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Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

A Time of War



Louise vividly remembered that cold winter morning in 1942 when Bill had left for the Army. They had been married for less than two weeks when Bill received the notice to report to the Huntsville National Guard Armory on Dallas Street at five in the morning.

Normally the inductees had reported at ten in the morning but as the casualty lists from overseas grew, the War Department decided there would be less emotional trauma by having them report in the early predawn hours.

Also in this issue: Home for Christmas

Lewter's Hardware Store



1946
From Right: J.M. Lewter, G. Gideon,
C. Giles, H. Brock, J. Fogg

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A Time for War

by Tom Carney,
first published in 1997

Louise stared at the strange letter. She could tell it was probably a woman's handwriting but it was written in a foreign language. "Probably German," she thought.

Although her first inclination was to dismiss the letter, she still had an uneasy feeling. She had heard too many stories about straying husbands and German Frauleins. "I trust Bill," she kept telling herself, "but what if...?"

That evening, after dinner, she showed the letter to Bill. "What's this?" he inquired while trying to decipher the foreign language.

"You tell me," Louise said as she pointed to the signature. "Is Gitta an old Army buddy?"

Abruptly Bill crumpled the letter up in to a tight ball and threw it in the trash can. "It's nothing," he said in an impatient and aggravated voice. "She was just a woman who lived near the camp. There's

nothing to it! I told you before I left that you had no reason to worry! No reason at all!"

Louise vividly remembered that cold winter morning in 1942 when Bill had left for the Army. They had been married for less than two weeks when Bill received the notice to report to the Huntsville National Guard Armory on Dallas Street at five in the morning.

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Regardless of the hour, there was still a crowd of tearful wives and families waiting outside the armory as the new soldiers boarded the buses. Even now, three years later, Louise could still see Bill's face outlined in the rear window of the bus as it pulled away and remember how desolate and alone she had felt.

The war in Europe was already winding down by the time Bill was shipped overseas. After Germany's surrender he became part of the Occupation Army, stationed in a part of Bavaria.

Though thankful the war had ended, Louise still missed Bill terribly. Oftentimes she would write 5 or 6 letters at a time, enclosing all of them in the same envelope. Bill was not

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(in memory)

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a "letter writer" and sometimes several weeks would go by before she received any note from him.

The letters he did write were always full of cheer, relating small incidents and telling her how he, "counted the days until they could be together again." Sometimes he would enclose snapshots of himself and his buddies. Her favorite picture was one of him dressed in a German officer's tunic. Though he described it as my "Nazi photo," Louise thought it was a good likeness of him. After carefully trimming the photo to get rid of the uniform she put it in a small frame and placed it on the mantle.

When Bill finally came home in the fall of 1945 the young couple began building a life together. They purchased a small house in a new subdivision on Halsey Avenue and Bill went to work for his cousin selling real estate. Bill had foreseen the demand for real estate once the war was over and had carefully saved his money. Now he began purchasing older houses and remodelling them before

selling them at a substantial profit.

Everything was perfect, it seemed.

Then that letter came.

Louise tried to put the letter out of her mind. "I really do trust him," she kept telling herself over and over again. Finally, unable to overcome her doubts, she retrieved the letter from the trash can.

The next morning, after Bill had left for work, Louise carried the crumpled letter to the Red Cross office downtown on Washington Street. One of the ladies who worked there translated it for her. Listening to the lady as she read the letter, Louise tried to read between the lines. There really weren't any hints of a romance or even a strong friendship.

If anything, the letter was sad. The writer was asking Bill if he had any old clothes or shoes, "...clothes and food are impossible to buy. My coat was made from a Wernmact overcoat but the authorities have forbidden us to wear any clothes made from German uniforms and now I do

without. If you can see to send something you do not need it would be greatly helpful. May God go with you, Gitta."

"Honey, don't let it bother you," the Red Cross lady said as Louise got up to leave. "We get those letters all the time. Those Germans are starving to death over there."

Though greatly relieved at the contents of the letter, Louise still experienced tinges of doubt. She had not been married long enough to feel comfortable in her relationship, and like many other young brides, was wary of any woman asking her husband for help.

After worrying about the letter for several weeks Louise decided to confront the situation head on by writing Gitta. "...Bill is my husband and we are happily married."

Staring at the words she had just written, Louise felt a tinge of remorse at the hardness of



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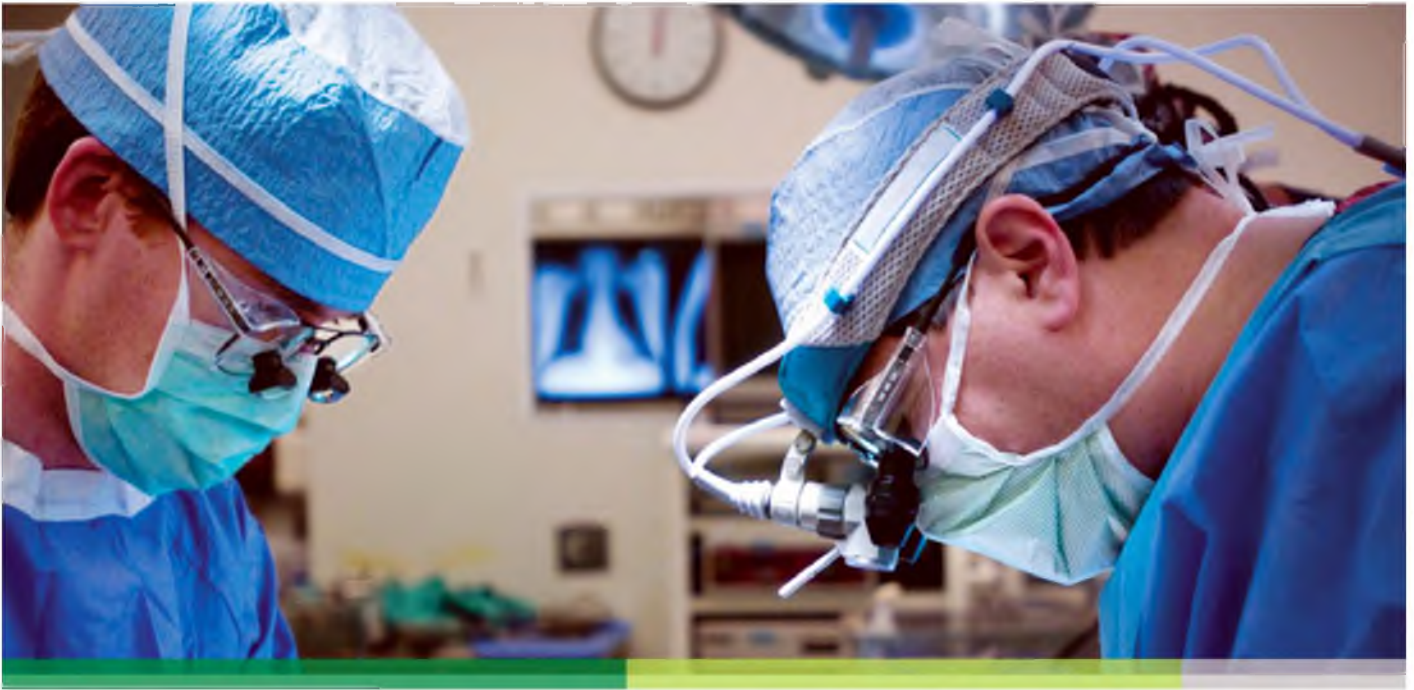


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them. "Maybe I should lighten it up a little," she thought. She then included several paragraphs about Huntsville and her life growing up here. After gathering up a few old clothes she placed them in a box along with the letter and carried them to the post office.

Louise had almost forgotten about the letter when several months later she received another, this time addressed to her. "Thank you very much for the clothes. What I could not wear I bartered for cigarettes." The writer then went on, in an almost chatty way, to describe life in Germany.

The reference to bartering cigarettes puzzled Louise until several days later when she was describing the letter to several of Bill's friends who were visiting for dinner. Both of the ex-soldiers burst out laughing at Louise's naivete. "Girl," one of the men explained, "In Germany there ain't no money except cigarettes. For a pack you can get a dinner in a fancy restaurant and for couple of cartons you could buy a suit of clothes along with a wristwatch!"

Louise was shocked as she listened to her husband and his friends tell callous "war stories" about "Occupied Germany." She had never really thought about the devastation wreaked upon the civilian population and about how much they must have suffered.

The next day she wrote another letter to Gitta. Not knowing what to write about to a complete stranger, she filled the pages with stories about her neighbors, going to church, cooking and tending house. Along with the letter she mailed two cartons of cigarettes.

A month went and then another letter came. As Louise opened the letter a small lace handkerchief fell out. "...Thank you so much for your kindness. I wish you to have this lace that belonged to my mother.

"Dear Santa, when you get here, could you throw a quick load in the washer, vacuum the carpets and wash your cookie plate?"

Thanks, "Mom"



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She was a kind person, just as you." Gitta then went on to talk about her life and about going to school at night to learn English. "When I finish," she wrote, "I will try to get a job with the Ami's and maybe someday I can come to America."

Louise was thrilled to receive a reply. All of her life she had been shy and found making friends difficult. "Now," she thought, "I have a pen pal."

If Louise was happy, Bill was sullen. "She's just trying to make you feel sorry for her. All those Krauts are just alike!"

For the first time in their marriage Louise took a stand against her husband. "She's my friend and I'll write whoever I want to!" Bill reluctantly backed down and an uneasy truce developed that would continue for years. Though Louise would talk excitedly to her friends about Gitta and her letters, she would never again mention them to Bill.

For Bill's part, he never said anything else about the correspondence though he would occasionally display his feelings by giving a loud grunt whenever he saw his wife writing another letter. Louise and Gitta began writing on a regular basis. Occasionally Louise would send several cartons of cigarettes along with her letter but after Gitta went to work for the Americans it was no longer necessary. Louise befriended the wife of a German rocket scientist here in town who taught her how to write in German. Gitta in turn became fluent in English.

Strange as it may seem

Louise and Gitta became best friends, often spending hours writing one another and sometimes posting 4 or 5 letters a week. As Louise wrote about her life in Huntsville, Gitta wrote about her life in Germany. Gitta had been married briefly near the end of the war but he was, she wrote, "lost on the Russian front." She had a son, Eric, who was born after her husband's death.

The fact that her best friend had a son thrilled Louise. She had always wanted children but had been unable to. As the years went by with Gitta writing about Eric's communion or how he was doing in school, Louise began to feel almost as if Eric was her child, too.

Ten years went by, then twenty and then thirty and forty. The letters now filled over a dozen shoe boxes on Louise's closet shelf. Eric had grown up and become a career officer in the German Air Force. Gitta never remarried; she was, she wrote, "too set in my ways for any man to put up with me!"

Bill, the man Louise had married so many years ago, was now a different person. They had nothing in common any longer and had almost stopped talking to one another. The real estate business

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had succeeded beyond Bill's wildest dreams and he was now involved in building new subdivisions. Unfortunately he also preferred to spend all of his spare time at the Elks Lodge drinking with his cronies. Rarely would he stagger home before midnight. When he was home he seemed to take a bizarre pleasure in verbally abusing her.

When Bill suffered a fatal stroke in the late 1980s while playing poker with his friends, many people claimed Louise was probably better off. Their strained relationship had been no secret to any of their friends.

Though she was now often lonely, she spent her time working with the library as a volunteer and doing charity work. Also, she still had her friend Gitta to write to.

Louise and Gitta had often talked about visiting one another, but as the years passed and their health began to fail, they both realized they would probably never make the trips. They still tried to write each other every week but the letters came slower after Gitta was diagnosed with cancer.

Finally the letters stopped altogether. After a pause of almost three months Louise received a letter from Eric informing her that his mother had died.

"...You were my mother's best friend and she asked me to make sure you got all the letters you had written her over the years. I will be in Huntsville for a week at Christmas time and

if possible would like to meet you and give you the letters. I will call when I get there."

The news of her best friend's death devastated Louise. Never in her life had she lost anyone who meant as much to her as Gitta.

Although grief never goes completely away, time has a way of making it easier to bear. By Christmas Louise was eagerly anticipating the arrival of Eric. He was a high ranking officer in the German Air Force now and was scheduled to visit Redstone Arsenal as part of an inspection tour. Mid-morning on Christmas Eve, Eric called.

Apologetically, he explained he had to attend several functions that evening but should be finished around nine that

night. He asked her, "Would that be too late to visit?"

"Please," Louise exclaimed, "Come over any time you can. I was going to midnight Mass tonight and if you would like, you can go with me."

Louise had planned a perfect evening. The Christmas tree was the prettiest she had ever decorated, there was a fire in the fireplace and German Christmas cookies were arranged on a tray. She had even invited two of her neighbors over to meet her best friend's son. She had known them almost as long as she had known Gitta.

