



No. 322

December 2019



# Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY



## A GIFT FOR AUNT MAGGIE

One year when I was about eight or nine we were making Christmas ornaments at school.

I remember I made a little wooden Christmas tree and painted it green. I had a photograph of Aunt Maggie that I thought was the most beautiful in the world and after carefully cutting her head out of the picture, I pasted it on the ornament.

**Also in this issue:** Christmas in West Huntsville; Mrs. Santa Claus; Christmas in Mexico; Holiday Recipes; Christmas of 1954; First Missionary Baptist Church History; Pet Tips; 1923 News Bits and Much More!

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# A Gift for Aunt Maggie

*As Told to Tom Carney*

*This story was originally printed in Old Huntsville in 1992. Tom Carney interviewed the man who asked that we not use his name. He passed away several years ago. His story, written by Tom, follows.*

There was a hint of snow in the air as we sat in the car outside the bus station trying to stay warm. It was Christmas Eve and the station was crowded with people going home for the holidays. As the bus from Chicago pulled into the Huntsville station and began closely examining its passengers, I watched eagerly, trying to pick out my Aunt Maggie from the hordes of travelers.

The last passenger finally emerged from the bus and there was no sign of her. Uncle Mil, Aunt Rose and I sat there silent for a long time until finally Uncle Mil started the car and we slowly made our way home.

For a boy of 13 it was devastating. I could not imagine Christmas without Aunt Maggie.

My parents, I had been told, died when I was just a baby. Un-

cle Mil and Aunt Rose, not having any children, took me to raise as their own.

Huntsville, like the rest of the country, was still suffering from the Great Depression. Uncle Mil worked part time at a sawmill and whenever he was laid off, delivered firewood door-to-door in Huntsville. Often people would not have the money to pay him and would pay with used clothes, chickens and other items that we could use.

I learned later in life that my aunt and uncle depended largely on money sent by Aunt Maggie from Chicago for their needs.

Aunt Maggie had lived in Chicago for as long as I could remember. I never knew the details at the time except that she had gotten in some kind of trouble and left Huntsville. I never questioned it or even cared to. For me, she was my Aunt Maggie, the most marvelous person in the world.

We used to receive a letter from her every Tuesday. Before I learned how to read and write, Aunt Rose would sit me down at the kitchen table and laboriously, with her limited ability, slowly read the words that Aunt Maggie had written. There were always two letters in the envelope; one for Uncle Mil and Aunt Rose and another, the long one, for me. Her letters were always full of stories and adventures about people she knew and things she had done. Many times they would include photographs or postcards showing the sights

**Wife:** "I was a fool when I married you."

**Husband:** "Yes dear, but I was in love and didn't notice."



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*(in memory)*

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of Chicago.

After I started school, Aunt Rose would make me write Aunt Maggie a letter every week. Often I resented the fact that I had to sit and write the letters while my friends were out playing.

A birthday or holiday never went by without Aunt Maggie sending me a present. Even in the fall, when it was time to go back to school, she would send money for my school clothes.

It was no wonder that I began to think of Aunt Maggie as being rich. Though we lived in a little three room tar-paper house, the fact that I had a rich aunt up in Chicago seemed to make me the equal of anyone.

Aunt Maggie always came home for Christmas. Uncle Mil and I would take the axe on the day before Christmas and search until we found the perfect Christmas tree. It was normally a scrawny little cedar bush, but to me it was always the grandest tree in the world. In the evening we would drive to Huntsville to pick up Aunt Maggie at the bus depot. It was always a thrill to see her get off the bus. She would be dressed in the latest clothes with

her hair done up beautifully and carrying large bags full of Christmas presents.

One year when I was about eight or nine we were making Christmas ornaments at school. I remember I made a little wooden Christmas tree and painted it green. I had a photograph of Aunt Maggie that I thought was the most beautiful in the world and after carefully cutting her head out of the picture, I pasted it on the ornament.

That year when Aunt Maggie came home I proudly showed her my handiwork. She had a real funny look on her face and then she started crying. Aunt Rose and Uncle Mil never said anything.

I was 13 the last time we went to get Aunt Maggie at the depot. Aunt Rose had already told me that Aunt Maggie might not be able to come home that Christmas, but in my youthful enthusiasm I refused to listen. I insisted that we go to the bus station just in case.

Aunt Rose and Uncle Mil were silent on the drive home while I sat in the back seat feeling sorry for myself. I just couldn't imag-

ine my Aunt Maggie not coming home for Christmas.

We did not have a Christmas that year. Sometime during the night one of the neighbors brought word that Aunt Maggie had died. I remember waking up during the night and hearing a strange type of noise. Our home was always quiet at night, but this was a different kind. It was a sad silence.

Uncle Mil and Aunt Rose and I embarked on the long drive to Chicago. I remember hearing them talk about cancer and making arrangements and what to do with her things.

Later that day we stopped in Indiana to eat the biscuits and ham that Aunt Rose had packed. Then she and I got out of the car to stretch while Uncle Mil stayed and listened to the radio.

Aunt Rose had always been a strong woman but when she heard the Christmas carols they were playing on the radio she




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started to cry. Uncle Mil made me ride in the front seat with him for the rest of the trip and Aunt Rose lay in the back.

When we finally reached Chicago I was not prepared for the rundown, shabby tenement that Aunt Maggie had called home. It was a two-room efficiency with dirty walls and torn wallpaper hanging from the ceiling. It had hardly any furniture.

The only bright spot in the room was a small Christmas tree in the corner with presents piled around in bright festive wrappings. The tree was decorated with pieces of tinfoil, a few pieces of fake holly and a single ornament.

The ornament was the small green wooden Christmas tree with Aunt Maggie's picture on it that I had given her.

All the presents under the tree, with the exception of one each for Aunt Rose and Uncle Mil, were for me.

Uncle Mil left to go somewhere and see about burial arrangements while Aunt Rose and I stayed to pack her belongings. I remember she had what seemed like hundreds of photographs of me. There were pictures of me on my first day at school, playing baseball, fishing and even one of me shooting marbles.

Aunt Maggie was buried the next day in a small cemetery in Chicago. The only people there were Uncle Mil, Aunt Rose, Aunt Maggie's landlady and me. There was no tombstone. There was no money for one.

Though it sounds strange, life improved for Uncle Mil and Aunt Rose after Aunt Maggie died. She had left an insurance policy and Uncle Mil was able to

buy a small house in West Huntsville. Soon he got hired at Merrimac Mills where he was, for the first time in his life, able to earn a comfortable living.

I received my draft notice in 1942 and was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, when I received word that Uncle Mil had died. Aunt Rose had died the year before and since I was the last of the family, I was granted a brief furlough. The day after the funeral I began to go through Uncle Mil's papers. He had saved almost every letter he had ever received and among them was a box containing letters from Aunt Maggie. With a nostalgic feeling I began to read the words my Aunt had written about me many years earlier.

The nostalgic feeling quickly turned into one of disbelief as I read further, as Maggie described her love for a young son she had treasured. Then the incredible truth became shockingly clear - Aunt Maggie, the woman who had written me so many letters and sent me so many presents, was my mother! For a moment I could not move, overcome with conflicting emotions.

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**"Some people just don't  
know how to drive.  
I call these people  
'everybody but me'".**

**Sam Keith**

In disbelief, I grabbed the small stack of letters and raced next door to see Mr. Kiles, one of Uncle Mil's oldest fiends. Even after confronting him with the facts, he was still reluctant to say anything.

Finally after seeing my determination Mr. Kites said, "Son, don't hold it against your mother. She really thought you would have a better life this way. She did the best she could. She loved you so much."

I returned to Fort Bliss with a heavy heart. All of my childhood memories were destroyed. Every time one of my Army buddies would make a crack about an illegitimate child or a loose woman I would cringe inside. I refused to talk to anyone about my family.

When I got married in 1956 my wife, sensing a reluctance on my part to talk about it, never asked about my family. The first Christmas we spent together was hard for me. Every time I looked at the Christmas tree I was haunted by memories of another Christmas tree in a cold water flat in Chicago; of an aunt who was really my mother.

We started attending church when my wife learned she was pregnant. I had never been much of a churchgoer but I wanted our child to be raised in a proper environment.

J. Otis King was the preacher and, though I admired him, I rarely listened to his sermons, preferring to daydream about other matters. One day we were sitting in church and I was thinking about cutting grass or whatever when Brother J. Otis began to preach about love. He used a parable about the man who had given up everything so that his children might have a better life. Though I tried to return to my daydreams, his words kept coming back to haunt me.

"There is no greater love," the preacher said, "than that of a mother for her children."

"How many mothers," he asked, "have done without so that their children might have something?"

Every time he raised his finger to point at something it seemed as if it was pointed straight at me.

My wife could tell that I was upset when we left the church, but she never said anything at the time. That evening after dinner I told her about Maggie and the shame I had felt when I learned the truth.

My wife sat silent for a long time. Finally she said, "Your mother must have loved you very much."

That was the first time she ever saw me cry.

The following year I went to Chicago on a business trip and my wife accompanied me. While there, we placed a tombstone on Maggie's grave.

And every year we hang a special memento on our Christmas tree; a small wooden ornament, timeworn and aged, on which is pasted a yellowing picture of a proud and elegant lady, my mother.



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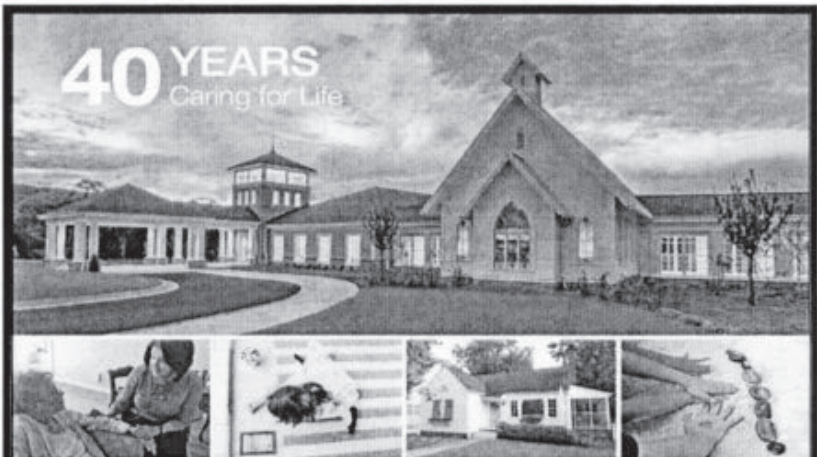
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# "It's Christmas - Oh Boy!"

by M.D. Smith, IV



Hot dog, Oh boy. I can't believe it's that season again. I have waited for so long. Hot diggity dog.

Oh boy, Oh boy, Oh boy am I happy.

Wonderful smells everywhere. Great aromas float from the kitchen as those holiday treats are being cooked.

Wow! It's here. I have been waiting and waiting. It's here, it's here are last. The Christmas tree in the house, Oh boy. A live one, not one of those artificial ones that some families have started using these days. Yea, this one is a Cedar and it sure smells good.

Dad keeps it fresh by keeping that bowl of water at the bottom, full every day. It makes the tree stay green and keep its fresh cut smell. Oh Boy, what a great smell.

Oh, and the holly wreaths. Oh Boy, real holly with the red berries on it. They smell so good and "Ouch," can prick your nose if you get too close.

And mom has the scented candles going. Oh boy, I don't know what those scents are called, but they sure smell like Christmas to me.

Everything is decorated so pretty. Just perfect all over the house. Fresh baked ginger bread men. Oh, what a good smell and even the crumbs when mom takes them from the pan are just wonderful. Yummy.

It's so good to see everyone so excited and happy. I just can't help but jump around for joy. Oh boy.

But look at that over there. Cat just lays there on the table top, regarding everything with an expression that says he couldn't care less. He's got his tail hanging off the table, just gently swaying back for forth. What is with that guy?

Well, he's always like that.

But not me. I'm the family dog and I am as happy as I can possibly be at Christmas time.

Oh boy!






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# Making Christmas Pomanders - Your Home will Smell Heavenly!



**Instructions:** Take the wooden skewer or thin knitting needle and poke holes in the fruit where you want the cloves to go.

You can make patterns (like the swirled orange or other designs) or just randomly stud the fruit with holes. Insert a whole clove into each hole,

firmly.

In a large bowl mix the optional spices (If you have more than 2 oranges increase the amounts).

