



No. 334

December 2020



Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

The Wish Book



Also in this issue: Lewter Family Park; Christmas in 1983: The Kiddie Club and More; Remembering Eula Battle; An Army Christmas; Survey Says? Your Christmas Traditions; Food Gifts to make and Much More!

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Domie Lewter
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A Hardware Store....

The Way You Remember Them

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The Wish Book

by Tommy Towery

I feel sorry for the children today will never experience the excitement my generation felt as kids when the Sear-Roebuck Christmas Catalogs made their way into our households. Forget about all the other pages, our fingers flipped automatically to the start of the toy section of the magic wish book.

The first trip through them was just looking to see what was new. Later we studied each page in more depth; that time with a pen, pencil, or crayon in hand giving us the ability to circle the toys which interested us the most. Even though we were kids we knew we could never receive all the items we circled, but it did allow other readers to see what we had on our wish lists.

Thinking back about those days I started wondering what the things were which interested me the most back then. Using the magic of the internet, to my delight I was able to find a digital copy of the 1955 Sears Christmas Catalog on-

line. So, I wondered if I were to go through it today (as a senior citizen) could I still remember and find the toys which so enthralled me back then.

In 1955 I was nine years old and living on East Clinton Street with my mother, my brother and my grandmother. The upstairs rooms of our house were occupied by men we called "roomers" who had traveled south to work on the projects at Redstone Arsenal which was propelling Huntsville into becoming the Rocket City. Many of my toy desires were born from the commercials on the 19" black and white television we had in our living room. Popular TV shows included "Truth or Consequences," "The Lawrence Welk Show," "The Honeymooners," "Gunsmoke," "Name that Tune," "\$64,000 Question," "Lassie," and "You'll Never Get Rich." The biggest fad of the time was the nation's infatuation with Davy Crockett.

So, with those memories in mind I turned to the 1955 Wish Book toy section and tried to revisit it as I might have done as a nine year old. As I do so my mind sometimes confuses one Christmas with another and what I got one year or the next, but still it was a trip down memory lane.

I begin.

The toy section starts off with a page titled "Playtogs

"My mechanic told me he couldn't repair my brakes, so he made my horn louder."

Fran Lowry, Athens



L. Thomas Ryan, Jr. Attorney At Law

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for the Land of Make-Believe" featuring Davy Crockett Gifts, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Suits and Other Western Wear. Since this was the first Christmas since Davy Crockett had really become so popular, items relating to him were the rage. The Davy Crockett TV series was done in five one-hour episodes shown on ABC from 1954-1955 as part of the Disneyland series. The series starred Fess Parker as real-life frontiersman Davy Crockett and Buddy Ebsen as his friend, George Russel. In the catalog the Walt Disney Official Davy Crockett outfit, complete with coonskin-style hat, was listed for \$4.98. If you wanted just the hat it sold for \$1.69. I want the whole outfit! And, to my surprise I got it.

A board game segment follows the Playtogs section with games like Carrom and Cootie catching my eye in 1955. I was also intrigued by a cork gun set where you shot plastic crows off of a telephone line with the corks fired from the rifle. I re-

member the pick up sticks and Parcheesi games as well, with the old standards of Monopoly, Clue and the Rook card games I loved to play. Current TV shows of the time were featured in games of "Beat the Clock" and "What's My Line" which rounded out the board game section.

In Alabama the sled, skis and ice skates pages did not hold much attraction and our lack of snow was instrumental in why they were quickly passed by.

Turning the page I was confronted with stuffed animals, and besides the normal Teddy Bears, a stuffed Zip the Monkey was the only one which interested me. I could not remember however, that he was featured on "The Howdy Doo-dy Show," but I remember the Zip stuffed monkey I owned. It was easy to skip the little kids' toys of spinning tops, building blocks, and Jack in the Box toys as well as the other toy musical items - I had outgrown them by the time I was nine.

But then I turn the page and there he is. One of my all-time favorite Christmas toys I ever saw, wanted and found under the Christmas Tree on Christmas morning. I remember feeling like Ralphie in "A Christmas Story" when he got his Red Ryder BB Bun. It was Robert the Robot and I read the description given for him. "I am Robert the Robot" says this remote-controlled mechanical plastic man as you turn the crank. "He moves across (the) floor directed right or left, forward or reverse by crank and trigger control. Electric eyes, antenna gleam. Moving Arms. An Ideal toy. 14-in. high and battery included."

Owners of this 1955 \$5.79



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toy now sell for up to \$300 for those in excellent condition on eBay. I cannot guess the miles I put on my Robert the Robot as I cranked the handle and drove him across our hardwood floors. My wife Sue had heard me talk about him so much she even bought me a replica one for Christmas a few years ago and he is still treasured. I skip by the Dick Tracy Two-Way Wrist Radio set, knowing I had to have a partner to play with them, but I liked the idea anyway. Although I inherited it from a cousin, the Howdy Doody marionette still catches my eye. For only \$2.99 he seemed like a bargain. Controlling strings make him walk and dance and wave his arms, just like the one on TV.

I keep turning the pages through the metal cars, and trucks and cranes, but stop to read about the Jackie Gleason Bus - the Honeymooners Special. "Press top, release, and AWAY WE GO" according to the description. There are more pages of truck and construction vehicles such as road graders and steam shovels but they fail to keep my attention. I stop again at the New Winky Dink Television Game Kit. It contained the Magic plastic window you stuck on the front of your TV tube and used special crayons to color the lines which popped up during the show. You drew on the screen to build things like ladders and bridges for the Winky Dink cartoon character on the show to use. I still remember the time

my friends and I got so excited to watch the show we forgot to apply the magic screen and ended up drawing right on the TV itself. The parents were not amused, even though it came off without too much work.

Pages of paints and modeling clay sets are followed with blackboards and magic joke sets, but I moved on. Finally I got to another of my favorite toys section. The action toy sets of forts, bases and farms, complete with little rubber men, weapons, buildings and accessories with which I could occupy afternoons of play, usually by myself. I am especially interested in the Fort Apache set with the soldiers and Indians that accompany it. The train sets interested me somewhat, but I was never a fanatic about them like some were and still are. Lionel was the big name back then. Bicycles and tricycles were big attractions, but those and the Radio Flyer wagons were usually out of my price range, even as Christmas wish items and I knew it.

I am set back at the toys of-

ferred at the top of Page 242 of the digitized catalog. In my child's mind the offering of a "Strategic Air Command" Strato-Jet Bomber Assortment of models of four plastic airplanes, complete with cement to construct them, is just a collection of toys. Featured in the set is the newest Strategic Air Command, the B-52 Stratofortress which entered the service in 1955. Little did I know as a nine year old kid looking at a toy catalog that I would spend 17 of my 20-year Air Force career in the Strategic Air Command and I would later fly bombing missions in Vietnam in a real B-52.

More craft and hobby sets followed, none making my wish list, but I did want and one year received an All-Electric metal Erector Set containing a motor and lots of screws, nuts and bright silver toy beams with which to build things. You could follow instructions, or let your imagination go wild and create your own designs. I quickly skip

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through the Small-Fry Furniture section on the screen but stop at the Tinkertoys section to remember drawing a circle around the tube of wooden pieces I wanted. I still have a set in my nostalgic toys tub in the attic.

The family already had a record player but I could use the red and yellow phonograph records to play on it. I think of the records bought at Hornbuckle's Records and remember the ones we bought.

One Christmas our purchases were Elvis' "Blue Christmas" and Bing Crosby's "White Christmas." I spend a lot of time looking at the six-shooters and double pistol holster sets featuring Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and Wild Bill Hickok but once again realize how expensive they are, priced from \$5.69 to \$8.82. It would be three more years until the release of the favorite cap gun of my child. I vividly remember the Mattel Fanner 50 and the Shootin' Shells and the Greenie Stickum-Caps I played with. Those cost a fortune now on eBay as well.

I pass on the cap guns and instead my attention is drawn to another toy gun I wanted and later received - a pump action rifle which shot four rounds of table tennis balls with each loading. Although my parents gave it to my brother Don and I, we were under strict orders not to shoot it in the house. It was surprising how much impact one of the table tennis balls had when fired from the gun and how many breakable things were always sitting around the living room.

Then the toy catalog offerings lost my interest as I moved on. I reached the girls' section of dolls, baby carriages, doll furniture, toy dishware and kitchen wear. I never could understand why a girl would want a toy doll called Tiny Tears that cries, wets and blows bubbles. I did stop when I saw a heart shaped picture of Lucy and Desi Arnez which was drawing attention to the picture of the Ricky Jr. doll that sits and stands.

My page turning once again slowed down when I reached the red American Plastic Bricks (early Lego rivals) and the cardboard cylinders of Lincoln Logs. I played for hours building houses and forts with the Lincoln Logs. I have a tub of them in my attic still and they come down when my grandchildren visit. We all sit together building things the way I did back then. And although I grew up with the American

Plastic Bricks, today's Legos allow much more creative construction projects.

The final page of the toy section has flashlights and lanterns, including those featuring Tom Corbet Space Cadet, Buck Rogers's Sonic Ray and once again Davy Crockett. Though Tom Corbet and Buck Rogers have lost a lot of followers, Davy is still "King of the Wild Frontier."

As I reach the end of my nostalgic journey through the catalog, I think back in wonder and am surprised how cheap all the toys seem to have been. But even though "Life is Good," life is not as simple as it seems. I bring up my U.S. Inflation Calculator program and enter the price of my Robert the Robot. I put in \$5.79 and 1955. I hit enter and am shocked that the equivalent price in 2020 dollars would be \$56.15. But that is how an adult looks at things today.

I am a little embarrassed at how much I wanted back then and my lack of understanding about why I never got all I asked for. As a nine-year-old price did not matter. Santa would read my letter and have it waiting under the Christmas tree when I got up on Christmas morning.

Merry Christmas to everyone.



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Then Come Home to Me



Anon

To my dearest friend:
I stood by your bed last night. I came to have a peep. I could see that you were crying, you found it hard to sleep.

I spoke to you softly as you brushed away a tear, "It's me, I haven't left you, I'm well, I'm fine, I'm here."

I was close to you at breakfast, I watched you pour the tea. You were thinking of the many times, your hands reached down to me.

I was with you at the shops today; your arms were getting sore. I longed to take your parcels, I wish I could do more.

I was with you at my grave today; you tend it with such care. I want to re-assure you, that I'm not lying there.

I walked with you towards the house, as you fumbled for your key.

I gently put my paw on you; I smiled and said, "It's me."

You looked so very tired, and sank into a chair. I tried so hard to let you know, that I was standing there. That it's possible for me to be so near you everyday. To say to you with certainty, "I never went away."


You sat there very quietly, then smiled, I think you knew... in the stillness of that evening, I was very close to you.

The day is over... I smile and watch you yawning and say "Good-night, God bless, I'll see you in the morning."

And when the time is right for you to cross the brief divide, I'll rush across to greet you and we'll stand side by side.

I have so many things to show you, there is so much for you to see.


Be patient, live your journey out.... then come home to me.



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A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS PRESENT

by John Carriker

Christmas 2020 for Huntsville will be like no other. Northern Alabama shares a worldwide virus that has produced multiple restrictions including travel, entertainment and all one would expect for one of America's most celebrated holidays.

Sometimes, when we confront the worst, we experience the best of God's grace. There is a realization that the minuses of life can lead to the pluses of revelation through His spirit. By reflecting on the past, the present is a time to give heartfelt thankfulness for what only He could and did provide as He gives eternal hope of what the future on this earth will hold.

The giving of various gifts involves a heartfelt emotion rather than a calculated, patronizing effort. There were many Christmases in the past where we would have to deeply consider how to answer when asked for what we were grateful over the past year. The most memorable blessings in life are those for which one is most thankful. The following, based on a true story in a rural Huntsville community, reveals such a narrative:

"Drill for oil? You mean drill into the ground to try and find oil? That's crazy."



