising seven Boxer dogs for sale. We even had a delusional pet pig who, having been raised among these dogs, never knew he wasn't a Boxer.

As if a horse, 9 steers, 7 boxers and a delusional pig wasn't enough, my Uncle Thomas Berry felt to really have fun on our new mini-farm, we kids needed a goat & wagon. He saw a Winchester, Tennessee ad for a black Goat (with large white spots), and its very fancy red & white Wagon. For only \$75, we could acquire all this, complete with leather harness. We wasted little time getting up there and purchasing it.

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This weird looking "Billy" goat was as wide as he was long. He absolutely looked like the most pregnant "Nanny" goat anybody ever saw. The seller informed us this goat had won first place (two years in a row) in their Winchester Christmas Parade. He strongly encouraged us to enter our Christmas Parade.

But, it wasn't so easy talking our safety-conscious mother into letting us enter this extremely stubborn "Billy". Fortunately my father, being a veterinarian, had much more experience with goats than us. He wisely insisted we not ride the goat in the Parade. Instead, Daddy had us load onto a large truck, this black goat wearing an old straw hat along with its very fancy red wagon.

Jimmy Barnett helped load, tie & secure the goat & wagon on the truck's large bed. He would drive it in the Parade for us. Along each side of the truck's large flat bed, we hung a huge 8-foot wide sign Mother had made saying "We Ain't Kiddin - WE'VE GOT YOUR GOAT".

After everything was loaded and tied down, we 3 highly-decked-out kids all scrambled aboard the truck and onto the red wagon, which we had decorated with green crape paper. To prevent this old "Billy" from getting untied & deciding to make a sudden departure, Daddy convinced Sandra's father (Burl Hardwick) to ride along in the truck's cab.

Riding in the Parade, cousin Sandra looked oh so cute wearing her Dale Evan's cowgirl hat & outfit. Joel & I absolutely felt ten feet tall wearing our Davy Crockett raccoon skin caps & Roy Rogers cap-pistols & holsters. Riding on the wagon's front seat, I held a buggy whip in one hand & a carrot on a stick in the other. The goat was far much more interested in eating his hat than my carrot. Joel, holding a toy buffalo rifle, road on the goat's back. Joel was continuously having to get off & tear the straw hat out of the goat's teeth in order to put the hat back on the goat's head.

You never saw so much vigorous laughter as when we rode the length of the Parade route through all the packed crowds along Church Street, Jefferson, around the Square and finished by going up Washington Street. About half way through the Parade (in response to our sign) the crowds started chanting "Give us our Goat - Give us our Goat!"

Needless to say, we won First Place. This has become one of our fondest childhood memories.

Uncle Burl & Jimmy Barnett often said they never had so much fun as watching all the hearty laughing crowds having such a ball watching us and our very wierd Billy Goat.

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Heard On the Street

by Cathey Carney



We had a winner for the Photo of the Month for November - the baby was **Jan Williams** who leads tours through the neighborhood he was raised in - 5 Points. Congratulations to **Tom Blakemore** who was the first correct caller. Tom is from the Big Cove area, his grandpa was **James King Drake** and I made him promise to send a story about Mr. Drake. Tom is just loving life!

Our north Alabama winner for the tiny chubby turkey I hid carefully on page 5 of the November issue was **Marcia Brown**, of New Market. Marcia has lived here all her life and has 8 grandkids that she's so proud of! Congratulations to Marcia! I'm getting better with my hiding skills because most people who called had the turkey in other areas of the magazine, but p. 5 was it!

Then finally I awarded the out of town subscription to **Becky Richardson**, who found it after her second reading. Becky is from Boaz, AL but worked for IBM for 25 years and NASA for 5 before retiring. At the same time she cared for her learning

disabled daughter, who's now 57 and still with her mom! An amazing lady.

Watching college football games seems to get more fun every year because of course our state has the two of the best teams - Alabama & Auburn! I know **Natalie and Kerry Johnson** are SO proud of their son **Kerryon Johnson** who is Running Back for Auburn University football. That Georgia game was amazing and Kerryon (who went to school at Madison Academy) has been winning so many awards. Old Huntsville loves both teams but the Iron Bowl will be the game to watch for sure!

Jean Ayers is the sweet lady you always see when you go to Ayers Farmers Market on Parkway & Governors Drive. We love you and are thinking about you and want you to feel better soon!

Liz Butler is looking for an old Huntsville phone book - anything older than the 1970s would be amazing - remember those heavy old things? If you have one that you could part with, please give Liz a call at 256.509.8545.

Hospice Family Care hosted an Annual Service of Remembrance in early November, for people they have cared for that passed away this year. We were there to honor my Mom who passed away in January. Hospice Family has a beautiful new inpatient facility at 10000 Serenity Lane, just down the hill from Redstone Village. **Anthony Ford** was the Chaplain and it was a very moving service and reception.

We all know **Nina Beal**, who started the Ark as a no-kill shelter for dogs and cats, but what she has started is interesting. It is a program for Senior animals that will be

called "**Canine Silver Muzzles and Feline Senior Cuddles**". Many people would love to adopt but don't necessarily want a puppy or kitten. Adopting senior dogs or cats who are up-to-date on all their vaccinations would be so rewarding. Love Nina for doing this!

This was sent to us by one of our readers: In Iceland, books are exchanged as Christmas Eve presents, then you spend the rest of the night in bed reading and eating chocolates. The tradition is part of a season called Jolabokaflo, or "The Christmas Book Flood", because Iceland, which publishes more books per capita than any other country, sells most of its books between September and November due to people preparing for the upcoming holiday. (Thanks to **Anna Talyne Carson** for this!

I've been ordering Old Huntsville Tshirts and sweatshirts from JR Enterprises for 15 years but the latest long sleeved Tshirts I got from them were SO PRETTY! I don't sell them, just give them away but the black shirt with red lettering was amazing! Special thanks to my friend **Margaret Watson** (one of the owners) who's also a Kiwanian.

So happy that the Sunoco gas station is open at Holmes & Andrew Jackson. The owners are two of the nicest people you'll meet and they

Photo of The Month

The first person to correctly identify the youngster below wins a full one-year subscription to "Old Huntsville"

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owned the BP station in that location years ago. They open 6:30am weekdays and 7:30am weekends, til midnight most nights. Welcome back **Dan and Srinu!**

Roosters Christian Coffee Shop is now open on the south end of Whitesburg Drive and they have a Christian Songwriters night the first Tuesday of each month from 7-9. They'd love to get more songwriters to join, and there have been good crowds there too who love music.

Many of you know **Skip Vaughn** who is editor of the Redstone Rocket. Skip recently finished the book he was writing called "Vietnam Revisited" and one of his book signings was at Barnes and Nobel. There was a steady crowd and his book is said to be excellent - I'll be looking for it on Amazon. So proud of Skip.

Allen Watkins is a singer and musician who is three-time Alabama State Champion for finger-style guitar, and plays banjo, mandolin and bass. **Connie Watkins** is Allen's sweet wife and she sings, plays acoustic guitar, djembe and mandolin. Along with **Bob Hill**, a bassist with a classical music background, they comprise the Allen Watkins Band and if you like acoustic music with a bluesy rock sound, you'll love them. They are having a CD release concert in an intimate setting on Jan. 13, 2018. It will be at Huntsville Strings Shop at 7pm and **Phil Riddick** (owner) created a listening room so you can really hear the beautiful music. Tickets available in December.

Sam Keith and I recently took a weekend trip to Dunlap, TN which is a tiny town but they have a museum there that is so interesting - the building they're in was built in

1904 as the store for the coal mining business there, and they have coke ovens (burn coal) all around the surrounding land. The Sequatchie Valley Historical Asso. hosts bluegrass concerts there and other events - we'll be back!

A friend recently told me she asked her doctor if it was OK to do crunches. This lady has had back problems in the past and is in her 70s. He recommended something that is gaining in popularity called the **McGill Curlup**, named for **Stuart McGill, Ph.D** who designed this exercise. Lay on your back on a firm surface. Have one leg extended out straight and the other one bent with foot flat on the floor or bed. Place hands, palms down, underneath your lower back and raise your elbows just off the floor. Now squeeze your abs to raise your head and shoulders a few inches off the floor. Hold for five seconds or as long as you can while maintaining good form, then slowly return to start. Do about 10 times then swap legs. I tried this and could really feel it in my abs! Always ask your doctor first if you're trying new exercises.

Verna McCulloch turns 90 in January! We wanted to wish Verna happy birthday and make sure she really parties it up!

I know many of us like burning candles in the winter, for the coziness and great scent. A candle maker told me recently that the worst mistake people make with their candles is not trimming the wick down to 1/4". If it's left too long when you light it, you'll have black smoke and a large flame which could also be dangerous. And he suggested burn a candle no longer than 4 hours before you extinguish it. Good tips!

Thank you to **Linda Jones** from Goodlettsville, TN who is a subscriber and wrote to congratulate Old Huntsville magazine on its 28th anniversary this year. Can't believe in a year or so we'll be at 30! Sure doesn't seem that long ago when **Tom** and I started this, and called it our baby. He still helps me with each issue, from above.

Wanted to mention that **Broadway Theatre League's** schedule for the next couple of months is as follows: Cabaret Jan. 5-7 (5 shows); The Sound of Music Jan. 26-28 (5 shows); and Million Dollar Quartet Feb. 16-18 (5 shows) all at the Von Braun Civic Center.

I read a weather superstition the other day - If you notice alot more acorns on streets and sidewalks under oak trees, it is bound to be a very cold winter. This agrees with **2018 Farmers Almanac** that says we will have a harsher winter this year. Crank up your fireplaces and stay warm!