No one could have foreseen the reaction, however, when Eric finally arrived. The moment he walked in the door



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"In the 60s people took LSD to make the world weird. Now the world is weird and people take Prozac to make it normal."

Bill Jenner, Arab

there was a stunned silence. Eric, now 50 years old, looked exactly like Bill, Louise's dead husband. Same blond hair, same clear blue eyes, stocky build, even the same cleft in the chin.

It was not merely a resemblance... Eric and Bill could have been identical twins....

Or!

Louise was the first to regain her composure. Seeing the shocked looks on her friends' faces, she took the coffee cups from their hands and quickly ushered them out the door, thanking them for being so kind as to stop by.

Later, if someone had ever asked Louise what to do when confronted with a situation like that, she would have replied. "Act like nothing is wrong." And that's just what she did.

Eric had brought a large box of his mother's belongings with him. As they sat on the couch going through the

old letters and pictures, a lifetime of memories came back. There were pictures of Louise, with paint splattered all over her from when she painted the house back in the early 1950s. There were bundles and bundles of letters from a half century of being pen pals and friends. Other envelopes held faded newspaper clippings about Huntsville that Louise had cut out and sent Gitta.

As they were browsing through the box, Louise spot-

ted one picture and reached for it. Eric saw the photo at the same time and tried to grab it from Louise's hand.

"That looks like Bill..." Her voice froze as she happened to glance at the mantle.

The picture she was holding was the same photo that Bill had sent her years ago. The one Bill had called his "Nazi" picture that had been sitting on the mantle for years.

Moments went by with the only sound being the fire crack-



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ling in the fireplace. Finally, Louise glanced at the wall clock and stood up. "Come on," she said. "It's time to go to church." The short drive to the church seemed like an eternity, with neither Eric nor Louise knowing what to say. Finally, Louise broke the silence.

"How long have you known?" "Since Mother died," replied Eric in a slow, hesitant voice. "I wasn't going to say anything; I just wanted to know for sure."

Louise had never been much of a church going person but there was something about midnight Mass at the Church of the Nativity that had always captivated her. Father George B. Wood was conducting Mass that night and she always looked forward to listening to his sermons.

Father Wood was a grizzled old ex-Army chaplain who had earned fame for parachuting into Normandy, France with his troops on D-Day. Years earlier Louise had privately nicknamed him "the bear," but as she came to know the priest she changed it to the "teddy bear," a name appropriate for the compassionate way he ministered to his flock.

As Father Wood began to preach, Louise's thoughts turned to a time long ago when the world was at war. Father Wood was a young soldier in uniform, like Bill. Did they do the same things? Were all the soldiers alike? Why had Gitta never told her the truth?

Suddenly Louise remem-

bered something that Father Wood had told her years earlier when they were talking about the war ... "a half century ago was a time for war; today is a time for forgiveness."

Maybe it was the thought of those words, or maybe it was the message of peace and compassion that Father Wood spoke of on that Christmas Eve night, but for whatever reason, Louise suddenly realized the true meaning of forgiveness.

When Father Wood had finished and the choir began to sing, Louise leaned over and whispered to Eric, "Your mother was a very special lady."

"So is my father's wife," replied Eric as he tenderly took the old woman's hand into his own.




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Ginny Frieshold, Scottsboro

Tips from Earlene

* To get rid of that fireplace soot odor, do the following. After you've cleaned the ashes out of the fireplace, place a shallow pan of baking soda in the fireplace for at least a couple of hours, or overnight.

* De-Stressing - whenever you feel anxiety coming on, pause to breathe. Focus on your inhalation and exhaling. You can actually calm your body just by regular, controlled breathing. A deep breath, held for a few seconds, can help you immediately.

* Storing stale marshmallows overnight in an airtight container with a slice of fresh bread will freshen them up.

* Snacks that mix carbohydrates with protein give you the biggest energy boost. Try fruit chunks dipped in yogurt, whole wheat crackers topped with peanut butter, or popcorn topped with Parmesan cheese.

* Keep a cardboard box in the trunk of your car. You can put your purchases in it to keep them from rolling around on the way home.

* Before going to sleep at night, compile a to-do list for the next day. You'll sleep more soundly and when you wake up you'll be ready to start solving problems instead of spending time remembering what you have to do. You'll find that you are more committed to tasks that are written down.

* If you have any plumbing repair be sure and flush out your faucets and showers for 15 minutes immediately afterwards. Banging on old water pipes can reactivate idle bacteria that cause Legionnaires' disease.

* Refrigerating cherries will help keep them fresh. It also is

a good idea to keep them away from onions and garlic.

* The terrible twos aren't that bad. Only 20% of parents with 2 year olds said their toddlers had behavioral problems, one survey reported.

* Not eating breakfast can lead to mental fatigue during mid-afternoon, even if you eat a hearty lunch. Start your day with a bowl of cereal with skim milk and a banana, a wheat English muffin with peanut butter, or some fruit and yogurt.

* Feeling younger will make you feel happier. In a recent survey, 500 women said they feel young when they play with children, color their hair, sing out loud while driving, gossip with friends and flirt.

* Many women in their thirties and forties begin to go through menopause and aren't aware that it's happening. If you experience unexplained irritability, feel very sad or depressed for no reason, snap at friends and loved ones suddenly and go through other unusual mood swings, you may be beginning menopause.

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Ask Grandma

By Mimi

A Very Serious Topic

I was asked about teenagers and serious depression. This month, here is a serious answer. Teens are often moody and some of it is normal. Having serious talks with teens is hard, when they don't want to talk about anything with parents, and certainly not about THEIR feelings, anxieties, hurts, etc.

It's legit, for a variety of reasons, why they resist and are very reluctant. You have to both find the right time and sit down, stare them in the eye, and seriously ask questions, then keep quiet and let them talk. Keep asking questions, even if they want to "button up". Sometimes they might even leave the room, car or situation.

Heck, a LOT of people, kids and adults are reluctant to talk to anyone about their problems and troubles. And not all parents know how to say the right things to keep the dialog going. That's something those parents can't learn by reading an article or even a book.

But everything helps if they are looking for a way to really communicate with their teen (the hardest to talk to).

Many teens grow up to tell stories of "talks with Mom and Dad" when the parents were simply told what they wanted to hear to make them shut up. Teens know their parents pretty well and know how to shut them up. Parents have to work past and through that when there are warning signs.

When one of yours shows the signs, if you love them, do something. If you are in control, do it yourself, if not, get the person who is in control to do it. Get professional family counseling with a Psychologist or Psychiatrist and not for just one session. No disrespect, but not the family minister

at church.

Yes, it can be costly, but a life could be at stake. What's that worth?

When a teen's grades start to fall, they withdraw from social activities and friends, they are very moody, they either don't talk to family at all, or discuss subjects that are disturbing, are all signs something is seriously wrong.

I am not just talking about a day or two, but over a period of weeks and growing worse.

The absolute fire alarm is if a kid starts giving away his or her stuff. That happened to someone very close to our family. Fortunately, a good friend of the boy called the mother and told her about giving away stuff and she told her husband. Alerted, the father chose to stay in the room with the teen that night, and about 1:00 am, thinking the father was sleeping, he crept

from his bed, found a hidden gun and was in the process of loading it when the father intervened.

They may never know if he would have gone through with a suicide but that was enough for a major intervention.

The Psychologist visits lasted for a number of months starting twice a week, then tapered off in the months to come and everyone gained from the joint sessions. Sometimes part of the visit was with the child alone, other times only parents, and often with everyone present.

Serious depression is not to be taken lightly. At the very least, it's debilitating and terribly hard not only on the individual, but close family as well.

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Christopher



Jerry & 'Lynn

LOVE NEVER FAILS

by Charlie Edgar



"I'm going to come down there and marry you", he said.

"You'd better," she replied.

Hugh had not talked to Jo in forty years. They had dated in high school in New Jersey and were engaged to be married when they broke up under family pressure. Hugh had then married another and they were married for forty years. His wife then suffered cancer and he nursed her with truly loving care until her death. All his friends reported that he was so saddened that they truly were worried.

Jo went to College in North Carolina, met a young man and married. They had three boys but when they were four, five, and seven he cleaned out their bank accounts and left her.

She was a single mom with three boys and set out to raise them after a divorce.

Sometime later she met a man who appeared to be an answer to her prayers. He was an executive with the Boy Scouts and was financially stable. After marriage she learned that he had a hidden drinking problem. He would become violent and abuse her physically. Apparently a total change of character. She had a second divorce.

She worked as an account manager at an Atlantic City casino. She did date a man who helped her in many ways, especially with her boys. They had a religious difference and his daughters were opposed to any marriage.

I am Jo's brother and had moved to Huntsville after duty in the Navy. I had an investigation business and was active in real estate. I

was also an ordained minister and pastored a small country church. She had a son, David, who was a dealer at a Casino. He had some personal problems and they felt he needed to change his environment.

David came to live with us. On the day he arrived, he literally got out of his car and we drove to church for special meetings. The visiting preacher was not dynamic, probably more "professorial". David came out of the meeting and said "that's what I need". He changed his life and started a hugely successful sales career.

Shortly thereafter I needed a secretary. David told me that his mother was probably a victim of age discrimination and needed a job. She moved to Huntsville and went to work. Our parents moved here shortly after.

Jo worked here for about twelve years. She had a secretarial service on the side and enjoyed socializing with her customers. She taught Sunday School and had an outgoing personality, but did little else.

When our mother died another sister was with her and Jo told her that the biggest mistake she'd

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made was not marrying Hugh. That was at the end of January. The first week in March she received an email from Hugh. They mailed back and forth until Friday night. He called and they talked for four hours. The conversation ended with the opening lines of this story. Hugh told her he had something to do in two weeks and then he would come to Huntsville. On Tuesday he was here. They then planned for him to go and come back in two weeks. The next day they were gone and I had to find a new secretary.

We went to North Carolina for the wedding and his friends told us of the amazing change when they got together. They told us they how truly worried they had been and how sad Hugh had been, but how he had come out of his shell.

They were in their early sixties but rode motorcycles, travelled, and had ten wonderful years together. They built a neat little house in South Carolina, worked in church together. Jo then began to have mini-strokes and perhaps slight

dementia.

But even that time was beautiful as Hugh went back to his nursing mode. Watching him was like watching a love scene as he cooked and cared for Jo. Watching their children blend together in a family, even as they were in their fifties was a thing of beauty.

All good things come to an end. One day they packed their pick up truck to take some items to a yard sale. Some items fell off and they stopped to pick things up and a log truck hit the back of Hugh's truck. He was killed instantly.

Jo wanted to keep their little house but her problems prevented that. The children took her to a home in New Jersey. She ended up being paralyzed on one side but not remembering that and would try to get out of bed and fall. But when we would visit, the nurses would tell us that she would always be cheery and laugh and joke in spite of all her problems.

Was the glass half empty or half full? Love is so powerful that I believe their ten years beat all the rest.

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The Christmas Tree Stand

by Derek Robertson

Christmas was always a celebrated holiday in my childhood home. No matter the turmoil and hustle and bustle of the world, it always provided some peace in our home. We never had a need not met and we did receive presents of things wanted. It was a humble Christmas in terms of the number of presents. We could still see the tree stand after all the presents were placed under the cedar tree we cut off the farm. Nonetheless we were all content. It was never about the presents but the pretext of the season. The reason we knew but was never recognized like it should have been.

I imagine we celebrated our holiday like everyone else. We had homemade Christmas cookies and made homemade Christmas decorations and ornaments. There was always a Christmas ham baked with all the trimmings. And the same old-fashioned holiday songs played regularly within our home. Regardless of the number of presents our excitement and anticipation for Christmas Day was always extraordinary for me and my brothers.

After opening our gifts and eating our dinner, my mother enjoyed a drive on Christmas night to see the lights and trees displayed in the windows of the country homes near our farm before they were all taken down, boxed up and put away until next year. As we drove I would investigate the homes to see what gifts might be able to be seen through the back-seat car window of my dad's Buick. I often wondered what kind of presents they exchanged with their family and how many they received, I thought as we drove by all the houses how they celebrated Christmas. Could they see the bottom of their tree when the presents were all laid out?

I began to marvel what my presents would be as I grew up. Did I share the same musings as a nine-year-old boy with other boys my age? Until we were in our middle teens we only received two presents. One was the main gift and the other was always something practical like underwear or socks. I can remember every main present back to when I was five-years-old. Unfortunately, the practical gifts do not come to mind. As the years passed and us boys began turning into young men, the peace in our home began to fade. The reasons are not important but the fact the peace was gone did. Choices people make can disrupt a small and humble home. It can literally tear a family apart.