Response when Edwin Drake tried to enlist men in his oil drilling project in 1859.

For many of his younger years, he was known only as his father's son. The relationship was not the type you would find ownership or pride ...his dad was an alcoholic. No one who knew him would have suspected the shame, anger and rejection that welled up in him, constantly, when someone would make reference to his "old man". The joke was that the father preferred to be with his favorite son, Jim (as in "Beam"), rather than his own blood.

None heard the words that were hurled upon him when as a small child he cowered before a gentle man who became a bullying, threatening stranger, staggering in from one of those constant late night

"meetings with my friends". It was no surprise when the boy began hanging around a crowd that led him into mischief, trouble and alcohol. But one day the boy went too far, and there was no way anyone could get him out of it. Even as his dad sobered up and made every attempt he could to help his fallen son, the boy had to be sent away.

The man wept when his only son was forced to depart. It was too much! Once the boy departed, he didn't hesitate visiting "the bottle" for relief but found no comfort there, only a terrible hangover after a self-pity party that was so big the devil and his angels seemed to be guests of honor. Guilt over the terrible lonesomeness he

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was suffering overwhelmed all desires he would conjure up until he dropped to his knees in anguish.

Memories of the past flooded his mind: he vaguely remembered the last time he had been in that strange position. He also recalled it was one of the final times in his life he had felt a peace within himself. He had prayed for mercy, God had heard, and He had answered with freedom from anguish at that time. "Oh, Jesus, help me," he involuntarily pleaded. "I don't know what or how to say it, but help me."

Strange, he thought after a few moments, as he stayed on his knees for awhile, halfheartedly awaiting an answer that didn't seem to come. "I need a drink." He licked his dry lips and rubbed the stub of a beard. Remember he had a six-pack in the barn behind the house, he headed toward his stand-by and was so eager for a soothing beer that he stumbled over

an unseen object on the ground and fell. He landed heavily and looked over at a small tricycle designed like a tractor lying near his head. It had caused the spill.

He thought of a Christmas past when he had bought that toy for his son who was 5 years old at that time. The boy had wanted the tractor so badly: it was "like the one that daddy rode," he would say. The man's memory of the son's surprised smile when he opened the box was so infectious that even as he lay on the dirt floor, he, too, had to smile. Then, laugh. His smile faded, his chin trembled, and his throat constricted. Finally, he broke before ("No," he thought) he cried. "Oh, God, I love that boy. I'm so sorry. I need You. Please forgive me!"

Then! Something happened that he would never be able to explain but would never doubt. The tears of grief became a weeping of relief. It was as if the dingy, dirty inside of

the barn began to lighten and a peace that the man could never recall from the past enveloped his very being. As he arose and dusted his clothes, the tears caked the dirt and salty rivulets marked his beaming countenance. A new life was being born and the old was dying. The father knew that the son would be safe and he knew he would share the presence of Christ with him in days to come.

The man did not know how or when his miracle of salvation would be shared just as he would never know how that tricycle ended up in the barn on the floor. (Years later, his brother would remind him how they had given the toy to the Salvation Army.)

The man was filled with joy, the prerequisite to giving with a thankful heart. This year, God's present was one that would never be forgotten!

It was truly a Merry Christmas.

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CHRISTMAS IN BIG COVE

by William Sibley

Each year on the first of December our family began to pick out our Christmas tree, which was always a live cedar. We usually put the tree up and decorated it about a week before Christmas. Decorations were usually strung popcorn, sycamore balls, sweet gum balls and a few Christmas bulbs.

There were 5 boys and 5 girls in our family and each of the younger siblings would write our names on a decorated box and place the box under our Christmas tree and wait for the arrival of Santa, who usually left each of us a toy and lots of apples, oranges and pecans.

Our church, Big Cove Cumberland Presbyterian, always presented a Christmas program each year and after our last practice, we would go "Christmas Caroling." Paul Drake would drive his uncle Will Drake's large farm truck filled with hay and carolers, and we would travel about Big Cove, singing to shut-ins. We always stopped at church elder Leonard Taylor's store because he would toss candy to us. The last carol was always "O Holy Night", sung exclusively by Sammy Taylor and our cousin, Allene (Lyle) Ray.

Sam later became Dr. Sam Taylor and sang opera professionally in New York. Allene also sang on TV several times.

In the meantime, my mother was baking cakes and preparing boiled custard and ambrosia. After our siblings were grown and had families of our own, each Christmas eve, we began to meet at the home place and eat country ham, sausages, biscuits and dessert. We still do that.

It seems that we had everything to eat on Christmas day and my mother would send my younger sister Sherry and me to take food to the two elderly men, Steve and Junior, who were Yugoslavian immigrants and living on our place.

One year my mother heard about a boy in our neighborhood who got nothing for Christmas. She filled a box with a toy and apples, oranges and pecans and had my brother Bob and me deliver the box and tell the boy that Santa mistakenly left his box at our house.

It came natural for my mother to do kind things, especially on Christmas. That is probably why she was selected Madison County's Mother of the Year and Woman of the Year in the Homemakers' Club. She always made sure that we celebrated Christmas the correct way.



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A Christmas Wish

by Ernestine Moody

One could almost feel the excitement churning in the air. Four more days, only four more days, and the jolly large man with the bearded face and a "tummy that shook like a bowl full of jelly" would be visiting our home.

Mom had helped me prepare my child-like thoughts onto a slightly crumbled piece of white paper.

Even to this day, approximately seventy-seven years later, I can remember the special occasion. It was the only request I ever made to Santa, but I wanted these items so much. These images had positioned themselves deeply in my brain and consumed my every thought of Christmas.

My parents, though very much aware of the news concerning the horrible war, tried to shield me from the hurt they were experiencing. They kept my excitement alive by posting a daily calendar demonstrating how long it would be before the big arrival.

I must reveal to you what precious items were listed in my correspondence to Santa. One of my friends owned a beautiful little table and chair set. She could play house and feed her wooden babies on this treasured piece of furniture. The other item on my list was a small metal cooking stove. I would not feed my babies cold food!

Finally, it was the 25th of December, time for the big revelation. Mom and Dad escorted me to the brightly lit tree in our dining room. Oh, and there I found my wish fulfilled. Though in my eyesight the set had the elegant styling fit for a king's castle, it was simply a small wooden table with a flat surface and four undecorated legs. It was enhanced by bright yellow paint and a couple of wide red stripes.

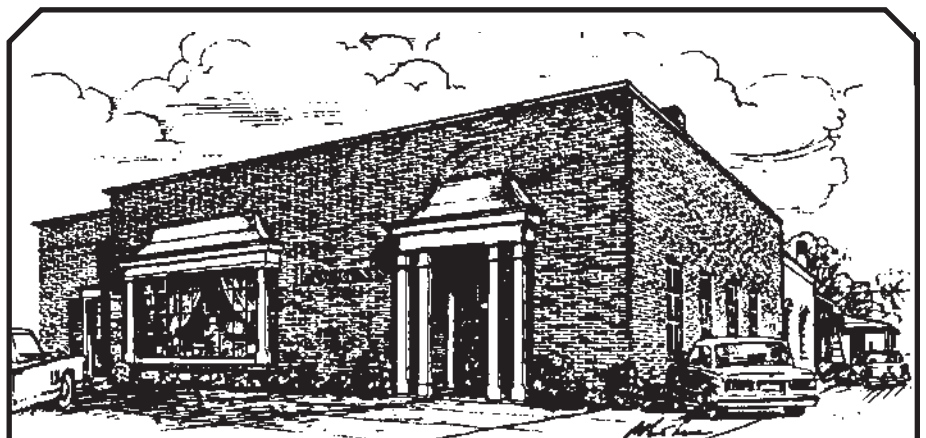
Sitting in one of the small chairs and surely waiting to be fed, was my new dolly with her plastic head, painted hair and face, and a soft cuddly cotton stuffed body.

My stove was ready to be put into service. It was only about 24 inches high. Its knobs and burners were part of its painted surface. There was no trace of today's more sophisticated kid's appliances.

Oh, I was a happy little girl. It surprises me that I still have memories of this special Christmas.

I can now appreciate the effort and expense my parents must have endured to make my childhood wish come to life.

It also helps me to realize that when giving a gift, I should try and make it special for that person. An item not purchased in a hurry so that I am able to "mark another name off of my list," but a small item pertinent to that someone's desires!



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chair spins."**

Fred Hill, employed



started making a big pot of soup and taking some to my single friends. They seem to greatly appreciate not having to cook one night.

I just found out that I will have another great-grandchild coming in May. Just proves life goes on, and who wouldn't rejoice in holding a new member of their family.

I just heard on the news tonight that there are more cases of the Virus than ever in Alabama and Madison County in particular. The governor announced mask-wearing was mandatory through December 31, and likely it may be extended further if things have not improved significantly. Thanksgiving gatherings might accelerate the spread. Continued holiday gatherings are no time to let your guard down. So wear your masks, spread out all over the house, and try to social distance when eating and not wearing your mask. I understand that it's tough, but what else about 2020 hasn't been? I am getting my Christmas decorations out early this year. As I write this, Thanksgiving hasn't come yet. So it's very early for me. But it brings joy to my heart to see the ornaments the children and grandchildren have made for me over the years. Making something special like an ornament, decoration, or baked goods for friends is a joyful thing to do. Handmade craft items that you make for others are more cherished than you think. Even a handmade Christmas card.

However you celebrate the holidays, I wish each and every one of you a delightful one. Please take the time to give of your time to someone else less fortunate than you.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Another Christmas is right around the corner. With Covid still lingering, I urge each and every one of my readers to shop early and go out when the least amount of people might be out. Shopping on-line is a great help. Items can be at your doorsteps in just a couple of days.

I want to thank Jewell Wallace from Florence, Alabama, for her sweet note that she wrote to me. She said she really enjoys the Old Huntsville Magazine and reads it from cover to cover each month.

I seem to have the shut-in fever, with the long winter days, short in daylight hours, slowly approaching. I think it is vital to stay in touch with friends and loved ones. People really need people. I

"My luck is so bad that if I bought a nice cemetery, people would stop dying."

Rodney Dangerfield

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A Christmas Without Christmas

by Barry Key

My family has always been conscientious about family gatherings, especially during holidays. And of course, one of our favorite holidays is Christmas. Christmas, a day that we pay homage to the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Seems like there is a special excitement in the air during the Christmas season. Homes and public places decorated with bright lights and colorful menageries to lift our spirits. Shopping sprees to pick that perfect gift for our loved ones, the cooking and baking that fills the house with the familiar smells of the Christmas season.

And nothing raises your spirit like the camaraderie of decorating the Christmas Tree, especially if the grand & great grand kids are there to help. Their enthusiasm and energy does more to re-vitalize this old body than a full bottle of Hadacol (for you youngsters under 60, Google "Hadacol").

However, there was a sequence of Christmases in the 1980s that I had to coerce myself into celebrating the holidays. Our two sons had graduated from high school and gone into military service for four years. Bryan was stationed in Germany and Barry Jr. in New Hampshire. Military duty took preference over family functions. Although there were other family members at hand...it just wasn't the same without our two sons.

Our sons' absences for the most glorious holiday of the year made me think about all our military men and women stationed in all four corners of the world. Men and women in harm's way, separated from their families for months, even years, trying to keep the "Spirit of the Occasion".

Back home, the spouse doing one's utmost to provide a safe and Merry Christmas for their children without the benefit of their father or mother.



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In March of 2020, an alien form attacked the world. People by the hundreds of thousands were getting sick..and even worse, thousands were dying from this little known monster. Our health officials tell us there is no cure or vaccination, that prevention is our only escape. Their recommendation for prevention is to wear a face mask, keep a minimum distance from other people and avoid crowds of more than six people. Also, statistics have shown that the elderly with underlying health problems have the highest risk of fatality.