Carefully place your pomanders into the dry spices and cover with the mixture. Leave for a week or so and you're ready to display or hang with ribbons or other decorations.

The good smells will put you in the Holiday Mood!



People will wonder if you've been cooking all day!

The basic premise is simple: stud whole cloves into pieces of fruit. This practice has been around for centuries, especially during the holidays.

Generally speaking, the more your fruit is covered in cloves, the longer it will last. Simple clove studded fruit can last a month or so. But if you want it to last longer, you'll find directions below for making pomanders that last months, even years!

**You will need:**



- Oranges
- Lemons
- Limes
- Whole cloves

Wooden cooking skewer or thin knitting needle

**Optional ingredients for longer lasting pomanders:**

- 1/4 cup ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup ground cloves
- 2 tablespoons ground nutmeg
- 2 tablespoons ground all spice

1/4 cup powdered orris-root (this ingredient will help the pomanders last extra long - find it in stores like Whole Foods, Pearly's, Fresh Market, etc.)

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# Morning Smoke

by Wayne E. Suns

In the Japanese tea ceremony, if the steam from your cup rises straight up, you will have good luck. If the same is true of houses, I lived in the luckiest neighborhood of all. Except on rainy days, I would be bundled up and sent out into the yard to play while the house was repaired from the previous night's sleep; roll-away beds folded, couches set up, pallets packed away; breakfast dishes cleaned and stored.

From early fall through late spring, wandering around the yard, I could see smoke rising straight up from our chimney and from the chimneys of the neighboring houses.

A central coal-burning fireplace heated each house. This would be considered an environmental nightmare today, but then, it was the cheap-

est way to heat the house. As the coal burned, an enormous amount of gray smoke and energy would escape up the chimney and would form a tall, straight plume which would spire up some forty or fifty feet. On dry days, the spire would then break off and, catching whatever slight breeze as was available, drift downwind.

However, on certain days when the humidity was high and the air was still, the smoke would become heavy from the moisture and puddle back into the yard making an acrid pool around the house. On those days, the other housedogs and I would come inside smelling like fire and brimstone. You could breathe comfortably outside only on windy or warm days.

Our fires were of necessity. However, a few families in the area had managed to have some form of central heating installed and used their fire-

places for recreational burning. They used wood instead of coal.

My great-grandmother had a gift for distinguishing odors unsurpassed by any woman I ever knew until I got married. One of the dogs could wander into the house and she'd be able to tell that the Craig's had their fireplace lit and what kind of wood they'd bought that year.

She was also an integral part of our heating system, a human thermostat. The only member of her generation, as I was mine, she was as immobilized by age as I was by youth. But at least I could go outside, into the yard. She was confined to a small rattan barrel shaped chair. My Grandmother helped her into it each day and back into bed each night with occasional shuffles to the bathroom. The chair was placed at a precise distance from the fireplace. Throughout the day, if she grumbled "hot", we let the fire

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die back. "Cold" always got a couple of chunks of coal added. She took this job very seriously. I thought for awhile that the chair was fixed to the floor but I ran into it once during one of her short forays away from it and it moved.

I finally realized that it was a simple case of strategic sitting.

From its location, she could feel the heat from the grate, catch the light from the windows to manage her crocheting and see into the dining room/kitchen. In short, participate in the family activities without ever moving.

The chair placement was not the only strategy required by the fireplace. My first exposure to planning and logistics came from watching my Grandmother manage the coal pile. The basic idea was to make sure that we had sufficient fuel to keep even the late spring chills out of the house without having much left over. She knew that I and the other neighborhood kids would scatter the pile playing in the summer, sometimes throwing chunks at one another, other times just climbing on it, ruining our clothes and invariably cutting a hand or foot on a chipped edge. I still have small bituminous filled tattoos from such incidents.

Of course, the main consideration was economic, buy as little as possible.

The first few buys of the year, after we had scraped up and burned the summer leavings, were substantial, a ton at the time when we could afford it. That usually insured that we got bigger chunks and earlier delivery. Smaller lots were left on the truck until last and were the dregs, including spots of slate and dust, shoveled off by hand. A full ton or more got a dedicated truck that dumped the whole load.

Times when we were short of money and hoping soon to get enough for a full load had me out for hours with the coal scuttle picking up small lumps, slinging away the slates, for there was no worse offense than having a piece of slate get into the grate; even searching the grass for enough lumps to carry us over.

But in the spring, the resource planning got serious. My Grandmother would begin logging every sign; did the groundhog see his shadow, have the dogwoods bloomed, were the daffodils out, have we had blackberry winter? I'd catch her staring quietly out the dining room window at the pile, measuring and judging. Never a good time to interrupt. I'd find myself outside with a rake fixing the pile so she could estimate it better.

Invariably, when we thought the cold and the coal might just run out at the same time, there would be a late front move through. This would send my dad or one of my uncles out into the neighborhood looking for someone whose pile was too big for the time of year, where we might borrow a scuttle or two.

Once my dad went by the coal company and bought a bag of coke to see us over. Of course no allowances were made for the difference in the burning characteristics between coke and coal, and he just dumped some in.

Pretty soon, the flameless embers were al-



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most hot enough to melt the grate, threatening to tumble them into the living room floor, or to set fire to the flue soot. There was lots of whooping and carrying on until things cooled down. Needless to say, my dad was forever relieved from coal duty.

One year, my grandfather raised enough money to have a central gas furnace installed. It was large enough to heat all but one room that had its own space heater. The fireplace became just a decoration; the mantel, a place to hang Christmas stockings. The furnace had a built-in thermostat. My great-grandmother died shortly thereafter, but I think I'm the only one who feels there was a connection.

The remaining chunks of coal somehow thinned out, the pile finally disappearing. My grandmother would occasionally glance out to where it had been with a look of nervousness, especially in late spring.

The various ash piles melted into the ground leaving no trace. The skies turned blue again, even in winter; but the house lost its tall, rising spire and with it, the luck.

Our nuclear family, like other such devices, reached critical mass and exploded, scattering the generations across the city into other neighborhoods. Neighbors died, or became affluent and moved away.

When I visited the house years later, either it had shrunk or I had grown. Nothing looks the same or feels right. Worst of all, I can't take my granddaughter out to the coal pile and let her get the black dust on her hands and wonder how we ever got the rocks to burn.

**"The surest sign that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe is that it has never tried to contact us."**

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Children and kitty cats, you better watch out because Sandy Claws is watching you.

Now Christmas is just around the corner. Children, you better get pen and paper out and make your list to send to the North Pole. Adults, your little one can get a letter FROM the North Pole. Put a first-class stamp on the envelope. Place the envelope in larger envelope — a priority mail flat rate envelope will work — with the appropriate postage and address it to "North Pole Postmark, Postmaster, 4141 Postmark Drive, Anchorage, AK 99530-9998 and the little one will get that letter back FROM the North Pole.

While children seem to be thinking of something different to add to their wish list, parents can get their thoughts together with shopping, menu list and Christmas parties to go to.

Many churches have beautiful Christmas music and pageants to attend. The Living Christmas Tree is one my family has enjoyed for years. It is held at the First Baptist Church on Governors Drive. Tickets are free, but get them at the church as soon as they are available. I suggest getting there an hour before it is to start to get that perfect seat and be sure to take a blanket to wrap up in. The sanctuary is rather cold to keep the carolers at a comfortable level. The Living Christmas Tree goes to the ceiling of the church and is spectacular.

Parents now start thinking of crafts to entertain their children. Some things my grandchildren liked to do was make and decorate Christmas cookies. I used to let them measure out the cookie ingredients, and from experience I recommend having the dough ready for the children to cut out and decorate. Having flour all over them and the floor is no fun. We would make enough cookies for them to wrap up and take to the neighbors for gifts.

Children like having a small tree in their room. Small artificial trees aren't costly. They can choose what color lights to put on it. Nowadays, no heat lights are perfect for a child tree. Making colored construction paper chains, stringing popcorn and cranberries are perfect for an evening of entertaining. For the ones a little older the craft stores sell wooden Christmas ornaments in many shapes like trees, candy canes, wreaths, bells, stars and more. Some even come with paints, just make sure you put aprons on them, a man's shirt on backward works well, and an old shower curtain on the table works well also.

I recommend anything to lessen the stress. It's well worth it. Try buying some of the dinner items that are cooked or pre-cooked. Many grocery stores offer a whole dinner, all ready for a perfect feast. One only has to call and place their order. The turkey, dressing and gravy, sweet potato casserole, green beans, rolls and cranberry sauce, and even a pumpkin pie or apple pie will be ready for pick up.

Personally, I plan to make a recipe of something every day and put in the freezer. That way, the Christmas rush won't get the best of me.

May I suggest if a store offers gift wrapping, take advantage of that service.

Older adults who have no little ones around might consider volunteering for different charitable as they are always in need of helpers.

Just walking through the Mall and Bridge Street is an excellent way to get into the spirit of the season. I don't think one ever gets too old to ride the Carousel at Bridge Street. It sends me back in time when my father and mother would take me to the fair, I never got tired of riding it.

Santa is bringing me another grandchild that I have been expecting for ten years, and it will be named after me. I couldn't be happier.

Whatever you do, I wish you the best of the season and a very Happy New Year.

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We want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas with warm wishes for a blessed Holiday Season from our family to yours.



Christopher



Jerry & 'Lynn

# The Child in Us

by Al Dean

There's a creek near our house that meanders across the county, sometimes east, sometimes west, but in a more or less southerly direction on its way to the Tennessee River. If you're like me, and I suspect you are, a walk along the creek would be relaxing and curative, and may even reawaken the child in you, especially when the foliage is splashed with the colors of autumn.

Upstream, about a mile from the bridge that crosses the highway, there is a sharp bend where floodwaters have carved away the bank leaving a steep drop off. Where the soil once lay thick and rich, the gnarled roots of an ancient oak tree reach out with arthritic fingers grasping for the nourishment that has been swept away by seasons of flood. This is a good place to pause, brush the rickety leaves away from the foot of the tree, lean back against its massive trunk and listen.

At the right time of day the sun will warm you like a comforter and if the wind is still you can hear squirrels scolding from the tops of shagbark hickories. Woodies and mallards swoosh along the channel seeking food and cover. Cardinals, jays and flickers flit from black gum to black gum and from oak to oak. Canecutters the size of beagles hop cautiously from one green briar to another. If you are very quiet a doe will appear followed by her young one, still in spots, tip-toeing through dappled sunlight from shadow to shadow. The warmth of the sun touches your face and you doze off. This is what it must have been like in the beginning; breathtakingly wonderful. And you dream, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

One of the traits that separate humankind from the lower creatures is our capacity to envision and plan; to dream; to see and create beauty; to imagine good and to build. However, on the way to adulthood, the harmony of our hope has often been disrupted by the reality of our world, and we shut off the childlike innocence that once knew the wonder in sunbeams, airplanes, tadpoles, rain filled puddles and lightning bugs.

From time to time our capacity to envision urges us to attempt to regain that innocence,

that simplicity and trust; to balance the single-mindedness of maturity with the naivete of little children in an attitude that is not wearied and mundane. It doesn't require any special position or rank, no secret knowledge, only the will to engage our imagination.

We are creatures of habit. For most of us the content of our days and weeks follow a prescribed pattern. We like it. We prefer the familiar to the unfamiliar.

My slippers are beside the bed. When I awaken, I step into them. I must move quickly so the bed can be made. The bed must be made the first thing in the morning. Heaven forbid, if we had a fire, the firemen cutting their way through our walls would find an unmade bed.

Like most right-handed men I begin shaving on the right side of my face. Before I shower, I put my shoes, socks and belt on the dresser next to the chair. If my shoes need polishing I do it before I shower. I hook the hanger holding the pants I've chosen to wear on the hinge in the fold of the folding door of my closet. I hang my shirt on the knob of the closet door.

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If I'm wearing a tie I drape it over the shirt. If I'm wearing a jacket I twist the hanger hook and hang it on the bedroom door. I use the entire room when getting dressed.

My wife and I can't get dressed in the same part of the house. She uses the bathroom at one end of the house for makeup: because she can get closer to the mirror. She uses the master bathroom on the other end of the house for dressing: because she can't get close to the mirror.

We shop at the same grocery store because we know peanut butter is on aisle four, and coffee is on aisle six. We use the same dry cleaner because they know to starch light in the white, and medium in the dark. Our habits and patterns are as predictable as sunrise and sunset.

We like to know exactly what the day will bring. When things don't go as we expect, we get rattled. We don't like being moved out of our rut. The Christmas season moves us out of our rut.