Rosemary Leatherwood of Ole Dad's BBQ wants to wish her son **Billy Leatherwood** a happy birthday on Dec. 18th. She's so proud of the way he's running the business after losing his dad, who's looking down from above and very proud of his son. And happy birthday to her oldest grandson **Austin Pinkerton** on Dec. 28th, he has made the family so proud!

OK, if you've read this far you'll be happy to know I've hidden a very **super-tiny Santa Claus** somewhere in these pages. If you find it, which I doubt, you win a free subscription to "Old Huntsville". Call anytime the magazine hits the stands.

Have a wonderful Christmas and stay Warm!

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Brazil Nut Chews

- 2 eggs
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- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 1-3/4 c. plain flour
- 1/2 t. baking powder
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1 lb. Brazil nuts, ground
- Sifted powdered sugar

Beat the eggs well in a large bowl til thick and lemon-colored. Gradually add your sugar and vanilla. Sift together the flour, baking powder and salt, add slowly to the egg mixture. Stir in the Brazil nuts. Cover your bowl and chill for several hours.

Shape the dough by using a teaspoonful for each cookie, and shape the dough into 2-inch rolls. Place the rolls 2 inches apart on your greased cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for about 12 minutes, then roll in powdered sugar while still warm. For a festive look dip the ends of the rolls in melt-

ed semisweet chocolate, then in ground nuts.

Light Eggnog

- 2 T. sugar
- 1/2 c. fat-free egg substitute
- 4 c. scalded 2% milk
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 1 t. sugar
- 1/2 c. light whipped topping
- Cocoa powder for garnish

Beat the sugar into the egg substitute, then slowly stir in the milk. In a double boiler, cook the mixture over hot but not boiling water. Stir constantly til the mixture coats the back of a spoon, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, add the vanilla and cool. Chill for 4 hours.

Pour the mixture into a punch bowl. Fold 1 teaspoon sugar into the whipped topping, top each mug of eggnog with a dollop of the whipped cream and sprinkle with cocoa powder.

Royal Ambrosia Cookies

- 1 c. butter (2 sticks)
- 1 c. sugar
- 1 c. firmly packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 2 c. all-purpose flour
- 1 t. baking powder
- 1/2 t. baking soda
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1 c. flaked coconut
- 1-1/2 c. regular oats, uncooked
- 1 c. chopped pecans
- 2 c. chopped dates
- 1 T. grated lemon rind
- 1 t. grated orange rind

Cream your butter in a large mixing bowl and gradually add your sugars, eggs, vanilla - beating well after each addition. In another bowl combine the flour, baking powder, soda, salt, coconut, oats, pecans, dates, and rind - mix well and add it slowly to the butter mixture. Drop the dough by teaspoonfuls two inches apart on

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a greased cookie sheet and bake at 375 degrees for 10 minutes. Cool on wire racks.

Chunky Peanut Butter Balls

- 1/2 c. butter (1 stick)
- 1/2 c. chunky peanut butter
- 1 c. brown sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1-1/2 c. plain flour
- 1/2 t. baking powder
- 3/4 t. baking soda
- 1/4 t. salt

Cream your butter with the peanut butter, add the sugar and beat til light and fluffy. Add the egg, beat well. Sift together the flour, baking powder, soda and salt in another smaller bowl, add it gradually to the butter mixture and mix well.

Shape dough into 3/4 inch balls and place them 2 inches apart on your greased cookie sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for about 10 minutes, cool for a few minutes then remove to wire racks to completely cool.

Almond Crusted Pound Cake

- 3/4 stick butter
- 1/2 c. light brown sugar
- 1/4 c. flour
- 1 c. sliced almonds

Make the crust by combining the butter and sugar in a mixing bowl, mix well, add the flour and blend til mixture is crumbly. Add the almonds, stir lightly. Butter the pan, then pat mixture over the

bottom and halfway up the sides of a regular loaf pan (8-1/2" x 4-1/2" x 2-1/2").

Spread evenly and don't get it too thick in the corners. Set aside.

Pound Cake Batter:

- 2 eggs, room temp
- 3/4 stick butter, softened
- 3 oz. cream cheese, room temp
- 1/2 c. sugar
- 1 c. plain flour
- 1/4 t. salt
- 1/2 t. baking powder
- 2 t. almond extract

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Mix the butter, cream cheese and sugar in a bowl, beat til smooth and blended. Add the eggs, beat well.

Combine the flour, salt and baking powder, stir them together. Add to the first mixture and beat well, add the extract. Continue beating til the mixture is smooth, very much like a soft frosting.

Spoon batter into the crust-lined pan, about halfway up the sides. Bake for 50-60 minutes, check to see that it's cooked by inserting broom straw in center of cake - it should come out clean. If batter sticks to the straw, back in oven for 5 minutes at a time.

Remove from oven, set on a rack to cool. When completely cool, run a knife between the crust and the sides of the pan and flip the cake out onto a serving board or platter.

Serve in thin slices.



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We Wish You a Merry Christmas and Happy 2018!

The Present State of Christmas Presents

by Tommy Towery

What do you want for Christmas?

That has always been a big question during the holiday season, and it triggers the thought of another big question I keep hearing these days. It seems the older I get the more often I am confronted with the question "Do you remember xxx?" where xxx is anything or anyone related to an event in my past life. This seems to especially be true on today's internet social media sites where such questions appear to be a favorite subject. Often such enquiries are related to a picture posted of something common to us seniors like a clothesline, a cork clothes sprinkler head, a pay telephone or some item associated with a car we once drove or some of the music of our times.

As the holiday season approaches, I got to thinking and I will go out on a limb and suggest that someday, not too long in the future, someone will put forth the question of "Do you remember when we had to actually go to a store and buy real Christmas presents for those on our Christmas list?" Such an idea is already foreign to a generation who believes all presents should be bought online and shipped free, or consist of a gift card to a favorite store plucked from a rack in a grocery store.

All I can say is yes, I remember those days, and I liked the old way of Christmas shopping better than the way it is done today. I know many of you will not agree with me, and I suppose your opinion is based upon your own personal memories of how you celebrated the holiday in your past. Unlike Scrooge, I have some great memories of my Christmas past. My earliest Christmas memories are based upon the arrival of the Sears and Montgomery Ward's Christmas catalogues which showed up well in advance of the actual holiday. From the moment they arrived I would get out a red pencil or ball point pen and go through the toy section circling all the newest toys of the year which I wanted to wake up to on Christmas morning

"Everything science has taught me and continues to teach me - strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace."

Wernher von Braun

and find beneath our tree. Looking back I know there was no way all my wishes could ever have been granted, but in doing so I gave my parents some idea of what I really wanted. I was not as bad as Ralphie in "The Christmas Story" who wanted the Red Ryder BB gun, but I sure left a lot of strong hints.

I come from a family who believed Christmas presents should not only be personalized, but also be bought in secret and remain so until they were distributed from beneath the Christmas tree on Christmas morning. No, we did not open them on Christmas Eve. Early wrapping and display of the presents was allowed, including shaking, but it was forbidden to try to remove any of the wrappings to see what treasures were beneath. Of course it was okay for Santa to leave our toys unboxed under the tree for us to find on Christmas morning, but all the presents for each other were systematically distributed and opened in front of the whole family.

Back in those days, some of the more expensive presents were placed on lay-away at one of the major department stores and weekly payments were made until the purchase price was reached

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and the item could be taken home.

One present I remember in particular was one my Aunt Helen Hall got me one year. The item was a spin off from the vibrating electric football games we had so much fun with in our youth. This toy was not a football game, but was instead a race car game with the same type of vibrating board with a track consisting of curves and intersections and four colored little cars to race around the track from the starting point to the finish line. It was an expensive item for an aunt to buy for a nephew in our family, but by putting it on lay-away eased the burden. I remember she gave me a dollar a week for the eight weeks it took to pay it off and get it out of lay-away. It came from Cathy's Hobby Shop, and even though I knew what it was, it was still wrapped and placed beneath the tree, not to be opened until Christmas morning.

Today I still do not know how my family put up with the terrible racket the vibrating metal board made, but I spent the next couple of days racing my car against all competitors over and over again.

Another favorite toy remembered from my past was the high-tech Robert the Robot. He was about 12 inches high and had grippers for hands to hold toys. This was before the days of wireless remote control toys, but Robert could move across the floor when you cranked a handle on a control which was connected to a cable attached to the back of the toy. It required no batteries and was simple to operate. If you wanted him to move backward, you just cranked the handle in the opposite direction. Squeezing a trigger on the remote could alter his course left or right. His most memorable feature to me was another little crank on his back, which when turned would play a little plastic record inside his chest which said, "I am Robert Robot, mechanical man. Guide me and steer me wherever you can."

Another year I got a Mattel Fanner-50 cap gun complete with Greenie-

Stickum caps, and I was the hit of my gang of neighborhood outlaws.

I mention the memories of these toys to remind you how great I thought it was to get up on that magical day and have a physical toy or other present to open right then and there. Even if it was not something I wanted, it was still fun to have a box to tear the wrapping off and see what was inside. Christmas was not all getting, but included giving as well. Though I did not have an income, my family always provided me the means to buy presents for those on my own shopping list. Even though I remember more about receiving than giving, there are always some presents which stand out.

I remember getting my mother a bottle of "Evening in Paris" toilet water one year in its glamorous blue bottle. What could be more elegant than a bottle of "French Perfume" bought at the W.T. Grant five-

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and-dime on Washington Street? I also remember buying her a set of coasters for the living room coffee table. My most memorable gift for my father was a simple white shirt. I really could have done better than that I suppose, but because of his divorce from my mother, I was not around him much to know what he wanted. The point is, I went to a store and picked out their presents all by myself and I bought them from a local merchant. It was fun and exciting, especially for a kid.