Because Judy and I are considered elderly, we have followed their guidelines as close as possible. We have canceled four of our annual family social affairs such as Cemetery Declaration Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day and Thanksgiving. We had kept our fingers crossed that our medical scientist would have a vaccine by late November, but we have given up hope that that's ever going to happen.

Our families have decided, since we have family members working and young members going to school, the risk of spreading the disease is too great, and now...our individual families will celebrate "A CHRISTMAS WITHOUT CHRISTMAS".

Author's Note: Because of their immeasurable sacrifices for our country, I have a special place in my heart for Veterans. I want to thank all our Veterans for their service and wish them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

For those stationed abroad...come home to your families safe, and soon.

Sometimes you have to burn a few bridges to keep the crazies from following you.

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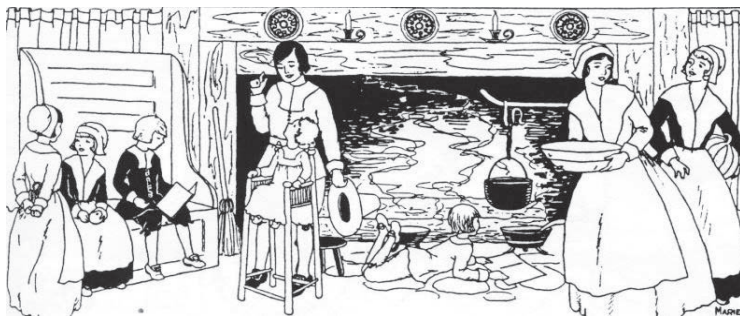
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One Christmas During World War II

by Lois S. Miller



World War II, 1939 to 1945, was a tough one for many families. My Father was farming, although he did not own his own land, so he was one of the last men to be drafted. I was about seven when he was called just before Christmas 1944.

Because he was in the business of farming there was very little money in the family when he had to go away. Daddy moved us from the country to a little house in a very small town. My Mother had a teacher's degree and found work as soon as she could, teaching at the nearby school. However it was quite sometime before her first check arrived and it was also quite some time before she received an allotment from the Army.

When we moved into the little house there were old things left behind by the former residents. My sister, Lavon, 2-1/2 years older than me and I began to investigate around the house and in adjacent lots. We found some old glass doll dishes and we gathered them up and washed them as best we could after we played with them for awhile. We were afraid Mother would not like us bringing in dishes from the adjacent lot so we hid them under the front porch.

My Mother wanted Christmas to be special although it was our first Christmas to ever be apart from our Father. She cut a tree from the adjacent lot and we cut rings from paper, glued them in circles, joined them and made a beautiful string of paper rings for the Christmas tree. We also strung popcorn and made beautiful popcorn strands and our tree was beautiful. Lavon and I were really enjoying decorating the small but beautiful tree, so Mother seemed pleased.

Come Christmas morning there were very few presents under the tree. There were oranges, candy, and believe it or not there were the dishes from under the porch. The present of dishes were from

Santa to Lois and Lavon. These were the very same dishes that Lavon and I had hidden under the front porch earlier. Apparently even Santa was having a tough year.

I didn't totally understand the significance of this until my sister explained things to me and suggested we did not mention the fact to Mother that we had put the dishes under the front porch earlier.

We did not want to put a damper on Mother's Christmas joy.

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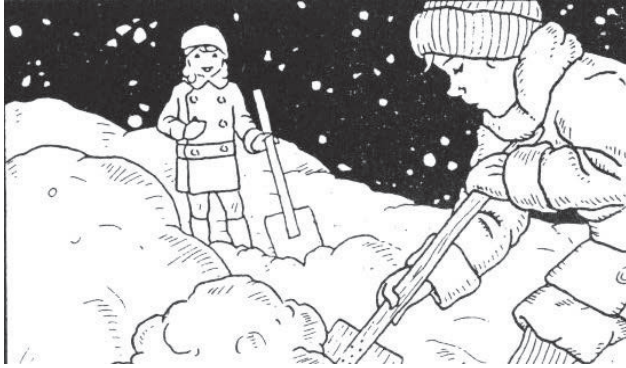
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"If you're not supposed to drink and drive, why do bars have parking lots?"

Stephen Casey, Madison

The First Snow

by Elizabeth Wharry



The first snow of winter is like no other snow that falls. If that first snow falls on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, it takes on a certain mystical quality. It seems to fall a little more reverently and sparkle, that much brighter. That particular year when I turned 13, the skies turned grey and somber around Thanksgiving. The clouds hung heavy and ominous day after day. The wind was thin and bitter. A thin wind won't go around one, it goes through right to the bones and sits there. It is also called a bone chilling wind. Day after day, the clouds just hung there...they didn't produce rain, snow or sleet.

Since I turned 13 a couple weeks before Christmas, I was allowed to attend my first Midnight Mass. Mass actually started around 11:30 PM Christmas Eve. Somewhere around 1 AM, the final benediction was pronounced, and the congregation was dismissed.

Mother and I bundled back up, prepared for the bitter thin wind. As we stepped out of the church, the wind had stopped! I looked up and it seemed that the clouds had changed in their appearance.

The air was still and as my mother and I made our way to the car, the snow started to fall. Mother and I headed for home. By the time we got up later that morning, about 3 inches of snow had fallen.

"My wife and I went to a hotel where we got a water bed. My wife called it the Dead Sea."

Jeremy Rich, Woodville

Gone were the heavy grey clouds. The sun finally showed itself! The snow looked pristine and the sun made it sparkle that much brighter.

I asked my mother if there were any Hungarian Gypsy traditions about the first snow falling on Christmas Day. She thought about it for a minute and said she couldn't recall any. Dad chimed in with his Irish lilt...sneachta Losa (schnochk-ta Yosa) Jesus snow. He then said, "Nollag Shon Duit, inion" (no-leg hone do-it, in-ion) Happy Christmas, daughter. I replied, "Nollag Shon Duit, Athair" (aught-air).

Happy Christmas, father. My mother smiled and said "Boldog karasconyt". I wished her a Happy Christmas back in Hungarian.

Merry Christmas to you and yours!

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Heard On the Street

by **Cathey Carney**



It's really hard to say Merry Christmas this year. It's the scariest, strangest year we've had in a long time. There are so many who have lost family members to Covid, and the rest of us are just trying to not get it.

Remember that there are some things you can do to help yourself, and you've got to do it. Number one, get your flu shot. Doctors have told us that the flu shot will help against Covid, not sure how much. You don't want flu and Covid at the same time!

Secondly, wear your mask when you go out - for yourself and others! Probably most important tho is keep yourself as healthy as possible, you have

to maintain a good immune system. Google "lung exercises" and do them, even while healthy.

Vit D supplements, Vit C, Zinc, Magnesium - all these are critical and have been shown to help. Airborne I swear by, not daily but at the first signs of a cold or cough. Green Tea - every day - also it soothes you. Eat a healthy diet and get moderate exercise, outdoors - like your Grandma told you.

Our doctors and nurses and hospitals are overwhelmed by patients and you have to keep yourself out of there! So take care of yourself, just be smart about the way you eat and find something to keep your spirits up. Help others when you can. We'll get through this but the journey may be a tough one.

This year's Veterans Day Parade was cancelled, but Tut Fann Veterans Home was the scene for a drive-by parade. Thanks to **Rae Kryc**, Tut Fann Activities Director, **John Perry** of Intuitive Research and Technology Corp., **Bennie Jacks** for putting the word out and many others who helped make this a better day for our vets whom we are so proud of. It started at the Max Luther Community Center and passed by the Veterans home. Thank you to all who participated and especially thank you to all our Veterans.

Our photo winner for the Photo of the month for November was **Claudia Hill** of Huntsville. The Photo was that of a young **Mitch Howie**, attorney on North Side Square. Claudia said she graduated from Huntsville High School with Mitch and she remembered him from school.

Not too many were able to find the tiny mask I hid - it was on p. 24 in the Downtown Rescue Mission ad, bottom left - see it now? **Jerry Webster** from Athens was the first sharp-eyed caller - congratulations!

We got a call about one of our readers - **Agnes Reid** is 92 and she reads the Old Huntsville from cover to cover! She lives in New Market and is very independent - you ROCK Agnes!

Jerry McCutcheon of Laceys Spring has been bringing firewood to Huntsville for many years. This is probably my 15th year of ordering firewood from him and having it delivered - nothing like that crackling and smoke and heat on a cold night. Very cozy!

Photo of The Month

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

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This girl loves history and music, is on many historic boards, volunteers for everything, and has a story in this issue.



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Ianthia Bridges has a family with a ton of special days in December. **Yolanda Ramsey** is her aunt from Orlando, FL who has a Dec. 17th birthday. Her cousin **Cedric Johnson** has a birthday Dec. 17th as well. Ianthia's brother and sister in law are **Carl** and **Tammy Ramsey** and they will celebrate their wedding anniversary on Dec. 23rd. Her uncle and aunt are **Mark** and **Tammy Ramsey** of Camden, Al. and their special anniversary is on Christmas Day. Then **Marie Ramsey**, her aunt, has a Dec. 12th birthday. Marie lives in Camden, Al. That's a lot of celebrating in December!

Many of us ladies wear powder make-up; eye shadow, face powder, etc. It occurred to me one day that talc is the ingredient that's in much of our make-up and isn't that the substance that has cancer-causing particles in it? Baby powder is just one product that contains talc and that's been proven to be not safe. Maybe there will be some research into that soon.

Don Royston worked for Thiokol Chemical Corporation for 30 years, and raised his family here. He was a Golden K Kiwanian for over 20 years and raised thousands of dollars for kids and their families, who were having rough times. Don was one of those energetic, funny guys who was kind to everyone, super hard working. The kind of guy you think will live always. Lots of hearts were broken when Don passed away on Nov. 10. His family was with him when he died. We just weren't ready to say good bye to him yet.

In upcoming issues we will write more about Don; he also wrote some stories for Old Huntsville years ago, and they were really good. He's watching over his 4 girls now.

John and **Peggy Richard** have been married now for 60 years! Their anniversary was

Nov. 12 and people said it would never last! Congratulations to the lovebirds.

Oscar Llerena was a Christmas Eve present for his parents! Oscar was born on Dec. 24 and currently lives with his beautiful family in Miami. He's a proud graduate of Huntsville High School, class of 1966, and he puts greetings to the class in each Old Huntsville issue! We love you, Oscar.

Our good friend **Louie Tippet** had a birthday on November 22 and probably had a party planned by sweet wife **Jane!** Happy Birthday Louie!

Medical experts are telling us that we need to spend more time outdoors even if it's chilly,

so in honor of that I have hidden a **small pinecone** somewhere in the pages of this issue. Note I didn't say Teeny tiny - I overdid it the last few months and very few could find what I hid. This one will be easier - so if you spot it and call me, you win a year's subscription to this magazine that has been going strong now for nearly 31 years.

Just to be on the safe side, you might want to stock up a bit on the **paper products** again. Sometimes bad weather in other parts of the country can delay shipments that arrive here.

Have a safe and happy Christmas.

Remembering Eula Battle

Several years ago the Golden K Kiwanis asked Eula Battle to speak at our breakfast meeting. She could choose the topic. She chose Free2Teach, the organization she had co-founded to give free supplies to school teachers. She told us how it started in her garage and ended up in a huge warehouse on Leeman Ferry. She had a 31 year career as a school teacher and loved every child.

Eula was really worried about teachers having to buy school supplies out of their own money. Many did it but it was a struggle. So she decided to help. To date Free2Teach has distributed over \$7 million in supplies (free to teachers). But that is for another story.