If faith permits us to imagine life in a certain way, at some level Christmas calls us to examine our faith. Christmas is about faith, it is about children, it is about a child who has excited the imaginations of countless millions for over two thousand years, and the one whose birth the season commemorates. Through the magic of the sea-

son, we can break out of our rut and rediscover the child in us. And who knows, on Christmas morning we right-handed guys might even shave the left side of our face first.

'Tis the season. Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas!



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# Christmas After the Presents

by Anna (Gene) Clift Chesnut

Christmas was always my responsibility in the small household of my mother and me. She went to work every weekday and half a day on Saturday and that did not leave a lot of holiday planning time. So, from an early age I became fiercely independent in my schemes of planning for Christmas. I always decorated the tree. I do not remember my mother ever helping me. Maybe she did the Christmas chores when I was very small but in my memory I did all the preparations. She did make sure that Christmas revolved around the church (First Presbyterian) and giving to others. Choir practice with Mrs. Hamm was mandatory for me.

My first job was to gather my old toys and some new ones to wrap so that on Christmas Day we could call Ernest (one of the men who drove for my mother as she could not drive a car) and have him pick us up and take us to his house. There, we distributed the wrapped toys to each of his nine children. When I was older (high school age), at Christmastime I would wrap presents at my cousin's men's store downtown, Clift and Holmberg. By that time, I had plenty of experience wrapping presents!

After my presents were wrapped the tree had to be decorated. Often, the tree was brought to us from our farm (the farm manager's responsibility). After delivery and set up, that was my tree to decorate. No matter how wonderfully or how badly I decorated the tree my mother would praise it "to the hilt". I am sure, in retrospect, she felt if she criticized me she might have to do the job herself!

On Christmas Day after opening our presents, my mother and I would go to the downtown Russel Erskine (at that time a beautiful Hotel) for lunch (more like brunch) and then later in the day (oftentimes) go to our cousins', the Warrens, for early supper. The Warrens, like my mother, both worked during the weekdays (they were dentists, a husband/wife team) so life was very scheduled. They had a cook, Emma, so my mother and I would have a formal meal with them and their children (much older than I was) and after supper we cousins would tell Emma how much we enjoyed her cooking and then run to the barn and saddle up their horses and ride.

The Warrens house was not, however, in the country. The barn was in their back yard and they had bought the house next door, torn it down and put up a riding ring. On this particular Christmas Day, having saddled the horses, we walked them to the riding ring, mounted and proceeded to ride. Now if one knows anything about horses (and I knew very little) they will sometimes bloat so that when one tightens the girth it is not really

tight if they expel the air. In my case, that is exactly what happened with my horse. I was blithely riding along and suddenly the saddle slipped and I was under the horse. This was a big horse - a Tennessee Walker - at least seventeen hands high. He could have smashed my head with one hoof but he stood quietly while the others raced to my rescue. So, rather than a Christmas Day disaster I think of it often with fond memories. To finish the day with a joyful activity rather than having it end with opening presents has always, since then, been my goal for Christmas.

To that end, when we moved to Seattle we joined with seven other families to have Christmas dinner (at a different home each year with each family bringing a special "dish") and then afterward having the children enact plays, read Christmas stories and poems, or play instruments and sing Christmas carols while we parents, through the years, watched our children grow and thrive.

What would be a better way to end this Christmas story than with this poem called "A Carol for Children" by Ogden Nash?

God rest you merry innocents,  
Let nothing you dismay.  
Let nothing wound an eager heart  
Upon this Christmas day.  
Yours be the genial holly wreaths.  
The stockings and the tree;  
An aged world to you bequeaths  
Its own forgotten glee.

Soon, soon enough come crueller gifts,  
The anger and the tears  
Between you now there sparsely drifts  
A handful yet of years.  
Oh, dimly, dimly glows the star  
Through the electric throng.  
The bidding in temple and bazaar  
Drowns out the silver song.

The ancient alters smoke afresh,  
The ancient idols stir.  
Faint in the reek of burning flesh  
Sink frankincense and myrrh.  
Caspar, Balthazar, Melchior!  
Where are your offerings now?  
What greetings to the Prince of War,  
His darkly branded brow?

Two ultimate laws alone we know  
The ledger and the sword  
So far away, so long ago,  
We lost the infant Lord  
Only the children clasp His hand;  
His voice speaks low to them.  
And still for them the shining band  
Wings over Bethlehem.

God rest you merry innocents,  
While innocence endures.  
A sweeter Christmas than we to ours  
May you bequeath to yours.



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# Christmas in West Huntsville in the 1920s

by Newman Ward

I remember that people were happy in the 1920s. Before the depression it was easy to get work at all the mills and factories running. A group of men had come to Huntsville from the Dakotas to start the West Huntsville Cotton Mill, the Huntsville Hardwood Manufacturing Company, and a fertilizer factory that also sold seed and feed.

Preston Cothran, a genuine dwarf, moved into our community about that time. He was able to get around by becoming adept at roller skating. He skated "better than some and very good indeed."

Preston, called "Shorty" by everyone, became the star of a YMCA annual affair hailed as the Great Barn Door-Bale Hay Circus. The idea was to make it sound like a Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey extravaganza. Shorty would stand on the end of a spring board, take a little jump, raise his feet high into the air and sit down hard on the end of the board. Then he would rebound into a standing position. Even though there were other gymnasts, the crowd thought Shorty's act was the hit of the show.

Coach Andy Boyd did a routine on the pommel horse, and three or four of the high school girls turned cartwheels and did back bends. They performed a routine that looked a lot like Swinging Statues, where they would spin each other around and throw each other into gymnastic positions. One girl landed on her hands in a handstand. Two brothers rode bikes no-hands and stood on their seats for a few feet before they started to fall off. The school didn't have a band, but six people got together around the old YMCA piano with a trumpet and fiddles and a drum for this lucky occasion. There were no animal tricks, of course, but the townsfolk put on a lively show. Shorty later became a watch repairman on Madison Street, just off the Square.

On Christmas most of us would get a bag containing a tangerine and pecans or walnuts. I relished getting special tropical edibles instead of the usual mashed potatoes, green beans, cornbread and canned tomatoes. Still, when I smell a tangerine, my mouth waters thinking about long-ago Christmases. We raised our own chickens, so we had one for dinner along with Waldorf salad, chocolate pie, coconut cake,

and boiled custard. My favorite was black walnut cake when we had been able to get enough walnuts to crack for the batter.

The girls received books of paper dolls and fancy paper clothes or sometimes a rubber dolly whose eyes opened and closed and who wet, because her mouth had a little hole for a baby bottle and a tube that required diapers.

After seeing Shorty's popularity in the circus, we local kids, boys and girls alike, wished we had skates. Naturally they were what my sister Earleen and I asked Santa for, for Christmas, and as it turned out, so did most of the other kids. Sure enough, on Christmas morning, we woke up early to see if we had gotten anything. There they sat under the tree, with metal wheels and clamps to fasten them to our shoes. We ran out the door early to learn to keep our balance by going around and around the YMCA block, which luckily had concrete sidewalks.

I was so happy skating that I volunteered to go to the store for Mama.


Once coming back home with my hip pocket full of a box of matches, I tripped and fell hard. The matches burst into flames from the impact. I looked like a circus act for sure. I probably made the quickest moves of my life getting that box out of my pants.

Earleen went skating down the hall of our house before she had learned how to stop. She got up steam so that by the time she reached the back door, all she could do was put out her hand. She ran her arm right through the glass panel. Everybody was worried, but fortunately she didn't cut herself.

Harold "Slick" Tipps became the star skater. He could spin around and jump a little bit. But we all did very well, it seems, because even though we raced each other around and around the YMCA, we came through the skating season with no broken bones.

The contrast between then and now makes me think of "the good ole days" with nostalgia. Were we really as happy as I remember with a bag of goodies and one precious present? I like to think so.


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# Heard On the Street

by **Cathey Carney**



We sure have some sharp-eyed readers. **Ruth Manzell** was the first caller who told me she found the toothpick after a little bit of investigation. Did you find it? I put it under **Mitch Howie's** name (in ad below). Most people thought it was just a line but it was a very detailed toothpick - check it out in last month's issue. And I know I did a good job hiding it because I got less than half the calls I normally get. Ruth is retired from USAMC and now she gets a free subscription mailed right to her house for a year! Congratulations, Ruth.

We had lots of calls for **Danny Banks**, everyone either knew him back in the day or had dealings with him over the years. Danny was that sweet boy in the Photo of the Month for November, a retired judge.

**Janice Norman** was the lady who called from Athens where she now lives, she remembered Danny from years ago and said she would recognize that face anywhere!

I wanted to make a couple of corrections in the story from last month - "Geneology 101" written by **Anna Chesnut**. Mac Vann's name was incorrect and should have been Mack Vann, and the twin sisters were Glenda and Lenda (not Linda).

Happy Birthday to one special person. **John E. Carson** teaches a Creative Writing class on Thursdays at the Senior Center at 1pm, has done it for years. He is so loved by his class. He's written many stories for Old Huntsville. This year on his birthday (Oct 6) his class put together a surprise birthday party at the Senior Center for John. The theme was around his most popular book "Scruffy" and had lots of dog paraphernalia. He is the man behind "Rescue Me" which raises money to get Rescue dogs together with military Vets who really are in need of four legged friends. We're so proud of you John.

I heard a great tip recently that you need to know. Many use space heaters to supplement their heating in these really cold days! You need to always plug it in directly to the outlet. Don't plug space heaters into power strips or splitters, because heat will build up

and can definitely cause fire.

**Delores Forsman** let us know that she sure loves the variety in our writer submissions that Old Huntsville publishes each month. She said she looks forward to it and wishes we were weekly!

Don't forget to feed the birds in the icy cold weather. It's harder for them to find seeds or anything to eat or water to drink. I have so many chipmunks this year and they love the birdseed too, so I try to keep it off the ground and in the feeders.

**Oscar Llerena** is one of the most generous people you'll ever meet and he's a graduate of Huntsville High class of 1966. He was also a Christmas Eve baby. He is having a big birthday on December 24th and lives with his family in Miami. So his many friends and classmates send love to Oscar in wishing him a very happy celebration of his birthday!

**Tom Paone** is the 2nd Vice Commander of the American Legion Post 237 in Huntsville and he said they will be helping to host the 83rd Annual Ameri-

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can Legion High School Oratorical Contest at Madison City Hall at 10am on Jan. 25, 2020. He would like to find high school students who would like to be contestants, as well as invite the public to attend this free event. More information by searching for Clayton E. Moneymaker American Legion Post 237.

**Lorene Fisk Dilworth** was 89 when she passed away on October 15. She married her sweetheart **Bill (William Penn Dilworth, III)** and went on to have two sons and a wonderful life. She is survived by son **William Penn Dilworth IV (Angi Penney)**. I remember her from years ago and she was a true southern lady who dearly loved her family.

The weather for the **Veterans Day Parade** on Nov. 11 couldn't have been better. Warm, nearly 70 degrees, sunny and clear. There were more entries than ever and I believe I heard that it is one of the largest in the country. There were so many flags and people saying Thank you, lots of Veterans and we're so proud of you.

**John and Peggy Richard** of Team Richard have been married now for 59 years! They celebrated their big day on Nov.

12. Congratulations to the lovebirds and here's to 50 more!

While we're celebrating important days, **Jane Barr** had an 88th birthday in October. She knows all about the history of Monte Sano and she, along with husband **Tom**, hiked so many trails up there. Tom passed away several years ago but Jane still lives on the mountain and loves the beauty there.

Recently I was at a friend's home and she served some really good spiced tea, cold. I had always had hot spiced tea but it was so good. She said she gets cinnamon sticks, pours some Milo's or whatever ready-made tea you like into a pot, heats it up and throws in a couple of the cinnamon sticks, lemon juice, honey, etc. Let that sit with heat off for an hour or so, pour back into a container and in the fridge. So good and it can be sugar free if you like, all kinds of varieties.

Happy Birthday to our friend **Louie Tippett** (below). He had a birthday on November 22 along with a big surprise party masterminded by his sweet wife **Jane** and their daughters. It was a total success and Louie had no idea.

There is something hidden in this issue that one or two

may find. It is a candle, I won't say if it's large or small. It has a flame. IF you find it, be the first to call and you get a free subscription for a year of Old Huntsville. I know many of you like to look for the hidden item before you read the stories, but you might have trouble with this one. Prove me wrong!