Alas, I fear those days are headed the way of the 10-cent Krystal hamburger. Today, as Christmas season grows more and more impersonal, I believe we may never return to those old ways. These days, all the grand kids want are gift cards. Personally, I hate giving and getting gift cards. Even at this age, I hate the idea of getting up on Christmas morning and opening presents and not having anything to play with when I am through. If I get an electric drill I can go out in the garage and drill holes in things to my heart's content. If I get clothes I can try them on and prance around the house in my new duds. If I get food I can snack till I am fat or sick or both. What can I do

if I get a gift card? I suppose I could sit around all day and think about what I may buy with it - but that's not really fun.

I learned when my daughter was young that if we gave her a present she was happy, no matter what it was. If we gave her money to buy whatever she wanted, she spent days or weeks of misery trying to make sure she came up with an idea of the best thing




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she could buy with it. I find the same problem with gift cards. I believe that is why so many of them end up being unredeemed.

Think about this scenario. I give you a \$20 Amazon gift card for Christmas. I open your present for me and "Wow!" It's a \$20 Amazon gift card. Why did we even bother to swap gifts? If you don't know me well enough to buy me something you think I'll like, and vice-versa, then why are we even exchanging presents? I know many people still get presents they don't like or won't fit and they have to take them back and exchange them, but at least someone went to the trouble of trying to show they cared enough to spend the time and effort to buy you something personal.

Now I will admit that online shopping doesn't hold the same traditional effort as going to a dozen or more stores trying to find the perfect gift, but it still beats gift cards in my mind. At least it is a physical gift that can be unwrapped on Christmas Day. And many find it just as difficult to shop online as they do in person, but again, they are putting forth more effort than just taking a gift card off a rack. They are picking out something personal and the receiver should be grateful for at least the effort put forth.

So, as we once again near the gift giving season, my mind will wander back to "the good old days" when the floor beneath the tree was filled with bright boxes in gift paper and bows and ribbons, and the traditional "To-From" name tags. I will even smile about the times when the tags sometimes came

off and the room was filled with people trying to figure out who an untagged box belonged to.

"Hey, do you remember when people used to send each other Christmas cards?" It's just sad to me that sending Christmas cards is almost a "ghost of the past" and I fear that someday actual presents may join that rank as we embrace almost virtual gifts in this new age of technology.

On a final note, I feel I must add one little thing. What do I do today when I get a gift card for a Christmas present? It's simple, I buy myself a toy. Not just any toy either. So far, I have

replaced the Fanner-50 cap gun and holster set, the Tyco Race Car set, and am now the proud owner of two Robert the Robots - one a vintage model and one a reproduction. I have them stored in a box with my Lincoln Logs, my Krazy Ikes and my Tinker Toys - all bought off the internet and paid for with gift cards. I want my grand kids to know what my Christmas time was like. Merry Christmas to me!

That said, and while I still can, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Tiny Tim said, "God bless everyone!"



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"There are many intelligent species in the universe. They are all owned by cats."

Anonymous

The New Teacher

After retiring from the Army, a former Artillery Sergeant took a job as a high school teacher. He didn't have a lot of hobbies and thought getting out every day and doing something useful would be good for him.

Just before the school year started, he injured his back. He was required to wear a light plaster cast around the upper part of his body.

Fortunately, the cast fitted snugly under his shirt and wasn't noticeable when he wore his suit jacket. He liked the idea of getting dressed up everyday and didn't really support the concept of casual dress.

On the first day of class, he found himself assigned to the toughest students in the school. Some of these kids had really pushed the limit as far as almost getting suspended, but each time managed to get back into the classes.

Some punks, having already heard the new teacher was a former soldier, were leery of him and he knew they would be testing his discipline in the classroom, starting immediately.

On the first day of school, the retired Sergeant walked confidently into the rowdy classroom. He could hear the noise level increasing as he entered the room.

The new teacher opened the window wide and sat down at his desk to get the students' attention. A strong breeze through the window made his necktie flap.

He picked up a heavy-duty stapler that was on the desk, and stapled the tie to his chest.

The noise level went to complete, dead silence.

The rest of the year went very smoothly.

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***Coach Bear Bryant,
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Three Christmases

by Elizabeth Wharry

Feliz Navidad - Spanish; Joyeux Noel - French; Frohliche Weihnachten - German; Nolloig Shon Duit - Irish; Christ is born! Russian. All ways to say Merry Christmas.

These are three of my best Christmas memories. December 1974. I had just turned 16. I will never forget the greatest sermon I never heard. One Sunday at church, a man dressed like John the Baptist was holding the Bible over his head chanting, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord". He was walking up one aisle. Coming from another aisle was a man dressed as Santa Claus. He was holding a box wrapped in pretty paper, extolling the latest, greatest, newest, "bestest" thing you know you want. Both men met in front of the altar and grew silent. The minister said, "What does Christmas mean to you?" As I walked out of church that wintry morning, I started to look at Christmas just a bit differently.

Suddenly, all the beautiful decorations took on a whole new meaning and my attitude towards preparing for Christmas had changed. I didn't mind the cold as I helped hang our single string of outside Christmas lights.

Fast forward to December 2007. My family and I had moved to Wichita, Kansas a few months earlier. I had just celebrated my 50th birthday. Our boys were 5 and 8. As part of a family tradition, we drove around looking at all the houses that were lit up. Those houses inspired me to "light up the night" as well. It was a definite change from Ohio. The lights and decorations were more extravagant.

December 2009 found us here in Alabama. What a difference! No single-digit temperatures with wind chill factors to deal with any more. It's cold, but not breathtakingly so. There was much more to see, especially the stunning displays at the Botanical Galaxy of Lights. If it's been a while, or you haven't been to see it, take the time to do so. It is nothing short of magical.

This year I turn (gulp) 60. To this day that sermon that I heard, or rather didn't hear, remains with me. Merry Christmas to all.

Sometimes the best helping hand you can give is a big push.

"We are born cold, naked and hungry. Then it gets worse."

Jerry Duncan, Madison

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My Best Christmas

by Malcolm W. Miller

I believe my best Christmas was nineteen thirty-three when I was six years old. Some of my older brothers had gone out to the pasture to cut a cedar tree, and we had all worked at decorating it with whatever we could find. There were locks of cotton; paper we colored and cut into strips and pasted into loops with paste made from flour and water to make a pretty chain to circle the tree; also popcorn was popped and sewed into a chain with a needle and thread, making a garland to encircle the tree.

You see, back in those days we had no store-bought ornaments to put on our tree so we had to be innovative and use whatever we had. Electric lights - we couldn't use them if we had them because we had no electricity. No matter what we had I was so proud of that tree. To me it was wonderful and the prettiest tree I had ever seen.

At that time all of us, seven brothers, wore caps and just before bed time on Christmas Eve all the caps were set around the Christmas tree with our names on the caps so Santa wouldn't get mixed up. I finally went to sleep dreaming of all the wonderful things I had been seeing in the Sears Roebuck catalog - there were bicycles, red wagons, BB guns and all kinds of wonderful stuff and I couldn't help but wonder why I had never received any of those things from Santa.

The next thing I knew I was waking up, it must have been three o'clock in the morning. I jumped out of bed and it was freezing cold in that old tenant house but that didn't slow me down. As I got into the room where the Christmas tree was, I ran to my cap and there among the apples, oranges, nuts and candy was a shiny new harmonica. I was so happy I didn't think of all the other things I had seen in the catalog. To me this was the most wonderful gift of all. Within minutes I had awakened every one in the house by blowing on my new harmonica. Before long I was getting a tune out of it, however, by this time I had tried to play so much that the corners of my mouth were rubbed raw and the backs started to come off the harmonica. But that didn't slow me down at all.

I developed a love for the harmonica that Christmas that has stayed with me my entire life. I now have a harmonica for every key there is and it all started on that wonderful Christmas morning back in nineteen thirty-three. The best Christmas I ever had.

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George Jean Nathan

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WHAT CHRISTMAS HAS MEANT TO ME

by Barry Key

As a child I was taught that Christmas is the spiritual celebration of the Birth of Christ. What did Christmas really mean to me? Until around the age of six, it was that day of the year that I was going to get that one special gift from Santa Claus (that my parents could not normally afford). In celestial times Christmas comes every 365 days, but as a youngster it seemed twice that long. In our home Santa Claus brought gifts to my sister and I until we reached that "certain age" then we would start exchanging gifts with the rest of the family on Christmas morning.

The tradition in our family... about a week before Christmas day my father and I would go out to my grandfather's farm and cut a cedar (Christmas) tree. My parents never bought an artificial tree. My mother always insisted on a real tree that gave off a wonderful cedar aroma you would forever associate with Christmas. We would set the tree up in our living room in front of a window facing the road. My mother wasn't necessarily superstitious, but she did believe it was bad luck to take down a Christmas tree before New Year's Day. About two weeks was as long as you could leave up a real tree because there was no way of hydrating it. The other thing that was always a part of our New Year's Day tradition...we had hog jowls and black eyed peas for dinner.

My mother, sister and I would decorate the tree with a string of all different color lights. For several years we made a rope out of popcorn and would wind it around the tree.

Then we would make balls out of syrup and popcorn and hang those on the tree. We had a few of the delicate glass balls that either my sister or I would manage to break at least one while decorating the tree or taking the tree down. We hung little peppermint canes on the tree and little strips of tinfoil that represented icicles. There was a mesh of white fiber that resembled a spider web that we called angel hair that we spread over parts of tree. My sister and I would cut out pictures of angels and animals and hang them on the tree. And last but not least, we topped the tree with a star ornament that represented the Star of Bethlehem...the Eastern Star.

