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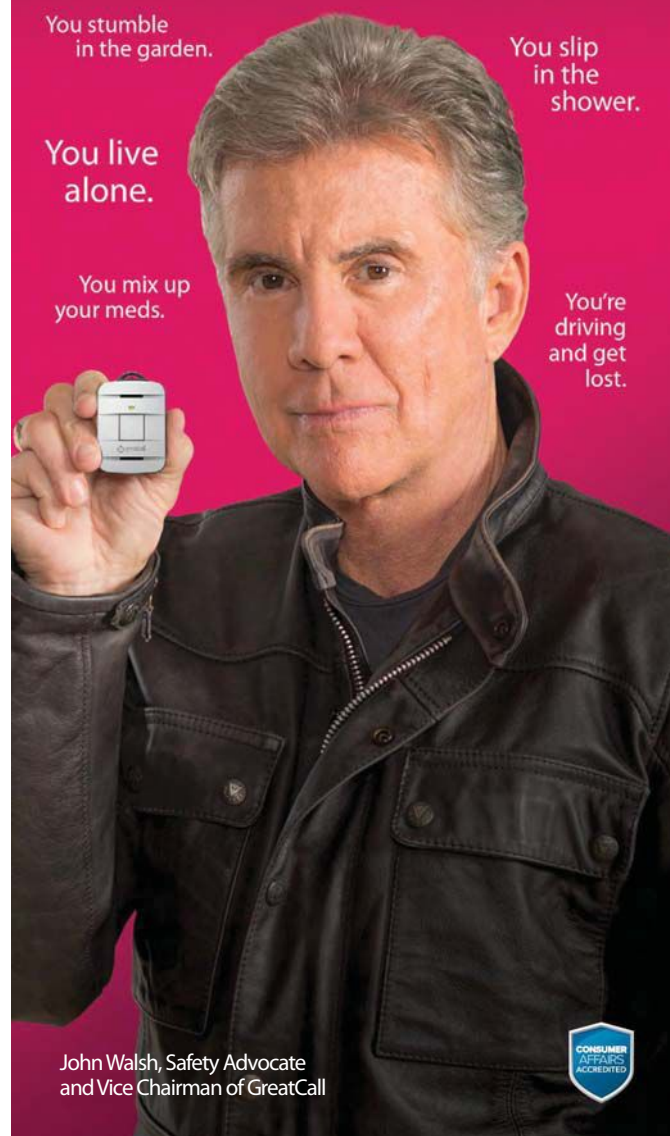
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John Walsh, Safety Advocate  
and Vice Chairman of GreatCall



# Features

32

## America the Beautiful

It's cold outside, but hearts are warm in this lovely photo collection.

40

## Christmas in the Mountains

In the Sierra Nevada, folks ski, sled and snowshoe into the holidays.

66

## Life in Focus

Celebrate the wonder of the season through a child's eyes.



The snowy Sierras are the backdrop for this family's holiday vacation.

PHOTO BY LONDIE GARCIA PADELSKY

# Contents

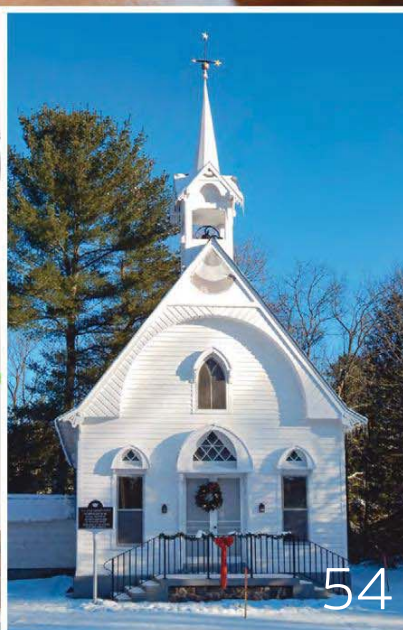
DECEMBER/JANUARY 2018 // VOL. 31 NO. 6



21



28



54

## Out & About

- 12 Fresh Air**  
Experience the joys of country life in this reader roundup.
- 16 Road Trip**  
Luminarias light up the night in Mesilla, New Mexico.
- 18 The Country Almanac**  
Make the season merry and bright with the hints in this calendar.

## The Good Life

- 22 Inspiration**  
For these readers, the holidays are all about family.
- 26 Backyard Blessings**  
A tractor ride through a cornfield made this Christmas Eve special.
- 28 What's Cooking**  
Santa Claus will remember these delicious Christmas cookies.

## Heart & Soul

- 50 Looking Back**  
Katie Martin's best Christmas gift wasn't under the tree.
- 52 Generations**  
Baking day unites three generations for fun in the kitchen.
- 54 Churches**
- 56 Animal Tales**  
Petey the dog brought Christmas cheer to Jessica Poet's family.
- 58 Good Neighbors**  
After Dad was hurt in an accident, the community pitched in to help.
- 60 Humor**
- 64 Traditions**  
Mom always had an extra gift for her favorite child.

## In Every Issue

- 6** From the Editor
- 8** Everyone Has a Story
- 72** Hidden Needle Contest
- 72** Submission Guidelines
- 74** Reflections

**FRONT** Christmas Tree, North Carolina  
PHOTO BY W.G. MURRAY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

**BACK** Wizard Falls Fish Hatchery, Oregon  
PHOTO BY DENNIS FRATES

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# Christmas Is For Kids

**THERE'S AN ELF IN MY HOUSE.** He's 5 years old, and he began eyeing Christmas decorations in October.

He can't wait to put up the tree and hang an ornament from every branch (less isn't more, in his opinion). And before the first snow falls, he's ready to help his dad string lights around the pine trees in our front yard. My oldest definitely has the Christmas spirit, and he's helped guide many of the traditions our family has adopted to celebrate the holidays.

This issue is full of readers sharing traditions of their own. On page 10, Helen Callaghan and her family start the holiday season the day after Thanksgiving by trekking out to the country in search of the perfect Christmas tree. Shirley Barberic teams up with her mother and sister to bake cookies (page 52). And, on page 64, Jay Ingerson recalls his mother's habit of giving him an extra gift every year. Who wouldn't love that?

Working on the Christmas issue is always a gift to me. We start it months before the holidays begin, so it helps me plan ahead and make the most of the time I have with my family. I hope this issue inspires you to do the same. From all of us to all of you, Merry Christmas and a happy new year!

*Marija*

**Marija Andric**, Editor  
[marija@country-magazine.com](mailto:marija@country-magazine.com)

## Show Us Your Holiday Snaps

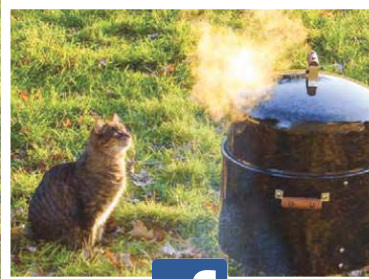


Enter your best holiday snapshots (high-resolution JPEG digital files, please) in *Country's* Christmas Photo Contest, and you might win \$250. You have until **Jan. 31, 2018**, to enter, so start snapping!

Go to [country-magazine.com/contests](http://country-magazine.com/contests) to enter as many photos as you'd like.