If not for a walk down a gravel road on a late, cool October afternoon, I may have never received the most precious Christmas gift of my life and discover the true meaning of peace. I worked for an elderly married couple that lived about a quarter mile away from where I lived. I did odd jobs around their farm, from gardening to plowing to hoeing. On occasion I also helped rob bee hives and collect the honey

with mason jars. These two people were more than neighbors but more like grandparents to me. I loved them dearly and, in some way, substituted them for my real grandparents that passed away when I was young.

The turmoil in my home one evening prompted a visit with them. After I arrived and was greeted by them and offered a glass of sweet tea it was noticeable I had a heavy heart and a mind full of questions. I sat on the couch and shared my troubles. Once I stopped talking the old man cleared his throat, leaned forward in his squeaky chair and reached for a worn black book that rested upon the table next to him. He slowly turned the cover to the left and began teaching me about the greatest gift to the world and how I might receive the gift for myself. The old woman sat close by me on the couch with her one hand in mine that looked like leather but was soft as cotton and the other she used a tissue to wipe tears of joy from her eyes as her husband read from that ancient book. It was not long before I found myself on my knees on their living room floor and I too received the most important gift of my life.

After that day I never again looked under my Christmas tree to see if the tree stand could be seen. Little did I know that not only did my gift secure my eternity but it would help guide and carry me as the years passed by.

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It wasn't long after that fall day and the following Christmas I found myself in the U.S. Army. I left my home only to return some twenty years later. My gift continued to protect and guide me, even when I was not taking care of it like I should have been.

The peace that was once in my childhood home vanished and my step-dad and mom succumbed to their demise. So much so on a summer night when the celebrating of my mother and step-dad got out of hand I found myself in the driveway with my children being told to leave home and never to return. I was not her son anymore she told me. My gift gave me the strength to remain strong in my little boy's eyes. I got in my truck and never returned. I did call occasionally hoping something had changed as the years went by, but I was always refused.

One day I called to discover my mother had passed some months before. The obituary did not even mention my name. Once again, my gift saw me through this difficult time and provided me the strength I needed not only for the loss of my mother, but the bitterness held against me all the way to her grave. All because of the demise that took her life, I was thankful and blessed to have a close relationship with my dad and step-mom. Although technically she was my step-mother I always called her mama. And she always called me one of her own. No one could tell the difference.

The gift I received as a young man taught to me by that saintly couple proved once again to take care of me. My dad and step-mother also shared the same gift. When I was forty years old, and after I discovered my mother's passing, the following Christmas all my extended family gathered for celebration in my home. My family can be loud and busy when we get together, and it was almost time for us all to exchange our gifts. My step-mother hushed the room and announced she was going to give me a gift and wanted all there to witness it. We gathered around the table and I sat down. I wondered why all this trouble for my gift and not anyone else's.

She slid over to me a large brown envelope. With a curious mind and an anxious heart, I opened the envelope and soon began to realize these were legal documents, adoption papers in fact. I was perplexed to say the least. I precipitously asked my stepmother what this meant. She said all men need a mother and while she was alive, she wanted to be mine. I expressed to her that I already considered her my mother and in fact reminded her that I called her mama. There was no need in an expense such as this I explained. But she insisted she wanted it on paper, made legal and wanted the entire world to know I was her son. Bona fide she called it!

My Christmas trees over the past several years are filled with presents under the tree. The tree stand cannot be seen these days. But I always remember the two most important gifts of my life were never placed under a tree anyway, but instead in my heart. Merry Christmas!

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Heard On the Street

by **Cathey Carney**



That sweet little girl in last month's Photo of the Month was Huntsville Green Team's **Joy McKee** and the first person to identify her was **Joan Banks**. Joan is retired, lives in Huntsville and worked years ago for Suma Technologies (AAR) on Sparkman Drive. When she was a child living in Tennessee she remembers the Goat Man coming through their town with his wagon and hundreds of items people could buy. She said she was reminded of that when we did the story on him when he came through Huntsville - same guy!

Then on p. 48 in the November issue I had hidden a tiny heart that hundreds of you found. OK it wasn't my best hiding job but the first caller was **Jeannie Worthey** who lives downtown. She said it took a few minutes but she found it right away. Jeannie and Joan are now getting the magazine delivered

right to them for a year - congratulations to both you ladies!

We wanted to send love to our Tennessee readers **Billy and Phyllis Lawrence** who enjoy reading about this area's history. Billy has been so active all his life and he recently had a bad fall and broke several bones. We are thinking about you and sending love and wishes for a good recovery. We know Phyllis is taking good care of you.

Another lovely couple whom we love to hear from is **Sandra and Buddy Esslinger** - always brightens up my day to talk with them.

I have hidden a tiny **feather** somewhere within these 52 pages. Now it's going to be sort of hard for you to find but not impossible. I have no idea why I picked a feather but I did so find it. And remember I'm trying to spread the love around so if you've won in the last year or so you can call but you won't get the free sub. Get out those specs!

This is the time of year when thieves and crooks try their best to take what you have. It can be skimming devices at ATMs or gas stations, or people calling you to get your financial information. Lately I have heard there are multiple parking lot robberies in parking lots of big box stores: Walmart, etc. Especially at night but not always. A good friend called recently to tell me there were 3 of these in a two hour period, with ladies having their purses yanked away from them. **DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU**. A good tip that this lady recommended is to get something small you can wear around your neck and hide under coats that hold credit cards, cash etc. This gives you both hands to hold bags and packages and you aren't as likely to have

a purse ripped off your body.

The main idea is to Always be very **AWARE** of what's going on around you. Don't leave a store with purse and bags and trying to talk on your cell phone at the same time - you're a walking target. If someone is following you or something just doesn't feel right, you need to get some help or to get out of the situation. Trust your gut. Go shopping with friends and don't go alone. And for sure, shop during the day instead of night, if at all possible.

You know it's a shame that these things are happening today. It's not that the good old days were easier, but I think they were kinder.

Hugh Michaels got one of those bad viruses going around and we want to tell you to **GET WELL** Soon - thinking about you.

SO proud of **Cpt. Carl Gamble**, a U.S. Air Force Veteran who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in Vietnam. Cpt. Gable wrote a book about his experience in war, "Wild Blue Yonder", that has been very popular. Last year Carl held a book signing at the **Historic Lowry House** with many in attendance. In November Cpt. Gamble, along with 5 other Veterans, was inducted into the Madison County Military Heritage Commission Hall of Heroes.

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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This little guy is no longer with us, but he had alot to do with what you drive on.



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Per **Bobby Hayden**, Carl is the first black soldier to get this honor in 43 years. Congratulations to Cpt. Gamble, we are so proud of you.

Billy Stone was a good friend to many in the music business, including **George Wells** whom we lost several months ago. Billy was a talented musician and writer, who wrote several stories for Old Huntsville. Billy passed away Sep. 25 of this year. He is survived by wife **Patricia**, children **Kenny Stone**, **Sherry Kincaid (David)** and **Cindy Semmier (Mark)** and grandchildren and great grandchildren. Billy was 80 years old.

Latham United Methodist Church held a very special event to honor Veterans on Nov. 11, 2018. The Huntsville Concert Band Brass Quintet played several songs and the message was given by **Rev. Coy Hallmark**. **Tyler Henderson** sang some beautiful patriotic songs and **Rev. Robert Sparkman** introduced **Rev. Hallmark**. **Matt Jones** welcomed all to the church, which was nearly full. A very moving event that honored Vets from the 5 branches of the military.

Sending love to **Chuck Saunders** and **Phil Taylor** to feel better SOON! We've been worried about them, they've been really sick.

Rosemary Leatherwood wanted to wish her son **Billy Leatherwood** a happy birthday on Dec. 18. And her grandson **Austin Pinkerton** will be turning 20 on Dec. 28. She loves you both so much!

Tom Carney's birthday is Dec. 15, this year he would have been 72. He always said that no one could put up Christmas trees until his birthday arrived. That was in our family, anyway so that was the rule!

I really enjoyed meeting **Joan** and **Bill Johnson** recently, who stopped by to buy a copy of Tom's new book. They have sweet cats as pets and Bill has promised to send a story or two about his favorite cat, **Tux**.

Margie Pylant Burks loved her family with all her heart. She was a positive and happy person who cherished her life and friends. Margie passed away on Nov. 14 at age 84, surrounded by her family. She is survived by her four sons, **Bruce (Karen) Burks; Brad (Sherry) Burks; Brent (Vickie) Burks; Mitch (Jodi) Burks**. She leaves her brother **Bruce Pylant (Vivian)**, sister-in-law **Joyce Burks**, 17 grandchildren and 19 great grandchildren. Margie is watching over her beloved family and will be in their hearts always.

One of my favorite people to see and catch up with when I do my banking at BB&T Bank on Church Street is **Ianthia Bridges**. She has several family birthdays in December and here they are: **Caroline Williams** (Rome, GA) on Dec. 10; **Demonica McCrary** on Dec. 10; her **Aunt Marie** (Camden, AL) on Dec. 12; her **Aunt Yolanda** (Orlando, FL) on Dec. 17 and cousin **Cedric** on Dec. 17. That's alot of gifts to buy. Happy Birthday to all!

Recently **Jodi Stephens** sent me the local history of the Huntsville Ballet Company and how it always features connections to Huntsville history as in *The Nutcracker* and a recent performance of "Unplugged" (Alabama 200) as well as "The Letter", about a Civil War soldier. Performances of *The Nutcracker* start Dec. 7 at 7:30 pm and to find out more go to their website www.huntsvilleballet.org.

We were so very sorry to hear of the death of **Mary Agnes Currie**. Everyone knew her as "**Ricky**" and she was a resident in nursing care at Redstone Village. My Mom was there for many years and we would regularly go to see Ricky, even when both Mom and Ricky were in wheelchairs. They would always find a way to try to give each other a hug, even while in their wheelchairs. Ricky is survived by her sons **Dan (Susan) Currie; David Currie; Roy (Paulette) Currie and Don (Patty) Currie**. Also brother **Doyle Richardson**, 13 grandchildren and 24 great grandchildren. Ricky served as 1st Lt. in the Army Nurses Corp. She loved little animals, plants and gardening and had the kindest heart. She will be so missed.

Please remember that this is a sad time for many who have lost loved ones so be extra considerate of their feelings. But if you're getting together with friends and family have a wonderful, warm and memorable Christmas.



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Pecan Ball

8 oz. package cream cheese
 1/4 c. finely chopped parsley
 2 T. chives, finely chopped
 1/2 t. Worcestershire sauce
 Dash Tabasco sauce
 3/4 c. pecans, finely chopped
 Combine the cheese, parsley and chives with the Worcestershire and Tabasco sauces. Chill til the cheese is firm. Form into a large or several small balls, roll in the pecans and wrap in some pretty colored cellophane wrap.

Spicy Cheese Tidbits

1 c. butter softened
 2 c. grated sharp Cheddar cheese
 2 c. plain flour

2 c. Rice Crispies
 1/4 t. red pepper, ground
 1/2 t. salt
 Combine all ingredients and mix well. Form into small balls and place on buttered cookie sheet. Press down with fork in crisscross fashion. Bake at 325 degrees for 20 minutes.

Cranberry Relish

2 c. fresh cranberries
 Grated rind and juice from a large thick-skinned orange
 1 c. granulated sugar
 1 t. dry English mustard powder dissolved in a teaspoon of cold water
 1 T. vinegar
 Wash your cranberries and put them in a heavy saucepan. Add the orange rind and juice

and the sugar. Bring to boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the mustard and vinegar. Chill for 24 hours, then pack into jars. Store in your fridge til you give them as gifts.

Creole Porcupines

3 T. butter, softened
 1 c. firmly packed brown sugar
 2 eggs
 1-1/2 c. chopped pecans
 1 c. chopped dates
 3 c. shredded coconut, divided
 Cream your butter in a large mixing bowl, then add the sugar and beat well. Stir in the nuts, dates and a cup of the coconut. Cover and chill for at least 8 hours.

WHAT DOES A CHRISTMAS TREE FEEL?

Our Christmas tree stands in front of the window in the living room as it does each year. It's a very pretty tree, the children did a great job picking one out this year. As I look at it, I wonder if the tree is happy to be the one chosen to grace our living room and be the center of everyone's attention. Is it proud of the lights and decorations that have been placed on it? Or is it sad that it is having to give its life, that a little of it dies each day in the heat of the house, so that a family will have a tree to put presents under? Does it feel silly with all the decorations on it? As it saw the boy with the saw coming towards it, would it have moved away if it could, or was it proud that the children had searched in the cold until they found the perfect tree to take? Was it happy to be picked to help celebrate the birth of a child that was born so long ago?

by Kathleen Vaughn



Shape the dough into 1 inch balls, roll them in the remaining coconut. Place them 2 inches apart on greased cookie sheets. Bake in 300 degree oven for 25 minutes or lightly browned. Remove to wire racks to cool.