To hold the tree upright, my dad would make a cross out of two boards. He would drive three nails through the center of the cross and into the trunk of the Christmas tree. As we decorated the tree, the last thing we would put on was the Star. It was situated on the very top sprig of the Christmas tree.

Everything about the Christmas tree represented Jesus' life and the Christian faith. The Star of Bethlehem that brought the three Wise Men and their gift of gold, frankincense and myrrh to baby Jesus. The conical shape of the tree as it spreads from the top sprig (baby Jesus) to the bottom of the trunk (the

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spread of Christianity). The cross (the base) with the three nails that held Jesus during the crucifixion.

As for the crucifixion, Jewish leaders were afraid of Jesus' popularity and felt that Jesus was going to take over some of their authority. With thirty pieces of silver, the high priest bribed Judas into betraying Jesus in order for Jesus to be arrested by Roman soldiers. Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor, under pressure from the Jewish and Roman leaders to execute Jesus, finally relented and condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion. Upon his death, Jesus was placed in a tomb and on the third day the tomb was found empty. Jesus was later seen walking among his followers for several days after his resurrection. 2,000 years later Christian's oldest festival is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus...Easter.

There were other things that made Christmas special other than giving and receiving. For at least two weeks we were continually visiting, or being visited, by relatives, friends and neighbors. Everyone always had cake, pie and cookies ready for company. Christmas was the one time a year that my parents didn't put a limit on the amount of sugar I consumed.

My favorite meal (and still is) that my mother prepared was sugar glazed baked ham, sweet peas and mashed potatoes, cornbread dressing topped with giblet gravy and a slice of cranberry sauce. My favorite deserts were blackberry jam cake and boiled custard. Until my mother's death, she always had a gallon of boiled custard ready when we came to visit during Christmas.

Each Christmas Day we would have a large dinner at home with just my dad, mother, sister and I. But before the holidays were over we would have a separate Christmas dinner with each set of my grandparents, which included all my uncles, aunts and cousins. After Judy and I were married we still continued the tradition but now there was one more dinner to attend, at Dadda and Booie's, the Hill Christmas dinner.

Judy and I had two boys and my sister had a girl and a boy. When we had Christmas at my parents, the grand kids would all crawl up into my father's lap. They had learned if they buttered him up with hugs and kisses, in addition to the wrapped gifts under the Christmas tree, there would be a couple dollars of hard cash for them....it worked every year.

One of the more vivacious and energetic gatherings during Christmas was

at Judy's parent's home. Mrs. Hill had hired a maid when Judy was less than a year old. Her name was Fannie. Fannie had essentially become one of the family. Judy had three sisters, each with their own family. Because the Hill family was so large, we drew names at Christmas in lieu of trying to buy everyone a gift... except for Fannie. Everyone from the youngest to the oldest gave Fannie a Christmas present. When Fannie was ready to open her gifts, Mr. and Mrs. Hill's grandchildren would all gather around her. When she would open a present she would clap her hands, jump up and laugh and start hugging the grand kids. The grand kids would get so excited I think at times they forgot their potty training. As we all know, laughter is contagious, and before long everyone in the room had laughed themselves to tears.

What Christmas has meant to me, not only a celebration of the birth of Christ, but a time to observe and celebrate the holiday spirit with "MY FAMILY & FRIENDS".

After you have read my monograph, sit back in your easy chair, close your eyes, and in deep concentration, think "WHAT HAS CHRISTMAS MEANT TO ME"



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CHRISTMASSES PAST

by M. D. Smith IV

I remember our very first Santa Claus show after we bought the Channel 31 TV station in November 1963 (just before Kennedy was shot) and we needed revenue after 5 days with no commercials.

My father had done a Santa show at Channel 6 in Birmingham when he worked there and he (and I) were gung-ho to do one on our station, WAAY. We got a full sponsor, the Toy Department of Montgomery Wards.

Our artist and handyman (Howard Troutman), whipped up a throne kind of chair out of plywood, and because we were black and white in those days we always painted sets and props in shades of gray so we could tell how it would look on the air. We painted it a medium gray. It was pretty plain with square wood arms about 5" wide on each side of the chair, with a square top.

Well, the manager of Wards came to the station to bring some toys for the props and took one look at our Santa Chair and said, "My God, it looks like a friggin' Electric Chair!" Actually, he was right. We just had not considered anything but the TV look.

So we very quickly got a whole lot of red corduroy, foam rubber and handfuls of big brass furniture tacks. We enlarged the top to make more of a throne, wrapped the red corduroy with foam underneath it all over and tacked it down with all the upholstery tacks.

It did look 200% better and when the manager came back, he was pleased with that look. Certainly for the kids who were live on the set, it did look much better to them to see Santa sitting on a big red, cushioned THRONE instead of a "gray electric chair." That chair is still around and I have several good photos of Santa in that very chair.

Now, fast-forward from 1963 to 1981 on the Channel 31 TV Santa Show:

When my third son Brent was a young kid in 1981 we had the Santa show on TV and I got him on it. When he was on Santa's knee and was asked what he wanted, he had this very long involved list that unrolled and was about 3 feet long.

Santa took one look (knowing that TV air time was short) and said tell me 3 things and I'll keep the list and see what I can do. That satisfied Brent and as he was leaving, as was custom, kids often said what they'd leave out for Santa and the Reindeer. Brent said, "And

Santa, I'll leave you a beer and some pretzels when you come."

Santa had a funny look on his face but then he smiled, said thank you and hurriedly got Brent off his knee. (I think one of his older brothers put him up to that).

And you know, Brent insisted that we DO leave what he'd promised or Santa would be mad. So we actually DID leave a beer and pretzels on a paper plate. We also left some milk and cookies to satisfy the younger children before we all went to bed.

The next morning, when the kids went to see what Santa left, there was some cookie halves left, partial glass of milk, but ALL the beer was gone and just an empty can left with one pretzel.

After assembling toys, games, stockings and much more on Christmas Eve, I think Santa felt he got one of the best presents of all that night, even if the original had to be swapped for a cold one in the fridge.

Santa even left a thank you note.

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* You can drive nails into a board easier and without bending them if you first dip the nails into lard.

* A half and half solution of mild shampoo mixed with warm water is a safe way to clean eyelids that are itchy, red or crusty.

* A lump of camphor in your clothes press will keep steel ornaments from tarnishing.

* Coffee burned in an open fire or a few grains on a stove is the best deodorizer.

* The pulp of a lemon, rubbed on the roots of your hair, will stop ordinary cases of hair falling out.

* In laying away of fine white gowns for any length of time, they should first be wrapped in blue paper, then in a sheet or in muslin wrap of some kind.

* Witch hazel is a great way to tighten skin of the face, just moisten a clean pad with it and wipe your face.

* Cornmeal and salt, mixed well, make one of the best brighteners for carpets during sweeping.

* Stale bread will clean kid gloves.

* Vick's VapoRub has been shown to be very affective for toenail fungus. Wipe the nail first with white vinegar, then with the Vick's.

* Vagisil makes a good lotion for smoothing the skin on your face.

* A lump of soda laid on the drain pipe will prevent the pipes from becoming clogged with grease; also, flood the pipes once a week with boiling water to which you've added a little soda.

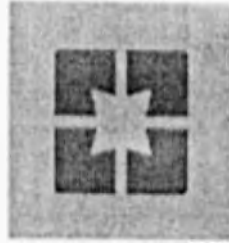
* White marble can be cleaned up with water and soda.

* A little Vaseline, rubbed in once a day, will keep the hands from chapping.

* Drinking half a cup of tart cherry juice each day will significantly lessen the pain of gout and arthritis.

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1930s and 1940s Christmas Time

by Harry S. Dill

I always looked forward to Christmas time back in the 30s and 40s when I was young because we would get candy, some apples, oranges, nuts and toys in our stockings as well as presents under the Christmas tree and have a really good dinner. But it seemed that Christmas would never come. About a month before December 25th we would start getting ready for Christmas. My Daddy and I would go out into the woods on Cedar Mountain and look for a cedar Christmas tree that was filled out good and the right size that we wanted for our living room. When we found it Daddy would saw it off at the bottom and we would bring it back home to our rock house on Toll Gate Road.

When we got the tree inside the house we would get a large bucket and fill almost full with sand and cut off the lower branches of the Christmas tree and put it in the bucket. We'd put sand around the trunk all the way to the bottom of the bucket and then finish filling the bucket with water. The water would keep the tree fresh looking for a longer period of time. Before that we used to nail the tree to two pieces of wood in a cross, but this was not too good and sometimes the tree toppled over when we were decorating it. We decorated the tree with a strand of electric Christmas lights and we would keep them to use the following year and add a new string of lights to the tree each year. We kept some extra bulbs on hand because if one bulb burned out the whole string of lights would go out.

We would pop popcorn and put a thread thru them and string them around the tree. We bought some other decorations and ornaments to go on the Christmas tree also from time to time. You could buy them really cheap after Christmas sales and use them the following Christmas. I would go in the mountain's woods and look for mistletoe. I would look for the ones that had white berries. They grew way up on top of tall trees and I would climb up and get some for more Christmas decorations at home and also take some to school in the hope that a girl would kiss me under it. They never did.

I would find some holly to decorate around the house. We would get most of our home decorations from the mountain and made most of the rest, except the lights and a few ornaments.. We also got a star that we put on top of our trees.