This story is about the Kiwanis meeting. At the end of her talk, many had questions and Eula said, "Just come over and see for yourself!" So several of us did. It was just mind-blowing. Teachers would enter, pick up a cart (donated) and choose from thousands of supplies. While there I asked her, "Eula what if Tommy becomes Governor (he was running at the time) - what will you do with Free2Teach?" I'll never forget, she said, "I'll just start them all over Alabama!"



We lost Eula way too early, she passed away on Oct. 20, 2020. Her passing leaves a hole in the hearts of many in Huntsville. Eula is survived by husband Tommy Battle, their son Drew Battle and wife Lauren; grandsons George and Benjamin; brothers Dr. Robert Sammons (Louise), Dr. Calame Sammons (Dianne) and Bill Sammons (Laurie), sister Susan Sammons Sullins (Bill) and 12 nieces and nephews.



Gifts of Love

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. Refrigerate.

Grandma's Lace

- 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.

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

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in the almonds. Add butter and soda, pour onto greased cookie sheet to cool, break into pieces when cool and store.

Macaroons

1-16-oz. pkg. angel food cake mix

1/2 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. semi-sweet chocolate chips

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

parchment 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 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 t. ground cinnamon

1 c. pecans, minced

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 to cool, about an hour.

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. Your friends will love them!

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LEWTER FAMILY PARK

by Anna Lee

If you see a small group of women practicing yoga under trees, children riding on swings, boys shooting hoops, or even men playing bocce ball in a sandy court, you must be at the Lewter Family Park in Huntsville's Five Points neighborhood.

A small treasure, the park has existed since 1926 and was first known informally as the "Wellman Avenue Playground." Originally just a vacant lot behind two houses on Pratt Avenue, the area adjoins an east-west alley and is on the southeast corner of Wellman and Windham Avenues. The houses belonged to members of the Lewter family who own the Lewter Hardware Store downtown and they made the area available to the public. At that time, local children also played in the ditch that once ran down Wellman Avenue and the nearby pipes. (When they could get away with it!) At Christmas time, grown-ups gathered the leftover trees and held a huge bonfire in the ditch.

Over the years, the Lewters continually paid taxes and maintained the area. As the neighborhood grew, they put up swings and a basketball hoop. They permitted the area to be used for games and public programs, often orga-

nized and led by high school students in their summer jobs. A city employee, Mrs. Dallas Brown, helped out and occasionally made sack suppers for the children.

In 1984 the Lewters asked the City of Huntsville to take over the park. School Board member Milton Cummings and the then-Mayor Loretta Spencer agreed. The City's Green Team later added a small parking space for cars and built 16 raised beds for a community garden where neighbors can stake a claim and grow their own vegetables. It's a welcome addition in such a shady neighborhood. In order to honor the generosity of the "founders," the City put up a sign that reads "Lewter Family Park."

The Green Team uses the park twice a year, in the spring and fall, as headquarters for a neighborhood clean up. They supply the volunteers with vests, garbage bags, gloves, grabbers, water and popcorn. Sometimes the volunteers even paint the area's fire hydrants! At the end of the clean up, door prizes are awarded. In the year 2019, a total of 80,000 volunteers participated in this and other such civic activities.

So, if someday you meet Donald Lewter or his sons Donny and Mac at the hardware store and you tell him you enjoy "their" park, he will probably smile and say, "Good. That's what we hoped for!"



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Homemade Christmases We Could Count On

by Jean Brewer McCrady

Christmases were a long time in coming 'round, but we knew exactly what to expect at the end of the long wait. Presents under the tree were not the "big thing." It was the two weeks of special treats that came ahead of Santa and lingered for the few days following his brief visit. As predictable as the sunrise, about mid-December Daddy would come in from town with the car loaded with a variety of treats that we never saw at other times of the year.

It was always the same variety. A crate of apples, a crate of oranges and a dozen or more white paper sacks filled with nuts and candies. There were pecans, English walnuts and Brazil nuts all in the shell; raisins on the stem, candy orange slices, chocolate and caramel fudge; chocolate drops with soft white centers, peppermint sticks, colorful hard ribbon candy, and mixed sizes and shapes of hard candies. We would watch in eager anticipation as he transferred the treats from the car to the dining room pantry.

This storehouse of goodies would be enjoyed as Christmas approached, according to a plan that made them last just the right number of days. When it was time for a round of oranges, Daddy would cut a small hole in the stem end of the orange so we could suck the juice out while turning and squeezing the orange until it was dry. Then we would tear it open and eat the pulp from the inside of the peeling.

Equally anticipated with joy was the batch of Christmas cakes Mama would make and store up. Again, there was variety and always the same variety. She would start with a 4-layer white cake iced with whipped egg white frosting then covered with shredded coconut. Then a devil's food cake with shiny chocolate frosting that

would get brittle over time. A favorite was the jam cake she made with jam preserved during the summer from blackberries we picked along the cotton field fence rows. It had brown sugar frosting that today we would call caramel.

The cake she considered her specialty was a 4-layer yellow cake stacked with applesauce. The longer it sat, the better it got. You have to wonder how a family of 6, two of them small boys, could consume that many cakes in a span of a few days, particularly since there was little or no refrigerated storage. She wanted to make sure there was enough sweets on hand for any company that might drop in. In those days, kinfolks didn't wait for an invitation to visit; they came when the notion would strike and work loads permit.

The Christmas traditions I just described spanned the years that my sister Net and I were in late elementary school and middle school. Until then, I can't recall our ever having a Christmas tree in the house. That changed with our "coming of age." When it was time to put up the tree, there was no trip to a store to select one. With our two brothers Buzz and Ray still too young to be involved in this adventure, Net and I would get the hatchet from the smokehouse and head out to the same fence rows where we had picked blackberries in the summer, in search of a just-right cedar tree. Meaning one about 4 feet tall, with only one "ugly" side (that we could put facing the wall), with full branches, a small enough trunk for us to chop through with the hatchet, and light enough for us to lug home without dragging on the ground. Daddy's part was to level off the severed trunk and nail a stand onto it, made of two crossed pieces of board.

Then the real fun started — creating and applying our homemade decorations. First, we covered the stand with a layer of cotton we had saved for that special purpose. For ornaments, we scoured the nearby woods for Sweetgum tree balls we could wrap with the chewing gum tinfoil we had accumulated during the year. Sweetgum balls have a little stem attached that is curved on the end just right for hanging over a cedar twig. We made chains from strips of red and green construction pa-

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per, with the ends looped over and pasted together to form the links. The paste was a mix of flour and water. For several years, the only store-bought decorations we had were icicles, which we meticulously removed one by one when taking down the tree, to save for the next year. Eventually we acquired a few small plain red, blue and green ornaments to supplement our homemade decorations.

As for Santa's role in our early Christmases — we always got presents that were a surprise on Christmas morning. Typically Net and I would get dolls. The first such Christmas I remember, I was nearly age 3 and a half and in less than a week, Net would be 5. Santa must have decided the age difference justified a difference in the two dolls. Net's was larger and had a soft cloth body with hard arms and legs. Mine was smaller, all rubber and a different color. Apparently I did not agree with the decision to "discriminate" and proceeded to put mine in the oven of the wood-burning cookstove when no one was looking, (I can clearly remember that intentional walk through the kitchen to the stove.) My show of dissatisfaction was discovered by the smell of burning rubber the next time Mama built a fire in the stove. Thereafter, for as long as Santa brought dolls for our Christmas, they were identical.

Another gift that stands out in my memory was not from Santa, but from Mrs. Jones, wife of our landlord while living on the land that was to be Redstone Arsenal. She gave us a Bible Story Book and the one story I remember is that of Jesus being crucified. One of my and Net's afternoon chores was to bring in "stowood" from the woodpile for the cookstove and fireplace. After reading that story, I remember feeling so extremely sad and crying profusely while making those trips to the woodpile in the backyard. I couldn't understand why on earth they would kill Jesus, and in such a painful way. Having no concept of the politics of that day, it seemed so unfair and made no sense to me. (I still don't understand the awful things people do in the name of politics; they still make no sense to me.)

This Christmas, and for every remaining one we have, let us each give the gift of kindness to everyone we know and love, as well as to those we don't know. Kindness to strangers is still kindness and just as much needed. Especially in places where it's least expected. Be the Christmas Blessing that others can count on.

AN ARMY CHRISTMAS

by Eugene M. Simonson, Colonel,
U.S. Army, Retired

It was Christmas Eve, 1951. I was a new 2nd Lt in an artillery battalion on its way to Germany. We were to be part of NATO's cold-war force to discourage any Soviet movement into western Europe.

After a week's trip from New Orleans, our troop ship docked at Bremerhaven, Germany. It was a drab day - cloudy, damp and chilly. The port's PA system was playing Bing Crosby's (Der Bingle) "White Christmas." We moved from the ship to a nearby train to go on to our new "home" where we arrived the next day.

Der Bingle's "White Christmas" was the only public Christmas celebration for about 750 of us that year.

It was something I never forgot. I stayed in the Army for 20 years.



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The Christmas I Almost Caught Santa

by Ann Gates

Most of us have at least one Christmas that stands out in our memory. Mine is the Christmas of 1956. I had just turned 10 years old. That year had been a difficult year for me. The best person in my life, the man who I knew as Daddy (my granddaddy) had passed away suddenly with a heart attack earlier in the year when I was only 9. I was devastated. He was my favorite person in the world! Daddy was the person who spent the most time with me, playing with me in the afternoon when he got off work, teaching me childhood games, taking me fishing, letting me hang out with him when he was working in the yard - he made everything fun.

I lived with, and was being raised by, my grandparents - and Christmas was always a fun time - filled with lots of excitement and expressions of love. Christmas was coming! I didn't know what to expect that year because of the weight of sadness that overshadowed our home. Mother (my grandmother) had to go to work outside the home in order to make ends meet. There were no more times of playing with me - because there just wasn't time or energy left at the end of a long, tiring day. Besides, Daddy was gone. Life was very different now.

Then....

December 24th was here! Santa Claus was coming tonight! I was told to go to bed and go to sleep so "Santa could come." Well... the anticipation of Santa coming kept this little girl's heart and head so excited that I just could not go to sleep. I was tucked in my bed in the back bedroom of the house - but my eyes were wide open. Mother was in her bed in her room. Soon, I heard our front door open. I heard rustling noises in the living room, as if there might be presents being placed under the tree! So, I thought, now's my chance to see Santa! I jumped up from my bed, and ran through the house, hoping to see the jolly old elf himself! But in my haste to get to the living room, I must have been making enough noise so that he heard me coming and he quickly disappeared. I actually heard the front door close! When I got to the living room, there were no presents under the tree! My heart was crushed! I knew then that I had scared him away. I went to Mother's bedroom where she was still in bed. Sobbing, I said "Mother! I think I've just scared Santa Claus away!"

She said, "Well, maybe if you go back to bed and be very quiet, and don't make a sound, maybe, just maybe he will come back. But if he does, you must not try to see him! You must just stay in your bed and let him do his work! Do you understand? He has other places to be tonight!"

I promised I would do just as she said. I went back to bed. I covered up my head and listened for the front door to open again. It seemed like hours later (but I'm sure it was just minutes), the door opened once again. I heard all kinds of noises coming from the living room, but I was determined not to try to peek this time. After what seemed like forever, the door closed once again and I ran into the room to discover the most wonderful display of toys and expressions of love I had ever seen!

Years later, I asked Mother who it was that came to our house that Christmas Eve, and she smiled and said "Why Santa Claus, who else?" To this day, 64 years later, the only explanation I've ever had for the Christmas visitor is Santa. So, I choose to believe in the magic of Christmas. That magic is "Love".

We know the REAL meaning of love is Jesus. He's the REAL meaning of Christmas. We are celebrating His birth. My heart is full and grateful for Love and for precious memories. Merry Christmas to one and all!