There are so many events to attend since we're now on the countdown to Christmas. Be sure and check **Valley Events** online for a variety of things to do with dates.

When it got so cold in November some people lost power in the middle of the night, with transformers blowing, etc. The **Huntsville Utilities** folks got out immediately, put a status on their Facebook page and website and fixed all the lines within just hours. I don't think we take enough time to tell Hsv Utilities how much we appreciate them not only this past time, but in years past with falling trees and tornadoes and much more, they are there right away. Thank You for your hard work.

I wish all of our readers a warm and magical Christmas and be sure and give your parents/grandparents extra hugs. You won't regret it.



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## Gifts from the Kitchen

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### Hazelnut Butter Crunch

- 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
- 1/3 c. chopped hazelnuts
- 1/4 c. packed brown sugar
- 1/4 c. butter

Mix all til crumbly - distribute evenly in a buttered 13x9 inch pan. Bake at 400 degrees til golden brown, 7 to 10 minutes. Stir & cool, store in covered container or give as a gift.

### Chocolate Nut Truffles

- 1 c. Eagle Brand condensed milk
- 4 oz. chocolate chips
- 2-1/2 c. powdered sugar
- 1 t. vanilla
- 1 c. pecans, chopped fine

Melt chocolate in top of a double boiler or in microwave oven for 30 second intervals. Add the condensed milk, let

it cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, add sugar, blending thoroughly. Add vanilla and nuts, shape as desired. Dip in melted chocolate or roll in coconut or cocoa powder.

### Grandma's Lace Cookies

- 2 sticks butter, softened
- 3 c. brown sugar, packed
- 1 egg
- 1/4 t. salt
- 1 t. vanilla or almond extract
- 4 c. quick rolled oats

With your mixer, blend the butter and sugar. Add egg, vanilla, salt and blend in oats. Spray a light coating of oil on a cookie sheet, make small balls on the sheet, two inches apart, and don't overcook. Bake at 325 degrees for 8 minutes. Cool completely before removing them from cookie pan or they'll stick together.

### Coconut Meringues

- 4 egg whites
- 1-1/4 c. sugar

- 2-1/2 c. coconut, shredded
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 1/4 t. salt

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Lightly grease a cookie sheet. Beat your egg whites in a deep glass bowl til foamy, beat in sugar, continue beating until stiff and glossy. Do not underbeat. Fold in remaining ingredients, drop mixture by heaping teaspoonfuls about 2 inches apart onto your cookie sheet.

Bake for 20 minutes and they're light brown. Immediately remove from cookie sheet and cool. Store in a tightly covered container.

### Toasted Almond Brittle

- 2 c. sugar
- 1 c. almonds, slivered & toasted
- 3 T. butter
- Pinch baking soda

Cook sugar in an iron skillet over low heat, stirring constantly til it forms a syrup.

Remove from stove and stir in the almonds. Add butter and

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soda, pour onto greased cookie sheet to cool, break into pieces when cool and store.

### Macaroons

- 1 16-oz. pkg. angel food cake mix (1 step)
- 1/2 c. water
- 1-1/2 t. almond extract
- 2 c. flaked coconut

In a bowl beat the cake mix, water and extract, use low speed for 30 seconds. Scrape, beat on medium speed for another minute. Fold in the coconut, stir. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto a parchment paper-lined baking sheet.

Bake at 350 degrees for 10-12 minutes, remove paper with cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

### Best Dark Fudge

- 3 c. chocolate chips, semi-sweet
- 1 dash salt
- 1-1/2 t. vanilla extract
- 1 can Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk
- 2 c. walnuts or pecans, chopped

In a heavy saucepan over low heat, melt the chips with the Eagle Brand and salt. Remove from heat, stir in the nuts and vanilla. Spread evenly over wax-paper lined 9x13"

pan. Work quickly because it will harden in seconds. Cover and chill overnight - next day turn fudge onto cutting board and remove wax paper, cut into small squares, store in refrigerator.

### Forgotten Crispies

- 2-1/2 c. powdered sugar
- 4 egg whites
- 1 t. cream of tartar
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 1 c. chopped pecans

Beat all ingredients except nuts for 15 minutes, then add nuts and drop by teaspoonfuls onto greased cookie sheet.

Bake at 225 degrees for an hour, turn heat off, leave in oven til cool.

### Peanut Butter Cookies

- 1 c. chunky peanut butter
- 1 c. brown sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- pinch salt

Stir all ingredients til combined. Shape level tablespoonfuls into balls, place 2 inches apart on a buttered cookie sheet. Flatten with fork.

Bake at 350 degrees for 16 minutes and cookies are set, but don't overcook. Cool for 5 minutes and remove to wire racks.

### Brandy Balls

- 3 c. finely crushed vanilla wafers
- 1 c. powdered sugar
- 3 T. cocoa powder
- 1/2 c. pecans, chopped fine
- 1/4 c. brandy or rum
- 1/4 c. light Karo syrup
- SUGAR MIXTURE
- 1/2 c. granulated sugar
- 1/2 c. cocoa powder

In a large bowl, combine the first six ingredients in order listed. Mix well with spoon and set aside. On a plate mix 1/2 cup granulated sugar with 1/2 cup cocoa powder, mix well and spread out. Roll small balls of the wafer mixture then roll in the sugar/cocoa mixture.

These make the perfect gift in a pretty covered container. You friends will love them!

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# The First Missionary Baptist Church

by Denise Swain

In the late 1800s a group of Christians from Aberdeen, Mississippi settled in Huntsville, Alabama.

Therefore, guided by the Holy Spirit in 1880 they established the First Missionary Baptist Church in an old house on West Clinton Street under the leadership of Reverend Robert Green.

Shortly after the formation of the Church in 1881 Reverend Pope Jones became the Pastor. During his pastorate, services were held in the United States Court Building at three and seven o'clock p.m. each Sunday. Reverend Jones started a building program. With assistance from the Muscle Shoals Missionary Baptist Association, the Church purchased a lot on Steele Street. Construction of the church began in 1886 with Reverend Jones and Reverend M. J. Hooks erecting the structure.

On May 4, 1895, the cornerstone was laid and the Steele Street building was complete. In 1906, a group of Huntsville ministers met at First Baptist Church to form the Ministers Union of Huntsville with membership extended to all area ministers.

By 1922, a new era of growth and vision began. Rev. C. N.

Perry, a young progressive & energetic preacher from Morehouse College introduced a program for expansion. Beginning in 1925 -- amid the mecca of Huntsville's black life of black-owned businesses & cultural activity within present day downtown Huntsville -- the 236 Church Street building was dedicated. At the time, pastors serving include Rev. C.N. Perry and Rev. J. M. Butler.

After 1927 the upper story of the church was begun. In 1931, the Missionary Society was founded. And between 1941 and 1943 the Mortgage on the Church was burned and the Missionary Society departmentalized.

A new and progressive era began in 1949 with the arrival of Rev. Horace P. Snodgrass. God sent a strong anchor, a blessing to the Church in the form of a young, gifted, well-prepared preacher. The Reverend Horace P. Snodgrass came to the church with a vision and a program. His tenure ended the previous pattern of brief pastoral stints; thus enabling the church to experience a period of real stability..

The physical plant of the Church was improved in many ways. The acceptance by the Alabama Baptist Convention of the Church's invitation to hold its 1953 annual session at First Baptist Church led to the complete renovation of the Church interior and the beau-



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tification of the building's exterior and grounds. The most notable renovations were the additions of an indoor baptistry, a central heating system, a modern kitchen, rest rooms and a sidewalk in front of the church. Shortly thereafter, the steep steps outside were remodeled to allow a rest between flights; thereby accommodating those members who found the task of climbing the steps very challenging.

During the 1960s civil rights era, the church was heavily involved in the community; serving as a strategy center and a focal point for rallies. Early in 1962, meetings were held nightly & weekly. Offerings were taken to pay for jail bonds & arrests. The church hosted training sessions which taught non-violence. On March 19, 1962 the church served as the daytime and afternoon host to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & Ralph Abernathy.

After 25 years of service, suddenly on July 29, 1973 while officiating at a funeral in his beloved pulpit, Pastor Snodgrass collapsed and passed away. With the passing of Reverend Snodgrass, the church called as its pastor Reverend Emanuel E. Cleaver, who was currently serving as assistant pastor. Pastor Cleaver became ill. And during the interim - between 1975 and 1976 and before Pastor Scruggs 1977 arrival - Wayne Snodgrass (son of Pastor H.P. Snodgrass) served as interim pastor.

After a long and prayerful search, the Church called as pastor the Reverend Dr. Julius R. Scruggs. Dr. Scruggs accepted the call and agreed to begin his pastorate in January 1977. He possessed superb academic credentials. The thrust of his pastorate was shaped by Christian Education, outreach ministry, stewardship, physical growth and spiritual maturity. Under Pastor Scruggs' leadership, the twelve-acre lot, which we now occupy on Blue Spring Road, was purchased in 1977 and construction of the Church began soon after. On March 9, 1980, the members of the First Baptist Church family, along with friends and well-wishers, marched into the new structure

After 42 years of fruitful ministry, in January 2019, Pastor Scruggs retired. After much thought and prayer, the church called Rev. Don Darius Butler. Pastor Butler began his tenure on February 3, 2019. Pastor Butler brings

a wealth of training and pastoral experience. An excellent preacher and profound teacher, he brings a cheerful disposition. Under his leadership, God will write many more successful chapters in the life of First Missionary Baptist Church.





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# How to Spoil Your Christmas

by M.D. Smith, IV

"Do NOT do this," I preached to my children as they were growing up.

A lesson learned from my childhood Christmases when I think I was about nine years old, was that it is NOT a good thing to know what you are getting for Christmas.

Up to that year, Christmas was a wonderful and mysterious time of the year. One look at all the brightly wrapped presents under the tree, many with my name on them, is exciting for a kid. We never knew what Santa would bring like a bicycle, but we sure could anticipate what might be in those boxes and packages wrapped with candy cane striped paper, bow ribbons of every color and the printed name tags taped to the presents.

Earlier in the month, my little sister had torn open a gift for herself. My parents told her it was wrong and removed it, telling her she would not get it. We knew we better not unwrap anything. They later did wrap it differently and put it under the tree on Christmas Eve.

So, this particular year of 1949, one Friday about a week before Christmas when my parents were gone, I got a single edge razor blade and carefully cut the tape at the seams, unwrapped every gift to me, examined it, wrapped it back, and carefully put a piece of tape over the original. You could not tell a thing. Now all the mystery was gone. So were the expectations and excitement.

Christmas morning came, and after the excitement of the Santa gifts, we turned to the tree. Little sister was as excited as ever and I calmly unwrapped each box already knowing exactly what was in each one. I suppose my lack of excitement, and even my, "Thank-you" must have seemed lackluster. My mother also asked, "Son, do you like your gifts?" I assured her that I did. I could tell both my mother and father were a bit disappointed and I tried to be a little more excited, but the truth was, the excitement was long past.

In all the years after that, I have never, not even once, opened a gift early. Judy sometimes gets a gift from a friend out of town or in town and opens it. When I do, she asks me why I don't. I tell her it's going under the tree. I learned my lesson long ago. I even told my kids the same story with the same caution.

On a particular Christmas morning, not so many years ago, my middle son seemed less than surprised at gifts I had carefully bought, and I let it pass. Later that afternoon, he confessed to me, "Dad, after you told us that story

of you at nine years old... well, I..." and I finished the sentence for him, "So you did the same thing, huh?"

He nodded and said, "You were right. It ruined the surprise. I'll never do it again."

Some people just have to learn the hard way.

I hope your Christmas is full of enjoyment and surprises. Don't spoil the fun.

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# Home for Christmas

by Kate Watts

Our family was never well-off. We didn't take vacations, we shopped at Goodwill and we were pretty familiar with spaghetti for dinner. And we always began saving for Christmas long before Labor Day. Still, the holidays never felt lacking; we relished Christmas just like any other family.

But one year, my mother was diagnosed with thyroid cancer just before Christmas. At the time, my brother and I were still young enough to find Christmas magical—and innocent enough for my parents to remain circumspect about the potentially negative outcome.

When Dad told us, then, that the doctor had detected a lump in my mother's thyroid, he prudently presented the situation as little more than a case of a misbehaving gland that surgery would resolve. An operation to remove Mom's thyroid needed to be performed without delay, however, and the date was set for December 21. Though we hoped Mom would be home by Christmas Eve, it was equally possible that she wouldn't.