We all wanted it to snow on Christmas and most Christmases we got our wish. Back then the weather was much colder then than it is now and it snowed more often. There was no TV but there was a multitude of Christmas songs and poems that we listened to on the radio around Christmas time. One of the most popular poem was this: 'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through' the house....." And one of my favorite Christmas songs was "Silent Night" There were many, many



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more that were played on the radio over and over again during the Christmas Season.

Well the night before Christmas finally came for us and we were all excited and we looked for the biggest stockings we could find.

There were my sisters, Jean and Alice and brother Brice and me. We hung our stockings on the mantel piece near the fireplace because that was where Santa Claus would come down the chimney and see them. We tried to be good that year so we would get the things we wanted. If we were bad we would only get switches and ashes so we tried to be as good as we could, for most of the days around Christmas time.

On Christmas morning we were up at the crack of dawn to look and see what we had got. Our stockings had small toys sticking out of the top so we knew that they were full. I had wanted a electric train one year and I saw a train box. It wasn't the electric train but a wind-up one and it had 7 cars and a caboose and enough track to make a figure eight and I enjoyed playing with it very much. The next Christmas I did get an electric train. Brice and I also got Red Rider BB guns and cap pistols and scabbards. The girls got dolls that would close their eyes when you laid them down, and different outfits to dress them in, sets of little dishes and sets of cooking utensils along with a toy stove.

Our stockings were packed with small toys and an apple and orange at the toe and many kinds of nuts in with the toys. I enjoyed eating the English Walnuts and the Brazil nuts as well as the paper shell pecans.

My Aunt Elizabeth who lived in New Orleans had sent us a large box of pralines and there was also a large fruit cake, I enjoyed eating both of them. We always had a large box of Whitmans Sampler candy at every Christmas too. They were delicious!

My Mother and Daddy got up early too. Daddy went out to the chicken pen and caught the big tom turkey and chopped off his head. It serves that turkey right as he had flogged me when I was feeding him and turned my back on him. We raised a lot of our own food back then and had plenty of chicken eggs. My Mother started cooking the turkey after Daddy had put it in boiling water and he and I picked off all the feathers.

She made cornbread dressing, turkey gravy, mashed potatoes and baked mincemeat, apple, pumpkin, and sweet potato pies and a big chocolate cake also. She cooked all of these things on the family cook stove at that time. My oldest sister Jean helped her.

By about 1:00 o'clock we all sat down to a turkey dinner with all the trimmings and could eat all we wanted to this time! We would be eating leftovers for several days to come too. We could sit by the open fireplace and enjoy the warmth while it was cold outside with snow most of those Christmases.

I didn't realize it then but all these good things come from God whose birthday we were celebrating at Christmas time of the year.

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Helpful Holiday Hints



- Fill your dining room with candles at different heights - try going with one color, like burgundy or dark green.

- For an eye-catching centerpiece for your dining room table, loop a wide taffeta ribbon around a wreath of greens and place on table. Intertwine with small white lights and in the middle put candles of varying heights.

- Make your own stairway greenery - just cut a large spray of greens, such as boxwood or magnolia - add a bow and wire it to the banister. Add a few Christmas balls to the greens and it will look great!

- Head off stress by sticking to your normal eating, sleeping and exercising routines as much as possible.

- Go to only those parties and events that you really want to attend. Don't feel obligated to go to a gathering you won't really enjoy.

- Shop early for those presents that need to be mailed away. Order your greeting cards and begin addressing envelopes.

- To keep warmer inside your home: vacuum heater surfaces frequently; open your shades and draperies on sunny days and close them at night; and wear warmer clothing, layered, indoors.

- If you have a room where clutter seems to multiply, just get a couple of large, attractive wicker baskets and toss the clutter into the baskets for a quick and easy pickup.

- Want your kitchen trash can to smell fresh? Just toss a handful of good-smelling potpourri into the bottom of the can, then put

in your plastic liner.

- Make sure your Christmas tree is fresh by using a knife to cut into the bark above the base. The exposed area should be green and begin to show moisture. Once you get home, cut about 1-2 inches off the base, strip away the bark an inch above the cut and immerse in water. If you've done it right, you'll notice that your tree is drinking a lot of water immediately. Keep adding water.

- When gift-shopping, have a list of exactly what you're getting for each person. Then you won't find yourself hopelessly frustrated and wandering around the store with hundreds of other shoppers.

- Try to do your shopping during daylight hours - more thieves are lurking in parking lots at night, looking for easy targets to rob. Look confident and have your car keys ready.

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A Dog-Gone Christmas

by Hugh Michaels

Several years ago, I heard the most unusually funny and somewhat ridiculous incident which happened here in Huntsville. It happened during Christmas season.

This family owned a dog. The father was not a lover of dogs. He was forever trying to find a way to get rid of it. The small dog got sick. The father had to take the animal to a veterinarian and it cost him a large sum of money. The parent was not happy. He was determined to get rid of the dog.


One day, while the father was at work, he received a phone call from his wife. She was crying. She told him that he needed to come home, something terrible has happened. The father tried to get her to tell him what had happened. She was hysterical and could not tell him. He quickly left his office and he ran every red light in south Huntsville. When he arrived home, his wife and son were crying. He tried again to get his wife to tell him what was the problem.

She finally said, "He is dead. He died this morning." The father thought perhaps someone in their family had died. He reached for the phone and proceeded to call long distance to his parents. She finally said, "It's the dog!" The father was pleased, but he tried to appease the two family members.

He offered to take the dead dog to a pet cemetery. This pleased the mother and son. His wife found a small box and soft cloth and gently placed the dog in the box. She wrapped the box in Christmas paper. A large ribbon adorned the box. The husband placed the box in the back seat of his car. He proceeded to take the poor animal to a pet cemetery. While driving up the Parkway, he went into the mall to do some Christmas shopping. When he returned to his car, he discovered that he had left his car unlocked. The box with the dead dog was missing. Someone had stolen the box. They had no doubt thought it was a Christmas present. Someone in this city will remember this act of dishonesty for the rest of their life.

Can you imagine the feeling they had when they realized that they had stolen a dead dog?

The father was relieved. He had disposed of the dog and he did not know where the pet cemetery was located.



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Public service message from Old Huntville Magazine

There are two very simple things you can do to protect yourself from scam calls.

- 1. Don't answer the phone if you don't recognize the number. If it's your family/friends they will leave a message.**
- 2. Don't EVER give financial information over the phone. This includes credit card #s, Social Security #s, Bank Account #s, Medicare #s - Never give your Personal information to anyone on the phone.**

Requests from legitimate agencies (like IRS, etc.) will always come in the mail.

It's a shame we can't be trustful now, but we can't. There are people who are very slick and will make you think they are trying to help you. Hang UP on them. This is a very serious problem and you need to outsmart THEM.



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Christmas Angel

Anon



I tried for several years to get my wife to let us adopt an angel from under the Salvation Army Tree. We had to buy Christmas for 5 kids so I knew I was asking a lot. One year she agreed to adopt a little girl with the understanding that it was one toy and one piece of clothing. Many little angels didn't

get adopted at all so we agreed that a little Christmas was better than none. All we knew was that she was a size 10.

We went to Kmart to shop and it being winter, my wife said we ought to get her a nice warm coat. We found a nice one and it was on sale for \$8.99. We found a stuffed animal and it was only \$4.50.

We got in line and since it was December 9, the line was really long. The cart behind us had the cutest little sweat suit and my wife noticed the price tag said it was only \$12 for the pants and the shirt set. She said for me to wait in line she would be right back. She had one in her hand when she came back in line and showed me smiling asking what I thought.

I nodded as she dumped it in the cart and I asked about that doll we were going to get before

she saw the bear. She smiled leaving the line again and came back with one that she liked. We spent almost \$50 on that little girl which wasn't really much. We weren't rich and still had other shopping to do.

Shopping for our own kids had always been about how to juggle to get each something nice, with everyone having about the same value and wasn't really about the joy of giving. We were glad when Christmas was over and happier still when the final bills were paid.

That year my wife had a Christmas Spirit she never had before and it rubbed off on our whole family. We weren't able to adopt another angel again but many years later my daughter said she remembered that year and helping wrap the presents for our angel size 10.

Merry Christmas.

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PET TIPS FROM ANGEL

Dog Facts



1. Is it a duck...or a dog? The Newfoundland breed has a water resistant coat and webbed feet. This dog was originally bred to help haul nets for fishermen and to rescue people at risk of drowning.

2. It pays to be a lap dog. Three dogs (from First Class cabins!) survived the sinking of the Titanic - two Pomeranian and one Pekingese.

3. A Beatles hit. It's rumored that, at the end of the Beatles song, "A Day in the Life," Paul McCartney recorded an ultrasonic whistle, audible only to dogs, just for his Shetland sheepdog.

4. Wow, check out those choppers! Puppies have 28 teeth and normal adult dogs have 42.

5. Chase that tail! Dogs chase their tails for a variety of reasons: curiosity, exercise, anxiety, predatory instinct or, they might have fleas! If your dog is chasing his tail excessively, talk with your vet.

6. Seeing spots? Or not... Dalmatian puppies are pure white when they are born and develop their spots as they grow older.

7. Dogs do dream! Dogs and humans have the same type of slow wave sleep (SWS) and rapid eye movement (REM) and during this REM stage dogs can dream. The twitching and paw movements that occur during their sleep are signs that your pet is dreaming

8. No night vision goggles needed! Dogs' eyes contain a special membrane, called the tapetum lucidum, which allows them to see in the dark.

9. Pitter patter. A large breed dog's resting heart beats between 60 and 100 times per minute, and a small dog breed's heart beats between 100-140. Comparatively, a resting human heart beats 60-100 times per minute.