## COUNTRY ONLINE!

Find all sorts of extras from *Country* readers on Facebook, rd.com and Instagram. If you aren't following us regularly on social media or visiting rd.com, here's what you're missing:



If Only They Could Talk: We asked our Facebook friends, "What do you believe Christine Gitz's cat, Lucky, is thinking?" Our favorite response: "I will steak my claim," wrote Loni Kirklin. [facebook.com/countrymagazine](https://www.facebook.com/countrymagazine)



We posted this beautiful image of a farm in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. Thank you, Carol Jacobs Norwood, for sharing the photo. [instagram.com/country\\_magazine](https://www.instagram.com/country_magazine)



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Sherah makes her mother-in-law's lefse recipe for Christmas.



# Everyone has a story... what's yours?

*Country* magazine is written by readers for readers, and it's easy to share your own stories and photos with us! Simply visit [country-magazine.com](http://country-magazine.com) and click Share Your Story, then fill in the required fields. Give us your take on the topics below, and you might get published in a future issue.



## FRESH AIR

Grab a camera and turn on your creativity. We want to know how *Country* readers embrace the changing seasons. Please send us your heartwarming words and beautiful images of nature, animals, and people of all ages enjoying rural life.

## GENERATIONS

Country folks love to pass on tried-and-true methods and words of wisdom. We can learn so much from those who lived before us. Tell us about the role your grandparents or parents played in your life, or how you want to help inspire the next generation.

## SPRING FORWARD

We all welcome the season of renewal and its colorful blooms, nesting birds, baby animals and lush greenery. Show us why you love spring with stories and photos of seasonal activities such as planting, collecting Easter eggs and looking for wildflowers.

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS

The most wonderful time of the year is almost here, and we want to know how your family celebrates the special traditions, customs and festivities of Christmas, Hanukkah, Thanksgiving and more. Send along your best memories with photos and stories.

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# Out & About

Live every moment

## OLD-FASHIONED TREES

These folks made lasting memories riding in a horse-drawn wagon in search of the perfect tree. Go to [pickyourownchristmastree.org](http://pickyourownchristmastree.org) and find a farm near you.

## Keeping the Tradition

The Friday after Thanksgiving was one of my favorite times of the year when I was a young girl growing up in Crown Point, Indiana.

We woke up to Dad making a hearty breakfast of eggs and potatoes. Then our family bundled up, piled into the car and headed to Kingma Christmas Tree Farm in DeMotte to cut down that year's tree.

It was a bit of a drive for us to get there, but holiday music and family chatter made the trip go fast. Once we arrived, we grabbed a saw and hopped on the hayride to the tree field. Half the fun was running through the rows, playing hide-and-seek. Bragging rights always went to the one who selected the winning tree!

After we cut our find and tied it to the car, we sang carols on the way home. At the end of the day we decorated our tree. Sometimes we watched a classic Christmas movie.

Today as a mom with three young children, I still keep up this tradition. My husband and I hope to make sweet memories with our children in honor of the rich family heritage I was privileged to know and love.

**HELEN CALLAGHAN**  
Santa Clara, California

## Messages of Love

**I READ A STORY** in the December/January 2015 issue of *Country* about a Christmas ornament that broke while the daughter was putting up her parents' tree. When the bulb broke, the family found a small note inside. It was from the girl's father to her mother and simply stated, "I love you."

I, too, had a glass ornament that my mother-in-law had given to me a few years before she passed away. It made a sound when I shook it, but I never thought about why. Upon reading this story, I found that the ornament had a small note inside that read, "May your troubles be less, your blessings be more, and nothing but happiness pass through your door."

Inspired by the article, I asked my parents, now in their 80s, to make ornaments with special notes in them for their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We gave them out on Christmas Eve, and everyone was overjoyed.

It's a blessing to have my parents, and I enjoy every day I have with them. When they are gone, these ornaments will remind the family of their love and kindness.

**DEBBIE WISMER**  
*Eagle, Nebraska*

**DID IT HERSELF**  
I cut my own Christmas tree this year with a chainsaw!

**URSULA URSCHELER**  
*Richards Landing, Ontario*



## HOLIDAY HEIST

A couple of years ago my then 4-year-old son wanted to help me shop for Angel Tree gifts for some less fortunate children. I thought he was old enough to understand the importance of helping others, so we picked our angels and went shopping.

He put a lot of thought into the perfect gift for a boy his age and a girl his sister's age (she was 4 months old). But then he became a little down about not getting any toys himself. He found a tube of Minion lip balm and insisted on getting it. I told him to put it in the cart.

After we got home, he frantically searched for his lip balm in all the bags. It was nowhere to be found.

I checked the receipt, and it turned out we never bought it. I asked him if he put it in the cart. He replied, "Yes. In your purse." Oops. So then we had to explain what stealing was, why it was bad and how to make it right.

Later that night we said our prayers. Each night he tells God what he is thankful for. He said, "Jesus, I'm thankful we bought toys for those kids, and I'm sorry my momma stole that 'slapstick.' Amen."

To this day, I can't decide if that was a parenting win or a failure.

**COURTNEY STULTZ**  
*Weir, Kansas*

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— Angie, El Cajon, CA

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# Granny's Greatest Gift

A white Bible with my name engraved in silver came into my life on Christmas 1970. Granny was dying of cancer, and she and Papa didn't have much money to spend on gifts.

I don't remember much about that Christmas. "Santa was here," my siblings and I most likely exclaimed on that Christmas morning. There were toys under the festive lights of the tree. We probably jumped around with the delight only children can feel after Santa works his magic.

The toys are long gone, but my Christmas Bible is still with me. It's a bit tattered, and the silver letters of my name have mostly faded away.

I only had 10 years with Granny. I never heard her say a bad word about anyone, and I don't think you could find a purer heart gracing any pew.

Most of the things that mattered to her are found in the Bible. Granny knew that the book held healing words for times of trouble, and that I would find comfort on those pages.

When my heart leads me there, I flip through my Bible, and I think I smell wooden pews mingled with spearmint gum. The white Bible is my most cherished gift, the one Granny knew would live on.

**FIELD EDITOR** SANDRA WARWICK  
*Cleveland, Georgia*

“During the holiday season each of us thinks about someone we've loved and lost. Like the star of Bethlehem shone brightly to lead the world on a journey toward love, our own memories shine brighter at Christmas. That is the best present of all.”

**FIELD EDITOR** SHERRIE BALL *Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin*



#### IS HE HERE YET?

Karoline and Karson Kettles make sure the chimney is all clear for Santa's arrival.

**WANDA THOMPSON SCARBORO**  
*Swainsboro, Georgia*

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— Sherri H., Granville, NY

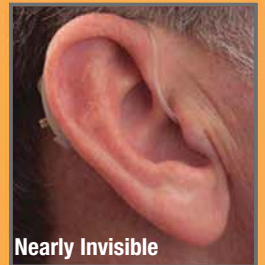
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Luminarias light up the Plaza in Mesilla on Christmas Eve.

ROAD TRIP

# Mesilla, New Mexico

This town sparkles with Christmas lights.

**LUMINARIAS ARE A HOLIDAY** mainstay throughout New Mexico. Albuquerque's lights span neighborhoods and Santa Fe boasts glorious luminaria processions, but there's something especially stirring about the Christmas Eve display in Old Mesilla, a small town just east of the Rio Grande.

Mesilla's backstory is peppered with Wild West lore. Billy the Kid was sentenced to hang here in 1881. (He escaped.) And the influence of Native, Spanish, Mexican and other cultures creates a folksy tapestry, evident in adobe architecture, galleries, eateries and places of worship—notably the Basilica of San Albino on the historic Plaza.