Nevertheless, our family prepared for Christmas as usual. We played Christmas carols and decorated our tree; we hung wreaths and our stockings. And we bought presents, because regardless of the diagnosis, we'd saved for Christmas for months and we still intended to enjoy it.

The day of Mom's surgery arrived, and the operation went smoothly. But unexpectedly, the doctors discovered two different types of cancer in her thyroid. As a precaution, then, her hospital stay was extended. She wouldn't be home by Christmas Eve after all.

So our family had two options. We could celebrate Christmas without Mom. Or we could save our Christmas celebration until she came home, even if that meant postponing the holiday until the new year.

Many kids would protest delaying Christmas for even one day, but my brother and I agreed: No Mom, no Christmas.

So while everyone else was vacuuming up pine needles, tossing out eggnog and finishing off sugar cookies, our tree stayed up and our stockings stayed empty. We kept the poinsettia on the table and the wreath on the door. And our presents waited, unopened, under the tree.

On the morning of December 27, Mom was released. By midafternoon, she was home. Pale, tired, and weak—but home.

Most importantly, though, the doctor had caught the cancer. She would be all right. We could have delayed Christmas until the next morning. Traditionally, Christmas commenced when we kids jumped from bed to raid our stockings; then, after an eternity of begging our parents to get up, we opened presents. Yes, we'd maintained our Christmas traditions so far this year and maybe it was the middle of the day, but Mom was finally home.

Still, my brother and I insisted we observe some protocol. If Christmas always began when we jumped from bed, then this Christmas should begin the same way. So the two of us tripped over ourselves running to our beds, where we drew the covers and pretended to be fast asleep.

When Mom and Dad finally sounded the all clear, our feet hit the floor and, laughing, we ran out to raid our stockings. Middle of the day or not, it was Christmas morning.

I suspect my gifts that year were humble, as always—books, stuffed animals, drawing supplies. But I don't recall any of them. I remember only this: That year, we saved more for Christmas than ever before.

**"Life is not a fairy tale. If you lose your shoe at midnight, you've probably had too much to drink."**

**Shaun O'Neal, Gurley**

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# A Truly Giving Family

by Charlie Edgar

It's a "blended" family. We have "biological" children, or "halves", "adoptees", "steps" and probably more if we thought long enough. But, you would never know it.

I want to share a recent incident that really illustrates this. First, a little background. Fifty years ago in August 1969, my wife Joyce and I came together as Widows. Joyce was left with two boys after her husband was killed in a plane wreck. My wife had died in a car wreck. Joyce had two boys 7 and 9 when we met, and I had two girls and a boy ages 5, 6, and 8. I was domestically challenged and was on a crusade to find a wife! We met on a Friday night and both of us knew we wanted to marry and we decided to do that on the following Saturday night. We married a month later. We have been blessed with our daughter Margie.

On the Saturday morning after our first date I called Joyce. She invited me to bring my children for a swim party. I have been asked if the children blended, and they did that day. They have truly been that way ever since. I could share many stories, but one in particular illustrates the "giving."

A little over a year before my first wife Jenny died, we learned that her family carried a genetic disease called Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD). After Jenny's death, I realized that this was one of many things I now was responsible for and I made an appointment with a doctor who described the disease to me. The doctor described a disease that wouldn't affect a person until they were in their sixties, or later. This is not how it worked out for

my three children.

Our son Chip experienced his kidney failure problem in his mid forties and needed a kidney. His wife Beth Anne volunteered to be a donor, and blessed him with a donor kidney and a longer life together. It was truly a gift of life and a blessing that they could share life with a new sense of "togetherness."

A few years later our daughter Beth found that she needed a kidney, and her gift came from her husband Michael. Giving seemed to be truly a part of the family, and we just rejoiced in what these be-

loved spouses were doing for their families.

We probably began to think that as great as the problem was, it would work out nicely in this way, and perhaps took the really amazing gifts for granted. Little did we know!

Katie, our second daughter from my first marriage came to the time that she need a kidney. Her husband Mike stepped up and was ready to show his love as the other spouses had done. He was a match, but had some borderline issues that caused two hospitals to finally re-

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ject him as a donor. He took it well, but it was obvious that this was hard on him and was a bitter disappointment.

An anonymous donor volunteered to be tested and was also a match for Katie. Unfortunately, it was determined that this person would not be allowed to be the donor. Katie had a dear friend from college that stepped up. She was the third match but the testing hospital asked her to undergo several additional tests that prevented her from being approved as a donor in a normal amount of time.

While all this was occurring, Katie had an emergency appendectomy, then developed sepsis and pneumonia. Time began to take its toll. We found out that medical problems could be complicated as well as life rewarding.

One Saturday morning this past September my son-in-law, Matt, came in the house and asked me to step outside. In the meantime, Margie had caught Joyce driving off but asked her to come back to the house. Margie let us know that it was not easy to get us together.

When Joyce arrived, Margie told us she had an appointment at UAB hospital to be evaluated as a donor. We decided that our family has blended so well that we had not considered Margie, but it was Jenny's genetic line that had the disease and Margie is not affected. Joyce and I were both overwhelmed and choked up. Margie found out in October that she was a match and the transplant surgery took place November 20, 2017.

Words cannot adequately describe that we as parents feel. Both Joyce and I were devastated by the deaths of our first spouses. But we see, as so many have described, that God works in mysterious ways that we do not understand.

In human understanding, if Jenny had not died, I would not have married Joyce, and Margie would not be with us. But it was Margie who was able to help Jenny's daughter (Katie) to live a longer life.

We often talk of miracles, but life walking in God's path is always miraculous.

**"I'm not going to vacuum til Sears makes one that I can ride on."  
Roseanne Barr**



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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.

It 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 "eeeeee" 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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- 1 tea kettle
- 1 step ladder
- 1 meat saw
- 4 stone jars
- 1 stove
- 1 coal shovel
- 2 granite-ware stew pans
- 2 wooden chopping bowls, 2 sizes
- 1 large tin pail and 1 large wooden pail
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# I'll Be Home for Christmas

by John Carriker

The fire shot up into the air, growing as it consumed the remaining oxygen and projecting a heat so intense it seemed to rival biblical Gehenna. Flames licked up the trunks of the trees in seconds with such speed and ferocity that the wood reacted with loud explosions. Literally, blew the giant forests apart, racing ferociously across the land, attacking the mountains and leaving the green-topped beauty of nature with a denuding that resulted in black, ember-strewn earth, destroyed for decades to come. Wildlife was slain, homes were destroyed and the human population was overwhelmed by fires that set much of California in harm's way.

"I just want to go home!" One woman wailed from the television set, caught as she was fleeing the quickly approaching inferno. It had already taken her house, her memories, her immediate-planned future, and now, it was searching for her.

The man stopped in the middle of eating the ham sandwich as he watched scenes of the terrible west coast fires on his television. "That should be my wish, this year," he muttered, as he recalled the well-planned birthday "party" he had received, earlier. "It was the Christmas of 2018," he thought, "and it will be the first time in 50 years I will not be home for Christmas ... or will it?" He went into the kitchen, fixed a cup of coffee, sat down in his recliner, wrapped a light blanket around himself to lessen the chill and began to reminisce.

The first Christmas homecoming he could remember occurred when he was in college and had taken a train, traveling several hundred miles to arrive home and be greeted by his parents. He smiled as he recalled how his mother gave him a hug and planted a colorful kiss on his forehead. It wasn't until much later he discovered the lipstick impression

did not come off easily. The family celebration that followed was full of joy and laughter. It had been the last time he had spent Christmas with the entire family.

A few years later, Christmas was celebrated from several thousand miles away while he was serving in the military. There had been a telephone call, a pulling on the heart strings as his mother had wept out of joy to be able to speak to him. His dad seemed strangely hoarse, moments later, as he wished his only son a "Merry Christmas" and a more somber, "I love you."

The following Christmases claimed their individual personalities with marriages, children, grandchildren, relatives, etc. Great times of warmth and expectation interspersed with periods of sadness and loss. As each holiday came, the noticeable influence of Christ in their lives changed and altered each in different ways ... to draw closer to God or to forget His love and grace.

This Christmas would be somewhat different from those in the past, he thought, as he reflected on where he had been, where he was and where he was going. A passing wave of nostalgia blurred his eyes as he remembered the song that marked many of those earlier yuletide events, "I'll be Home for Christmas".

"Where is 'Home' now?" he wondered several evenings earlier as he watched the small town's Christmas parade begin down its

main street. The illustrious mayor and his spouse led the way with "visions of sugar plums" and a joyful "big" white-bearded man followed an entourage of floats, fire engines, police vehicles, high school bands and beauty queens.

Some may have had a bad year, he reckoned; others were celebrating their first Christmas parade and others, their last, but didn't know it. Some did. But that night, the lights were bright and colorful, the music was upbeat with a sound that warmed up the cold air. There were those without hope who found it during those

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minutes of bliss they experienced.

Nothing is guaranteed except the moment, the older man acknowledged. A wise man once observed: "There are three moments in life — the past, the present and the future. The past is no longer with us except by what it has left; the future is to be that which is coming; but it will all be planned by the present, the only part of life that is real and you have some type of control over how you use it. Romanticists consider it in the terms of a "moment". It is defined as the time that is approximately 6-12 seconds in length. That is yours to use. Be wise, be joyful, be hopeful.

A gray-haired older man held the tray of hot chocolate as he moved around the large group that was gathering. "Want some hot chocolate?" he asked. Then, he went to others with the same question. The hot liquid went quickly in the cool night. Another woman was doing the same. The Methodist church's generosity to the parade attendees was well-received by those waiting for Santa to make his arrival.

There were kids on parents' shoulders ... the most popular ride of the night. A young pastor had his daughter (pink hooded snow-suit, concealing her blond hair), bouncing joyfully on her father's shoulders as she chattered away with a quickly developing vocabulary. No presents exchanged, only the joy of the season ... the joy of Christ's announced birth brings with it all the pleasures that God has to offer His people!

It is through immersion into the ordinary — the apparently empty, trivial and meaningless experiences of a routine day — that life is encountered and lived. Real living is not about words, concepts and abstractions but about the experience of who or what is immediately before us. Phrasing it another way, you are "Home" for Christmas. Joy, freedom from worry and anxiety, knowing your eternal family and realizing that they are here with you.

"Yes," he smiled, gazed up and declared, "I am home for Christmas."

We must not despair if it seems to be a Christmas that's lost its glitter — its charismatic identification with lights, flowers and family meals surrounded by friends of the past and present. What God has ordained — the birth of His only begotten Son — man cannot destroy! His preparation for you in your forthcoming eternal home has already begun. We can celebrate the season with joy and hope,

knowing that even as our life and way of living has been disrupted or destroyed, our expectations will be lifted; our "home" has been cleansed through the blood sacrifice of our Master, Jesus Christ!

Merry Christmas!



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# Local News from the Year 1923

- Whether because of an accident or an attempted joke, street cars on Holmes Avenue were unable to make their schedules for an hour or two yesterday because of a veritable lake of molasses on the right of way in that section. The sticky substance had to be shoveled up and placed in carts and a liberal supply of sand placed on the tracks before traffic could be resumed. A reward of \$500 is being offered for the apprehension of the party who placed the molasses on the track. If caught and the act found to have been committed as a joke, the joker will be prosecuted.

- Mrs. C. T. Greaves, of Dallas, TX was one of the most seriously injured in the wreck of the Southern passenger train near Scottsboro last week, is still at the Huntsville infirmary, where she was taken immediately following the accident. Mrs. Greaves is, however, reported to be doing well. She is the only one of the several brought here who have not returned to their homes.

- Two boys, Lonnie Jones, 16 and Warren Sanders, 14 will be held in Huntsville for the arrival of their parents this week. They said they lived near Scottsboro and were taken in charge by Chief Hackworth. Their parents had telephoned the chief to notify him that the boys had traveled to Huntsville, after telling them that they "wanted to see the world." They were without money and seemed quite ready to return home after seeing enough of the world and its hardness.

- Sunday, while riding his bicycle on Walker Street, Howard Larkin, a small boy, was knocked from his wheel by an automobile driven by Henry Thomas. Young Larkin was jolted but not seriously injured.

- Messrs. James McGill and Lee Guy have perfected a new automobile light which they intend to apply for a patent. The light will contain a revolving fan on one end and colored lights on the other, the lights being generated from a dry battery and being operated by the car. The gentlemen have tried out their light with complete success. Investors are encouraged to contact the gentlemen.