Almond Cookies

1/2 lb. unsalted butter, softened
 3/4 c. granulated sugar
 1 t. almond extract
 1 t. vanilla extract
 2 c. sifted flour
 1 c. almonds, very finely ground
 1-1/2 c. confectioners sugar
 Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Beat the butter and sugar together til they are light and creamy, using an electric mixer. Beat in the extracts, flour and ground nuts. Chill the mixture for 2 hours in fridge. Grease 2 cookie sheets. Form the dough into bite-sized balls and put them on the sheets. Bake in oven for 10 minutes, bottoms should be barely browned. Remove the cookies from the oven right away and transfer them to wire racks to cool. Roll them in confectioners sugar while they are still warm, let them cool and roll in the sugar again. Store in airtight container, if you can keep them away from your family.

No-Bake Party Mix

4 c. Crispix cereal
 1 c. pretzel sticks
 1 c. mixed nuts
 1 c. Cheese-Its
 1/2 c. popcorn oil
 1 oz. pkg. dry Ranch dressing mix
 1/2 t. dill weed
 1/8 c. Parmesan cheese
 Mix cereal, pretzels and nuts in a 2 gallon bowl. Add oil and mix well, add the dressing mix, dill weed and cheese. Mix well, carefully so as not to break up the cereal. You'll be surprised at how crisp this stays. Can be stored in gallon Ziploc bags.

Santa's Whiskers

1 c. butter
 1 c. sugar
 2 T. milk
 1 t. vanilla extract
 2-1/2 c. plain flour
 3/4 c. finely chopped red and green candied cherries
 1/2 c. chopped pecans
 3/4 c. flaked coconut
 Cream butter and sugar. Stir in milk and vanilla, stir in flour, nuts and cherries. Form 2 rolls, 2x8". Chill for several hours, then remove and slice 1/4" thick.
 Roll each slice in coconut and bake at 375 degrees for 12-15 minutes and edges are golden.

Chocolate Pecan Turtles

1 c. brown sugar
 2 sq. semi-sweet chocolate, melted
 1 c. plain flour
 1/4 c. butter, melted
 1 egg
 1/2 lb. pecan halves
 Mix all ingredients except pecans. For each turtle, place 4 pecans on greased cookie sheet. Drop a teaspoon of dough on pecans. Bake for 10-12 minutes at 350 degrees.

Vanilla Extract

3 whole vanilla beans
 1 c. good vodka
 Cut beans in half, split them down the middle, scrape beans out into glass container. Add Vodka and mix. Add a couple of scraped bean pods to fit in jar, cover securely. Takes about 2 mos. or longer to make good extract.



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Judy & Barry Key

A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

by Barry Key

For several years, for Thanksgiving, our family would rent two cabins at Callaway Gardens, Georgia. The main attraction, that was enjoyed by all ages, was the tour of lights. It was an hour long ride in an open air trolley. The trip was through a woods where the facility had arranged millions of different colored lights into all kind of characters and shapes.

One year while sitting around the cabin fireplace and sipping our brew of choice, someone said next year let's plan a different trip, say at Christmas instead of Thanksgiving.

Without hesitation, a unanimous decision was made in favor of the suggestion. Where would we go, what would we do? Several locations and things to do were suggested, but the most popular suggestions were snow skiing and snowmobiling. Pop, that's me,

was unanimously nominated via a democratic process (show of hands) to make all the arrangements.

OK, it was settled, we would go snowmobiling and snow skiing. With 14 people in our family, it needed to be relatively close so we could drive. As I started to make plans I discovered that most of the ski resorts in the east only offered skiing...also, the slopes may, or may not, have adequate snow.

To do both, it seemed we would have to go out west. Without really thinking, I sent everyone an e-mail suggesting we go to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Again, I immediately received a 100 percent response in favor. My granddaughter told me later, she could tell that Alice, still snug and warm in the womb, had also raised her hand in favor.

I had more than a year to plan. There were fourteen people that would be going; great grand kids, age 8 months, to great grandparents, Judy and me, ages 75. Also, we would have to fly. We would have 6 people flying from Huntsville, 4 people flying from Birmingham, and 4 people



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we would meet at the airport in Atlanta. Now, with work and school schedules to consider, when would everyone be free to go for at least a week?

The dates were set, we would fly out on Christmas day and return on New Year's Day.

Since we were going to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Judy and I wanted our family to visit Yellowstone National Park to see the hundreds of bison and elk and the numerous geysers.... and of course, the most famous of all geysers, Old Faithful. The only way to see Old Faithful in the winter is by Snowmobile. From Jackson Hole it was a 16 hour round trip by snowmobile which was out of the question.

For the Snowmobile trip, I made reservations for three days at West Yellowstone, Montana. For snow skiing, I made a four day reservation at the Snow King Lodge in Jackson Hole. We flew from Atlanta to Jackson Hole, rented three cars and drove to West Yellowstone on our first day. It should have been a 2 hour drive but there was a blizzard and it took us over 4 hours. It was a little scary, but everyone enjoyed the snow covered scenery.

Judy and I had been to Yellowstone National Park several times, so at West Yellowstone, Judy and I kept our 8 month old and 2 year old great-grandchildren while the rest of the family toured the Park by snowmobile. When they returned it was like a flock of Magpies, all talking at once about the animals and natural phenomenon they had seen. They were with a guide and the guide had really given them a grand educational tour. The third morning we returned to Jackson Hole and the Snow King Lodge. We spent the rest of that day touring the town and buying groceries for the rest of the week. The next few days the family spent skiing, snow tubing and sightseeing.

Even Judy (great grandma) skied one day. I was content just watching our wonderful family having the time of their lives. The last day we took a horse drawn snow sleigh ride out through the National Elk Refuge. There were thousands of elk so close that you could almost reach and touch them.

I'm still amazed that so many of my family traveling by airplane, from such a number of different cities, during that time of the year, experienced no delays or problems. I was finally able to uncross my fingers! The only hiccup in our plans....I guess I didn't make myself "perfectly clear" when I made reservations at the Snow King Lodge. I

had insisted on two condo apartments, in the same building, side-by-side. When we checked in, the clerk assured me the apartments were next to each other. He was absolutely right, they were next to each other. But to get from one apartment to the other, you had to walk down three flights of stairs, walk across a parking garage, and up three flights of stairs. Although inconvenient, we all had a big laugh after we had thought about what the clerk was thinking... side-by-side.

Now, when our family gets together, we still laugh and talk about "side-by-side" and our "CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER".

Gary Campbell
General Manager

Huntsville


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MY GRANDDAD

by Don Broome

My granddad lived in Houston, Texas. His name was Oliver Lafayette Broom. My dad added the E to our name. We always took our vacations there probably because we didn't need a motel. He was what you would call an old Geezer. I remember him always spitting and look out because he didn't care where it landed.

He lived in an old log cabin with gravel paper siding and a screened-in front porch. Most of the yard was just sand so it was good for us boys. There was an old sofa on the porch that was more sand than couch. We would either go at Christmas time or in the middle of summer. Talk about hot and humid weather that was summer in Houston. Winter could be mild or bitter cold, you never knew.

Inside the walls and floors were logs. The floor had about 10 layers of rolled flooring and you could feel the roll underfoot. The walls had about 20 layers of wallpaper on them. The kitchen had metal on the ceiling. They say that every millionth roach is an albino. I killed 4 of those in one day. It was kept clean by my Aunt Florence who was my 2nd grandmother on my dad's side. She was the best part of our visits as granddad always ignored everyone except dad.

I remember him telling us one time about all the jobs he had during his working days and he never seemed to keep one very long. I asked him why and he said he didn't much like being told what to do.

The health department visited him one time and told him his well had been condemned. It was only 15 feet from his outhouse. He told the man to wait a minute and got his shotgun and laid it across his lap in his rocker and asked to tell him again what he had said. The man cleared his throat and suggested that he boil his water before drinking it.

A couple of years later he was driving on the interstate in Houston and the highway patrol pulled him over. Granddad told them in colorful

language that he didn't know why he was pulled over, he wasn't speeding. He was going 15 MPH on the freeway. People were passing him doing close to 90. They pulled his license for that one.

Years later when I graduated from Huntsville High, I drove out to see him. After 3 days of him going Huh? I told him I had to go.



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Gifts of Love

by Don Sanders



Christmas at my house when I was a boy was not a big deal. All kids love Christmas because they always have hope that there will be a present under the tree for them, left there by jolly old Saint Nick. I don't remember having a Christmas tree or Christmas decorations, but we did get Christmas presents.

I grew up in the 50s when times were hard and money was scarce, I don't know where the money went, but we didn't have it. We always put a box beside our bed for Santa to leave our gifts in. We usually got a little candy, nuts etc. plus a gift that

we had requested. We did not feel bad about the conservative present that we received because we knew no children that received any better than we did.

As I said, times were tough and everyone that I knew were all doing the best that they could. Dad worked, mom worked and all the children worked to have what they needed, not necessarily what they wanted.

Christmas was better then, it was more about love and family. Today Christmas is too commercial, you may receive lots of nice gifts, but no one puts love and effort in getting them for you. I believe that the best gift that you can receive is one that someone has thought about and made for you.

When I became a father and the children grew old enough to buy a present, they wanted to know what I wanted for Christmas. I told them that what I wanted, money could not buy,

that I wanted them to get paper, pens and crayons and sit at the table and make me a Christmas card, to do this takes love and effort.

This is what they did and I have every card, letter and note that they have written to me in my night stand beside my bed. If they had gone to the store and had bought me a nice present, I'm sure by now that it would be worn out, but this way, my presents will last as long as I live.

In my opinion, marketing may be a good thing but it has messed up Christmas. How many Christmas presents would you get if your friends and loved ones had to take time from their busy schedules to make you a present?

Today's Christmas gift is ordering online and returning after Christmas.

Merry Christmas and a great New Year. And good luck with those Christmas Gifts.

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My Favorite Things

by Jennifer Jonas

Last December I was called to the home of Idalette by her daughter Rusla, who believed her mother had only days to live. If available, she wanted me to come that day.

Feeling the urgency in her voice I made plans to leave and quickly found my collection of "The Sound of Music" songs because I was told that this musical was one of Idalette's all-time favorites. Rusla filled me in upon my arrival about her mother's status. She had quickly declined and was now bedridden.

I listened with intent and then we walked to Idalette's room passing a brightly lit Christmas tree in the hallway. As I was getting my chair and music positioned close to Idalette, I was surprised to see Rusla crawling into her mother's bed. She climbed in right next to her.

I smiled, hiding my surprise, and then strummed my first chord and began to sing "Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens, brown paper packages tied up with strings, these are a few of my favorite things." This is a well-loved song and if you know the lyrics it is hard not to join in. Rusla knew the lyrics very well and so she joined in.

After the last note was sung we continued with "Edelweiss" and then "Do-Re-Mi." After this third song Rusla asked her mother if she needed anything, wanting to keep her as comfortable as possible. Idalette opened her eyes, looked to her daughter then shook her head "no." She was aware of our presence and she seemed comforted by the sound of her favorite songs.

It was not long before Rusla's 10 year-old daughter Kylara came

home from her Montessori school and for the second time that evening I was surprised when she too climbed into the bed.

As she got comfortable finding her spot at the end of the bed, I picked our next song. Together, our now 3-voice choir sang for Idalette "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey. You'll never know dear how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away."

By the end of the song the light outside was dimming and there was a third member of the family in the bed - the family dog. It was at this moment that a feeling

of awe overcame me. Here was a family embracing death; getting as close as they possibly could to their loved one who was passing away.

I felt very blessed to be sharing this precious moment with them but I knew I had to bring a close to our musical time together and so I chose a song that spoke of farewell; of saying goodbye. The sun was setting as I began to sing:

"Now is the hour when we must say goodbye.

Soon you'll be sailing far across the sea.

While you're away, oh please remember me.

When you return, you'll find me waiting here."

Woody Anderson



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Christmas 1954

by P Sherman Furr

There was a small farming community in Kentucky where a dirt road fronted old houses. The people who lived there built a fire station and purchased a bright red fire engine.

In 1954 a deep snow covered the community, but it never kept the red truck from making a Christmas Eve run. The firemen wrapped a pine garland across the fire engine and drove it through snow tracks along that dirt road. They switched between the sirens high pitch "eeree" to the blaring of its air horn. Everyone knew they were bringing Santa Claus. The kids raced with laughter to greet Santa even before he reached their house. Santa sat on the back. He had a wide smile across his rosy cheeks. His black gloved hand waved in the air.

The older kids ran along beside the truck sweating under their warm hats and heavy coats until the fire engine stopped. Santa was surrounded by stockings filled with hard candy, nuts, oranges and apples. It was pure happiness. The fire engine was exciting because they got to see the white-bearded man in the red suit and get fresh oranges.