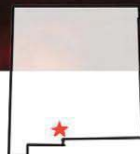
The town's luminaria tradition began in the mid-1960s, when Josefina Gamboa Biel Emerson moved into her parents' home near the basilica. In keeping with family practice, she set out luminarias, inviting guests in for food and drink. In time, her display grew. Boy Scouts helped place the lights; merchants gave to the candle fund.

**Did you know?** Starting in 1857, Butterfield Overland Mail stagecoaches stopped on their route between St. Louis, Missouri, and San Francisco, California, at a building that now houses a popular restaurant, La Posta de Mesilla.

Today, the Las Cruces High School marching band and Los Leones de Mesilla (the Lions Club) help sustain the custom, filling paper bags with sand and votives. Locals distribute them throughout the Plaza and along the Avenida de Mesilla, and the candles are lit in unison. Come sunset, the Plaza is bustling with revelers, carolers and 6,000 flickering lights.

For a memorable daytime excursion, head 2 miles southwest to Bosque State Park, an Audubon-designated birding area with inviting trails and views of the Organ Mountains to the east. In town, check out the historic Fountain Theatre, the Mesilla Book Center, and green-chile-smothered everything at Andele Restaurante. And if you're here at Christmastime, by all means, take in the spectacular lights.

**ELLIE PIPER**  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Birders may spot sandhill cranes at Bosque State Park.



## Plan Your Visit

There's plenty to see and do year-round in Mesilla. Check out these resources before you book your trip.

**MESILLA EVENTS CALENDAR**  
[mesillanm.gov](http://mesillanm.gov)

**FOUNTAIN THEATRE**  
[mesillavalleyfilm.org](http://mesillavalleyfilm.org)

**MESILLA VALLEY BOSQUE STATE PARK**  
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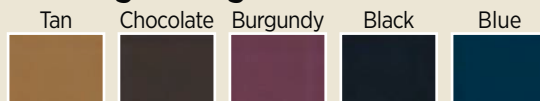
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# The Country Almanac

## December/ January 2018

As snowflakes fall, Christmas wishes rise to the heavens. 'Tis the season to celebrate, to give and to receive.

### December 1

The **International Festival of Lights** continues through Dec. 31, dazzling visitors to Battle Creek, Michigan. The Twelve Days of Christmas is featured along the river, and the old railroad depot is the backdrop for sparkling displays. Add the gently falling snow and it all translates to magic.

[battlecreekmich.com](http://battlecreekmich.com)

SUSAN TERRY

Battle Creek, Michigan

### WEDNESDAY 12/6 St. Nicholas Day

Here's a tradition to honor the patron saint of children: Have your little ones put their shoes outside the bedroom door the night before. Fill them with simple treats (oranges, candy canes).

### December 12 Hanukkah begins at sundown.

7<sup>th</sup> OF DECEMBER  
**PEARL  
HARBOR  
REMEMBRANCE**

### 12.13.17

Geminids meteor shower, the best and brightest of them all, puts on a stellar show from evening until the early morning.



## Dec. 25th

CHRISTMAS DAY

*"Christ is born!"*

That's how we greet each other on Christmas morning in my culture. It's a lovely way to remember what the holiday is all about.

MARIJA ANDRIC, Editor



## Christmas Cards

Try these tips to add cards to your holiday decor. It's amazing what you can do!

1. **String some twine** (sagging slightly) across a window and hang the cards with clothespins.
2. **Create a tree design** on your wall by pinning twine in a zigzag pattern (use decorating clips to secure it). Attach your cards with clothespins and add snowflakes or ornaments to finish the look.

Want more ideas? Go to [rd.com/Christmascards](http://rd.com/Christmascards) and you'll find a lot of seasonal inspiration.



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-Jon

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# The Good Life

*Savor the simple pleasures*

"The only present our daughter Cora wanted for Christmas was a puppy. As you can see, it was love at first sight!"

**SARAH ROGERS**  
*Coxs Creek, Kentucky*

# Christmas with Family

Escape the holiday hustle and bustle. Gather your loved ones and focus on spending quality time together. Here are five ways our readers put family first.



Annie's trusty snowshoes are essential for winter hikes in snowy Utah.



## 1

### Let the Snowflakes Fly

My family goes snowshoeing each winter in Alta, Utah. We had over 600 inches of snow in the mountains last year.

Snowshoeing is our absolute favorite activity—and definitely much safer and less crowded than skiing! All you need are some snowshoes and poles—they're optional—and you're set. No special skills needed, just bundle up and go.

**ANNIE THOMSON**  
Provo, Utah



Nancy Tully of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, set up this bountiful outdoor buffet for the birds.

## 2 Decorate Inside and Out

Putting up the tree inside is always special, but then we head outdoors to decorate a Christmas tree for wildlife. The kids smear peanut butter on pine cones and roll them in birdseed, then place strands of popcorn over the branches. After stomping the snow off our boots, we trample back into the warm house.

**FIELD EDITOR** MANDI WOOD  
*Cleveland, Georgia*

# 3

## Feed the Hungry

While everyone else is out at the mall or big box stores, head to the grocery store with the family and pick out items to donate to those in need. Let each person choose what to include in a bag of groceries and then take them to your local food pantry. Or better yet, spend the morning sorting the groceries at the food pantry. It's a great way to help others in your community and reinforce your family's blessings.

**DANA MEREDITH**  
*Waukesha, Wisconsin*



Keepsake ornaments hold cherished memories.

# 4

## Collect Memories

Each year since our children were young, they were allowed to pick a Christmas ornament that had meaning for them. As we go through them, we travel down memory lane and recall the reasons why each ornament was chosen.

When my kids move out of the house and start families of their own, I'll pack up their ornaments to send along so they have a collection for their own Christmas trees.

**FIELD EDITOR** **JACKIE LYALS**  
*Grand Rapids, Michigan*



## 5 Plan a Baking Party

One of my favorite traditions is to bake Christmas cookies. My mom makes a ton of varieties every year, so we get started early. Since a lot of family is already in town for Thanksgiving, there are many relatives who can bake with us or hang out while we bake.

It's always a delight to hear Christmas memories from when my mom and aunts were kids. There's just something about staying in and baking cookies that puts everyone in a good mood!

**EMILY RACETTE**  
*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

Baking is a hands-on activity kids and adults love.

# Dashing Through the Corn

A vintage tractor stands in for a sleigh on a moonlit ride to remember.

BY BARBARA WEDDLE Oconto, Wisconsin

**M**y cousin Gilbert brought back to life a 1957 D17 Allis-Chalmers tractor. It had been faded by the sun and was dilapidated after languishing for years in the machine shed. But it now boasted a new coat of Persian Orange paint and an overhauled engine, and the old iron relic stood ready for a test run around the cornfield on Christmas Eve.

I was the last person to abandon the warmth of Gilbert's farmhouse to join in the fun. Excited voices greeted me as I took a seat on the trailer hitched behind the tractor.

When I was settled in, Gilbert put the tractor into gear. The trailer lurched as we bounced across the

field. The temperature dipped to 5 below, and wind out of the north chilled us.

Gilbert coaxed the tractor down a slope onto a rutted dirt road, then steered it in the direction of the woods. A few dried corn leaves made ghostly apparitions under the soft glow of the moon. Light shone from one of the farmhouse windows like a star.

Someone whispered, "There's the Big Dipper."


We followed the road toward a stand of trees, galumphed on through, and then bounced back out into a large clearing. Gilbert's son, Todd, began to sing, "Away in a Manger." Soon everyone was caroling, our voices swelling to fill the air. We continued with joyous

choruses of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "The First Noel."