**"Late last night, as I lay in bed looking at the twinkling stars, I thought, 'What happened to my ceiling?'"**

**Johnny Steele, Scottsboro**

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# Wandering Spirits of the South

by *Betty Hallmark  
Atkinson*

Years ago I went with my twin sister to visit the Shiloh, Tennessee Historical Battleground. While walking by the pond that was said to be where both the Confederate and Union soldiers went to cleanse their wounds, I had the strangest feeling come over me, like a deep sadness that I had never experienced before and a feeling that I too had once been there taking care of the wounded.

As the grief stuck, so did the tears, so I reached in my purse for a Kleenex, and instead of a Kleenex, I pulled out what appeared to be a surgical tourniquet, that would have been used by the soldiers. But how could it be, nothing like that could have lasted for over 100 years. My sister was as shocked as I

was, as there was no logical reason for this to be in my purse.

In the early '70s I was living alone with my three daughters in northwest Huntsville. One night I had just gone to bed when I had a feeling that someone was in the room with me. Thinking it might be one of my daughters, I was startled to see a tall man dressed in a military uniform standing by the bed, but he quickly vanished.

The next day while at work, one of my daughters called to ask about a missing loaf of bread that I had just bought the day before, well that was strange. But when I came home that afternoon and walked into my bedroom, I discovered a saber propped in a corner against a wall, that I hadn't noticed that morning in my haste while getting ready for work. Could it be that the soldier from the night before had been hungry and had taken the loaf of bread, and for payment, left his saber?

Years later, before the Internet, my granddaughter came over to borrow a World Book Encyclopedia for a school paper. While looking through the book, both

my daughter and granddaughter yelled at me to come and see what they had found.

There in the World Book was a picture of a Confederate Soldier with a saber exactly like the one left in my bedroom, which I still have to this day.

I guess I should mention, that about a block from our house, there was an old Plantation Home, and located in the woods next to it, was an old cemetery where some Confederate Soldiers had been buried. While living in that house for over thirty years, there was a lot of unusual and strange things that appeared and happened there, not only just to me, but also to the other family members.

Years later I talked with my doctor about the experiences in my life and home, and I asked if he thought I was crazy. I'll never forget what he said. He told me I had one of the sanest minds of anyone he had known, then went on to say, that there are wandering spirits that have never found their resting place.

I never did get a second opinion on that!



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# Mrs. Santa Claus

by Charita Avery



Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would ever get to be Mrs. Santa Claus. Growing up, as for most children, Santa Claus was a very special person in my life. My parents had moved to Huntsville from Jackson County to work in the Lincoln Textile Mill before I was born. The mill provided housing for their workers for a very minimal charge. My parents both worked, and we appeared to make it okay financially. I later realized we were poor financially and materially, but we were blessed with a lot of love.

Coincidentally, my name, Charita, is Greek meaning "blessed with love." True to my name, I have been blessed with love all my life. Also, as a child I always seemed to be blessed with presents at Christmas time, so I knew it didn't matter if you were poor, Santa would still visit.

One particular Christmas I remember I received a doll, table & chairs and a play cabinet with dishes — a huge Christmas for any little girl! Later I discovered my older sister and her husband had helped Santa that year.

I never really saw Santa personally that much; however, I do remember his coming to Lincoln Baptist Church one year and climbing through the second-floor window. Later I discovered that was really Ray Pearman dressed as Santa Claus' helper. I guess that was the first time I knew Santa had

helpers.

I would normally just write Santa a letter to tell him what I wanted for Christmas. I never saw Mrs. Claus; however, I knew she existed. I guess I just always assumed she remained back at the North Pole keeping things going on the home front while Santa was working.

After I married and had a child, Christmas was just as exciting as it was when I was a child. We loved taking our son Denis to see Santa every year, having his picture taken with him and shopping for ideas for his Christmas list. Since we had a fireplace with a chimney for Santa to enter, we always left cookies and milk on the hearth. I treasure all those memories of my Christmases and my son's too.

Fast forward approximately 25 years later, after the

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death of my son and husband. My niece, Gigi, operates a daycare in her home and she approached me regarding being Mrs. Santa Claus at the annual Christmas party for the children in her day care. That excited me, so I got busy designing and making a Mrs. Claus outfit. The children loved me as Mrs. Claus and enjoyed sitting at my feet as I read them Christmas stories. The parents made pictures, and I gave out gifts to the children. I continue to do this each Christmas.

About three years ago I was approached by Radio Station 96.9, who sponsors the annual Huntsville Christmas parade, regarding serving as Mrs. Santa Claus in the parade that year. I was so excited – of course, I agreed – I already had the outfit.

The parade this year will be on Tuesday, December 3, and this will be my third year to participate as Mrs. Santa Claus. Prior to the parade, I, along with Santa Claus, attend a private party at the Von Braun Civic Center for children who are specifically selected by the radio station through a contest. We meet each child, take their Christmas requests, and pose for pictures with the children as well as a few adults.

The night of the parade, I am privileged to ride in a new sports car convertible. Yes, it's cold, however, the driver usually has the heater going full blast. I feel like a queen, riding on the back of the car, waving to the shouts of "Hello, Mrs. Santa Claus" from the crowd. Last year, I visited some classrooms in a Decatur school and read Christmas stories to them. I look forward to visiting with them again this Christmas.

We never know what experiences life will bring our way each year – some bad but mostly good. Throughout this experience as Mrs. Santa Claus, I have learned just how much the children love Mrs. Claus – it seems as much as they love "Jolly Ole " Santa himself.

How remarkable for me – a poor little mill village girl grew up to be Mrs. Santa Claus.



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# FIREWORKS FOR CHRISTMAS

by Walt Terry

I must have been destined to become a rocket engineer. At an early age I became enamored with fireworks. In those times, fireworks were part of the Christmas celebration. I was hired to help sell them at stands on or near the Courthouse Square.

I earned the grand salary of fifty cents an hour in front of the Hutchens Hardware store and at a stand across Washington Street on the northwest corner of the Square. This stand belonged to George Gulps, our Tax Collector at the time. I would have gladly worked at the stand for free, but I never told him that.

I loved fireworks, the shape and feel and smell of them, as well as the tantalizing thoughts of exactly what would happen when you lit the fuse.

I remember one Christmas, during the Great Depression in the 30s, my father was working as a traveling salesman to keep us alive, but in sympathy with my passion, he asked me if I'd like the two of us to order ten dollars worth of fireworks from a catalogue. He might as well have asked if I'd like a pirate's treasure chest of gold coins.

We picked out a wonderful assortment. My mother, who was a teacher at \$60 a month in those days, was shocked that we had chosen to "burn up ten dollars". But she wound up going along with it with as much good grace as she could muster.

On Christmas morning when I saw the box by the hearth, I was almost out of my mind with joy and excitement. At first, I wanted only to look at the fascinating shapes of rockets and cones and vertical cylinders with little wooden bases. I sorted them, marveled at them, drew pictures of them - even took some of the aerial launchers apart to see how they were

made, then put them back together. They promised to do all kinds of wonderful things and they exploded in different ways.

The torpedoes came packed in 2 packs, in boxes of sawdust, little hard cardboard balls that exploded on impact and could be shot against wells with a sling shot ("flips" we called them). They had captivating names like "Whistling Storm Kings" and "Crazy Crackers.". The Storm Kings scooted wildly on the street, screaming, and then exploded violently. Jimmy Burnam's police dog could not stop



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chasing them, but he sure paid for it with a scorched and sometimes bloody muzzle.

The "Crazy Crackers" were the diameter of a silver dollar and were wrapped in red paper. When rubbed against a rough surface they would pop and smoke. As one unlucky school prankster found out, once you got a Crazy Cracker started, stomping on it only made it angrier and more uproarious, and woefully disruptive in the classroom.

He paid the price with a week's suspension from school. I'll never forget Miss Annie Merts, our teacher, tapping her foot with hands on her hips, watching him suffer.

The Christmas fireworks were a memorable part of my young life, lasting through New Year's Eve and on the 4th of July. You might wonder, why fireworks at Christmas? Well, we celebrate the birth of our nation with fireworks, why not do the same with the birth of our Savior?

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# DECEMBER MEMORIES

by Elizabeth Wharry

My birthday is in December. It's not the best time to have a birthday. Usually, everyone is busy with Christmas preparations, shopping and parties.

This particular year, I had graduated high school, and was turning 19. My mother and I went to California on the train to visit relatives and sightsee. Amtrak was running a special; two weeks of unlimited travel. This trip was a combination of high school graduation and birthday present.

We spent the first few days in California visiting my brother. Our next stop was my mother's niece. That's when we went

to the original Disneyland. It was wonderful! I saw Lee Majors, and his then wife, Farrah Fawcett Majors. They were too far away to approach, so I waved, and she waved back.

The most thrilling event happened a couple days later. We were visiting my mother's brother, John, and his wife Rose. Uncle John was a retired physician, and a member of the Del Mar Country Club. That day was my 19th birthday. Uncle John and Aunt Rose took us to lunch at the club. He mentioned to the waiter that it was my birthday. The waiter leaned close and said something to my uncle. Soon, a complimentary bottle of champagne was brought to the table.

Uncle John looked around, and saw a friend of his. He went over and said something to his friend. Both of them came back, and I was speechless! Un-

cle John said, "Bing, this is my niece, Elizabeth, and it's her birthday." I stood up, and he took my hands, and sang "Happy Birthday" to me. Mr. Crosby asked if I could sing, and I said yes. My mother tried to butt in, but Mr. Crosby said that he wasn't talking to her.

He then asked me if I would sing a couple Christmas songs with him...anything but White Christmas! We sang "I'll be home for Christmas" and "Silent Night". Bing Crosby was very charming. I was surprised to see that he was only about 5'7" tall. I had always thought he was taller.

Six months later, I was saddened to hear of his death. Thanks for the memory!

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## Your Senior Dog



Your senior dog has different care requirements than those of a younger dog. This fact probably doesn't come as a surprise to anyone. Here are some things to remember about your senior loved one:

**\* Diseases** - What are some of the things to expect as your dog ages? Your dog may develop arthritis or other degenerative diseases that cause him to slow down. He may not be able to walk as far or play as long. He may tire more easily. He may become reluctant to go up and down stairs or have difficulty getting into and out of the car.

**\* His Teeth** - Without proper care, dental disease can pose a problem, particularly for older pets. You may be surprised to learn that veterinarians find evidence of dental disease in many pets as early as 2-3 years of age. If nothing is done to care for your dog's mouth, by the time your dog is a senior, he may even have lost some teeth. Dental disease can be painful, causing your pet to avoid or have difficulty eating his meals. This may result in weight loss and an unkempt hair coat.

Brushing your dog's teeth may seem like a silly idea but it can help keep your dog's mouth healthy. If you cannot brush, consider dental treats and toys that help keep the teeth clean.

**\* Weight Loss** - Senior dogs frequently suffer from kidney disease, liver disease, heart disease and other conditions that may result in weight loss.

**\* Obesity** - Pets who are overweight is a major health issue in dogs of all ages and senior dogs are no different. Overweight dogs have a higher incidence of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, skin disease, even cancer.

**\* Visits to the Vet** - Schedule regular visits with your veterinarian. Your dog needs to be examined at least yearly as many diseases are hidden and not apparent. Remember it is much cheaper to prevent disease than it is to treat it! Ask for a body condition evaluation during each vet visit. Body condition is crucial to determining whether your senior dog is overweight, underweight, or at an ideal body weight.

**\* Eating** - Feed your older dog a high quality diet. Read the labels! Use food to keep your senior dog at his ideal body weight. Consider fortifying your senior dog's diet with fatty acids such as DHA and EPA. They have been shown to be useful for dogs with mobility issues due to arthritis or other joint diseases.

**\* Special Diets** - Consider a special diet if your older dog has heart or kidney disease. For example, diets lower in sodium are sometimes advocated for dogs with heart disease, while diets which help control phosphorus, calcium and other electrolyte

levels are given to dogs with kidney disease. Your veterinarian can help you choose the best food for your dog based on your dog's individual situation.

**\* Brush your dog.** It feels good to him and is good for his skin. Be sure the brush you use is a good one and that the bristles are not too hard for his skin. Older dogs have more sensitive skin so be gentle. He may appreciate a sweater in the cold days of winter too.