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A Letter from Bob Cratchit

110 Cheapside Lane, London
October 2, 1824

by Ted Roberts

Dear Mum,

What a year we've had! With the fire's warmth working on the outside of me and a half pint of mulled wine doing the same inside, I'm as happy as the Lord Mayor of London. What more would a man want than a good wife and a bunch of kids with the glow of the fire on their pink cheeks. That's exactly what I've got around me - my good wife and children. Tiny Tim, too. When I call him over to sit next to me, he straightaways walks over. NO CRUTCH and NO LIMP. That's the grandest Christmas miracle of all.

All of it due to my employer, a gent named Ebenezer Scrooge. This fellow, Scrooge - my employer - was meaner than a green hickory switch. Three shillings a week, he paid me. In at dawn, out when the streets were dark as himself.

I tell you, Scrooge was a fire-breathing dragon 364 days a year, but on Christmas he grew a second, scaly head. I don't know what it was about Christmas that made him so miserable. I tried to stay out of his way, but Christmas Eve I'd come softly into his room to plead for the holiday. He'd be wrapped in his great coat, huddled over a single desk candle. He wanted me to beg, and beg I did. As humbly as a street beggar. When he yielded - as though it was his day to give - I thanked him properly. But my heart was full of hate - on Christmas Eve, can you imagine.

But then something happened; I never saw a man change direction overnight - like Mr. Scrooge. Let me come to the point. The mystery began Christmas Day when the butcher boy knocks on our door carrying a great turkey. It's for us, he says. It's enough turkey for a week's meal supported by bread and pudding. But there's no

note. Who could afford it and who would send it to us?

"Mr. Scrooge," says Tiny Tim.

Sure, and Queen Victoria wants us all to join her for supper at Buckingham Castle.

Then the next morning at work - the first day after Christmas - I'm late. So I'm sneaking in and Mr. Scrooge, with a voice that would drown the chimes of Big Ben, shouts, "Front and center Cratchit". Oh boy. I tremble. That turkey, I'm thinking, is gonna have to last a long time - a lifetime - because in five minutes I'll be an ex-clerk.

But no. Mr. Scrooge ups my salary - tells me to throw some coal on the fire. He takes me across the street to Wilshires and buys me a mug of their best. Sits right down at the table drinking with me, his clerk. He's quite out of his mind talking like he's had a flagon instead of a cup. Says he's been a miserable old geezer, but that's over now. "I've been reborn," he says.

It's been almost a year now and Mr. Scrooge, God bless his reborn heart, has been as good as his word. Last night after a festive meal at my place - with him in attendance - we threw Tim's crutch in the fire and watched it burn. Uncle Ebenezer's doctor made a miracle. In short, Mr. Scrooge has become our benefactor.

That fella Dickens - the one who writes the stories - sent me a note last week. Wants to do a Christmas tale about Mr. Scrooge. Everybody on the street has noticed his spiritual flip flop. "Angels," says Charley Dickens. "Celestial visitors," says Charley. They're nuts, you know, them writers.

So what happened to fix his ailing heart? I think it was a woman. He met some sweet patootie who warmed his heart and cracked that lock on his wallet. You don't think a flight of angels flew down here and shook out the miser's soul like a wet sheet? That's silly.

Well, Mum, we'll see you in a couple of weeks. Get your old hound ready. Tim will be wanting to run the meadows with him.

Fondly, Your Son, Bob

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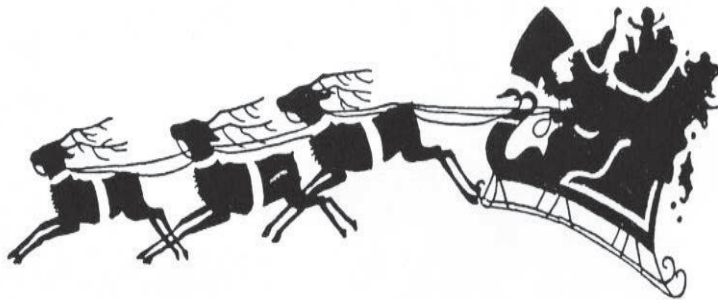
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A CHRISTMAS MEMORY IN 1983

by M. D. Smith, IV



Raising eight children, my wife and I have told many "Santa tales" and answered a gazillion hard questions from our children when they were young.

My most memorable discussion came on a Christmas season long ago when our only daughter was five. Being the only girl in the family, she seemed the most curious at her young age.

"Why are there more than one Santa on the streets and in the stores?"

"Santa's helpers," was the first easy and practiced answer I remember. With four older brothers, I knew a lot of the answers.

"Where is the real Santa?"

"Busy with his elf helpers, making toys and preparing for the big Christmas Eve ride to bring them to good little girls and boys." Easy questions.

"Does Santa do that all year long at the North Pole?"

"Yep, all year, every year." I patted Allison's back. "And it's been that way since I was a kid, and since your grandparents were children."

"That's a long time." Allison sort of arched her eyebrows when she said that, but she didn't ask any more questions, until later that night when I tucked her in bed.

"Goodnight, Honey. You've been mighty quiet all evening."

Allison tightened her lip, arched her eyebrows, and, with a most sympathetic voice, said, "I feel sorry for Santa."

I was so surprised. "Oh, Sweetie, he's a Jolly Old Elf doing just what he wants to do."

"He never gets a vacation, or even a day off. Years and years and not a single day off. I bet he and Mrs. Claus would like to go to the beach for a week." The image of Santa and Mrs. Claus in bathing suits at the beach made my cheeks bulge, and I almost laughed out loud but restrained myself. Allison was seriously concerned.

"But he loves what he does, Sweetie, they are the happiest and most magical people on the planet. With his magic, he could do anything, but he chooses to do this for the boys and girls around the world." I smiled and looked directly into her face with frowning eyebrows. "Don't you see? It's what he wants to do."

I was not sure I convinced her, but we ended the conversation that way with only a few more days to go to Christmas,

Christmas Eve arrived with all the stockings hung with care. We left a plate out for Santa on a small tray. Allison wanted plenty of carrots for the reindeer who flew so hard, and extra cookies for Santa, the hardest working person she knew.

Older son Brent insisted on a Budweiser as his contribution to Santa. Not to get in an argument, I got one of my cans, ice-cold, to go with the cookies. When almost ready to hustle all the children to bed, Allison had a letter, folded four ways, to leave for Santa. We were not to read it. The lights were put out and all retired to bed, while Momma and Poppa watched TV in the den. The hall door to the bedrooms was shut.

"People tell you that everything old is new again, but if you wore it before, you're too old to wear it the 2nd time around!"
Louise Avery, Huntsville



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I couldn't stop myself from creeping in to read Allison's letter to Santa, and I read it aloud to Judy.

"Dear Santa. Thank you. You work so hard. You never take a day off. It makes me sad. If you want to take the next year off, I will understand. We can give some of our toys to poor children who don't have any. You work too hard. I love you, Allison Smith."

My wife and I both choked up a bit on that letter. Our sons would never have thought such a thing or written a message like that. We did a few Christmas Eve chores and went to bed. The next morning as the children all lined up outside the living room door, until Daddy (that's me) hollered, "Okay, I got the lights on with the movie camera running..." and the kids ran in the room, each squealing with excitement running to "their" place in the room to see what Santa brought.

Brent was the first to look by the edge of the fireplace and shout, "Look, Santa drank the beer I left for him, he emptied the can."

The whole family got quiet and looked. I said, "I hope it was still cold enough for him when he came."

Allison hollered next. "My letter is gone, but look, there's something in a tiny Christmas colored envelope on the tray by the cookie crumbs."

Allison opened and read it to us. "Dear Allison: I have been delivering gifts and presents to good little girls and boys for longer than you could

imagine. I enjoy the cookies, milk, carrots for reindeer, and the other things left to nourish me on my journey. But I have never gotten a 'thank-you' letter left for me like the one you put on the tray. I will cherish it forever, and tell all my Elves about that sweet and kind, Allison Smith, who lives in Huntsville. Mrs. Santa and I will keep it in our special book of memories."

"Love, Santa."

What a special Christmas we all had that year.

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"Jesus enunciated the Golden Rule, which says to do one to others before they do one to you. He also explained that a man doth not live by sweat alone."

Billy, 7, on Religion test

The Kiddie Club and More....

by Anna (Gene) Clift Chesnut

I was inspired to write my own article about the Kiddie Club after reading "The Friendly-Teers Club" article by Betty Miller Lewis in the August issue of OHM. I do not know Betty (since I have lived in the West for fifty six years, two of those years in San Francisco and fifty four in Seattle) but I did appreciate her memories of the Kiddie Club, some of which I had forgotten.

I had racked my brain over the name of the piano player so I was thrilled to see her memory of Donald Patrick. I had also forgotten that Mrs. Timmons was in charge of that wonderful variety show at the Lyric Theater for children (performances, also, by some of those same children) every Saturday morning. It preceded, usually a "short" and then a cowboy movie. (Roy Rogers with, of course, Dale Evans and Gene Autry were my favorites.)

Mrs. Timmons had a deep voice that could mimic many voices so she was the reader of children's stories at the library several days a week for many years. I loved to go to the library on days that I did not have after school activities. I cannot remember exactly which days she read but I always looked forward to hearing her portray each character in the book. She also read the "funnies" in the newspaper on Sunday mornings on the radio, again, portraying each character in a voice that might have been their own.

**One gossip to another:
"I won't bore you with all
the terrible details. In fact,
I've already told you more
than I heard myself!"**

As I remember, Martha Fleming's family owned the Lyric Theater and Mrs. Fleming could be seen, occasionally, at the Kiddie Club with one or two of her seven children in tow. I think, often, about what a wonderful thing the Kiddie Club was for the whole community.

As for my participation in the Kiddie Club, I along with two other friends sang the Andrew Sisters' version of "Stars Are the Windows of Heaven" and another time I did a tap dance on roller skates. I imagine that Dee Cummings probably sang "Sweet Georgia Brown" as she would "bring the house down" when she sang it in Mrs. Hazel Robinson's recitals. I did

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not go every Saturday so I probably missed some notable performances.

When my husband told me we were moving to Seattle in 1966 my first question was, "Where is that?" My second was (from my Kiddie Club knowledge) "Are there cowboys and Indians there?" "Yes, east of the Cascade Mountains" as I later learned.

I was also interested to read from Betty's article that WBHP broadcast the performances of the Kiddie Club on the radio. I had forgotten that.

Buster Pollard, whose family owned WBHP, was my third grade "boyfriend". We would hold hands across our desks in Mrs. Bradford's third grade class at West Clinton School. On some Saturdays we would meet at the Kiddie Club and hold hands while watching the performances and the movie. One Saturday we walked to my house from the Kiddie Club, Buster was on his way to WBHP, which was at the far end of the block where I lived. We stopped at my house and sat on the front porch swing where I suddenly said "Kiss me!"

He threw his hands up to his face and yelled "Noooo!" and that was the end of our "puppy love". The next day he told Margaret Anne Goldsmith that he liked her and "he would lie down in the middle of the street and let a car run over him if she didn't like him." Not sure how that went!

On April 16, 1999 an article appeared in the Wall Street Journal about Buster Pollard from Huntsville, Alabama building a lodge on Guntersville Lake in the old Adirondack style. My husband, an avid WSJ reader, asked me who Buster Pollard was and I told him my third grade "boyfriend" story.

As we learned, later, a friend of my husband from boarding school, who had grown up in Lake Forest, Illinois, was familiar with Buster because of their common interest in old boat-houses.

Many years later the Symphony had a gala at the Art Museum and Margaret Anne and I were sitting with friends at the same table. Buster was

there with his wife at another table.

Margaret Anne and I went up to the band leader and asked him to call Buster up to the stage and when he came we told him he "had" to dance with both of us at the same time while the orchestra played a jitterbug song. What a dancer he was, twirling both of us in sequence as if he had been planning for that dance all his life!