In the end it was not the tractor that failed us, but the trailer. Todd, realizing one of the tires had gone flat, yelled for Gilbert to halt.

I stared in awe at the stars above me. Sentimental thoughts of a Christmas Eve more than 50 years past flickered in my memory—when my father, his voice merry with the trickiness of his claim, summoned his children to witness Santa's flight across a starry sky.

The ride had ended too quickly. But I'll always have the memory of that night—the way dried corn leaves rustled, how my breath rose in the silence of a cold night, and the sound of the tractor's engine as it rolled across the farm. ☼



Snowy farm fields were the perfect setting for an unforgettable winter night.

.....  
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## Voice Clarifying TV•Ears Headset

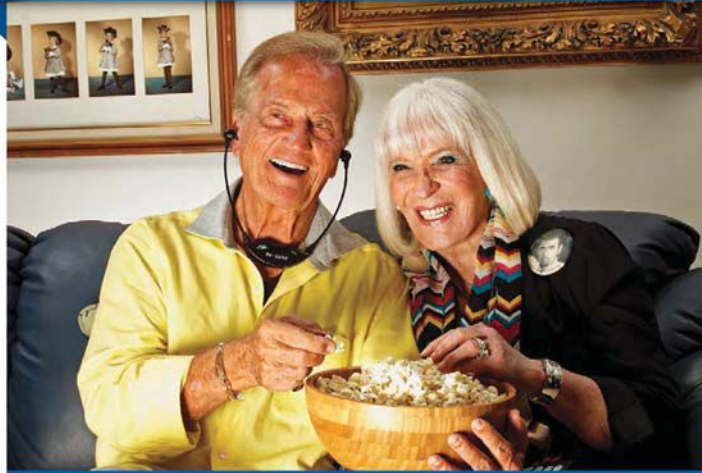
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— Pat Boone, Singer/Songwriter

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— Robert Forbes, M.D., California

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# Cookies for Santa

Surprise Old St. Nick with a cold glass of milk and a plate of these tasty treats.

## JWELED THUMBPRINTS

MARIA DEBONO NEW YORK, NEW YORK

PREP: 20 min. + chilling • BAKE: 15 min. + cooling  
MAKES: about 6 dozen

¾ cup butter, softened  
¾ cup confectioners' sugar  
1 large egg yolk  
½ tsp. almond extract  
1¾ cups all-purpose flour  
½ cup raspberry  
or apricot preserves

### DIRECTIONS

**1.** In a large bowl, beat butter and sugar until blended. Beat in egg yolk and extract. Gradually beat in flour. Refrigerate, covered, at least 2 hours or until firm.

**2.** Preheat oven to 350°. Shape into ¾-in. balls. Place 1 in. apart on greased baking sheets. Press a deep indentation in the center of each with your thumb.

**3.** Bake 12-14 minutes or until edges are light brown. Remove from pans to wire racks. Fill each indentation with ¼ teaspoon preserves; cool completely.

**Freeze option:** Freeze unfilled cookies, layered between waxed paper, in freezer containers. To use, thaw in covered containers and fill with preserves.



JWELED THUMBPRINTS

## CHOCOLATE SANDWICH COOKIES

SALVATORE BERTOLINO

INDIANA, PENNSYLVANIA

PREP: 30 min. + cooling  
BAKE: 10 min. • MAKES: 4 dozen

1 cup shortening  
2 cups sugar  
2 large eggs  
1 cup (8 ounces) sour cream  
1 cup hot brewed coffee  
1 tsp. vanilla extract  
4 cups all-purpose flour  
¾ cup baking cocoa  
2 tsp. baking soda  
½ tsp. baking powder

### FILLING:

¼ cup all-purpose flour  
¾ cup 2% milk  
1 cup shortening  
2 cups confectioners' sugar  
2 tsp. vanilla extract  
⅛ tsp. salt

### DIRECTIONS

**1.** In a large bowl, cream the shortening and sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in the sour cream, hot coffee and vanilla extract. Combine the dry ingredients; gradually add to the creamed mixture and mix well.

**2.** Drop by tablespoonfuls 2 in. apart onto greased baking sheets. Bake at 350° for 9-11 minutes or until firm to the touch. Remove to wire racks to cool completely.

**3.** In a small saucepan, combine flour and milk until smooth. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Cool to room temperature, about 20 minutes. In a large bowl, beat shortening, confectioners' sugar, vanilla and salt until smooth. Add milk mixture; beat until light and fluffy.

**4.** Spread 2 teaspoonfuls of the filling on the bottom (flat side) of half of the cookies; top with the remaining cookies.

*“When my family visits,  
I have a plate of these soft,  
fudgy cookies sitting out.”*

— SALVATORE BERTOLINO

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SANDWICH  
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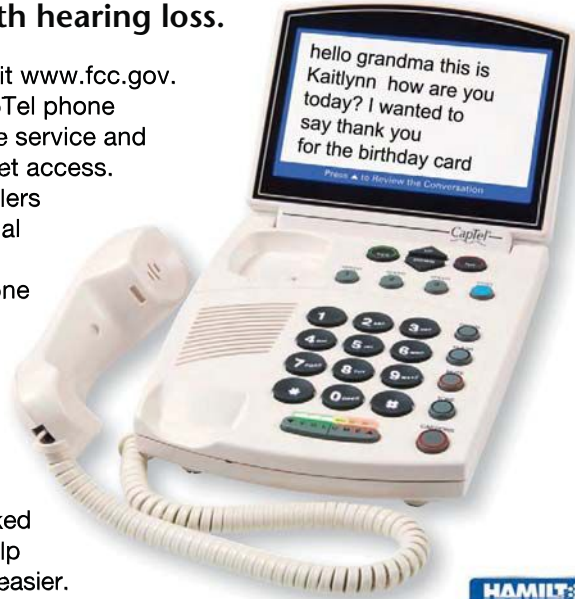
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AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

# ALL IS BRIGHT

The spirit of the season  
lights up the land in this  
collection of photos.

A glowing Christmas tree  
sparkles on the beach at  
Crystal Cove State Park in  
Orange County, California.







As snowflakes fly, this mom and daughter take a cozy horse-drawn sleigh ride in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.



A snow-covered drive leads the way to a New England farm filled with Christmas cheer.



**MYSTERY  
PHOTO**

Can you guess the  
location of this  
festive scene?  
Turn to page 72  
to find out.







A skier leaves new tracks in freshly fallen snow in the Sierra Nevada.



GOD'S COUNTRY

# Christmas *in the* Mountains

IN CALIFORNIA'S SIERRA NEVADA RANGE, THE LOCALS SKI, SLED OR SNOWSHOE INTO THE HOLIDAYS.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **LONDIE GARCIA PADELSKY**

“Sleigh bells ring, are you listening?  
In the lane, snow is glistening  
A beautiful sight, we’re happy tonight  
Skiing in a winter wonderland...”

Without realizing it, I was singing this song (and slightly adapting the last line) while cross-country skiing in a meadow where I had once photographed a sleigh ride during the Christmas season. It was about the same time of year, too, but this time we had already accumulated a lot more snow on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada.

I was reminiscing about two velvet black horses that wore thick, shiny leather harnesses with jingle bells attached on top. The horses had pulled a fancy red sleigh full of folks all bundled in warm blankets, joyfully singing. Just the thought put me in the Christmas spirit!