The times were hard, especially for one family. The father retired from the army. He was not working because he was in Birmingham attending school. The oldest boy helped with finances. His pay was not much but he gave it to his mother. She fixed hair at a beauty parlor. The money they earned went for milk, bread and coal. It had been a bitter winter and it took a lot of coal for the old iron stove.

On Christmas Eve the boy cut a fragrant cedar tree and placed it in front of the living room window. All the children helped decorate the tree. They wrapped it with garlands of popcorn and hung handmade ornaments on the prickly branches. They drew names and made each other something to put underneath.

Their aunt raised turkeys. She sold them for her Christmas money. It was her turkey money that made the Christmas of 1954 memorable. She bought each of the children something. On Christmas morning she came to visit bringing gifts wrapped for

her sister's children. I was ten years old.

I will always remember the box of fragrant bath powder inside the deer made of amber glass. I will never forget the generosity of Aunt Mary or the brother who saved Christmas."



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turn to the experts

What's the Nutcracker Connection?

by Jodi Stephens

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the recently relocated German families influenced the development of many of our arts organizations which still exist today. Community leaders organized Community Ballet Association in 1963, and Huntsville Civic Ballet performed its first cameo showcase in May 1964. In December 1969, under the direction of the first Artistic Director, Loyd Tygett, Huntsville Civic Ballet performed the traditional holiday ballet of The Nutcracker for the first time. Fast forward to today.

What's The Nutcracker connection now?

From its humble origin near the Big Spring in the early 1800's, Huntsville has developed into the high-tech and art-loving city it is today. In the years preceding the Civil War, Huntsville became a vital cotton trading center where planters and merchants built impressive homes.

How does all of this connect? In 2008, Huntsville Ballet engaged Mr. Phillip Otto as Artistic Director, and his wife, Ms. Rachel Butler as School Director. A few years later, Mr. Otto began restaging The Nutcracker to incorporate Huntsville's rich history. The changes focused on Act I, known as The Party Scene. Act I previously was set in a European home setting. Today it is presented between 1830 and 1860 in the home of the Erskine family who resided on Franklin Street between 1830 and 1860. The scene is complete with the guests arriving in appropriate period attire and being received and greeted by the Erskines as one would expect of the etiquette of the times. The set design includes portraits of other Huntsville notables who watch the festivities. Paintings of the first Governor William Wyatt Bibb and his wife, Mary Freeman Bibb, the first First Lady of Alabama are featured on the backdrop.

Among the Erskine's guests for the Christmas gathering are the families of Mr. and Mrs. George Gillian Steele, an architect, originally from Virginia. Mr. Steele designed and built many public buildings and residences, including his home, Oak Place, still located on Maysville Road (now known as East Huntsville Baptist Church). Mr. and Mrs. James Joseph Donegan, a commission merchant, originally from Ireland. Mr. Donegan was one of the owners of the Bell Factory, a textile mill and also a partner in Fern, Donegan, and Company. The Donegans resided at the east end of Randolph Street.

"I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, but if it runs out I'll drink the Merlot."

Linda Drake, Huntsville

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Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Pope Walker, one of the Huntsville's early founders, was a lawyer and held various political offices. He would later become Secretary of War of the Confederacy.

Mr. and Mrs. William Willis Garth, a lawyer who served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Garths resided on Franklin Street.

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Coltart, originally from Scotland, a bookseller and insurance agent. His office was located on the Public Square. In October, Huntsville Ballet showcased the celebration of Alabama 200 during their performance of Unplugged. This world premiere performance of "The Letter" is the story of Sullivan Ballou, a Civil War soldier and his unwavering love for his wife and country.

In this now famous letter to his wife, Ballou endeavored to express his emotions of worry, fear, guilt, sadness and the pull between his love for her and his sense of duty to the nation. He met an unfortunate end the next week at the First Battle of Bull Run. The performance featured the voice of Ms. Christie Weber, a well-known local soprano, and Ms. Amiee Fincher to accompany her.

Huntsville Ballet Company continues to feature a connection to Huntsville's history whenever possible. To learn more about this organization and get more information, please visit their website at www.huntsvilleballet.org.

All performances at the Von Braun Center Mark C. Smith Concert Hall

* Friday, December 7 - 7:30pm

* Saturday, December 8 - 2:00pm


* Saturday, December 8 - 7:30pm

* Sunday, December 9 - 1:00pm

* Sunday, December 9 - 5:00pm (*Benefit Performance without HSO-\$15/ticket; tickets available through Huntsville Ballet office only)





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John Richard*



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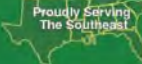








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The Longest Day: December 25, 1970

by Lee Burkett

In 1970 I was stationed at Qui Nhon Depot at Long My, Vietnam. I was a Second Lieutenant and was the assistant depot engineer and in charge of an engineering platoon in the Services Section. I had, at that time two majors, a first Lieutenant, and a civilian, as bosses. Mr. Cook was a friend of the Depot Commander and as such found out about a new program that the Army had started.

If you had been in country for at least four months and had four or more months to go, you were eligible to be selected for a program to return to CONUS (Continental United States) for Christmas. I got over there in August and was scheduled to

return home in August. When Mr. Cook was contacted by the head shed about it, he turned and asked me if I was interested. I said sure but after finding out the total cost I told him I was short. He said he would lend me the money so I signed up.

There were three of us from the Depot. We flew to Bien Hoa on December 24th and had to sleep in the airport on the concrete floor or on the wooden seats. Here we encountered some combat veterans who were also flying out. They were a rough looking and battle hardened crew.

The next morning we flew out at about 9 in the morning on Christmas day. The time back at home was 8 pm Christmas Eve. I heard through the grapevine that connecting flights beyond Chicago were all standby, so I blew twenty dollars trying to get an upgrade on a connect-

ing flight. I paid the money but didn't see any benefit from it.

We flew about four hours to Japan and got off the plane there for a layover of a couple of hours. It was very hot at Bien Hoa and in Japan, with temperatures approaching 100. Next we loaded up and flew to Anchorage, Alaska. It was 18 hours of torture. The plane being a charter was crammed full. I had a middle seat of three and had no arm room.

The soldiers on either side worked for me on the Depot. It was interesting the "secrets" they revealed on that long leg of the flight.

We landed at Anchorage and it was snowing and in the low thirties. The soldiers on the plane were a motley crew. Some of them were wearing cut-off jungle fatigues and OD (olive drab) green tee shirts with the regulation Army belt and flip



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flops. Can you imagine going from almost 100 to freezing and walking into the airport with cold and snow, to wearing flip flops? We had no personnel connector from the plane to the terminal. After an hour or two of delay, we re-boarded the plane and left for Chicago.

At Chicago, I bought a ticket for Memphis, Tennessee and called my wife Jan of seven and a half months at around 10 PM Christmas day her time and told her "I might be home for Christmas". I had been in Vietnam longer than the time we had together before I left. This was the first time I told her about the trip, since I never believed, up until then, that I would actually make it. She was staying with her parents in Holly Pond so we could save money for a house. I told her that I should be landing at the Birmingham, Alabama airport at 3:30 AM in the morning.

This was the 26th of December. I was able to book the flight out of Memphis and landed in Birmingham on schedule at about 3:30. My father-in-law Buddy drove my wife down to pick me up. They ran late and got there about 4:30. It took another hour or more to get back to Holly Pond and we got home around 6 AM.

I flew about half way around the world leaving at 9 AM Christmas morning and arriving at 6 in the morning on the day after Christmas. We flew back in time and picked up hours and crossed the international date line. I figure the total trip time was 34 hours.

Funny thing is I was so excited to be going home to be with my wife that I don't remember sleeping at all on the trip. Since I had my feet in both worlds my Christmas day was thirty seven hours long with the overlap.

The return trip to Vietnam was interesting too. We had a snow storm in Alaska and had to spend the night in Chicago before flying up there. We blew a tire landing at Cold Bay in the Aleutian Islands

where we landed to re-fuel. Finally we were delayed leaving Japan because of a mortar attack going on at Bien Hoa. I traveled almost half the way around the world leaving Christmas morning and arriving in Birmingham at 7 PM the 26th on Vietnam time.

It was a glorious 12 days that will always be remembered.



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My Pleasure

by Belinda Talley



"It's 6:55 am and it started already! Can someone get the phone? I am trying to get ready."

"Well, I guess I'm the only person in the house that can hear! Just because it's probably a wrong number is not an excuse. We are supposed to be a family!"

"HELL-O!"

"No, this is not Lewter's Hardware... No, sir, this is a private residence... Yes, sir. It happens several times a week, we get their phone calls... It's okay, Merry Christmas to you, too."

We have to be out the door and in the car in 5 minutes, traffic is crazy this time of year. "Kids, did you hear me? We gotta go!"

Make-up done...check. Permission forms signed...check. Teachers' gifts ...check. Dog out, cat in...check. Christmas cookies...check.

Not again! Not now... But, what if there was a family emergency... "Oh... HELL-O!"

"Santa saw your Instagram pictures - you're getting clothes and a Bible for Christmas."

Parent's note to teenager

"No, sir, It's not! You called this same number two minutes ago. I'm just as sorry as I can be, but this is not Lewter's!... No, sir, you called a wrong number... Don't get upset, just calm down, sir. Sir, let me explain. You dialed 536-5777, that is my number, a private residence. You need to dial 539-5777. Do you understand? You dialed a six but you need to dial a nine... No, sir. I am not trying to be smart with you, I am trying to be polite in the mildest manner that I know."

"No, sir! You need to hang up and call 539-5777, that is their number!"

"You're not going to hang-up, because you know who you dialed... and it was Lewter's Hardware. You called two different times this morning. Really?"

"Oh, and you're in a big rush." (long pause, deep breath...)

"Happy Holidays. I apologize for any inconvenience. How can I help you?... Yes sir, you want to place an order for pick up and you are in a big hurry. I know all about being in a hurry. I'm ready when you are."

"You need 24 of those...check. A case of what?... I believe you might need two. Got it, 2 cases of the green ones...check... You have a taller tree this year and need a larger tree stand, okay, got it...check. Now, anything else today?... Yes, sir, it will. Like I said, I know all about folks being on time especially during this busy holiday season. I know all about it!"

"You're on your way right now? Well, all-righty then! Do you know where we are located?... Oh, you know our phone number by heart, and you know where we are. Okay, I'll see you in a few minutes. Merry Christmas to you, it has been... My Pleasure!"

Yes, this really happened (before caller ID). We had our number for nine years and received at least a dozen Lewter's calls each month, but I was only convinced once... that I worked there!

"Sorry about your order sir. Ya'll come back, now."

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Christmas in the Rock House: 1938-1940

by Harry Dill

Around a month or so before Christmas our parents would tell us that we had better be good if we didn't want Santa Claus to put switches and ashes in our stockings. We got one of our biggest socks on the day before Christmas and hung it on the mantelpiece over the fire place because Santa Claus would be coming down the chimney after he landed on the roof in his sled and reindeer. The bigger the sock the more it would hold, and they stretched too.

About two or three weeks before Christmas we had gone out into the woods and searched for a nice fully filled out cedar tree, and cut it down, carried it back to the Rock House, got a five gallon bucket and filled it with sand and covered the tree base with the sand, and filled it with water. This would keep the tree from drying out so quick. We then covered the can with Christmas wrapping paper. And it looked pretty.

We then decorated our tree with a string or two of electric lights, some red, blue, yellow and orange ropes that we hung all over the tree from top to bottom. We also fastened colored balls to the branches. I remember they were easy to break though. We had a big star that we put on the very top of the tree. Also we hung silver icicles.

Well it seemed like Christmas would never come for us as time passed by very slow. We were hoping Christmas would hurry up and come and we would get lots of good presents and food.

Christmas

Eve finally did come and we hung up our stockings. We left some cookies on the living room table for Santa Claus as he might be hungry from his long trip all over the world. We were so excited that it was hard for us to go to sleep that night. We finally did though and we woke up the next morning early and went into the living room. There were a lot of presents with our names on them under the tree!! Every body got something!!! I got a cowboy suit and cap pistols and even a train with the railroad tracks that made a figure 8.

My brother also got a cowboy suit and pistols and one year we both got BB guns too. My sisters got dolls and doll dresses, little dishes and little stoves that were electric and you could cook on them. They got one each of a big doll that when you lay it down it would close it eyes and you could wind it up and it would talk.

After a while we went over to our socks hanging on the mantle piece and opened them up. There was a big red apple and a orange. There was candy and nuts and several little games and puzzles in each of our stockings also.

Christmas time was a very happy time especially for children back then! We also very much enjoyed the good food, the turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, cakes, pies, etc. and all the trimmings at Christmas time. Nowadays the stores are commercially trying to outdo each other and maybe they do have more items

But more importantly it is said to be Jesus' birthday. We should worship Jesus and sing carols in His honor and read the stories about His being born in a manger and the wise men coming to see Him and remember all those stories in the Bible. Give praise and to glory to Him! MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERY ONE and I hope you all have a Great New Year of 2019.