10. According to a Petside.com Press poll, 72% of dog owners believe their dog can detect when stormy weather is on the way.

11. It's not a fever...A dog's normal temperature is between 101 and 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit

12. Is something wet? Unlike humans who sweat everywhere, dogs only sweat through the pads of their feet.

13. Here's looking at you. Dogs have three eyelids, an upper lid, a lower lid and the third lid, called a nictitating membrane or "haw," which helps keep the eye moist and protected.

14. Americans love dogs! 62% of U.S. households own a pet, which equates to 72.9 million homes.

15. Move over Rover! 45% of dogs sleep in their owner's bed (we're pretty sure a large percentage also hog the blankets).

16. Why are dogs' noses so wet? Dogs' noses secrete a thin layer of mucous that helps them absorb scent. They then lick their noses to sample the scent through their mouth.

17. It's not so black and white. It's a myth that dogs only see in black and white. In fact, it's believed that dogs see primarily in blue, greenish-yellow, yellow and various shades of gray.

18. Did you hear that? Sound frequency is measured in Hertz (Hz). The higher the Hertz, the higher-pitched the sound. Dogs hear best at 8,000 Hz, while humans hear best at around 2,000 Hz.

19. Dogs' ears are extremely expressive. It's no wonder! There are more than a dozen separate muscles that control a dog's ear movements.

20. While the Chow Chow dogs are well known for their distinctive blue-black tongues, they're actually born with pink tongues. They turn blue-black at 8-10 weeks of age.

21. Why do they do that? When dogs kick after going to the bathroom, they are using the scent glands on their paws to further mark their territory.

22. No, it's not just to make themselves look adorable. Dogs curl up in a ball when they sleep due to an age-old instinct to keep themselves warm and protect their abdomen and vital organs from predators.

23. Breathe easy. In addition to sweating through their paw pads, dogs pant to cool themselves off. A panting dog can take 300-400 breaths (compared to his regular 30-40) with very little effort.

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From the Desk of Tom Carney

“Account Paid”

When Bragg's Grocery on Hurricane Creek closed in 1993, it was the end of an era. The old store had at one time been the center of the community, with housewives gathering inside to trade gossip while their husbands sat outside on the bench talking endlessly about the weather and whittling on ever-present pieces of cedar.

With the store closed, the only thing that remained was a stack of old ledgers from a bygone day, when people would charge their purchases and pay when their crops came in, or maybe when times got better. These yellowed account books contained, in many cases, the life stories of many people who called Hurricane Creek home.

There was Bob Ashburn. He charged a pair of shoes that cost \$2.65. That same day, he purchased a shirt for 75 cents. Looking back at an old calendar, we see that the day was a Friday. Had he just gotten paid? Or, maybe he was buying new clothes in order to court someone special.

Bill Matthews, the following day, bought 12 yards of cloth and 10 cents worth of snuff. Wonder if the same person used both?

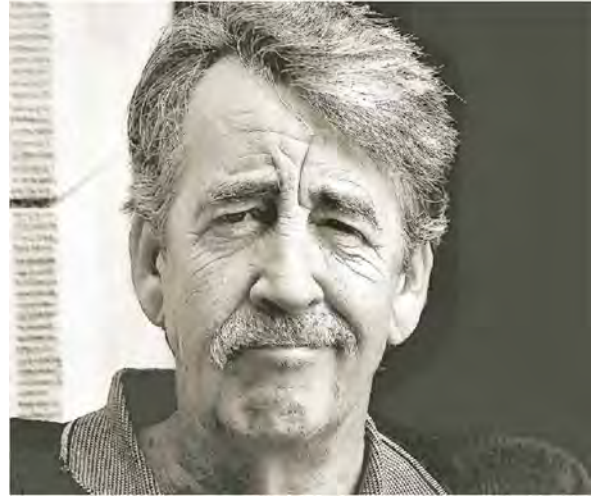
Charlie Fears must have been a hard-working man because most of his purchases were for farm implements and seed. Two days before Christmas, in 1937, he was back in the store buying apples, candy and oranges, probably for Santa Claus.

Henry Tucker stopped at the store for 50 cents worth of gas on Christmas Eve. Louise Jolly was in the store the same day settling her account. Bob Langford seemed to have not been in the Christmas spirit that year as the only purchases he made on December 24, were tobacco, snuff and coffee for a total price of 65 cents.

The first of the month must have been a busy time at the store. Old-timers called it “check-cashing day,” as that was when they received their government checks. That must have been a popular day for the children too, as almost everyone purchased candy when cashing their checks. Among the people cashing checks was Bill Smith, who also paid his insurance premium (51 cents) at the same time.

Gus White must have been a carpenter, or maybe he was adding on to his house. In January of 1938 he purchased 500 feet of oak boxing, 50 posts and 25 feet of lumber. The lumber was 2 cents a foot.

Macaroni was obviously a popular food. Besides tobacco, coffee and candy, it was the product sold most often. The Walton family purchased macaroni four times in three weeks.



Alvin Blackwell probably didn't travel very far when he was young. His average purchase of gas was only 50 cents. That summer he also charged 19 cents worth of fishing tackle.

The community didn't need a restaurant. On almost every page were listings such as “Logan Honey, lunch - 20 cents.”

You would have to guess that the Robert Harris family suffered from sickness that winter. Among their purchases were aspirin, salve, iodine, Black Drought, castor oil, alcohol and salts. The week before Christmas, Mr. Harris added a French harp, stationery, tablets, apples and a coconut to his bill. Perhaps the most poignant entry in the ledgers is the account of an old man who purchased cotton seed in anticipation of making a crop that year. The man was poor with no way to pay until the crop came in.

Several weeks after the purchase, the old man died, leaving no family or money. The next day someone, in old-fashioned, meticulous handwriting, had carefully entered “Paid” to his account.



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Rocket City Santa

by Jan Neighbors

Yes, there is a Santa and he lived in Huntsville, Alabama. For most of us our parents were our very first personal Santa's and always knew exactly what we wanted and often managed to get it for us plus some surprises. In the 1970's Boots Shelton was the Dunnavant's Santa. He had beautiful blue eyes and the personality to match. He loved people and never met a stranger. His granddaughter, Judy Baxter now Lott, was his Elf. He always had time to chat and smile and make your day.

After Boots retired I met Charles Cooper, the real thing Santa. If you remember a smiling and winking Santa on the Coke commercials you were at one time seeing Huntsville's own real life Santa. I had the pleasure of getting to know him when he lived on Mt. Gap Rd. in South Huntsville. He was an excellent story teller. Even in overalls you recognized him.

He was in the neighborhood store where he lived and one wide-

"Yes I know where your keys are. And I believe you know where my treats are."

Ted the Yorkie, to his owner

eyed child came in one day. They exclaimed, "Santa Claus". He grinned big and leaned over and said "Yes, and I am friends with the Easter Bunny." I am lucky enough to have photos of him with my son (picture to left). People stood in long lines for his photo. Children brought out the best in him.

One day he said he used to travel as Santa Claus and his wife went with him; it was her first and last time all rolled into one. So he was traveling alone when he hit the road after that trip. I hear rumors he was a bootlegger when he was younger, guess it is tough making ends meet when you have seasonal work. I don't know that for a fact but I realize most of the nice people who read "Old Huntsville" would never repeat malicious gossip so the story is safe here.

I hear he had children besides a Mrs. Claus.

Then we have had two Santa helpers who have brought joy to

many coming to see the Christmas decorations on Horseshoe Trail. One is Dr. John Higginbottam and Mr. Lanza, his son is Tim and one grandson is Paul, sorry I don't know Mr. Lanza's first name. Oh the stories those families have to tell. I have seen reindeer and llama's on the lawn.

Huntsville is full of good spirited people who are Santa helpers. I encourage each of you to find someone to help this Christmas! Most of us are blessed and really don't need any more stuff.

Then we have our own Scrooge Rankin Sneed who when he wasn't practicing law in downtown Huntsville was performing at Huntsville Theater League. Somehow it seems fitting that Scrooge was also an attorney. I appreciate his legal advice and his sense of humor.

I like to think he was more like the Scrooge at the end of the story rather than at the beginning. One of Huntsville's finest.

Merry Christmas to all and to all a goodnight.

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Fusstive Season's Gratings

by Mark Dyer

Santa and I got off on the wrong foot back in 1962. That was the year he committed the nearly unforgiveable mistake of delivering a piece of furniture instead of a red fire engine pedal car with working detachable ladder to a four-year-old. In spite of the fact that four-year-olds grow up, they are capable of holding a childish grudge well beyond the lap-sitting age. By age twenty-five, I assumed I had completely forgiven the jolly old fellow, but it turned out I was still holding onto some resentment. This came to light during the Christmas of 1983 when WUGGI (Wife Under Gift Giving Influence) decided we would take care of another family for the holidays. This was a great idea in every way except one, it required some effort on my part.

At a quarter of a century of life, I was well on my way to becoming a master fusser and when WUGGI realized that it was simply easier to do all the work herself, she wisely cut me loose right in the midst of one of my more spectacular funks. I even fussed about that. She sneakily researched and found a family who had hit hard times and wasn't expecting any Christmas at all. WUGGI, in complete spy-mode, discreetly determined the clothing sizes for the parents and their four small children. Her sources provided insights into the ages and likes of the little guys, as well as the wants and needs of the grownups. Soon our apartment was filled with shirts, shoes, toys and other miserable gift-related things. My mood was growing fouler by the minute as Christmas neared.