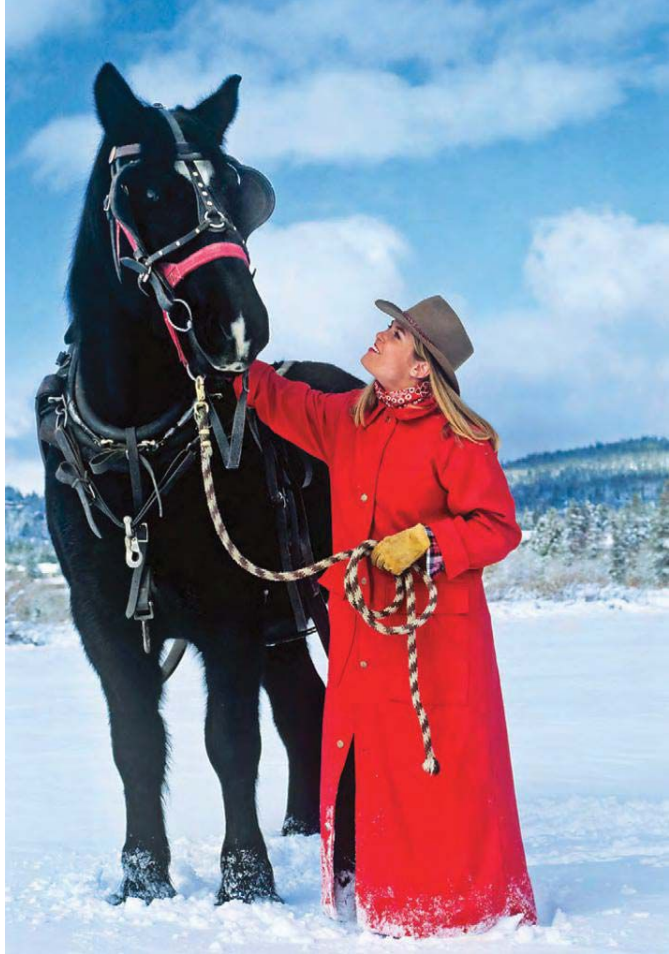
Suddenly the perfectly clear sky turned pink and the alpenglow lit up the snow-covered mountains, bringing me back to earth. I was skiing on fresh-made tracks in total solitude. It was just the Sierra Nevada and me.

The mountain range stretches more than 250 miles north from the Mohave Desert to the Cascade Range, and is about 80 miles wide at Lake Tahoe. Most of the range lies in the state of California. Over the last three decades I’ve been fortunate to explore, on foot and horseback, many of those rugged backcountry miles of glacier-carved valleys and slick granite peaks, and a sea of alpine lakes and rivers.

I’ve done this in summer and fall for weeks at a time, but during the snowy season I prefer skiing and snowshoeing the trails closer to my home base in Mammoth Lakes. Every new dusting of snow offers endless opportunities to take photos of pine trees, windswept mountains, and meadows laden in snow and covered with critter tracks.

My love for the Sierra Nevada began when I was a youngster. During Christmas vacation, our family took our old blue station wagon to the Badger Pass Ski Area in Yosemite National Park. As my siblings and I grew a bit older, my family graduated to a pickup truck with a cabover camper so we could make the longer journey to ski at the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area. I can still visualize all five kids in pizza position—forming a wedge—snowplowing down the slopes right behind Dad. We started at one end of the mountain and zigzagged our way to the other, which took most of the day.

This year, while driving up to Mammoth on Christmas vacation with her family, my younger sister Heidi stopped in the quaint mountain town of Lone Pine to give me a call. Two hours south of Mammoth, she was so excited to catch a glimpse of the snowy mountains—quite a contrast from the central coast of California. Her two boys, Bode and Cash, had just spotted the jagged peaks of Mount



Christmas spirit is everywhere in the Sierra as a cowgirl prepares her horse for a sleigh ride (above) and folks in Mammoth Lakes decorate for the holidays (below).





*“Every new dusting of snow offers endless opportunities to take photos of pine trees, windswept mountains, and meadows laden in snow and covered with critter tracks.”*

— LONDIE GARCIA PADELSKY

Snowfall averages  
400 inches a year  
in these mountains.

Whitney, the highest summit in the lower 48 states. The unusual dusting of snow on the Alabama Hills and the holiday lights in the foreground made a perfect postcard. I reminded her to stop in Bishop at Erick Schat's Bakery for my favorite cinnamon raisin bread.

The stretch of U.S. Highway 395 from Lone Pine to Bishop passes through the small towns of Big Pine and Independence. There, the mountain backdrop is just as pretty, and store windows are filled with holiday displays and Christmas cheer.

What I love about living in the eastern Sierra is that after a morning ski, you can drive 45 minutes south out of the snow to Bishop. At its lower elevation and warmer temperature—usually twice as warm as in Mammoth Lakes—you can hike, bike, rock climb or play a round of golf. This outdoor community has a hometown flair that's hard to beat. The town comes aglow the first week of December with the Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

The next morning, Heidi called me to join them skiing on Mammoth Mountain. She was ecstatic about

the unbelievable amount of snow. The 2016-'17 season was a record 618 inches—way over the average of 400.

I met the boys early the next day so we could make the first tracks on the slope. From every high-speed chairlift, Bode and Cash were amazed by views of the Minarets (a series of jagged peaks), the White Mountains and Lake Mary.

It was the last run of the day that did me in. My young trickster nephew, Cash, got me to follow him on an unfamiliar trail. Surrounded by trees on an icy, bumpy path, he took off, leaving me stranded, and laughing all the way. Exhausted and exasperated, I was getting mad when suddenly a big grin appeared from behind a snowdrift.

To end the day we treated ourselves to hot chocolate topped with whipped cream around an open fire at the European-style Village at Mammoth. We strolled through the brightly lit shops among the twinkly lights, Christmas music and falling snowflakes. It was truly a magical experience. In this wondrous moment, the Sierra Nevada was truly God's country. ☺

**Heidi, husband Robert and sons Cash and Bode found holiday magic in the snowy mountains.**





Yosemite Falls (top left);  
Mammoth Mountain  
Ski Area (top right)



Snow and ice  
on pinyon  
pinecones



Frosty Kings Canyon  
National Park (left);  
rustic cabins at Tom's  
Place Resort (right)