People cleared the floor for our "exhibition". What a joy for the three of us to have that last dance, as Buster died the next year.

Memories of the Kiddie Club, both wonderful and bittersweet.....

"Have you ever wondered why people who tell you to calm down are the ones who made you mad in the first place?"

Linda Brown, Arab



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A TALE OF TWO GIFTS

by Al Dean

"It's the most wonderful time of the year, with the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you be of good cheer. It's the most wonderful time of the year."

It's the Christmas season. Decorations have been pulled out of storage; trees have been adorned. Colorful lights hang from roofs and encircle shrubbery illuminating dark chilly nights. Except for me and my fellow procrastinators, fewer shoppers jam stores and malls because Covid-19 has encouraged more on-line shopping.

The pandemic is also responsible for the greater number of greeting cards we've received, not only from across the miles, but from neighbors and nearby friends from whom we have been isolated and haven't seen for far too long.

And in the glow of the season we reflect upon Christmases past.

I was nine years old; my sister was seven. It would be several years before our family was complete: another sister and brother. Our mother had only completed the eighth grade of school, so teaching or nursing or secretarial work was not an option. But like many women of her time, she contributed to the war effort, working briefly on an assembly line building torpedoes at a munitions factory in Alexandria, Virginia shortly before WWII ended. The building she worked in is now home to the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

She was content being a housewife.

Dad had quit school after the fourth grade, worked the family farm and as an adult drifted into painting houses. To make ends meet, he worked part-time

at one of the two dens of iniquity in our hometown: the poolroom, the other was a beer joint. He worked three evenings a week, and on weekends. He was also a member of the town's Volunteer Fire Department, where he became addicted to turkey shoots sponsored by the VFD to raise working capital. We ate a lot of turkey during the turkey shoot season.

He had to borrow a gun or use the one provided by the VFD, a single barrel relic held together with tape that came apart when it was fired. If he could have afforded one, it would have been an Ithaca model 37 featherweight; twelve gauge, pump action, thirty inch barrel, hi-visibility front sight.

Mom knew how much he wanted one, but what could she do? She had no marketable skills. There was no discretionary income; no extra money to put aside until she could save the \$91.16. She did what she could. She washed other people's clothes; she took in ironing; she cleaned the local Methodist Church, the Congregational Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Eastern Star meeting place. No one asked her to join, her or those two rag-tag kids she dragged behind her.

She collected pop bottles and beer bottles from the



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"That dog is NOT coming in this house. I don't care how cold it is out there, dogs don't stay inside."

What you don't hear anymore

sides of the road; redeemed them at the grocery store; got two cents for the pop bottles and a nickel for the beer bottles. Never mind what people said about that crazy woman picking up bottles along the road.

When she took my sister and me, our responsibility was to find bottles thrown farthest from car windows into the weeds bordering the road. Each brown bottle we found was a delight because of its value and because Mom made a big deal over our contribution. Dad knew nothing of her little scheme. She had to scramble to get everything done before he got home from work or after supper when he went to the poolroom.

Finally, one cold Christmas day, a very special gift lay under the tree, the culmination of months of hard work and determination. Dad was speechless. His eyes glistened. My sister and I had never seen Dad like that. We didn't know what to think. Dad said it was the greatest Christmas gift he'd ever received. It may have been, until one day his beloved wife of fifty years passed away after a long battle with cancer.

He tried to stay busy. He immersed himself in the painting contracting business he had built over the years, but late at night and in the early mornings, loneliness overwhelmed him. The vastness of a bed holding one restless soul; the smell of coffee in a silent kitchen. In the midst of his emptiness, he was given another gift.

It didn't come in a brightly wrapped box, under an evergreen tree bedecked with shimmering lights crowned with a star. It didn't have to be returned because it didn't

fit or it was the wrong color or he had one just like it that he'd never used, squirreled away in a closet. It was a gift that helped him deal with his loss; it didn't eliminate it, but it gave him hope, strength and purpose.

Though skeptical of the gift, I felt an unexplainable peace, so profound it nudged me into ministry. At age 72, he received the greatest Christmas gift of all.

Christmas became real for Dad when he embraced the one in whose name we celebrate this season. And it seems to me, that in these difficult times, having a little more hope, a little more strength and purpose - a little more Christmas - makes a lot of sense.

Merry Christmas!



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Survey Says?

by Belinda Talley



I was very curious to know about your Christmas traditions, so I asked a few questions and put them out to you on Facebook. I received hundreds of responses and with space limited, following are the ones I picked.

Different family traditions do not make one right or wrong, but so interesting. Thanks to each of you who responded. (Ages of those responding ranged from 23-87). Here were my questions:

- **Does Santa come on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day?** Ninety percent said that Santa arrives when you are sleeping on Christmas Eve.

- **Are your Santa's gifts wrapped or not?** 51 not wrapped. 17 were

- **What was in your stocking?** Oranges, tangerines, apples, nuts, gum, candy, Life Saver Book, Bolo paddle, Yo-yo, Hot Wheel Cars, fireworks, lip gloss, nail polish, colored pens, jump-rope, CD's, jewelry, candy canes, lotions, toothbrush, hairbrush, gift cards, cash, movies, a deck of cards, and small toys.

Johny Gilbreath lived in north Huntsville, and "Santa came to see us first, before the rest of you."

Elizabeth Umbarger: My stocking always had a Christmas ornament from my grandmother.

Liz Love Hewitt: I remember getting concert tickets in my stocking and mace spray!

Carolyn Blue: The best stocking gift Santa ever brought was a puppy! That little thing was so cute sticking out of the stocking and hanging from the mantle.

Anna Strickland Mavromat: I will never forget getting a birthstone ring in my stocking. I wore it until the prongs wore down to nothing.

Brenda Post Bourland: My mother, always read the Christmas story from the book of Luke. A tradition that I have carried on.

Lana G. Denyer: Our gifts were not wrapped, but Santa put bows on them to dress them up.

Nancy Woodall: I remember Santa coming in person one time to see us before we went to bed.

Pat Fanning: I remember Bibles as gifts for Christmas. There was cash hidden inside certain scriptures, just more TREASURES in God's word.

Melanie Moore Bumgarner: Our first Christmas married was different because one of us came from wrapped Santa gifts, and the other did not.

Dale Hopper: We went to my grandparent's house on Christmas Day, so Santa came on Christmas Eve. It is funny, I would go with Analoyce (my sister) to Mullins for chili hot dogs, and when we returned, Santa had just left our house. Darn. I missed him again! Oh, well, there's always next year.

Connie Brogdon Broadway Lougheed: I remember getting unwrapped ribbon candy, and it always had red fuzz stuck to it from the stocking.

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Western Union internal memo, 1876

Courtney Synowiec: One year in the stockings were Auburn Chocolates that looked like dollar bills. They all melted because we had a fire in the fireplace!

Brittaney Shoemaker: My mother, made us three-foot-tall, huge stockings. On Christmas morning, the stockings were too heavy to hang. They were lying beside the fireplace.

Steve Moquin: Christmas morning, our gifts were wrapped. I do not know how Mom did it with eight kids."

Lynda Eilerman Senkbeil: We always went to First Presbyterian Church for Christmas Eve services. I still remember hearing Judge Parsons singing "Oh Holy Night." We read the story of Baby Jesus' birth in the Bible, hung our stockings, and went to bed. Christmas Day, we had a star-shaped cake for His Birthday!

Rhonda Tate Childress: One time, my little sister, **Sammie Tate Laster**, and I woke up at two in the morning. We were playing with our new dolls and clothes that were in a doll suitcase. Daddy woke up and made us go back to bed. The excitement was real!

Sarajane Steigerwald Tarter: My mom or dad read the Christmas story from the Bible. We also went to church on Christmas Eve.

Dianna Cook: Santa came on Christmas morning.

Margaret Raymond: (my sister) and I each had a little rocker filled with different fruit and nuts types.

Christmas traditions must start somewhere. There was one unusual stocking item that caught my attention. Why a jar of olives? I knew there must be a story.

Jane Anglea (Rawson): Santa came on Christmas Eve while I was sleeping. When I woke up, he had

laid out my gifts on the sofa, by the Christmas tree. I always had a jar of olives in my stocking. Why olives? I had to ask. My mother told me that she had an unusual craving for salt as a child but was a healthy kid. At Christmas, they asked her what she wanted. She chose olives instead of candy! From-then-on, a jar of olives was in her and her sisters' stockings. She continued the custom for my siblings and me. Today, I, my brother and sister, continue the Olive Family Tradition with our children.

You folks are the best. I asked, and you delivered. Oh, what a joy this has been. And I will continue to ask for your help. Thank you for your contributions. I could not write without you. Cathey Carney of Old Huntsville Magazine loves this idea and we want to keep her printing. Look for my "Grandmother Name" story in the January issue. Remember, "I make things up, and I tell stories."

You are a fun blessing! Merry Christmas, Y'all, and Happy Birthday, Jesus.



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"There should be a support group for women who can't put their dishes in the dishwasher dirty."

Maxine

CHARLES GATES' GARAGE

by Claudia Gates Hill



Throughout its eighty-plus years of operation, many employees have come and gone. His brothers, Leighton and Robert, Jr., as well as Phil Holloway and Gene Adcock, spent the majority of their working years employed there. Claude's wife, our mother, Methra, was his bookkeeper/secretary until her retirement. All of us children did little odd jobs while growing up around the business.

Before Dad retired in 1978, the garage was incorporated, and the name changed to Gates Auto Repairs, Inc. Along with that came new management as he turned the business over to sons, Paul and Dehaan.

At present, the business is still in operation owned by our brother, Dehaan.

The rest of us kids: Janell became a CRNA; Gary (Ann) served many years as a Baptist minister.

Tim (Bonnie) ventured around as a traveling artist; Kay (Eddie Miles) taught elementary school.

Paul (Sheila, deceased) retired from the auto repair business; Mark owns and operates a machine shop and I, Claudia, (Don Hill) worked at the garage as Paul's and Dehaan's bookkeeper/secretary.

When Claude Gates was thirteen years old, his dad let him buy an old car from the junkyard. He paid \$15.00 for it. They loaded it onto a two-horse drawn wagon and took it home. Within a few months, Claude had it running.

When he was sixteen, he asked for and got a job working in the orange groves in Florida. He did numerous jobs such as planting trees, clearing land, harvesting oranges and repairing broken equipment, including vehicles. The owners of the grove owned a service station on the land and Claude filled in there, too.

In 1939, he purchased a service station on the corner of Fifth Street and Humes Avenue in northeast Huntsville after he decided he was going to ask Methra to be his wife. His auto repair business at the station was so busy that, by the time they married, he was working on cars every night at their home.

Claude Gates Garage opened at its' present location in 1945. Located behind Claude's place of residence, it began as a single car building. Several additions, built by his dad, Robert Gates, Sr., expanded the building to its' present-day size which includes an office area and six work bays.

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"Dear paranoid people who check behind their shower curtains for murderers - if you do find one, what's your plan?"

Jesse Maples, Hazel Green

My Love of Music

by Carol Harless

I have always had a love of music. Probably because my mother and grandmother were both music teachers - both taught piano, Grandmother taught organ and Mother taught violin. Mother played in the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra prior to our moving to Huntsville in early 1952. She worked with Alvin Dreger and some of the German scientists to establish the Huntsville Civic Orchestra, predecessor of Huntsville Symphony Orchestra.

Mother told me that from the time I found I could make noise with my mouth I was singing, or maybe it was "singing". I would also climb up on the piano bench and "play" the piano.

Soon enough I was really learning to play and sing. So when our church's new organist/choir director Ken Turvey began asking if children would be interested in choir, I excitedly asked Mother if I could join. I did.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s the Huntsville Christmas Parade was at night and reasonably short, not the long type we have now. J. Oliver Johnson (Johnson High was named after him) was the man in charge of the parades. One year the parade had church choirs as part of the lineup. I don't know where the truck came from or how the "organ" to accompany us was powered, but the truck had wooden sides to keep us from falling off. The "organ" was pushed up against the back of the cab.