On Christmas Eve Eve, just as I was getting in the groove for a few grouchy exercises in order to stay in tip-top fuss-budget condition, WUGGI tricked me into being happy. She had a plan and executed it to perfection. First, she reminded me of all the good things I was going to receive in two days, with the guarantee of no furniture. I should have seen it coming with that one.

Next, she provided a bunch of my favorite treats; malted milk balls, chocolate covered raisins and eggnog. When she excused me from dish washing duties, I foolishly let my guard down. Finally, she told me that she was going to take care of some additional surprises for me and that she needed to run some errands. Here it comes. She turned on the charm and said

in her sweetest voice, "Since I am doing all this for you, could you wrap a few presents while I am busy?" I had been lulled into a stupor of Christmas cheer and before my brain could react, my rascal mouth, which was filled with chocolate balls, raisins and nog, answered, "Sure, why not?" She was gone like a shot.

I glanced around and noticed for the first time that several thousand unwrapped presents had materialized out of nowhere. Additionally there was a boatload of festive paper, three pair of scissors (two just for backup), and an entire wheelbarrow full of transparent tape and bows. What had just happened? I may be fussy, but I am a man of my word, so I settled into an afternoon of paper cuts and rips. By the time WUGGI returned, I had completed my task, bandaged my cuts and settled into a professional-grade Grinch-worthy series of bad feelings, rancor and bitterness.

The following day, try as I might, with Christmas so close, I just couldn't gin up much animosity about anything, but that soon changed. It turns out that we had amassed too many presents to haul in a single vehicle. WUGGI invited her entire family to participate and I could feel a top notch ill will brew-

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ing. Sure enough, I was drafted to participate. We broke the known laws of physics by compacting a train car's worth of presents into a couple of automobiles along with six people. As we pulled out onto the road, I calculated I could see just about thirty percent of what was in front of me while driving through the congested Christmas shopping traffic. I gained an extra five percent by getting one of WUGGI's sisters to move her foot off the windshield.

When we arrived at our destination, it looked like a scene with which I was all too familiar. There were a couple of rundown hovels pretending to be houses, some cars on blocks, a fence or two leaning drunkenly against each other, and nothing that even remotely looked like a lawn. Basically, this was the neighborhood of my youth and I was hit with a bout of nostalgia. What was that noise? Was it a cracking sound?

We parked some distance away and the six of us all piled

out balancing as many packages as we could. We quick-stepped across the dirt and weeds, tip-toed onto the porch, stacked our loot and scooted away. While

everyone was racing back to the cars, I waited a minute to make sure someone knew we had come by and when there was no indication, I found myself running back

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up to the porch to knock. I didn't want the presents to disappear before the people even knew they were there. Did you hear that? A sound kind of like ice melting?

I crept back up on the porch and just as I tapped on the door, little Cindy Loo Who from Whoville opened it. I am not kidding. She had blue eyes as big as saucers and a messy little bunch of blonde curls on her head. She was about four years old and just stared at me. Crrrrack-kkkkk. I smiled, looked down at her and gently said, "Honey, go get your mommy or daddy, please." About that time, I heard some heavy steps coming down the hall and I sprang off and began to gallop toward the car. A man walked out on the stoop and yelled, "Who are you?!" I fired back over my shoulder, "Santa Claus" as I jumped in the car and spun the tires getting out of there.

When we got back home, I noticed my chest was hurting from some inexplicable pain. My face felt strange as well, several unfamiliar muscles were flexing around my lips. Even my eyes seemed to be a little watery. I was definitely coming down with something. I could still feel some cracking and groaning behind my ribs, but I mostly ignored it, assuming I needed to eat some more Christmas ham. Later that afternoon, I turned on the local news and was not really paying much attention until I saw something that caught my eye. There was a man being interviewed wearing a very familiar sweater that I knew was the only one of its kind in the world. I had purchased that particular article of clothing along with a dozen other items in Korea a few years earlier. I loved that pullover and had taken excellent care to keep it like new.

Back when WUGGI was first getting started on her project, she pointed out that the father of her surrogate family was about my size and that I sure had an awful lot of sweaters. I ignored her. She persisted and said, "Wouldn't it be nice if that man had some nice warm sweaters himself?" I turned up the sound on the movie I was watching. Just as I could feel her building up a head of steam, I decided to avoid the rest of her wheedling and grabbed a handful of sweaters for her to box up. The man on the TV screen was wearing the one item I had debated most about letting go. I have never seen its like before or since.

As I stared at that Christmas Eve news broadcast, I recognized the sweater instantly. Turning up

the sound, I heard a reporter asking, "Why have you and your whole family come into this soup kitchen to volunteer your time on Christmas Eve?" He replied, "We had no Christmas at all this year. We were expecting nothing. Today, completely out of the blue, Santa Claus showed up on our doorstep and provided what I could not for my family. We were so filled with gratitude that we all felt we had to do something to express our thankfulness, so we came here to serve others even less fortunate than us."

The camera turned on little Cindy Loo Who and I was a goner. Crack, shred, split. Just like old Mr. "Sauerkraut and toadstool sandwich," my tiny heart grew three sizes that day and I retired my Santa grudge forever.

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WHAT DO I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

*by Rayford Key, to his parents,
in 1986*

Let me see what I need....

Let's see, I have a father and mother. They are called Walker and Delia. They were married 66 years ago today, Christmas Eve.

They gave me eight sisters, five of whom I still have; Novella, Sadie, Laura, Faye and Geraldine, and precious memories of three that are gone; Janell, Christine and Lora.

I have five good brothers; Houston, Audie, Leon, Clinton and Dalford.

I have wonderful brothers and sisters-in-law to go with those above; nine nephews, nine nieces, thirteen great-nephews, ten great-nieces, one great-great-niece, which represents five generations in our family.

Most of all I have a wonderful wife, Pat, and two healthy boys to share a good, warm home. I'm blessed with a good job and good relationships with the people with whom I work, a good church to worship as I choose and good fellowship with

the people who attend.

As I sat wondering what I needed for Christmas, I fully realized that what I needed was to be thankful for what I have already received.

Happy Anniversary, Mama and Papa Key



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SILVER BELLS

by Jennifer Jonas



There was a cold chill in the air that December morning I visited Nannette at the nursing home. Nannette dislikes the cold tremendously so I found her on her bed wrapped in her bright yellow blanket. As soon as I entered the room with my guitar, her face lit up with a radiant smile. She knew I was there to sing her favorite songs. But today I had an extra job to perform. I needed to prepare Nannette's mind for a visit from her husband, Charlie. You see on many days Nannette does not remember who Charlie is and this can cause great sadness. So to prepare her before he entered her room, I talked of her sweet husband, how much he loved her and how they used to dance together years ago. Then I sang the particular favorite songs they used to dance to: "Let me call you sweetheart," "Till we meet again," and for the festive month of December, "Silver Bells."

I sang each song and then the moment came. Charlie walked through the door and came towards Nannette. My heart stopped for a second as I held my breath. Would she recognize him? Did my songs and shared memories help? Nannette stood up from her bed and met Charlie's gaze. Charlie puckered his lips and Nannette responded with a big smile and then she leaned into him and placed a big kiss right on his lips. I sighed and took in the scene with joy and relief. After their kiss Nannette reached her

arms around Charlie's waist and gave him a big hug. I took advantage of this moment and began singing "Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you." To my delight Nannette continued to sing along with me "let me hear you whisper that you love me too." As we sang, Charlie began moving to a 1-2-3 step and their embrace turned into a beautiful waltz.

I didn't want this loving moment to stop so when that song ended I didn't miss a beat, but continued with "Silver Bells." "Silver bells, silver bells, its Christmas time in the city. Ring-a-ling, hear them ring. Soon it will be Christmas day." The 1-2-3 waltz step was replaced with an easier side to side movement, but for Charlie it was still a beautiful dance. I could tell by the expression on his face that he was treasuring every moment of it. Charlie joined in with our singing so we now had created a trio, but in spirit, I think it was a lover's duet.

I was there to guide them along, but the song and the moment belonged just to the two of them.

WISHING YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES A BLESSED AND PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS



*With special greetings to the
Huntsville High Class of 1966*

Oscar & Maria Llerena

"If it weren't for televised football, hockey and basketball, many kids wouldn't even know what a real millionaire looks like."

Phyllis Diller

And Then It Is Winter



You know how it is - time has a way of moving quickly and catching you unaware of the passing years.

It seems just yesterday that I was young, just married and embarking on my new life. Yet in a way, it seems like eons ago, and I wonder where all the years went. I know that I lived them all. I have glimpses of how it was back then and of all my hopes and dreams. But, here it is. The winter of my life and it catches me by surprise. How did I get here so fast? Where did the years go and where did my youth go?

I remember well seeing older people through the years and thinking that those older people were years away from me and that winter was so far off that I could not fathom it or imagine fully what it would be like. But, here it is...my friends are retired and getting grey - or gone... they move slower and I see an older person now. Some are in better and some worse shape than me...but, I see the great change....not like the ones that I remember who were young and vibrant...but, like me, their age is beginning to show and we are now those older folks that we used to see and never thought we'd be.

Each day now, I find that

just getting a shower is a real target for the day! And taking a nap is not a treat anymore... it's mandatory! 'Cause if I don't nap on my own free will...I just fall asleep where I sit!

And so...now I enter into this new season of my life unprepared for all the aches and pains and the loss of strength and ability to go and do things that I wish I had done but never did.

But, at least I know that though the winter has come, and I'm not sure how long it will last...this I know - that when it's over on this earth...it's NOT over. A new adventure will begin.

Yes, I have regrets. There are things I wish I hadn't done... things I should have done, but indeed, there are many things I'm happy to have done. It's all in a lifetime.