**\* Exercise is crucial for your senior dog.** It can help keep him maintain healthy joints and muscles. However, tailor your dog's exercise needs to his individual requirements. For a large breed dog, walking around the block is probably just getting started but for a tiny Chihuahua, a brisk walk around the block may be a long trek. If your senior is not used to exercise, start slow and gradually increase the intensity – and only after you've consulted a veterinarian.

**\* Provide plenty of toys** to keep your senior dog occupied. Food puzzles, for example, are not only useful for entertainment but for weight loss purposes as well.

**\* Provide your older dog with special accommodations too.** For instance, dogs with arthritis might benefit from soft bedding in the form of a special dog bed or towels/blankets on which to sleep. Steps by the bed for those who like to sleep with you will help. Ramps can be used to make stairs easier to navigate if they cannot be avoided. Even providing carpeting or rugs over hard-surface flooring can help your arthritic dog gain his footing and make it easier for him to get around.

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# From the Desk of Tom Carney

## UFOs SIGHTED IN MADISON COUNTY - 1910

by Tom Carney

One of the great mysteries of Madison County that has never been solved are the reports of a UFO, here in Huntsville, on January 12, 1910. This was the era when airplanes and balloons were almost unheard of in the Tennessee Valley.

The following account comes from the January 13, 1910 Huntsville Mercury newspaper:

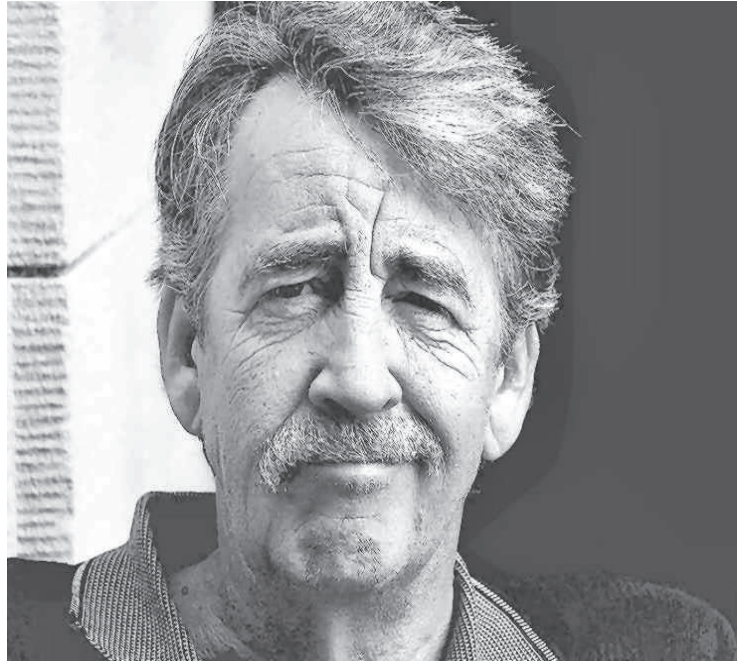
### *Strange Airship Passed Directly over the City Yesterday Afternoon. Rapidly Passed Out of Sight, Going in a Northwesterly Direction*

"An unknown airship passed almost directly over Huntsville at half past four o'clock yesterday afternoon coming from the southwest and continuing on its course on a straight line to the northeast. The craft appeared to be making a long journey and it passed on its course without making any signal or other demonstration and so swiftly did it move that it was out of sight over the crest of Chapman Mountain before many people on the streets had an opportunity of seeing it. It is believed to have passed on out of Huntsville territory as nothing more was heard of the ship during the evening."

".. Before anyone had time to obtain glasses, it had passed out of sight. The aircraft was not traveling with the breeze near the surface of the earth because the breeze on the surface was coming directly from the west. The speed appeared to be, greater than any wind short of a hurricane would travel."

At first glance the preceding article appears to be speaking of an airplane or a balloon, except for the fact that a balloon could not travel against the wind and an airplane of that date, by no stretch of the imagination, could travel as fast as a "hurricane." Also, there were no airplanes in the Tennessee Valley in 1910.

If the whole event had a logi-



cal explanation, why did the New York Tribune think it was newsworthy enough to run an article about it on the front page of the same day?

Also on the same day, January 13, 1910, the Chattanooga Times, with a front-page headline, reported sightings of a "cigar-shaped vessel" traveling at a high rate of speed in a northeasterly direction.

The following day the strange airship appeared again in the skies over Chattanooga. The Chattanooga newspaper speculated that it was the same one that had appeared over the city the day before. The article went on to say, "Some are inclined to think the mysterious airship is the craft of a sky pirate who has sinister designs upon Chattanooga."

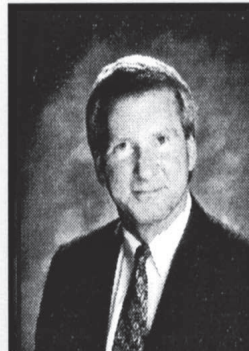
On January 15, the "cigar-shaped vessel" was spotted in the skies over Knoxville, Tennessee, headed south. This was the last reported sighting.

If this "airship" was some type of an airplane or a dirigible where did it come from and where did it go? It was in the area for three days, but there were never any reports of it landing anywhere.

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## ALL IT COST WAS A DOLLAR

by Don Broome, Sr.

In the year and a half before my Dad died, my Mother was busy working at Huntsville Hospital as an RN and floor supervisor, taking care of him. My Dad, who was a big man at 265 pounds, dwindled to 94 pounds before he died in April of 1964. Christmas 1964 I was a senior at Huntsville High School, left pretty much to myself, I had enormous freedom and came and went when I pleased.

I was working almost full time at the Wynn Dixie located at south Huntsville's Haysland Square. I was the first hourly employee hired at that store. With no one at home in the evening, I often would go for long drives out in the country. The only radio station that had good reception was WEUP and I would listen to their talk programs and music and just kind of get away from the hell at home.

This one night, the subject was the plight of the Harris Home. Mrs. Chessie Harris, an old woman at the time, had a heart that couldn't say no. She had, I think, around 13 children that nobody wanted, giving them love and care.

The program went on to say that Oakwood College had given her an old house to use but the college was too poor to offer anything else. There was to be no Christmas at the Harris Household, and no Christmas Dinner.

I guess this story could have ended there or have been forgotten altogether if not written down. You see, working at grocery stores at Christmas was gravy time because bag boys got really big tips for carrying out the groceries. Half dollars, or even an occasional silver dollar were common. We all had our pockets stuffed with all they could hold by the end of the day.

It just so happened that this was a very cold Christmas and out front was this angel ringing her bell with the Salvation Army kettle. All of the bag boys wanted to see what she would look like without that great

big bulky coat on. I suggested that if we all would empty one pocket into her kettle, she would come in to wait for a pick up and would take her coat off.

The first part of our plan worked perfectly. We filled up her kettle and she came in to wait for a pick up, but she never took her coat off. What made me think about Harris Home was the frozen tear on that lovely angel. What we had done with one pocket apiece affected all of us that way.

Mr. Whitt, our store manager, was surprised when I asked him what he would sell me a flat of the day-old bread for. Asked me what I wanted with it. I told him about the program and he told me a dollar. He was going to have to say that a lot in the next few days. I asked about that old candy leftover from Easter, Halloween, etc. A DOLLAR. Hey, how much for a cart of bent cans. A DOLLAR. After five or six carts he stopped us. The Christmas tree in the lobby; all decorated yep A DOLLAR. Two Turkeys TWO DOLLARS. There were five or six cars that left the store Christmas Eve, including a van with a Christmas

Tree all were loaded with people and goods.

The house was out in the country back then and as we pulled in, it seemed like we were encircling the house. I looked in through the glass in the door and there was an old gentleman rocking by the cast iron stove. We knocked softly until he heard us, not wanted to wake the children. When he came to the door, there was fear in his eyes, not knowing what a bunch of white teenagers were doing out in the country on Christmas Eve. He asked me who we were and I told him "Santa Claus".

As we brought in load after load of groceries, he sat back in his rocker with tears running down his cheeks as I heard him saying over and over "Lauds a mercy. Lauds a mercy."

That Christmas, the one that was going to be so sad, turned into one of my most cherished memories. And to think it only cost each of us a dollar.

A thought I've had many times since that night is that we gave and put out effort one time and have relived that wonderful moment of sharing over and over.

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# CHRISTMAS IN MEXICO

by Barry Key

It was the fall of 1956. My father had just bought a new 1957 Mercury. With the new car, it was decided we would take a driving trip out west. About two weeks before Christmas we set out on the vacation of a lifetime.

Heading south from New Hope, Alabama, to New Orleans, then west, we traveled through several large cities, such as New Orleans, but I am only going to cover the ones that bring back specific memories. Our first encounter was Houston, Texas. We were driving downtown and the car just quit running. Dad, in a very horrible mood, had it towed to the Mercury dealer. The problem had something to do with the fuel system. The dealer corrected the problem immediately and we were again on our way.

We left Houston and drove to Galveston. While we were in town a major storm rolled in along with a flash flood. We were in the brand new Mercury and water started to rise in the streets. We thought it was going to flood the car but it stopped rising just before it got in the carpeted floor.

We left Galveston and drove to San Antonio. A movie about Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and the fall of the Alamo had been released about a year earlier. Davy Crockett and the Alamo were still the buzz in 1956. I was really excited since I was going to get to tour the Alamo...but this can't be "The Alamo"! This Alamo is in downtown San Antonio, not out on the open prairie where it should be and it looks nothing like the Alamo in the movie.

Traveling through Texas we stopped at several tourist attractions and it seemed each place had the "original Bowie knife". Viewing the artifacts in the Alamo, what do I see on display, the "original Bowie knife". Supposedly Jim Bowie had designed the knife and had a blacksmith in Louisiana make only one knife from a steel file.

We left San Antonio and crossed the border at Nuevo Lar-

edo, Mexico. Even that close to the U.S. border, Mexico was a different world. No matter where we stopped, immediately there would be a group of young children (from barely walking to teens) surrounding us begging for money. Most were filthy looking and wore ragged clothing. The buildings and streets were dirty and littered with trash.

From time to time I would have a few Mexican coins and would pass them out to the younger kids. Some of the older kids had become entrepreneurs. Instead of begging for a hand-out, for

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## Abby

Hello, the Ark named me Abby. I am a pretty silver tabby. I was born at the Ark with my 5 brothers and sisters. Wow! The Ark has had a lot of kittens this year. They call it "kitten season".

There were lots of baby kittens born at the Ark this year. Many are adopted and others waiting for adoption. There are still nursing baby kittens that are not ready for adoption. It has been a long kitten season. It started in May and is still going strong. Four of my siblings have been adopted to loving homes.

Please try and remember to have your pets spayed and neutered so they cannot have babies. That would be a true kindness to your cat or your dog. Remember a cat can have 3 litters of babies a year. There are not enough homes for all that are born.

I am still waiting for my loving home. When you come to the Ark ask to see Abby, that's me.

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a small fee they would watch our car while we were sight-seeing. Some had bought small trinkets, packs of chewing gum and hard candy and they were selling the pieces for a profit.

Heading south to Monterrey, we passed several little villages that looked like the towns I had seen in western movies. However, Monterrey was a very large city with many large buildings and a population of several thousand. The buildings were modern and the city streets were clean and well kept.

My dad hired a tour guide (he drove our car) to show us the sites and places of interest in and around Monterrey. It took two days to cover the city and surrounding area. Although a modern city, it was the same as all the other Mexican towns we had stopped in when it came to the "ghetto" areas. There would not be a kid in sight but as soon as we got out of the car, kids seem to materialize from out of no where. The guide would not let us give them money, nor buy their paraphernalia. He would appear to be mad, scream at them in Spanish and they would disappear almost as fast as they appeared.

The first day our guide took us to numerous attractions mainly consisting of museums, missions and cathedrals. For a 14 year old boy, very boring. He also took us to some very upscale neighborhoods. What was impressive to me was these "retirement developments" were enclosed inside very high concrete block walls. The top (of the walls) was covered with the bottom of broken glass bottles with jagged edges sticking up. At the entrances were armed guards to prevent non-residents from entering.

The second day (the day before Christmas) he took us to an area where numerous railroad tracks passed through the city. Alongside the tracks were rows and rows of shacks as far as you could see. The small one room shacks were built out of discarded materials from business dumpsters and the city's garbage dump. The entire area was littered with garbage and trash. There were no sanitary facilities nor running water. I'm not sure how the people there survived. I remember some of the "houses" were nothing more than pasteboard boxes that large equipment had been shipped in. I witnessed (and still remember) true poverty!!