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A Tale of Two Legion Field Tickets

by Larry Maples

Most of the college football I "saw" as a kid was on my dad's little brown Philco radio. Few games were televised so every Saturday I searched the dial for the scratchy radio voices of the Mississippi State Bulldogs, the LSD Tigers and the clear tones of Alabama and Auburn. My chance to see a live game was so rare that I have graphic memories of the few I witnessed. My older cousin Paul provided a couple of those memories because he was relentless in his efforts to get inside Legion Field in Birmingham when a big game was brewing. Plus, he felt a moral obligation to properly indoctrinate me in rooting for his favorite team, the Crimson Tide.

In 1955 high schooler Paul developed a nagging sense that his young cousin was wavering in his loyalty to Alabama. But, consider the point of view of this 10-year old who may not have been a budding Einstein, but did possess one well-honed skill. I virtually memorized the sports pages every day and Auburn was one of the top teams in the country in the mid-50s. Alabama was, well, terrible. This disparity did not faze Paul, a true believer in Roll Tide. Knowing I had never been to a college game, he seized on the opportunity when my family came visiting to Birmingham. He sold my parents on the idea that he should be the one to introduce me to big time college football.

Off we go to Legion Field. I don't remember Paul making any effort to lower my expectations as we crept along in game day traffic. The fact that Bama was 0-7 on the season and that he carried only one solitary nosebleed ticket in his pocket didn't seem to dampen his irrepressible optimism.

As we walked from the car to the big gate at the northeast corner of the stadium, his only cautionary words were that I should just hold my tongue while he did a little negotiating. He walked right up to the ticket man and gave him a tear jerking speech about how his little cousin here had never seen a college game and he came all the way from Huntsville and would just be heartbroken if he didn't get in. And then he gave the man his personal guarantee that he would see to it that I didn't occupy a seat if he would just let me in. The man said he was sympathetic with my plight but no one was getting in without a ticket and he turned and began collecting tickets from other fans.

As soon as he turned, Paul grabbed my hand and we flew through the gate. The Million Dollar Band was marching in and I was

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beginning to feel the excitement when suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. The ticket man had intercepted us about 20 yards inside the gate and was marching us right back out while he was scolding Paul for his trickeration that had almost succeeded. Paul politely listened to his dress down then looked up at the man and uttered the immortal line, "Well you can't blame me for trying can you?"

Back outside the gate, Paul went to Plan B. "Larry, you stand here by the fence. I'll be back n a minute." I saw him stop and talk to several people but finally lost sight of him. Ten minutes later here he comes back with a big smile and two tickets in his hand. "Let's go, he said, Bama is going to stick it to those Yellow Jackets." To this day I don't know how the sausage was made, but we were inside and that was enough for me. We circled through the east stands looking for two unoccupied seats because, of course, the two tickets were in different sections. Two or three times we found two seats together only to be run off by late arriving fans. Finally, we were able to sit together on the very top row. About the time we got settled in, Georgia Tech scored and the Tide was on its way to its eighth straight loss.


Paul wanted me to see the field up close. So in the waning moments of the game with Alabama trailing 26-0, he pulled me down to ground level right behind the Alabama bench. As I pressed my nose up against the chain link fence, Ears Whitworth, the Alabama coach, turned his red face right toward us screaming for a particular player to get in there on the line and push Tech back into the end zone. It must have been the only play that worked all day as Bama scored a safety in the last minute of the game. But, I couldn't help but feel a little sad that all the emotion in the Coach's face was directed at losing 26-2 rather than 26-0.

The next two years were more of the same. Alabama kept losing and Auburn won a national championship. On Thanksgiving Day 1957 we were all having turkey and dressing at Mamaw's house in New Hope when Paul launched into an impassioned speech that a seismic shift in college football had just occurred because Alabama had hired Paul Bryant away from Texas A&M.


Uncle Noonan (Paul's dad) skeptically asked "What do you know about Bryant?" Paul waxed eloquent about his successes at Maryland, Kentucky and Texas A&M. A few days later I opened my new issue of Sport Magazine and an article jumped out at me. It was entitled "Bear Bryant: The Great Rehabilitator." Wow. Paul just possibly knows what he is talking about. Alabama increases its win total from 2 wins to 5 wins to 7 wins to 8 wins in successive years and in November 1961 is on the verge of a perfect season and Bear's first national championship if they can just beat Auburn. I get a call from Paul. "Get your tail down here. This is the biggest game in history." "How am I going to get in?" "Don't worry about that. I've got connections."

After he hangs up, I thought hmmm he didn't say ticket. He said connections. Oh well, he got me in last time....

When my brother David and I were going through Dad's things after his 2016 passing, we found an old yellowed envelope with a couple of interesting Iron Bowl



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items. One was a ticket stub from the famous "Punt Bama Punt" Auburn win in 1972. The other item was not a ticket but a sideline pass dated December 2, 1961 and that gets us back to Paul and his phone call to invite me to Birmingham. As we're eating supper the night before the game, I pressed him with the question, "How did you say you're getting me in this time?" "Oh, you're going to help us make the film for the Bear Bryant Show." Yeah right. Paul was always pulling my leg and he was having a lot of fun playing me along. I asked a dozen questions all of which received evasive answers.

On Saturday when we got to the same gate we entered six years before, Paul flashed two passes and we walked in like royalty. Rather than looking for seats, Paul flashed the passes again at the field gate and we walked right onto the sideline. I was standing there with my mouth wide open not 20 yards from Pat Trammell warming up throwing to Bill Battle and only a few steps behind them is the Bear leaning against a goal post. I'm transfixed in what seems like a dream. Paul is trying to get my attention, "Larry Larry, I've got to go over there and help that guy. You see those folding chairs?"

He pointed to two rows of chairs set up to seat Bear's recruiting guests. "Just blend in. Nobody will bother you. You have a pass around your neck," So, at ground level I watched Bear win his first national championship.

It turns out that Paul had a gig as the right-hand man to the camera guy who did the close-up sideline filming for the Bear Bryant television show. Cousin Paul had wrangled an extra pass for an assistant to the assistant who was me. But, all I did was watch football and try to be as inconspicuous as possible. A few times I couldn't resist slipping out of my folding chair up to the sideline.

One play is forever a snapshot in my memory. Alabama was driving toward the north end zone and as I edged my way one step from the field, Mike Fracchia broke off right tackle and was running right at me! I had the view of the Auburn secondary and that was scary as he lifted those knees high after blowing by the linebacker. Eight years later my friend Allen and I saw a picture of that very play on the wall of the Fracchia family restaurant just off Sumner Avenue in Memphis.

With about a minute to go in the game and Alabama with a commanding lead, Paul signaled me to meet him at the south end of the field. As I cut through the Alabama bench area, I found myself standing under the biggest man I had ever seen up close,

All-American tackle Billy Neighbors. I got out of his way just in time to watch him and his teammates rush the field carrying the Bear on their shoulders.

Those two games are etched in my memory not just because they capture in two moments in time Alabama's rise from the bottom to the top of the heap. As I look back now, the fact that my cousin, six years older than I, was willing to spend two afternoons with me instead of with a friend is amazing.

Thanks, Paul, for two great "ticket" memories.



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Let us make their holidays warm and cozy. May God Bless us one and all.

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CHRISTMAS PAST

by Elizabeth Wharry

The best Christmas I ever had was one most people would consider the worst one ever.

I was in my mid-20s, separated from my then husband, in beauty school, and my daughter wasn't yet 3. Money was tight to say the least. I saved every tip I got from being a senior beauty student. It wasn't much, but I was grateful to have the money. Fortunately, we were living with my parents. In between studying and caring for my daughter, I made aprons for Christmas. Mom had some beautiful fabrics and a sewing machine that weren't being used. These weren't the host-

ess aprons, these were the full length ones.

My daughter wanted a Rainbow Bright doll for Christmas, and her own special Christmas tree with lots of pretty ornaments. I got the doll shortly before Thanksgiving that year. But how I was going to get her that tree and those ornaments was beyond me.

Some friends of my parents had heard about my situation. These lovely people owned a funeral home. It seemed that their kids were too busy to be able to set up chairs, make coffee, and empty ashtrays during the time between Halloween and Christmas. Due to their generosity, I was able to buy a 3 foot artificial tree, some inexpensive plastic ornaments and some pretty paper to wrap everything in.

After the last person left the funeral home on Christmas Eve,

I went to the local discount store, and bought everything at half price. When I knew my daughter was asleep, I set up the tree, put the ornaments on it and put the doll underneath. I wrapped the whole package up in the Christmas wrapping paper. The look on her face Christmas morning was priceless!

Fast forward quite a few years. My daughter was now an adult. When I gave her those ornaments from childhood, she looked at them with that same sense of wonder and delight. She wondered what had happened to them over the years.

She also asked me what happened to the tree. When I told her that I still had it, and was using it, she smiled. I asked her recently if she still has those plastic ornaments. They're still on her tree, in a prominent spot.

Merry Christmas to all!



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PET TIPS FROM ANGEL

Holiday Safety

Pet-Proof Your Christmas Tree

Whether live or artificial, a Christmas tree is potentially hazardous to your pets. Ensure your pets remain healthy and your tree stays upright with some simple precautions:

- * Keep the tree blocked off with a playpen or other barrier because tree needles are sharp and indigestible to pets. Use baby gate if necessary to block off a room.

- * Cover your tree stand to prevent your pets from drinking out of it. Tree sap and water can be a lethal combination.

- * Secure your tree to the wall or ceiling so climbing cats or playful dogs can't knock it over.

Decorations

It's normal for pets to be curious about the new and unfamiliar. Ensure your decorations are pet-friendly:

- * Choose Christmas tree ornaments carefully. Avoid those made of glass, if they contain small detachable parts or are covered in toxic paint. If you aren't sure an ornament is pet-safe, hang it out of your pet's reach, or leave it off the tree completely. Decorate the bottom of your tree with nonbreakable, nontoxic items.

- * Don't decorate with edible ornaments, such as candy canes, Christmas cookies, popcorn garlands or cranberry strands. They make pets sick and your dog may knock over the tree while attempting to reach them.

- * Say no to tinsel. Even if you only decorate the upper branches of your tree with tinsel, it can fall to lower branches and the floor. When swallowed, it can block your pet's intestines.

- * Select nontoxic varieties of holiday plants to beautify your home. Amaryllis, holly, mistletoe and poinsettia are all beautiful to look at, but they're toxic to pets.

- * Keep snow globes on the mantle or a high shelf so your dog can't break them with a wag of his tail. This classic decoration often contains antifreeze that, although sweet-tasting, is deadly to pets.



Prevent Burns

Nothing makes a home more festive than the warm glow of candles and twinkling lights. You don't have to do without, just choose options that safeguard your pet:

- * Make electrical cords less enticing. Cats, in particular, love to chew on dangling cords, which can result in shock or electrocution. Protect cords with cord covers, tinfoil tape or double-sided tape. You can also wipe down cords with something cats find distasteful, such as hot sauce, lavender oil or vinegar.

- * Choose flameless candles. Wagging tails and curious paws don't mix with traditional candles.

Pay attention to Your Pet

Remember to keep your pet's interest top of mind. While the holidays can be a busy time, it's easy to keep your pet happy and content: play with him, take him on long walks and provide him with healthy treats and stimulating toys.

- * A bored pet is more likely to get into mischief so keep him active and entertained.

- * Vary your pet's routine as little as possible. Keep his walks, feed and play times and naps on a regular schedule.

- * Confine your pet to an unused room or crate. Some of your guests may be uncomfortable or afraid around pets, while your pet may be nervous or frightened by a large group of unfamiliar people. Ensure a comfortable situation for both by keeping your pets safely confined.

- * Don't feed your pets food scraps. Nothing puts pounds on a pet like table scraps, plus turkey and chicken bones can choke dogs.

- * Keep bowls of candy and chocolate well out of your pet's reach. Chocolate is toxic to pets, and even a small amount can make pets sick, while hard candy presents a choking hazard.

- * Secure the trash so curious pets can't forage for food scraps.

- Keep wine, eggnog and other alcoholic beverages away from your pet.