MAP ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT SCHILLER

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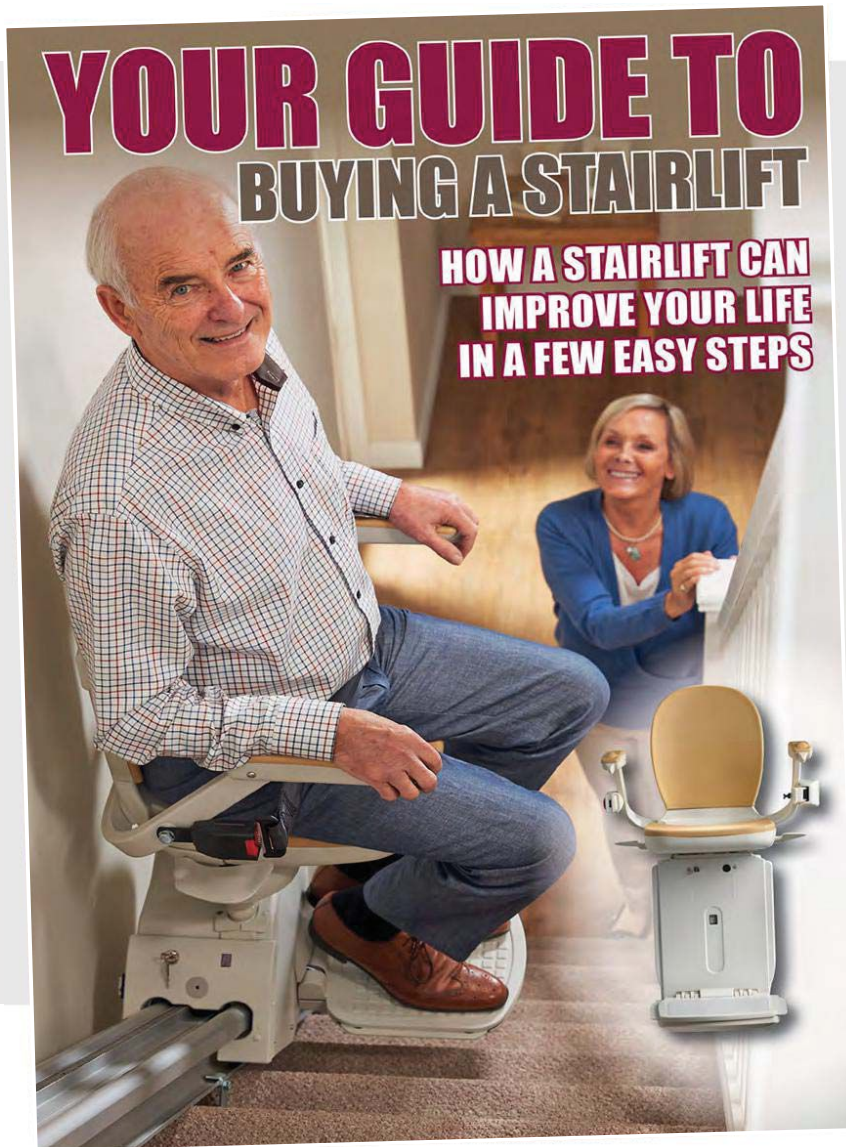
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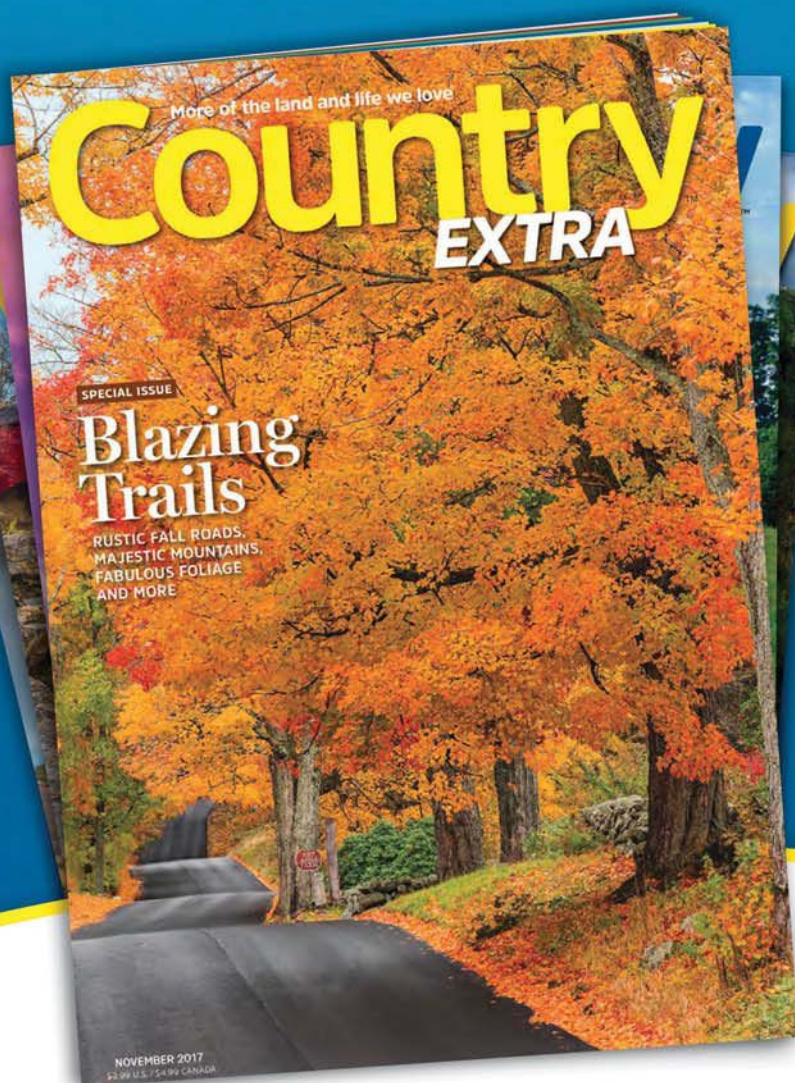
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# Heart & Soul

*Love. Laugh. Inspire.*

Our town square is always decorated so nicely at Christmas, and on this night, the moon added some extra magic.

**SUSAN GROVE**

*Gettysburg, Pennsylvania*





Surprise reunions are extra special during the holiday season.

Disappointed as she was, Mother knew he was right. She also knew we would be upset, so she told my two sisters, brother and me right away. The news hit me very hard. Christmas just wouldn't be the same without Daddy.

I knew he had tried his best. Still, I went to bed on Christmas Eve with a heavy heart.

When we woke up on Christmas morning, Santa had come. I don't remember what gift my brother received that year, but my sisters and I found new Dy-Dee dolls. Their dolls had a carriage to ride in, and Santa had brought mine a crib.

We were all happy with our gifts, so we went outside to play. I didn't want Mother to see how glum I was that I couldn't show Daddy what Santa had brought me. I could tell she was feeling sad, too.

As we were playing, I looked up and thought I saw my daddy in the distance. I ran inside to tell Mother. She did not believe me and told me not to make up stories.

But I was sure it was Daddy! My mother repeated he would have been there if he could, but it just wasn't possible.

I turned to go back outside when I heard familiar footsteps. I ran down the stairs. Daddy was home!

As I rushed into his outstretched arms, Daddy explained that he had tried everything to get home for Christmas, but without success. At the last minute, a group of the workers had decided to drive.

But the nearest guy lived 17 miles away. So Daddy started walking on Christmas Eve until he arrived home. He had walked all night to get home to his family.

Though the presents that year were wonderful, the best gift was not found under the tree. Daddy's special surprise made this my most memorable Christmas. ❄️

LOOKING BACK

# The Long Walk Home

Santa's best gift wasn't under the tree.

BY **KATIE MARTIN** Danbury, North Carolina  
as told by Jean Kivette

**I**n 1952, my daddy traveled with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He worked on a very large dredge vessel, and he went where it went. This meant he spent a lot of time away from our North Carolina home.

As Christmas approached, he called from Galveston, Texas. Daddy explained to my mother why he would not be celebrating the holiday with us. Money was tight and he didn't have a way to get back to his family.

.....  
**WORDS of WISDOM** *It's better to have laugh wrinkles than worry warts.*

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From left: Dottie, Robin and Shirley made baking day a tradition.

**GENERATIONS**

# Ready, Set, Decorate!

A dusting of sugar and sprinkles turns time in the kitchen with my mom and sister into sweet Christmas memories.

**BY SHIRLEY BARBERIC** Grand Island, New York

**B**aking Christmas cookies with my mom, Dottie, and my sister, Robin, is always a day filled with laughter, fun, memories of Christmas and lots of eggnog.