The second day the guide took us into the mountains that circled Monterrey, which was a much more pleasant scenery. I don't remember much about the mountains except he took us to a spectacular, beautiful waterfall. The Spanish name for the falls was "Cola de Cabello" translated into English as "Horse Tail Falls".

It was Christmas Eve night and we were in a motel room in

Mexico with no decorations to help brighten our Christmas spirit. I'm not sure how or when they did it, but mom and dad had bought my sister and me Christmas gifts without our knowledge. When we woke Christmas morning, there were our gifts all wrapped with Christmas paper and ribbons.

I know I received more than one gift but the one I remember most that would thrill a 14 year old was none other than the "original Bowie knife". Evidently, historians were wrong and Jim Bowie had more than "one knife" made.

Evidently, the return trip home was uneventful because I don't recall any significant occurrences. I would imagine after more than two weeks on the road, I spent a lot of time in a snoozing mode.

**OSCAR LLERENA WAS A CHRISTMAS EVE BABY!**

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY ON DECEMBER 24TH TO OUR FRIEND AND CLASSMATE**



**WITH GREETINGS FROM HIS HUNTSVILLE HIGH CLASS OF 1966**

**Huntsville Area**  
**CRIME STOPPERS**

# They Called Him "Tony"

by John Tate

"He loved people - He was respected by all who knew him - He welcomed and accepted everyone - His family adored him." How often can any question about a man's life be answered with one of four answers, whether you are asking about his personal-relationships or his business successes?

Hikmat Rasheed "Tony" Antonios was such a man. "Tony," as most people called him, was a Lebanese American entrepreneur who left his mark on Huntsville and the surrounding communities. When he went to his Heavenly home in May 2014, his viewing line wrapped around parts of the building. Who was this man to whom many wanted to show their final respects?

Born in Tripoli, Lebanon, in 1942, his family immigrated to the United States in 1960. Tony attended Warren Wilson Presbyterian College in North Carolina as an Engineering Major and an All-American Soccer Player. It was in the cafeteria on campus that he met Joanna, the woman who would become his wife, and they would raise a family of three kids; daughters Mariam and Monique and one son Rasheed. The family would grow to include five grandkids and two great-grandkids.

As with all world-class athletes, Tony was very competitive but never abrasive. His love for people was the distinctive personality trait which would contribute to his future successes. The combination of his engineering mind, competitive spirit, and his love for people would take him down a path of which only a few could dream. Tony found himself employed with Pic-N-Pay shoes, and he fell in love with the retail shoe business. Before making a move to Huntsville, Alabama Tony had worked in the Quad-Cities area, moved to Decatur, Alabama to run the Pic-N-Pay Shoes store there. It was while he was working at Pic-N-Pay Shoes that one of the owners of Family Footwear became impressed with Tony and offered him a job as a manager at the Family Footwear at Haysland Square in Huntsville.

He accepted the position, and in a short period of time, Tony wanted to own his own company. After repeated refusals from the owners of Family Footwear to sell to him, Tony made sure the owners knew that he was leaving to open his own company. The owners saw the writing on the wall and decided it was better to sell to Tony instead of competing against him.

Tony bought the Haysland Square Family Footwear between the years of 1978 and 1980. It was his longtime em-

ployee Grace Thompson who started calling him "Tony," she said she could not say his name. Grace was a well-respected employee by Tony and his family; the Family Footwear clientele loved her. She was a loyal employee until 1997. Grace transitioned to her heavenly home in early 2000.

In 1985 or 1986, Tony opened Tanius Shoes in Parkway City Mall, currently

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known as Parkway Place Mall. In October 2000, Parkway Place Mall opened at the corner of Memorial Parkway and Drake Avenue; it replaced Parkway City Mall. Parkway City Mall, built after the tornado of April 3, 1974 which damaged the strip center known as Parkway City Shopping Center, which had opened March 14, 1957. When Parkway Place Mall opened, the two anchor stores were Dillard's and Belk department stores. Now Parkway Place Mall is the last fully enclosed mall remaining in Huntsville.

Tanius Shoes was another crowning achievement for not only Tony, but also for Joanna because she became its manager. At first, Joanna was a reluctant manager, and she only took an Assistant Manager's position to help out. That was until the day Tony informed her that he fired the manager, and by the way, she was the new manager.

Over time Tony owned several shoe stores; Family Footwear at Haysland Square - Huntsville AL, Tanius Shoes in the Parkway City Mall - Huntsville AL, Connie Shop in Hickory Hollow Mall - Nashville TN., Tanius Florsheim Shoes in Madison Square Mall -Huntsville AL. Mariam managed Family Footwear for two years, and Rasheed managed Connie Shop in Hickory Hollow Mall, Nashville, TN.

Tony loved his stores; however, Family Footwear at Haysland Square in Huntsville was his baby. It was the store where his wife Joanna saw him accomplish a dream, and it was the store where he helped to develop students from the Distributive Education class at Grissom High School.

According to the family, the students from Grissom High School learned a valu-

able lesson from Tony. They learned that the "Customer is always right." A lesson they carried with them throughout their professional lives.

Monique was about twelve-years old when she would work/play at the store. She recalls the two display windows at the front of the store, and how she loved to get inside to help clean and design the displays for the windows. Oh yes, she and Mariam had crushes on all the Grissom guys who worked at the store.

This writer has some cherished memories of Tony Antonios. The first Mrs. Tate worked for Tony several years, and our first ever company Holiday dinner was at Family Footwear. Tony treated the employees and their guests to Mr. C's Restaurant. Just as he did in the store, he always had a pleasant smile and kind words for all who were in his presence.

As his second act, after leaving retail, Tony became the owner and President of Medalion Builders, dealing mostly with re-modeling and limited new build. Yes, if you look at his picture from his later years you can see the imprint of time;

however if you take your time and look into his eyes, you can still hear his voice, "Hello my friend, how are you today?" There is a saying regarding wealth, "You can't take it with you, but if money is all you left behind, you did not leave true value."

What did Tony leave behind? One can measure his wealth through the smiles brought to people's faces when they hear his name, and the warmth in their voices as they recall the special moments they had with Tony.

Joanna shared something Tony said when she asked what things he enjoyed most of all he did? His response was pure Tony, "Everything I've done."

**"Speed was high,  
Weather was not.  
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# Why We Do what We Do

by Jerry Lankford  
and John E. Carson

Stepping up to the microphone at a recent fundraiser for Pets for Vets, Honor Guard Commander Jerry Lankford wanted to share a story with the audience that had gathered in the pavilion of Southside Park in South Huntsville.

Following entertainment provided by Patsy Trigg (of the song "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer") and singer/entertainer Marilyn Green, the Honor Guard of American Legion Post 237 in Huntsville, Alabama had fired a 21-gun salute to the fallen victims of PTSD/TBI veteran suicide, an average of 22 veterans a day, a figure that has become to all too familiar.

Clearing his throat, Commander Lankford began his story...

"We had just returned to the Post after a long drive to a remote cemetery on a cold and rainy winter day. I sat at the end of the bar and ordered a coffee to warm me up, shaking off the chill and running my hand through wet hair."

"Nasty weather today," one of the patrons at the bar said, "I really respect what you guys do."

"Before I could thank him for the comment, the man sitting next to him spoke up; "Well, I think you guys are a bunch of fools," he said."

"And why is that," I asked, holding back my anger at his comment."

"You drive miles to get here, miles to get there, stand in the rain and snow or bake in the sun and get no compensation for your time and trouble; a bunch of fools I think," the heckler repeated.

"Mister," I said, "I'll tell you why we do what we do. Not long ago we were out on a rainy day to lay a veteran to rest, the sky had cleared just in time for the service and the gun salute. We folded the flag and presented to the man's widow, a young woman with a little six-year-old girl sitting next to her. After collecting three of the spent shells, I presented those to the lady who sat with tear-filled eyes; one for Honor, one for Duty, one for Country."

"Our work done, we formed up and marched half-time to the van to stow our

weapons and head back to the Post. While we were still gathered at the back of the van, the young girl approached us, her mother standing back away. The girl gestured to us, one by one, to bend down so she could whisper something to us. Right there I had all the reward I'll ever need and it is something money can't buy."

"Choking up a little at the memory, I stopped to clear my throat. The heckler gave me a snide look and asked what the little girl could have said that would be worth so much. I told him."

"She said, 'Thank you for burying my daddy.'"

"Well, avoiding my eyes that man got up and left without a word and we have never seen him since."

"The other man at the bar wiped tears from his own eyes and thanked me again."

"And that is why we do what we do."

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turned on to maximum speed. "**

**Josh, 18 years old**



# THE CHRISTMAS SHOVELS

by Belinda Talley

We were wide awake, with our eyes closed. It was 1957, Christmas Eve, the hardest night of the year to fall asleep. The song says, "He knows if you are sleeping". And we were convinced it was true. We laid there motionless for an hour, at least it felt like an hour. It might have been ten minutes.

Escoe, my sister, was born two years before me. She told me that she was older and wiser. I believed it.

"Belinda," she warned, "If you have to talk, tuck your head under the covers and whisper."

"Okay, but is it time yet?" I questioned.

"No! Get under here." She lifted the sheet. "You never listen to me!"

On Christmas morning, we would wake up about the same time that the sun did. As instructed by our parents; we were to go into their room, wake them and wait. We were not allowed to go into the living room; not to even look in that direction. Daddy would plug in the tree lights and play Bing Crosby's Christmas music on the record player.

Before Christmas, our stockings were hung by the chimney with care but, after Santa had come, they leaned against the fireplace. They were budging with apples and oranges, and unshelled nuts; too heavy to hang.

"Escoe... ESCOE, I heard something!"

"Shhhh, Belinda. Quiet!"

"Listen, did you hear that?"

"No! Go to sleep! You're going to get us in trouble."

"Look, I know that I heard something. I have to tell Mother and Daddy. It may be Santa; but it could be a crook, stealing our presents. Now let me up." Tip-toeing she cracked the door just enough to sneak a peek toward the fireplace.

"Oh, No!" Belinda scooted back under the covers.

"What? What is wrong?"

"I can't believe it. You go look!"

"Tell me. What'd you see?"

"Shovels! I saw shovels! Are you happy?"

"What are you talking about?"

"We're getting shovels for Christmas! Daddy's been saying we need to help mama more. Go see for yourself."

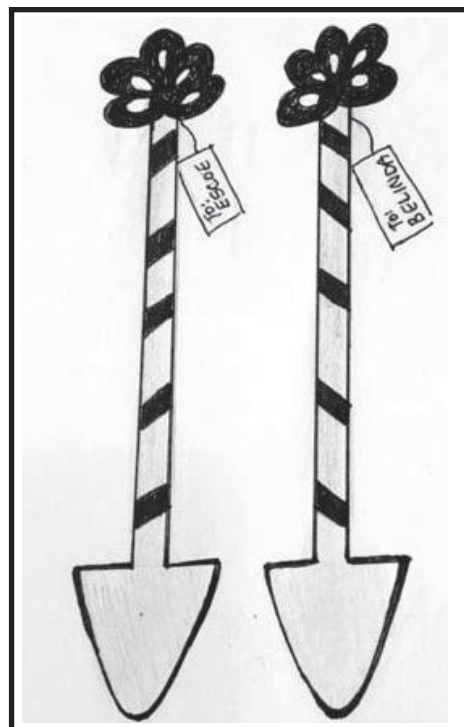
"Belinda, you always exaggerate. I will look for myself."

Escoe glanced down the hall, turned around expressionless. She crawled back in bed. "You're right, we really are getting shovels."

Christmas morning, 1957 the sun rose before the girls. The smell of coffee and the sound of White Christmas wooed the two sleepy-heads from their rest. There were plenty of gifts and giggles. The girls grabbed their red stockings by the toe as nuts and tangerines rolled across the hardwood floors. Mama nudged us toward the shovels. She wrapped them in brown paper grocery-bags with red ribbon. She had candy-striped it from the top to the bottom. Then Mama topped it with a big red bow.

Those gifts stood as tall as we were and looked like huge candy canes. Everything else had been opened. It was time. Our lack of excitement was obvious when we exposed the red handle. As we tore the paper from the bottom and we were in for quite a surprise. Shovels they were not. We had two brand new shiny-red Pogo Sticks.

*Christmas Moral:* Do not jump and judge a gift by its cover.



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