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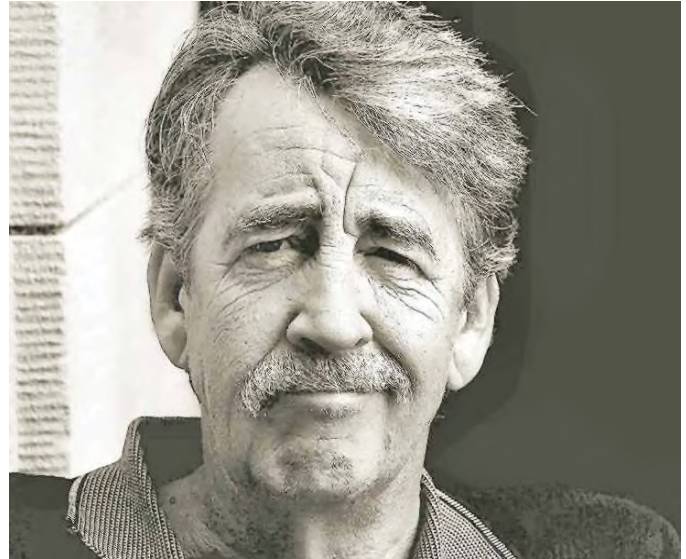
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As hard as it may be to believe, the Tennessee Valley at one time hosted a major ship building industry, with its ships plying almost every ocean of the world.

From the earliest days of settlement, the Tennessee River has been a major transportation route for emigrants moving into the area and for goods being shipped to market. With the traffic increasing every year, it seemed only natural that a shipyard be built here.

One of the first boat yards boasted the unlikely name of "Boat Yard of the American Oak Leather Company." This company manufactured an extract made from chestnut trees to tan leather. When a blight killed most of the local chestnut trees in 1887 the company was forced into bankruptcy.

In 1937, with war imminent all over the world, Ingalls Steel and Iron Works opened a shipbuilding facility on the river, near Decatur. The company would eventually employ more than 1500 workers and operate 24 hours a day, seven

days a week. The company enjoyed a large part of its success due to the fact that it was one of the pioneers of building ships with welded seams. It was not only faster than the old fashioned rivet method, it was also much cheaper.

During the war over 3000 "Liberty ships," barges and landing crafts were built at the facility before being sent down river to the Gulf. Other companies in the Valley provided gear such as oars and life Jackets. As unlikely as it may seem, by the end of the war, the area had become an important supply center for the U. S. Navy.

Though the shipyard closed in 1983, there are Naval buffs who swear there are rusted

hulks, still plying their trade in the far reaches of the world, bearing the slogan "Made In Alabama."

Christmas Superstitions Holly

Holly is protective magic against witches and lightning and is brought into the home during the holiday season for that purpose.

A popular belief is that if the holly leaf is smooth, the wife will be the master of the house, but if the holly is prickly, the husband will be, so cautious couples bring in both.

"Every time I start worrying too much about how old I look, I just find a Happy Hour and by the time I leave, I look great."

Katie Nelson, Gurley



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I'M DREAMING OF A TAN CHRISTMAS

by Blossom Wood

**"The horse knows the way
To carry the sleigh
Through the white
And drifting snow."**

If only! We were disadvantaged youth, living in Huntsville, in one aspect of our yuletide memories. Every card, every depiction, every song about the perfect Noel had one common theme - a white Christmas.

Ours were more or less tan - tan yards, tan trees, tan windbreakers as it never was quite cold enough for the dark topcoats and red scarves that showed Christmas as it should be - or as we had been taught from books, television and catalogs. The sleds and shovels that Mr. Lewter would put out in the front of his store in the late fall would inevitably gather dust before being restored in the back when the crocuses came up.

I can clearly remember my excitement about the thought of a white Christmas - or those even holier of days when the radio would announce "no school" due to a one inch pile up of flaky white powder that would paralyze drivers with fear of being stranded on California Street with no provisions and only a pair of work gloves to save themselves from frostbite. Big Brothers would be emptied of bread, milk, and eggs - as if the whole city simultaneously decided to live off of French Toast for the next

week or so.

Some stores would appease the children, or the child-like qualities in all of us, by frosting their windows and incorporating plastic snowmen in their holiday decor. But it, even to me then, seemed forced and foreign - similar to when Woody Anderson would promote his sale in the summer called "Operation Snowball" giving his showroom the appearance of January in New England. Who were they fooling? Not us - the hyper-charged children who longed for a snowball fight or even sledding on Tollgate Road where houses with silver and flocked trees in their windows would blur by in a blaze of UL approved lights.

But looking back, there were advantages, I guess, to a holiday season in a less than icy bucolic and stereotypical setting. After

a Christmas dawn of opening presents, the weather would be gracious enough to allow us the opportunity to use those tan lawns to debut our bounty of newly-acquired toys - ride the pristine bikes left by Santa - and meet the other neighborhood children for a Hasbro show-and-tell.

And now, at my age, I enjoy the thought of a Christmas without shovels and snow-tires and would love to be back in school - to make up just one of those snow days - to see old friends and have the excitement of the season in all its simplicity.

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for a rain storm to pass.
It's about learning to
dance in the rain."**

submitted by Barry Key

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Home for Christmas

by John E. Carson

The last of the wooden boxes had been loaded onto the city truck and the driver signed the clipboard after verifying the count of the cargo. Opening the door, he climbed into the driver's seat, hung the clipboard by its magnet on the metal dashboard and started the motor. "Looking at the man seated on his right he smiled and reached out a hand. "Name's Tim," he said.

The other man said nothing; just looked over and nodded and turned his head to the windshield again.

Withdrawing his hand, Tim put the aging truck in gear and pulled away from the loading dock. Once the truck was rolling, Tim tried again to start a conversation.

"I usually work for the Park system, but someone called in sick and I was asked to pull his duty here; first time for me." Again, his partner just nodded and kept his eyes ahead. Riding silently on the long straight-away, Tim stole a few glances at his quiet partner. The man looked old; too old to be doing this kind of work. His wrinkled brow and weathered face revealed the age in his troubled eyes through the lines that spread from their corners and the white beard that did not

hide the scarf around his neck. "Aging Hippie dude," Tim thought to himself as he reached down and turned on the radio to break the silence. Anything to keep his mind from the grim task that lay ahead of them.

"I'll be home for Christmas, you can plan on me..." Elvis Presley's Christmas hit struggled to be heard over the rattle of the truck bed as Tim hit a pothole in the road an oncoming car had prevented him from dodging.

"Hey, that's one thing we got going for us dude," Tim said, "it's Christmas Eve and we can get off early today. Good thing too; they say there is a storm coming and we could see some snow; we'll have ourselves a white Christmas!"

With no reaction to his comment, Tim concluded further that the old guy had probably burned out his mind on drugs back in the seventies.

Following the map, the old truck finally reached its destination; the city's Potters Field; the final resting place for the indigent, homeless, the unclaimed deceased as well as crooks and the criminally insane.

Upon arriving at the Morgue, Tim had Googled Potters Field. All he had managed

to read before he was called into the office was a quick definition of the term and a reference to the book of Mathew in the Bible about a man named Judas.

Donning a painter's mask and a pair of gloves, he turned to his rider and said, "Hey, where are your mask and gloves? Regulations..." His voice trailed off as the man opened the door and got out of the truck.

Tim shrugged, climbed down and walked to the back of the truck where the old guy was waiting. Backed up to the edge of a long trench with the designated marker matching the one on the clipboard, they began hoisting the wooden caskets one by one and setting them on the stacks already waiting in the long rectangular plot.

Though each one required more effort as they worked to empty the flatbed, the frail looking old man seemed to handle each one with no more effort than the first.

Halfway through unloading, Tim called for a break and offered a cup of coffee from his Thermos to his co-worker.

"Hey man." Tim said after his offering had been refused, "Can you talk? Is there some-

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Belinda Talley, Huntsville

thing you don't like about me?"

At that, the man looked at Tim with weary eyes as grey as his hair and nodded, "Yes, I can talk. But I am here to work."

"Yeah, okay, but you could lighten up a bit. This is a grim enough job as it is and I was promised we could leave early today. It's Christmas Eve and I have plans; presents to wrap, parties to go to. Let's get these things in the ground and get back to the land of the living!" The day was darkening fast as the storm clouds rolled in and with the last coffin finally on the ground, Tim checked his watch.

"Four O'clock. Quittin' time!" He announced.

"No," said the old man, "we have one more to place and then we must cover the trench."

"Hey man, the guy is dead; they can finish the job after Christmas. He can wait!"

"You have no respect for the dead?" The old man asked.

"Sure, but these people are nobodies; scum of the Earth, they can wait. We need to leave now."

But the old man refused, reaching down to drag the last casket to the edge.

Reluctantly, Tim bent down to help him and at last the burden was in place and the trench filled to capacity.

"Okay, now we can leave," Tim said with finality.

But the old man said, "No, they must be covered," as he looked at the waiting CAT and the mountain of dirt.

"Oh no, that will take too long! We could get snowed in. If you want to do it, fine, I will leave you here. What is it? You want overtime? Make more money? Is that it? Buy more drugs? Or do you feel sorry for these creeps? Maybe you've been doing this too long."

"Indeed, I have been doing this a very long time," the old man acknowledged as he began walking to the CAT. "Those who do not respect the dead have no respect for life. Leave if you must, I will finish the job."

"Don't you have a family?" Tim asked, "I still don't know your name even."

"I have been called many things, if you will stay and help,

I will tell you what it is."

The lights on the CAT shined through the dark, illuminating the snow as the pair finished the work and all the coffins were properly covered.

Climbing back into the city truck, Tim turned on the radio for the weather and road report.

Resuming the Christmas music, the radio once again played Elvis singing "I'll be home for Christmas" and Tim smiled and looked over at his partner.

"Looks like I'll be home for Christmas after all", he said.

"And so will the man we buried," Judas replied.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL, WITH
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CRIME STOPPERS



The Spirit and Dangers of Christmas - 1950

by M.D. Smith, IV

This is how one boy overcomes selfishness and banishes an unknown fear at Christmas.

Coming from an upper middle class family, I've heard my parents speak about the dangers in our town "on the other side of the tracks," meaning not only the poor part of town, but one where more crime happens.

I have also heard that Christmas is more about "Giving than Receiving", but I am ten years old, and most of my thoughts, are all about what Santa might bring me for Christmas in 1950. Thoughts of what my parents and grandparents might have hiding in those brightly wrapped boxes under the trees.

I am about to learn something more about those who have so much less, that will enhance my Christmas's to come. Now mid-December and I am visiting "MeMaw," my kid's name for Mamie, my grandmother's first name. She's is a devout Catholic and goes to Christmas Mass every Christmas Eve, to church every Sunday and works with ladies of the church on needy causes. She has been working at the church filling baskets for the needy this Christmas and this is the day for her to deliver her list. I am visiting her today and she tells me what she is going to do, visit poor and needy families, give them baskets of food and some clothing for Christmas.

"Do you want to go with me M.D.?" she asks.

"Uh-oh," I'm thinking, I know about the "poor" side of town. I am reluctant. I have seen ragged, dirty kids and adults in

movies and they are a bit scary looking. "I don't think so," I say.

"Now don't be that way, Grandson, this is the season for giving, especially to those who have so very little this time of year," she replies.

Well, I have not thought much about this angle of Christmas. I guess really poor children do need Christmas blessings more than I do. I am a bit ashamed at myself and I really don't have much else to do, so a bit reluctantly, I agree.

It is one of those cold gray winter days with almost a mist in the air. Pretty typical of Alabama in mid-December and the heater in her '47 Packard does feel quite good as I sit in the center of the front seat where the heat comes out of the center vent.

We first fill the trunk of her car and then the back seat at the church with some kind of large giant wicker baskets with a red and white checker cloth over

the top. There's a red Christmas bow ribbon tied on the top of the handle to make it look more festive. And we are off.

We are actually "crossing the railroad tracks into the poor part of town", as I have heard it said. I see the first little wood cabin we approach. It reminds me of the hobo shacks I have seen in movies, only larger. It is made out of weathered old vertical wood slats and a single backward slanting roof of corrugated steel on top. There is a big old solid rust coated barrel out front with pick-axe holes all around it that is obviously used for fires, but today it is just sitting there in the cold. I see some smoke coming out of an iron pipe chimney in the back part of the roof of this single room dwelling.

There are a couple of weathered wooden steps going up to the front door.

My grandmother says, "We are here at our first stop, want



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my left eye is good, just shaped a little different. Guess what? I am house trained, too. Can I be your new family member? When you come to the Ark, ask to see Foxy. That's me.

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to come and help me with the first basket?"

I am shaking my head because I am not sure what kind of people are coming to that front door and I really don't think I want to find out.

"Oh, come on Grandson, these are nice people, just down on their luck and need some help with food, some warm socks and things at Christmas. Come on and help me. I am not as strong as I used to be and other people helped load the baskets at church. I sure could use your help now on the other side of this handle."

Well since she puts it that way, "OK., I guess I can help you," I reply with trepidation.

We get the first one of the heavily loaded baskets out of the back seat of her 4-door Packard and with each of us on one of the sides of the arched side-to-side handle, and begin towards the wood-

en steps of the front door.