So, if you're not in your winter yet...let me remind you, that it will be here faster than you think. So, whatever you would like to accomplish in your life

please do it quickly. Don't put things off too long.

Life goes by so fast. So, do what you can today, as you can never be sure whether this is your winter or not. You have no promise that you will see all the seasons of your life...so, live for today and say all the things that you want your loved ones to remember...and hope that they appreciate and love you for all the things that you have done for them in all the years past.

"Life" is a gift to you. The way you live your life is your gift to those who come after. Make it a fantastic one.

Live it well! Enjoy today. Do something fun - be happy - have a great day. Always remember - it is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver.

Live happy in this year and every year. Lastly, consider the following: Today is the oldest you've ever been, yet the youngest you'll ever be, so enjoy this day while it lasts.

If you stop getting thirsty, you need to drink more water. When a human body is dehydrated, its thirst mechanism shuts off.



Jasper

Hello, the Ark did not know my name when I came to their shelter so they named me Jasper. I was a mess! My coat was matted with knots and was covered in fleas. Yuk and Ouch! My teeth were so bad I could not eat dry dog food. I was underweight and very scared. I am a Poodle and my curls are now pretty and white. I weigh 14 lbs. The doggie doctor had to extract the 24 teeth I had left. My tongue hangs out some times because I have no teeth to hold it in my mouth.

I wish I could talk and tell the kind people at the Ark my story. They are smart people and know that I am a senior dog. They know that I used to have a family that did not take proper care of me. Especially my teeth!

Did I get lost or did my family throw me away? I can hear a little and I can see. I was so glad the kind lady that found me brought me to the Ark. I love to go on walks with the volunteers. Please be devoted to your pet and make it a member of your family. If you do that you will keep it its lifetime. Do not get a pet if you cannot make that commitment. Those of us that have more years behind us than in front of us should be loved as we were when we were young. That should apply to you too. We deserve nothing less. Come to the Ark and ask to see Jasper. That's me!

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THE CHRISTMAS PURSE

The Purse from God and Me

It's been fifty years now, in December of 1967, when I was a young seventeen-year-old Baptist preacher. My Mama had only days to live before she joined Christ up above. We were poor, and I had only three dollars to my name. But I made my way to the Old Miller's discount department store in Birmingham, Alabama, having no idea of what I could buy. I prayed to God, asking him to lead me to the best gift that I could buy that would clearly send Mama a message of how much I loved her and that I wanted her to stay a little longer.

I looked over hundreds of things, but nothing cried out to me as the perfect gift to buy with my three dollars. With my head hung down, something touched me, and I looked up and saw just what I needed to make the statement I wanted to make. It was a purse, and after taxes, left me with exactly three pennies.

That night, some of my family members who were looking on scoffed at my present, but the joke was on them. When Mama saw the purse, her face lit up and she smiled the biggest smile. That was the best gift she could have given back to me.

That smile still warms my heart. And I still have that three-dollar purse. I would not sell it for a million dollars, because God picked it out for me.

By Harold Lee Vest

For more info please contact me at: haroldleevest@yahoo.com

or John E. Carson: www.facebook.com/JC8020 or johnecarson8020@gmail.com

If you enjoyed *The Christmas Purse*, please check out my true short story *Happy Endings* which can be found in the anthology

Moments in the Sun



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Also available by author and creative writing instructor John E. Carson. A tale of hope with proceeds going to establish a **Pets for Vets** in Huntsville. If you could save two lives, would you?

Scruffy



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Lena's Christmas Mall

By Lena Mae Nelson

As I examined the contents of my home a few summers ago, I decided it was time to purge some products. I asked myself, "Where do I begin?" How did I end up with so much? The answer was simple. My mom died and left her clothes and household belongings. Likewise, two of my childless aunts had journeyed to their celestial home and I had their clothes and household items. I saw the need and began to purge.

I gave one of my aunt's pieces of antique furniture to a church in my hometown of Madison, Alabama. I gave my old car to my girlfriend's son in Huntsville, Alabama and some clothes to another girlfriend's church in Lexington, Kentucky for their flea market. In addition, monthly gifts of clothes and miscellaneous items had been given to the Viet Nam Veterans; Am-Vets; Goodwill; Salvation Army and the Kidney Foundation. However, as I examined my home I saw no dent in the contents—I was still abundantly blessed! There was a dire need to continue to purge. I continued my purging through the fall with seemingly no dent in my celestial blessings.

One Sunday evening before the Christmas holidays, I was looking at my bills and the numerous medical bills I had after being treated for cancer. In the beginning, I became a little depressed. I wondered how I would be able to buy Christmas gifts and pay my medical and other bills too. I looked around a room and saw a candle set I had not opened or used. A light bulb came on in my head. I asked myself, "Why not give the candle set to someone for Christmas?" Webster describes a mall as a street with shops, restaurants and businesses that are closed to vehicles. I describe "Lena's Christmas Mall" as a house with enough products to create shops, restaurants and a business or a flea market for sure that is closed to vehicles and the public! The idea in my mind was to create a Christmas Mall of the many items I had in my possession. Thus, "Lena's Christmas Mall" was created.

I began searching through the house and boxes for gifts. I was successful. My sister-in-law talked about losing weight—a gift for her was one of the two sauna suits I had purchased and one of my zumba tapes. Other gifts I gave were glass pie dishes and water glasses to each of my neighbors. My ex-husband's wife who is a seamstress was given a glass Christmas platter and a roll of yellow cloth. My daughter, Cheryl was given wine glasses, dish towels and cookware. I gave

"Invite us to your next blowout."

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my stepmom sheets and candy dishes. One of my aunts had left whiskey jiggers that have been in the family for over 50 years. I gave the jiggers to my son-in-law David. He promised to take care of them and to forever cherish them. This just to name a few of the items I gave as presents for Christmas. In addition, I baked cakes for everyone. After carefully wrapping each gift, I composed a letter to accompany the gifts. The letter stated:

"Happy Holidays to You"

As I was sitting at my kitchen table Sunday reflecting on the holidays and all the things that I have to be thankful for, a thought came to mind. Why not share all the love and treasures that I have with family and friends. So for this Christmas, I may give you something new; however, I will also share with you some of the treasures left behind with me from my loved ones who have exited into their celestial life!

I have a house full of treasures. Over the years I have given many things away - bedroom, kitchen furniture. I have given away chinaware, flatware, glassware and Corningware, pots pans, skillets - just to name a few. Yes, I have much more of all kinds of treasures. After all, I was left with the household goods of two aunts and a mother. You know how the folks were back in the day. They bought things they NEVER used saving for a rainy day. Things were hidden in boxes, in closets and under the bed - you name it. I kept holding onto things with plans to have a yard sale or sell them on Ebay and I still plan to do that. However, I just wanted to share an item or two with you for Christmas to share the love that was shared with me. I hope you will enjoy your gift.

Hope you had a (Blessed Thanksgiving. Wishing you a Christmas filled with love and joy and a very abundantly Blessed Happy New Year!

Much Love, Lena Mae

"Who's cruel idea was it for the word "Lisp" to have an "S" in it?"

Becky Johnson, Athens

Everyone was pleased with the gift he or she received. My neighbors told me my idea was so thoughtful and kind—their gift was the best they had received. My daughter was overjoyed to receive the cookware, wine glasses and decorative Christmas towels with potholders.

Their responses were very jubilant and endearing to me. Gifts given from Lena's Christmas Mall was a success! I was very happy and pleased they loved their gifts! "Lena's Christmas Mall - a place where I can give gifts from the depths of my heart!"



WHAT'S THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR YOUR LOVED ONES?

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The Story Behind the Song - a Memory in Every Note

by George Wells

When Barbara, my wife of 58 years, died I went deep into my music to find a peaceful place. I wrote many lyrics relating to our life and love. While listening to one of my songs it came to me that songs are great landmarks for the many events we experience during our life. Those musical memories are stored in every song, waiting for us to take that walk down memory lane.

I met David Wall, a singer/songwriter from here in Huntsville. His voice was most unusual. Was it unusual enough to be successful? Who knows, but I asked him to write the music for my lyrics, "A Memory in Every Note". When I heard how much feeling he put into the song, I decided he would be the one to record my song.

David Wall was born in Winston Salem, NC and after several other stops, his family ended up in Chattanooga, TN. As a youngster, 8 years old, he became interested in music and started singing around the house. His parents were impressed so they found him a music teacher. Those lessons were short lived as the family moved to Huntsville, Alabama.

It was there David met the famous Alton Delmore, of the Delmore Brothers. Thrilled by the presence of Alton, David's interest in music peaked. Events in his life lead him on to the year 2016. It was then that David finished his first gospel song, and had the good fortune of singing his song in his hometown church. Again, fires of songwriting started burning brightly. Locating other songwriters, he was encouraged to write for the love of the trade.

It is our hope that you agree that David has earned the title of singer/songwriter. And his first recorded project showcases his skills and feelings to both write

and sing. We hope his song will walk many down memory lane to find those memories hidden in their songs. We used some of Huntsville's finest musicians to build the music track. Backup vocals were added by Hershey Reeves. I am sure you will be pleased with his talents. And the final touches were added by Donny Carpenter, the premier studio violinist in the famed Muscle Shoals area.

We thank you for taking time from your busy day to let us share

a few words with you. David and I hope the song will touch the hearts of many and will become their favorite when reliving life's precious events. God bless all.

An mp3 copy of the song can be purchased from CDBABY.com, Amazon Music, iTunes and many other digital sales sites on the internet.

Update: "A Memory in Every Note" was released and opened as #23 on the International Top 40 Singles Chart.

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