When we started our baking day tradition back in 1993, it was at my house. I was so excited to have Mom and Robin come over to make cookies. We baked all day, frosted all night and must have had at least six different kinds of cookies going at once: chocolate chip, Russian tea cakes, peanut butter, coconut macaroons, gingersnaps, straw-

berry thumbprints and, of course, the classic sugar cookie cutouts.

Robin and I had just started our families, and Mom was never one for the kitchen. So we really didn't know what we were doing. By the end of the day, we were exhausted and the kitchen was a disaster.

Over the years we've refined our skills, and we're a little more organized. It's a lot of work, but Mom, Robin and I always have fun.

When our kids were little they helped us with the frosting, and maybe the cookies didn't always look bakery-perfect but they got

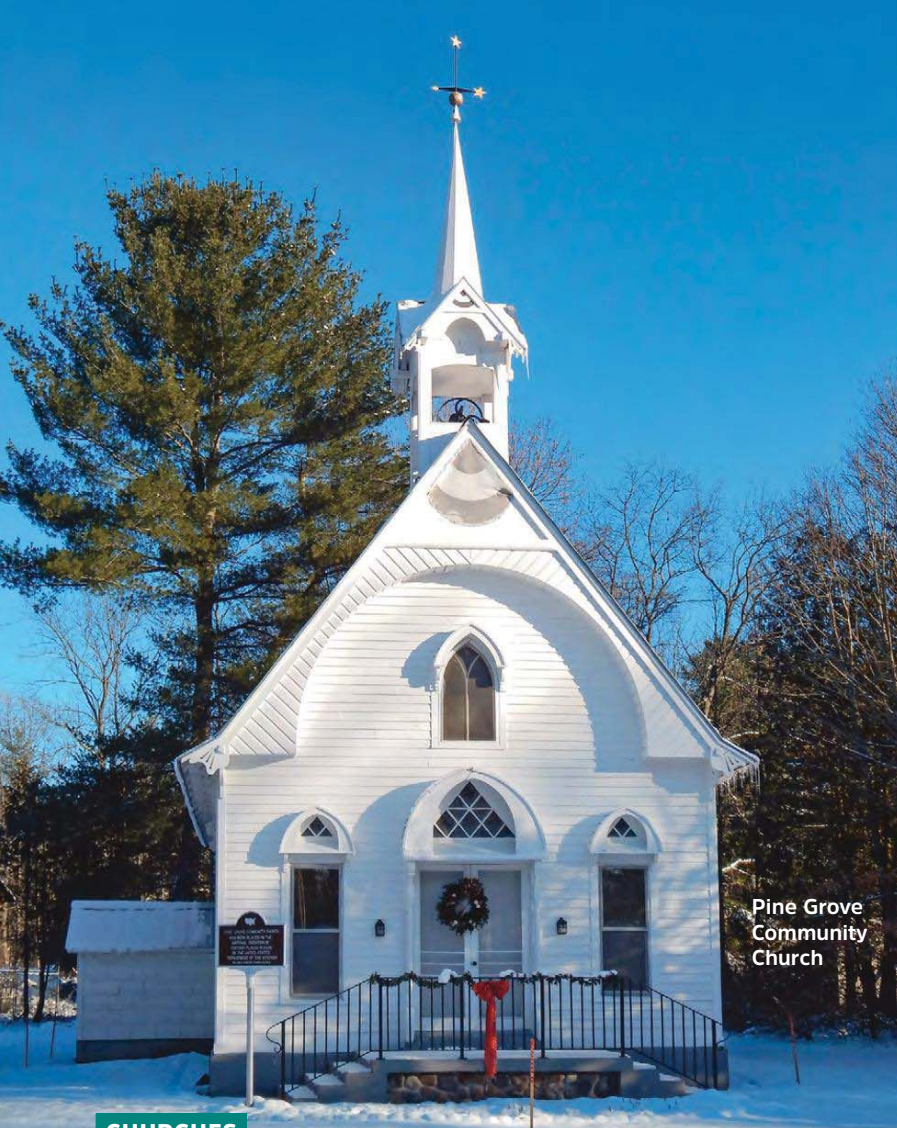
eaten just the same. Older now, the kids come and go, but they still look for their favorites at the end of the day. I'd love to see them carry on this tradition. Until then I'm happy to bake for them.

Looking back on the past 24 years I realize that those cookies are a lot like life. Sometimes they turn out great, but sometimes the cookies are a little burnt and rough around the edges.

It's not really the cookies that make the season special. It's the people we bake with and for who make it all worthwhile. ☺

**WORDS of WISDOM** *Time invested in children will always reap huge dividends.*





Pine Grove  
Community  
Church



The seating was designed to resemble a theater. Parishioners walk along a corridor to reach seats on the sloped floor.



## CHURCHES

# Landmark of Faith

Historic Pine Grove Community Church unites worshippers in fellowship and preservation. **BY DONNA KOZICK** Glenfield, New York

If you attend services at Pine Grove Community Church in Watson, you had best be on time. The church's unique design makes it impossible to sneak in unnoticed.

Completed in 1896, the church's interior was built to resemble a little theater that the architect and builder, Lucian Rumble, had seen on his travels. Parishioners walked from the entry at the front of the building along a central corridor, directly to the altar at the back of the building. Upon reaching the

altar, they turned right or left to face the front of the building and walked up a steeply sloping floor toward a choir loft.

First, Methodists held services in the church. Later, Mennonites worshipped and gathered children for vacation Bible school. Classes were held in the basement, in tents in the yard and in tiny rooms under the sloped seating area. As a child, I attended Sunday services and Bible school here.

Unfortunately, the church was unoccupied for many years, so a

group of neighbors of different faiths banded together to rescue it. The Pine Grove Community Church Preservation Society made many improvements. It's been especially heartwarming to see the steeple standing straight atop the belfry and to hear the bell ringing again.

Now a nondenominational house of worship, the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Pine Grove hosts weddings, semiregular services and holiday events. It is a beloved landmark in our rural community. ⚙

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# The Gift of Petey

Turns out Dad wasn't the Scrooge I thought he was.

BY JESSICA POET

Ridgley, Maryland

Our family had felt like something was missing since we lost our beloved dog, Annie. And so a few weeks before Christmas in 2012, I looked at our local Humane Society's website to see what dogs were up for adoption.

I'm a vet tech, and I was careful about researching what kind of dog would be good for us. Plus my sister, Megan, was working at the shelter, so I knew she could give me the inside scoop.

I showed my mom, Kathy, two dogs online, and we decided that Petey, an 11-year-old pit bull mix, was worth checking into.

However, I was disappointed when my dad, Dave, said no way to meeting Petey. Mom tried to talk him into it, but he wasn't budging. Since I had moved back in with my parents at home, it was ultimately their decision.

Christmas came, and Dad left two gifts under the tree, one for my mom and one for me. At Dad's urging, we opened them together. My gift was a red leash; Mom's was a bag of dog food.

At that moment, Megan and her boyfriend arrived, and Petey came bursting through the door with them, as happy as a dog could be. Mom and I were thrilled, and Dad was beaming.



Petey brought joy to Jessica's family.

Turns out, Dad and I had the same idea at the same time, only neither of us knew it. He adopted Petey, and then found out later that night I was interested in the same dog. Dad somehow managed to keep his secret until Christmas.

Petey was a staff favorite at the shelter and was perfectly trained, but he had a cancerous tumor on his leg when we welcomed him into our family. After a successful operation, he can now play all day and run faster than I can. He loves to go on car rides.