She knocks on the door. A thin woman with long dark hair and wearing a plain plaid dress, answers the door. Clutching her skirt is a little boy almost my age and a little girl a

bit younger. They are dressed shabbily. I can also smell the holiday food aroma drifting off some of the fresh baked goodies of the basket overwhelming the musty smell of the wood cabin mixed in with the smell

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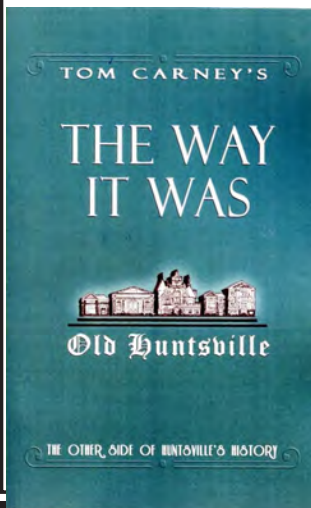
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of coal burning from the stove-heater.

"I'm here from Catholic Charities," my grandmother says, "with a Christmas basket for you."

Their surprised looks change to big smiles and the little girl starts jumping up and down behind her mother's skirt and clapping her hands. The mother says, "Oh thank you. This is such a blessing for us this time of year," as she looks under the cover at all the canned foods, and some baked goods on top, along with some socks and mittens mixed in with the foods. I am surprised as well at how much could be stuffed in that oversized basket.

"You don't know how much this means to us, especially at the Christmas season," as she takes the basket from the two of us and puts it on the floor inside the door. She turns again to thank us as her children are already examining the contents of the basket. "Thank you and God bless you," she said.

"Oh, my goodness," I am thinking. These people really needed what we have just given them, and a whole lot more. I have never seen people, kids or adults, so excited over just a basket of food and small clothing that I have always taken for granted. As we are walking back to the car, not feeling the chill in the air at all, I remark, "This really has been a good thing to do, MeMaw. These people really needed that basket and they were so happy to get it."

"That's what I was telling you," she replies. "It is the true spirit of giving, particularly at this time of the year." The rest of the deliveries that we continue to make today, only amplify the warmth I am feeling in my heart. I am eager to help.

Yes, I have heard the saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" at my parent's Episcopal church for many years, usually as the collection plate is passed around, but I had no idea what the real meaning was until this day. It really does "warm my heart."

I know it will continue to be a cherished memory for many years into the future, and it helps me TRULY understand the spirit of Christmas on the day Christ was born. From now on, I will try to make my gifts to family and friends very special. Many will be hand-made and given from the heart. I will sing carols at Christmas to raise money for the poor.

I greatly look forward to helping MeMaw next year. What a very special day this has been. It's 1950, the year I really found out about the true spirit of giving.

A Christmas tradition is that the yule log for the fireplace has to be cut or found rather than bought and should be big enough to keep burning all night. Otherwise it means bad luck for the year ahead. It can be a stump or a big root, not necessarily a proper log. Then you're supposed to sit around telling ghost stories and drinking mulled wine on Christmas Eve in front of the Yule fire.

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Navajo Code Talker

by Allen Alcorn

At one time or another in our lives, we've all had experiences with codes. It may have been one we got off the back of a cereal box as a child, or a diagnostic code from a Check Engine light in our vehicle. While some of these codes are easily broken, there was one spoken code in history so impossible to crack that it's been credited with helping the U.S. win the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II. It was used from 1942 thru 1945, helped win the war by transmitting top secret messages, and was used in every major battle in the Pacific theater. It remains the only military code in modern history never broken by an enemy.

This was the top secret tongue created by the "Code Talkers", young men from the remote Navajo Nation and thrust into service in the US Marine Corps. According to one of the last remaining code talkers, Peter MacDonald Sr. of Tuba City, Arizona, the system they used to communicate was based on his native tongue, an unwritten language spoken only by a handful of people outside the borders of the reservation. Mr. MacDonald enlisted in the USMC at the age of 15 and served in the South Pacific as a Navajo Code Talker and in North China with the 6th Marine Division.

This little-known chapter of America's military history began with a World War I vet named Philip Johnston who had grown up on the Navajo reservation. Johnston, one the few non-natives to speak the language fluently, suggested to commanders of the Pacific Fleet Amphibious Corps that this convoluted local dialect might make a good way to securely communicate instructions on the battlefield without the time-consuming tasks of encoding and decoding a given message.

Approximately 400 Navajo Code Talkers served with the US Marines in the Pacific Theater. This small band of highly specialized warriors took part in every USMC assault from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. The code talkers faced the challenge of memorizing as many as 600 words and phrases that described everything from troop movements to requests for artillery support. The Navajo language lacked words for many of the basic tools of modern warfare, forcing them to simply make them up. "That's part of what made the code so effective," says MacDonald. "Even someone from the reservation would hear a string of Navajo words like 'sheep, eyes, horse, onion, turkey' and it would just sound like gibberish."

MacDonald says the entire project was considered so important to national security that the code talkers were told not to discuss it with anyone. They didn't for nearly a quarter-century until their work was declassified in 1968, which was the first time their contributions to the Allied victory in the South Pacific could be recognized. All of the code talkers, including MacDonald, received the Congressional Medal of Honor in 2001 for their previously unheralded service.

The Navajo Code is a unique World War II legacy. The code saved hundreds of thousands of lives and helped shorten the war in the Pacific. "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima." Major Howard Connor, 5th Marine Division. Peter MacDonald Sr. is one of only nine remaining Navajo Code Talkers. **He is the former Chairman of the Navajo Nation, and will be in Fayetteville, TN on Thursday, Dec. 6th at 6pm to give a presentation to the public, at the Ninth Grade Academy (NGA), 900 South Main Ave.**

His presentation is always enthusiastic, clear and heartfelt. This will be a truly memorable experience hearing the story from an elder Navajo statesman and patriot. We are reminded how precious each of the nine remaining code talkers are and how extraordinary it is to experience the story firsthand.

When Mr. MacDonald was being honored at a ceremony in the White House last year, President Donald Trump said: "You are a special people, you are really incredible people, and from the heart we appreciate what you have done, how you've done it, the bravery that you displayed, and the love you have for your country."

Mr. MacDonald, President of the Navajo Code Talkers Association, is raising funds to build a National Navajo Code Talkers Museum and Veteran Center to honor heroes of WWII in Window Rock, New Mexico. His speaking fee for this event will go toward that effort. Other proceeds from this event will go to the Lincoln County High School Falcon Football Club, LCHS Cheerleaders and LCHS Dance Team.

This event is being sponsored by: The Falcon Football Club, Landers McLarty Toyota, Bank of Lincoln County, ADC, Shoney's, Howard Bentley Buick GMC, Las Trojas, Lincoln County Officials, Higgins Funeral Home, and NDesigns. The Falcon Football Club would like to thank all of our sponsors for making this unique event possible for our community.

Mr. MacDonald will also have a Q&A session, book signing and allow time for pictures after his presentation at NGA. Limited seating is available, so you are encouraged to buy your tickets prior to the event.

Tickets are \$15 for adults or \$10 for students, veterans, and active military. Tickets can be purchased at Carter's Pharmacy on the Fayetteville square, at the BSA Greater Alabama Council at 2211 Drake Ave SW in Huntsville, AL or by calling 931-438-0340.



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Two People Who Influenced My Life

by Hugh Michaels

Decisions - people make them every day - some good, some bad.

One of the best decisions I ever made took place in 1948. The Korean conflict was taking it's place in history. I had just graduated from high school and was eligible for the draft.

I avoided the draft and joined the Air Force. Two weeks after I joined, I received the draft call. I was already stationed in the Air Force. I was taking basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

Failure to join the Air Force would have caused me to become a soldier in the U.S. Army. I did not want to be a soldier and possibly follow in the footsteps of my brother. He was drafted and approximately

6 weeks later, he was sent overseas and had to participate in the battle of Anzio Beachhead. He was badly wounded and was a prisoner of war. He received several medals including the Purple Heart.

My brother was a major factor in my decision joining the Air Force. He did not want me to be a part of the ordeal which he had experienced. Thank God for the decision I made to join the Air Force.

While I was in the Air Force I met lots of fine young men. The friendship of some will last in my memory forever.

There was one person who helped me to make a decision which shaped my life forever. I had no plans about what I was going to do when I was discharged. The kind of work that I was doing would not help me to get a job in civilian life. I listened to this friend and finally realized

that I had to make a decision on my future. My "buddy" convinced me to go to college (who would ever imagine me going to college?). He advised that I select the college, and I enrolled

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John Purdy
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both of us in Jacksonville State College.

Our families were very happy for us. My friend wanted me to visit his home in North Carolina before we began school and I did go to see him.

I realized when I visited his home that we both had similar family backgrounds. Our families were good people but were not families full of riches.

While in college my friend married a beautiful young lady. She helped to guide his life.

Both of us rejoiced in our decision to go to Jacksonville. We helped each other when there was a need. We shared in good times and stood by each other in times of need. Both he and his wife received a pastor's degree. They taught school in Florida and retired from that profession several years ago.

My friend was a hard worker and excelled in every task of which he was a part.

Since he came from a family

that had very little, he was determined to do better. He came from the bottom and reached the top.

We have been good friends for 69 years. I am proud to be his

friend! He is a good man!

He requested that his name not be included in this article for his personal reasons.

Today he is a very prosperous man, from very hard work.



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91 year-old Peter MacDonald, Sr. Navajo Marine Veteran, only one of nine Navajo Code Talkers who remain.

Black Velvet

by Judy C. Smith

(Oct. 16, 2006) I'm awakened this morning with a start. As M.D. is shaking me saying get up now and drive me to the emergency room, I'm having a heart attack. What time is it? It's 3:30 a.m. and I've only been in bed two hours. I just got started designing a new outfit for Chandler, my 4-year-old granddaughter, who is named after me and she loves to dance even more than I do.

It's December 19, 1959 and the phone rings. It is my cousin Mickey Townsend from Birmingham, Alabama. He wants me to come to a fraternity dance tomorrow in Birmingham. He will come to Huntsville and get me, then bring me back. I'll be glad to be his date if I'll have time to make a quick trip to the Town & Country Shoppe, located on North Side Square. I call Phyllis McAnally and she has her mother on the lookout for the perfect dress. It will be waiting for me to try on when I arrive. It's black velvet with a straight skirt and cording run to a piece around the neck. I have shoes to match and a black velvet headband to match, like the ones Hillary Clinton used to wear.

Mickey is to arrive by afternoon. We will leave for Birmingham as soon as my size three dress is finished being altered. Mrs. McAnally is hurriedly putting the finishing touch on the dress. I promise coach Milton Frank, the owner of Rose Jewelry Company where I work part time this Christmas season, that I'll be on time for work on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of December. He has given me a Christmas job between semesters where I'm a first year student at the University of Alabama. I like working there. I started several years before when I was 15 years old. I polish silver, wrap gifts and work as a sales person. I'm paid 50 cents an hour.

As we ride to Birmingham, Mickey and I reminisce of old times his grandmother and my grandmother were sisters. They were two of the Brantley children from Troy, Alabama. Bessie Brantley married Francis Scott Key we remember. Oh, those were the days.

I'm on the dance floor dancing as I always danced every dance, when this extremely handsome guy cuts in, saying, "may I have this dance," and "where did you get that good looking dress?"

We danced several dances; one of the songs was "I'm Just A Dancing Partner" by the Platters. Then Mickey cut in and away we whirled. He really knew how to

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cut a rug, if you know what I mean. Later I remarked about the handsome guy, but I forgot what his name was.

The next day Mickey drove me back to Huntsville and I was at the jewelry store at 8:00 a.m. in time to welcome the first customer. Later that day I looked up and there he stood, Mr. Handsome, wanting to take me next door to Mr. Tom Dark's City Drug Store for a Coca-Cola and chips. He said that he was a disk jockey for WAAY Radio, and that he had moved to Huntsville the year before, but was attending the University of Virginia. He asked several people at the dance who was that blonde in the gorgeous black dress. Finally he found out who I was and where I lived. When he called, he was told I was at work at the jewelry store and came down to meet me again.

When the bill came for the cokes and chips, I picked up the tab, knowing that probably disk jockeys didn't get paid very much and that I could afford the treat since I had such a good job paying 50 cents an hour.

We had our first date on Christmas Eve 1959. He transferred to the University of Alabama in January of 1961 and we became engaged in March and were married on Thursday, June 8th. Everything possible was in yellow for the wedding. It was the color of the rising sun and a new beginning of a new day, and a new couple.

We have eight children, seven sons and a daughter. No, she was not the last one born and we are not Catholic.

I race down the stairs to get dressed and get my jacket and then race to the hospital and as I looked up before I left, I see the black velvet dress still hanging in my closet.

I wonder if I'll get to wear it one more time as the handsome guy puts his arm around me and says, "May I have this dance," and "Where did you get that good looking dress?"

A friend is God's way of telling us He doesn't want us to walk alone.

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