We learned one piece which I fell in love with and have had a passion for ever since: "WHAT CHILD IS THIS?" We sang this song as the truck went down one street, around the square, and returned up the other street. Yes, it was cold out, but we were all warm in the back of that truck.

Ken was our organist/choir director for about 50 years. Singing under his direction was a blessing. Learning and singing songs led by him was a true experience.

My love for music continued to grow thanks to this dear man. Until he took us in an open truck to sing in the Christmas parade, Christmas caroling was something I'd only seen on the screen of a movie theater or a television set.

Thanks to Ken, my love for Christmas grew with the words to "What Child Is This".

What Child is This?

(Greensleeves)

William Chatterton Dix (1865)

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.



Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and donkeys are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spears shall pierce him through,
the cross he bore for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
the Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The babe, the Son of Mary.



This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.

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Our Christmas Tree

By Gail Lee, 5 Points



I have a few Christmas memories. Some good and some not so good. This one was both good and sad.

Back in 1960 or '61, I was only in the second grade at Lincoln School that was located on Meridian Street in Huntsville. This was before

we moved further east to Five Points. Back during that time walking to school and back home was just a normal thing to do.

I remember having our Christmas party at school before it closed for break. Yes we called it a Christmas party. I remember my teacher asking if anyone who didn't have a tree wanted the Christmas tree we had in our class room. I raised my hand.

Why I thought we needed it I don't really remember but we must have really needed that tree! It was a small tree but I dragged that tree all the way home from Lincoln School to my home on Bass Circle.

I was so proud of that tree but could never understand

the bewildered look on my mom's face when she met me at the door with that tree behind me.

This was a good memory for me because I was proud that I got the Christmas tree for our home that year.

Today I think about all the children who may not have a tree and they would be so proud to drag one home if it was only offered to them. We live in such a throw away world these days but some of those throw away things such as that tree could be such a blessing for those who don't have things.

I know it was a blessing for me. My Mom maybe not so much back in the day, but we decorated that tree and proudly planted it in our living room.

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PET TIPS FROM ANGEL

Cold Weather Fun



Getting pets who dislike the cold to go outside in winter can be a challenge, but chilly weather or not, pets need fresh air and exercise. ASPCA experts assure us that while short-haired and smaller breeds may require cozy apparel to protect them from winter's bite, others simply need a little training to learn how to enjoy a cold-weather romp.

"With a few simple training tricks — and the right attire — pet parents can teach animal companions to be much more enthusiastic about playing outdoors in winter" says ASPCA Animal Trainer Kristen Collins.

1. Entice your pooch with off-leash exercise sessions; playing tug or fetch, or romping with canine buddies — the more aerobic the activity, the warmer the dog will be.

2. If your dog's playing off-leash, you can use treats to reward her for fetching toys — even if you usually don't have to. The extra incentive might further spark her interest in the great (and chilly) outdoors.

3. Offer your pet special treats during outdoor excursions. While on a brisk walk, pop something delicious into her mouth every now and then — or feed her breakfast by hand while outdoors. Always have a bottle of water.

4. Winter is a great time to enroll in indoor training classes. Sports like agility and flyball are often taught in heated facilities and are excellent exercise for the canine body and mind — and you'll enjoy them, too!

5. Walk your pet in wooded areas during the winter months. The forest not only provides protection from wind, but the rich smells, sights and sounds can be infinitely interesting for dogs to investigate, distracting them from chilly temperatures. It's also much more comfortable than asphalt or concrete.

6. Many dogs dislike going outside during winter because snow, salt and chemical de-icers hurt their paws. Canine booties can protect paws, while keeping them warm — and disposable latex boots are available for dogs who don't like the feel of thicker boots.

7. Musher's Secret, a waxy substance that you can apply to your dog's paws, can be an effective alternative to booties for protecting toes and paw pads in snow and ice.

8. Getting your dog to play outside may simply be a matter of keeping her warm:

- Dress puppies — who don't have as much body fat as adults — in a coat or sweater.
- Get waterproof gear for wet days and reflective tape for evenings.
- Invest in a well-fitting coat that covers your dog's back and underside (Fleece is nice!).
- Staying warm during winter takes more energy, so increased food intake may be necessary. Good body condition means you can feel, but not see, your dog's bones. If you can see his spine, hips and ribs, then he's too thin and you should talk to your veterinarian about increasing his food intake.

9. If you've tried everything and your dog still seems miserable when you take him outside, provide extra exercise indoors by playing games that involve physical exertion, like tug-of-war.

10. Help your dog expend mental energy by feeding her meals in food-puzzle toys, giving her plenty of things to chew, teaching her new tricks and playing interactive games like hide-and-seek.

Make sure your dog has access to shelter and water at all times. Please remember, that if you're cold, your dog probably is too and it's time to go home. Be sure to watch for any distress with your pet while you're out and remember to bring the water!

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An Old Man and His Violin

by Tom Carney

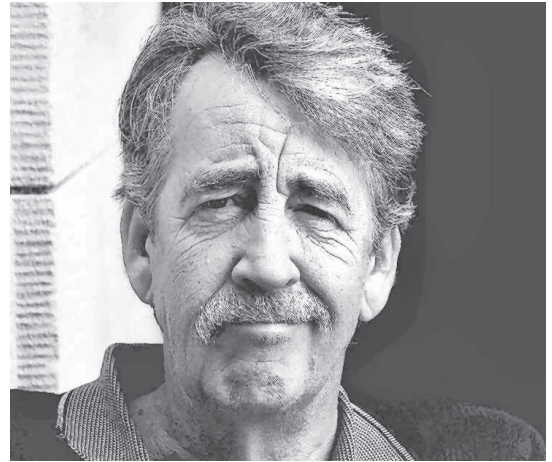
The night was cold and blustery, with a touch of snow in the air. It was a night unfit for mortal or beast, so when the old man with the beat-up violin case walked in and sat down in front of the wood-burning stove to get warm, no one paid much attention. On a night like this, everyone was welcome to share the warmth of the old bar.

It was a week before Christmas and everyone was feeling low. Joe and Laura, sitting at the table in the corner, were depressed. No money, no gifts to give their relatives. It didn't look like it would be a very cheerful Christmas. Benny, who had just lost his job, was sitting at the bar, carefully trying to nurse one beer to make

it last as long as he could. Even Cathey, the bartender, was lost in thought, wondering how she would buy presents for her children and pay rent at the same time.

The old man might have sat there forever without anyone paying any attention to him if he had not picked up his violin and begun playing. Softly and quietly he began, so low that it took the customers a few moments to realize where the music was coming from.

It was obvious to everyone that the old man and his violin had seen many years together, maybe a concert stage or maybe even a symphony orchestra. Hushed and hauntingly the music poured forth, filling the room and finding its way into every dark corner and crevice. With his head bowed and his fingers dancing softly on the strings, the old man and the instrument seemed as one. It was the music



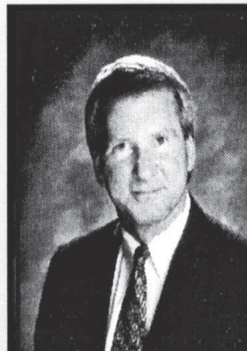
of the gods — music that would make an angel cry.

The customers stared at the old man as his music began to envelop them with its warm, haunting melodies. The music seemed to gently beckon to them until finally, unable to resist, they were caught up in its magical harmonies and transported to a time and place where everything was perfect. The only tears shed were those of joy. Riding on a crescendo of love and passion, the violin carried the customers to a place where time had no meaning and Christmas was in your heart forever.

Maybe it was because of the tears in the patrons' eyes, but for whatever the reason, no one saw the old man leave. ...

Just a short story about an old man, his violin, and Jay's Lounge. A completely meaningless story — unless you had been there.

A lady ran after the garbage truck yelling, “Am I too late for the garbage?” The driver said, “No, jump in.”



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A CHRISTMAS LESSON

by *Belinda Talley, (as told to her by her husband Tom Talley)*

Tommy Talley grew up on Ninth Avenue in West Huntsville, the oldest of three in the 1950s. Most of the neighborhood boys had heroes like Roy Rogers, The Lone Ranger, Gene Autry and The Rifleman. They all fought for justice and all were fast with a gun.

"I wanted to be just like Lucas McCain (Chuck Connors) in The Rifleman. He would cock his rifle faster than I could say lickety-split. Chuck Connors was a big guy standing 6 ft. 6 in. tall, and I wanted to be tall, like him, but that never happened."

"Running around with older guys made me feel like a tough guy, more mature. We had outgrown cap-guns and were ready for BB guns. Not just any BB Gun, it had to be one like The Rifleman, but not a rifle. I wanted a Daisy Red Ryder BB Gun for Christmas, so I started bugging dad about it in October. I assured him that I was old enough and I knew how to handle it."

"Santa came to our house on Christmas Eve. All five of us

would pile into daddy's pick-up truck. Daddy, mama, David, Frances and I would climb into the cab to ride around and look at Christmas lights. People wouldn't think of doing that now, not all in one seat."

"I don't remember having stockings, but the man in a red-suit left apples, nuts and a mesh bag of tangerines. Back then we only had tangerines at Christmas. We cut down a tree from the woods and the decorations were simple. Our tree lights were multi-colored and I remember two hypnotic-like bubble lights; one red and one yellow."

The truck had hardly stopped when we three kids ran inside to

see what Santa brought. Almost everyone was happy.

Dad asked me, "Son, didn't you want a Daisy Red Ryder BB gun?"

My head hung down, as did my bottom lip, "Yes."

"Well, what's wrong?"

"I didn't want a Pump BB gun; I wanted a Cock BB gun, like The Rifleman."

"Red-faced and silent, dad picked up the gun. I never saw it again. And I never got a Daisy Red Ryder Cock BB Gun."

"That Christmas taught me one of the greatest lessons of my life. It is not about the gift, but the heart of the giver. We build character during lessons learned. I am a better man today because of it."

In ancient times, the reason people shook hands was to show they were unarmed.

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"I just saw the sequel to the movie "Clones" and guess what? It was the same movie!"

Jeremy Stutts, Arab



Eighteen Christmases I Treasure

by Charita Smith Avery

For Christmas 1970 my husband and I purchased our first artificial Christmas tree in anticipation of the birth of our son, Denis, in April 1971. It was a beautiful tree flocked heavily with artificial snow, which we purchased from JC Penny at their after-Christmas sale. For the first ten years of our marriage, we always had a live tree. My plan was to purchase new ornaments each year, then when Denis grew up and got married, we would give him the tree, along with all the ornaments. Because we handled and stored the tree with great care, we used that tree for over twenty years.

That same Christmas, we bought a little stuffed reindeer and an elf as a present for our unborn child. We placed these under the tree that year and have continued to use these as part of our Christmas decora-

tions each year. For years, Denis was the baby on both sides of the family and as a result, he received Christmas gifts from everyone.

Added to what Santa brought, Denis received more gifts than a child probably should. I particularly remember one year when my brother gave him a red and black cowboy outfit and a tricycle, when either of these nice gifts would have been great.

For several years when Denis was younger, we had a big Christmas party at our home for him and his friends. We had a fireplace so Santa could enter and, with the sound of reindeer bells, surprise the children with a visit and gifts for everyone. Many years we had the family Christmas dinners at our home, so Denis was able to experience several "Norman Rockwell" Christmases. It was always a rule at our house that the adults ate in the formal dining room, while the children ate in the kitchen. This particular year, when Denis was eighteen, he convinced me that he was now an adult and should be allowed to eat in the dining room, to which I agreed. We lived in the county so many times we had fireworks after dinner.

We always permitted Denis to open one of his presents on Christmas Eve, saving the rest to open with his dad and me on Christmas morning. Even though Denis was an only child, we had very joyous and festive Christmases. When Denis was younger, we had a birthday cake and sang "Happy Birthday" to Jesus.

For Denis' 18th birthday, he asked for money instead of presents from us so he could purchase what he wanted. This was certainly not a surprise since, as you probably know, most teenagers like to receive cash. (I always liked that idea for myself.) That year he gave me a beautiful set of angel candles in wooden candle holders, which he purchased at a candle shop in Madison Square Mall. I recall he informed me they cost him \$34 and instructed me that I was never to burn them. I am still using these candles in a prominent place and will never burn them just as I promised.

The reason these eighteen Christmases are the ones I treasure is because these were the only ones I spent with my only child before he was killed in a car accident in May 1990. When I think back, I am so thankful I agreed he could eat at the table with the adults that year because that was his last Christmas with us. I have always loved Christmas and that love has not diminished, as my love for Denis hasn't.

I still love to decorate for Christmas, although I am now decorating a different tree. We passed Denis' tree along to another

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family since it still had some life left in it. I always think about how much Denis loved Christmas and how he would, very early on every year, ask me, "Morn, when are you going to decorate the Christmas tree?". Many years, when Denis was a small boy, he and I would get out the ornaments in the middle of the summer and examine them one by one, recalling the story behind each one.

I guess we were really a "Christmas family" because my husband, Buddy, loved Christmas also. After Denis died, we continued to decorate and celebrate as usual, including using his Christmas stocking as part of the decorations. More than on one occasion, during the summer, Buddy would say, "I wish it were Christmas." I knew why he said that was because there is a special joy remembering those eighteen Christmases we shared with Denis and it's the time we celebrate the joyous birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Since then, my husband died in 2014 and I live in a different house with a different Christmas tree. I am thankful that I still love Christmas and have these precious memories to reflect upon and to treasure. I am sure you can now see why I treasure these eighteen Christmases.

I hope all of you have a blessed Christmas and treasure the time with your family, because we never know how many we have left together.

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home. I want a forever home too. Please always be sure you want a pet and make that pet a part of your life. Do you think that could be you. When you come to the Ark, ask to see Sassy. That's me.

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The Ring

by Avery Davis, an interview
with her grandmother,
Jane Davis (1962)

First published in Old Huntsville
magazine in Dec. 2013

"I remember our first December in Huntsville vividly" recalls Jane Belyeu Davis. "It was 1962. Our temporary living area was a rented out basement apartment downtown. There was a window that looked out right above the sidewalk, so we would always peek outside at the pairs of feet shuffling by. But that winter, the snow came down so heavy our view was completely blocked. I woke up one morning to total darkness, and when I approached the window, charcoal-gray windows greeted me. For days I felt as if I were living in a cardboard box. Everything surrounding us was bathed with fifty shades of brown - the ceilings, the floor to wall carpeting, the furniture.

I made my husband Jerry take a shovel out there to give me back my view. Of course, he didn't think it would take nearly an hour. I guess we were pretty lucky he wasn't fired after arriving late at his internship with that kind of excuse."

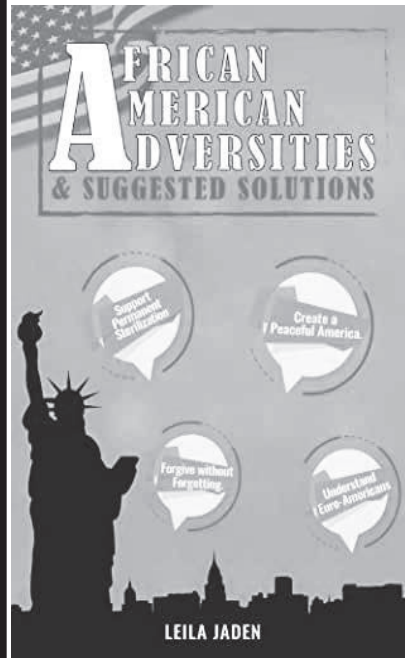
"Jerry and I had been married almost six months and had started entering what I call the "dark days". We were

"If this resume doesn't just blow your head off, please return it in the enclosed stamped envelope."

Received at a local tech company

running through money like water. Jerry was just entering his internship at the airlines and I was still taking classes at the nursing school, so we were lucky if we had a dollar to spare. If we bought a Christmas tree, we couldn't afford

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John Purdy
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ornaments to decorate it with; if we bought ornaments, we couldn't afford a tree."

"A colleague of Jerry's was really the one who put us in the Christmas spirit. He and his family owned a patch of land outside the city and the fields were crawling with oaks, maples, and pines. He was kind enough to become our personal lumberjack. He showed up at our doorstep one morning with this gorgeous pine tree strapped down in the back of his truck."

"As soon as the tree was mounted in the corner of our living room, the Christmas spirit was almost tangible. We bought a single strand of red, green and white lights and intertwined them with the pine needles. Instead of dropping all our money for a box of reindeer ornaments and plastic candy canes, we got creative. Aluminum foil is really all you need. We molded leftover wrappers into stars, hearts, candy canes and prisms. They were beautiful dangling from the limbs with the twinkling lights reflecting off them."

"Those are the lengths you have to go to when you're dirt poor. There's nothing like an empty wallet to bring two people together. If we didn't even have enough money to buy an ornament, there was no way we could afford gifts for each other. We turned to the old cliché saying, 'That's not what Christmas is about.' Instead of tearing into presents on Christmas morning, we huddled around the tree with mugs of hot chocolate and just enjoyed each other's company."

"But at about ten o'clock that morning, there was a knock on our door, and we found out someone sent up a twenty-five dollar Western Union Christmas gram. You would have thought gold was raining down. That twenty-five dollar Christmas gram brought the biggest smiles to our faces. I wanted to think practically, so I suggested we use the money for groceries or the fix the jiggling knob on the front door. There were so many issues with our house that needed tending to."

"Later the next afternoon though, Jerry handed me this

tiny box wrapped in newspaper of all things. Inside, there was the gorgeous, sparkling sapphire ring. The gem was nestled into the band in the shape of a heart, and there were tiny diamonds on either side. The silver turned my finger green, and you needed a magnifying glass to see the diamonds, but I loved that ring. I wanted to be angry because that twenty-five dollars could have been put into our house instead of jewelry."

"Jerry really knew his audience though. I couldn't be upset over something so pretty."

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Christmas Shopping

by Austin Miller



When I was growing up in Ryland we made our living growing about 35 acres of cotton. Twelve acres was our own land and the remaining 23 was rented from a cousin named Howard Tipton. The rent was 25% of the harvest. On an average year, after we paid the loan for money borrowed to raise the crop, paid Howard for the land rent and all other expenses, we had less than \$1000 to live on the

rest of the year. This was not as bad as it sounds because \$1000 in the fifties went a lot further than in 2020.

Also, we raised almost all our food. Mama canned enough green beans, pinto beans, corn, tomatoes, kraut, beets, black berries and other vegetables to last at least two years. We ground our own corn meal, killed two hogs, had dozens of chickens and a milk cow. The only things we bought in the way of food was lard by the stand, flour in a 25 pound bag, coffee, sugar and salt.

Our only other living expenses were four tons of coal bought each fall to heat the house; electricity to run four lights that hung from the ceiling, a refrigerator, wringer washing machine, electric stove and a refrigerator. We drew our water from a dug well in the back yard and had no indoor plumbing.

There were no car expenses because we didn't have a car. As frugally as we lived there was very little money left to spend beyond the basic necessities of life. To pay for my school lunch

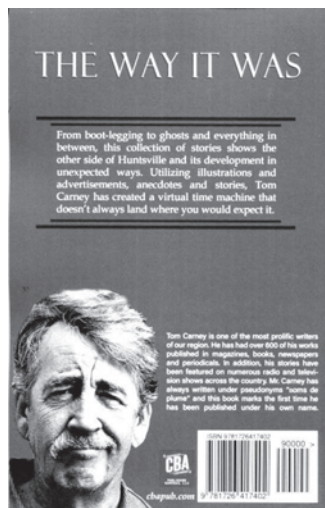
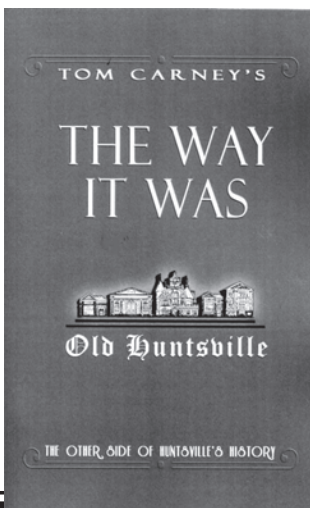
and my brothers school lunch. Mama sold eggs and butter to our neighbors. She could make a dollar go further than anybody I ever knew. If she made two pennies she would save one of them.

After the cotton was picked and sold, usually in late October, we made a shopping trip to town to buy clothes for school and church. What we bought had to last a year. By the time the next year rolled around what I had to wear was well worn and tight fitting. What was in style was not a consideration that entered our thoughts. Our favorite place to shop for clothes was the J.C. Penny's store on the East Side of the Square downtown.

In December each year we made another trip to town to do our Christmas shopping. We didn't buy gifts for each other and the sole purpose of the trip was to find our own present to be opened Christmas morning.

That special Christmas feeling was in the air and I loved looking in all the stores. But the search was limited by the small amount we could spend. I made

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the rounds to Harrisons, Montgomery Ward, Lewters, Grants, Kresses, McClellan's and the pawn shops. I couldn't afford the things I wanted but it was still a fun day and one of my favorite things to do at Christmas. Besides the department stores there were several small locally owned men's clothing stores downtown.

On our shopping trip in 1958, when I was in the eleventh grade, my mother and I were walking down Jefferson Street when I noticed that one of those locally owned stores had a leather bomber jacket on sale at half price displayed in the window. I persuaded Mama to let me go in to get a better look. The store owner insisted that I try it on. I did and it was a perfect fit. I could tell Mama liked it but she wouldn't let me buy it. She didn't say so but I knew the reason was because it was more than we could afford. I don't know if the owner had the Christmas Spirit, saw how bad I wanted the jacket, had it in stock a long time and wanted to get rid of it or if it was a combination of all three. But he lowered the price two more times and Mama finally agreed to buy the jacket. I was most pleased and couldn't wait until Christmas morning to get it from under the tree.

It was the only jacket I wore for the next six years. I wore it my final two years in high school, I wore it for four years at Athens College, I wore it to carry out groceries at my part time job at the A&P Grocery Store that once stood on Greene Street across from the First Episcopal Church. When I got a real paying job, I bought a new jacket but continued to occasionally wear my old leather jacket.

Over the next fourteen of fifteen years it stayed a part of my wardrobe. By the early 1980s the lining had been patched so many times that more repair was a futile effort, the cuffs and waist ruffle had been replaced so many times that new ones could not be attached and the leather was so deteriorated it would not hold a new seam.

So after more than twenty years I threw it away. I can't say it was my best Christmas present of all time but I can say no other present served me better or longer than that brown leather bomber jacket.

"High maintenance chicks are having their moment right now. We don't have nails to fill and paint, roots to dye, eyelashes to re-mink and are thrilled not to have to get dressed every day. I have been training for this moment my entire life."

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A Political Rally in Huntsville, ca. 1920's Held at the Huntsville Fire Station #1

Now that most of the historical election of 2020 is behind us, we can all be thankful for the tremendous voter turnout, and no matter who you voted for, it shows that Americans care deeply about their country and security. Unfortunately, we are in a worldwide economy and what other countries do also affects our local economic situations.

With several countries, including the United States, printing paper currency to support weakened economies because of the effects of the Covid 19 virus, lowering interest rates to near zero, it has caused the value of "specie", considered by many to be "the only real money", to have massive increases in value from January through November.

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