Our dog doesn't have a mean bone in his body. Petey "smiles" at anyone who smiles at him. Those

who meet him have to be careful of never-ending kisses.

Petey has been with me through some of the toughest times in my life. He sleeps beside my bed every night and wakes me up in the morning, ready to start the day. I can do anything with him and he just goes along without any fuss.

And how many dogs enjoy going to the vet? Not many, but Petey does! He goes to work with me often for baths and to hang out.

People tell me all the time what a great dog he is and how lucky he is to have us. But we are the lucky ones. Petey truly is the best dog a family could have. ☺

.....  
**WORDS of WISDOM** *Wisdom comes more from living than from studying.*

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# Richest Family in Town

When my parents were in trouble at Christmas, their friends taught me the true value of kindness.

BY NINA SCHEPKER Linn, Missouri

I grew up on a 50-acre farm in the small rural community of Catawissa, Missouri, as the sixth of seven children. My parents often noted during meals how everything on the table except the sugar and flour came from the land.

Besides running the farm, Dad was also a carpenter. In the fall of 1970, he was working on a house when the ladder broke. His back was fractured in two places.

He stayed in the hospital for three weeks with his head and feet down, permitting his back to align correctly so the bones would fuse.

On Thanksgiving, Dad was still in the hospital. We always butchered hogs the day after the holiday,

and that year my uncle showed up with a couple of cousins to help my three older brothers prepare our year's supply of pork.

After Dad returned home, he was in a back brace and unable to work. I was too young to realize our family had no money coming in as Christmas approached.

One night we heard a car coming up the long driveway. Always alert to company, we kids were curious about who was visiting.

Peggy Phelan was at the door, holding an envelope stuffed with money. She told my dad she had collected money in the community and was there to deliver it.

He tried to protest but Peggy would have none of it. I can still

hear her saying, "Archie, whenever someone's baler is broke, you bale their hay. Someone passes away, Altha is cooking. It's our turn."

That evening, this 6-year-old understood what being a good neighbor was, and that because her parents were good neighbors, their kindness would be returned.

I learned later that my mom's sisters all "adopted" one of us kids to help with Christmas, and we received gift baskets from more than one organization.

My parents were used to being the givers and not the receivers of such generosity. They had a bit of pride to swallow, but continued all of their lives to show us kids the value of kindness. ☼

Caring angels repaid my parents' generosity by helping out on the farm.



WORDS of WISDOM *The sunrise never finds us where the sunset left us.*

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HUMOR

# The Turkey Snatcher

While we relaxed in the living room,  
another family member raided the kitchen.

BY MARK BUERSMEYER Union, Missouri

'Twas an hour after dinner and full we all felt;  
Grandpa and Dad had undone their belts.  
Mom and I turned on the big football game  
And tried to remember our team mascot's name.

Out in the kitchen we heard such a clatter;  
There the dog had found the turkey left on a platter.  
Some of us rushed from the room with a frown.  
Grandpa forgot his belt so his pants fell down.

The dog we all chased at a very hurried pace  
As pieces of turkey were left all over the place.  
In the dog's mouth, the turkey was held high;  
As I reached out I was able to save a thigh.

Stuffing was flung all over the floor  
As the frightened dog ran for the little pet door.

Too big were the remnants of the holiday bird;  
As the dog met the opening, a dull thump was heard.

A wing I grabbed after the dog fell,  
The neck and a breast I was able to snag as well.  
The dog sat up and started to beg,  
But as I looked away he grabbed the turkey's last leg.

Through the pet door our sneaky dog did fly;  
As I picked up what remained I let out a sigh.  
What was left of the bird was piled on a plate;  
It was obvious we had gotten to the kitchen too late.

There were few leftovers, which made us sad,  
All because of the dog who had been so bad.  
There is only one thing left for me to do—  
To wish Happy Holidays to all of you. ❄️

.....  
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# JOKES

## Did you hear that Santa knows karate? He has a black belt.

**BRAD WESNER** *Simpsonville, South Carolina*

### Not So Hot Lunch

My grandson picked up his son, Graham, after work and asked him what he had for lunch.

Graham said, "Cold." Turns out, they had chili.

**PAULINE NEDDO**  
*Fairland, Indiana*

### A Fresh Start

On New Year's Eve, I'll join my friends to toast the days ahead. We'll all stay up until it's late, then eat a tasty spread. At midnight, though, I might just wish that I were home instead, sleeping very peacefully in my warm, cozy bed.

**CAROLYN BOLZ**  
*Riverside, California*

### One Day at a Time

While our great-granddaughters

were getting ready for bed on Christmas Eve, Molly had a loose tooth that she wanted to pull.

Addison said, "Don't you dare pull that tooth out tonight because the Tooth Fairy wants to be with her family."

Molly waited until Christmas to pull her tooth.

**DOROTHY SCHENK**  
*Rupert, Idaho*

### Coming Soon

Mom and Dad told Julia, our granddaughter, that she was going to have a baby sister or brother. "It's a secret and we don't tell secrets," they said.

In Sunday school class, Julia's teacher asked if anyone had a prayer request. Julia said, "I don't tell secrets, but it's going to be born next summer."

**DAVID DAWDY**  
*St. Marys, Ohio*

## Now That's Funny!



### HOLLY, JOLLY CHRISTMAS

I feed the deer around my home and continually take photos and videos of them. On this day, I was lucky to capture their festive winter frolicking.

**TRUDY WHEELER**  
*Havelock, Ontario*

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**01-22135-050-R78601**



Though money was tight, Jay's parents managed to get gifts for everyone.

mom when her baby moved out. But if she was upset, she never let it show. She just said with a smile that if I needed to come back home there'd be a room waiting for me.

Ma, as we called her, always bought five gifts for each child. Don't ask me how my parents could afford it, but somehow they managed. That first Christmas on my own, Ma pulled me aside before the gifts were passed out and told me that she had made a mistake.

"I bought you an extra gift," she said. "Don't say anything!"

I figured, *She buys for a lot of people. Who am I to complain that I got one gift more than my siblings?* So I kept quiet.

The next year she pulled me aside and told me she accidentally had bought me an extra gift again.

She must have made another mistake. She wouldn't treat one child better than the others.

The next year Ma did it again. I was a little more special! It must've been because I'm the youngest.

This went on for years, even after I got married. I told my wife about it, and she couldn't believe that my mother would favor one of her children over the others.

Years later, talking to my sister, my wife discovered that I wasn't the only favorite. It turns out that all six of us received an extra gift.

It's easy to feel overlooked in a large family. Ma wanted each of her children to feel a little special, and one extra gift did the trick. We were all her favorites.

My mother, Marvel, passed away more than 10 years ago. None of the Christmas gifts I've received since will ever compare to the extra one I got each year. ☀

## TRADITIONS

# I Was Ma's Favorite Kid

My mother always made us feel extra special during the holidays.

BY JAY INGERSON Clayton, New York

In most homes, holiday traditions include singing Christmas carols, watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas* or just having a large meal.

We did those things except for the singing, and that was a good

thing. But the tradition I loved most started the first Christmas after I moved out of my parents' house. I was in my early 20s and ready to be on my own.

I was the youngest of six, and I'm sure it was difficult for my

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**WHAT FUN IT IS TO RIDE**

My daughter, Addy, is a true country girl who loves animals. In winter, she and our dogs are always eager to get out the sled.

**SHERRY PEDERSON**

*Homer, Alaska*

**LIFE IN FOCUS**

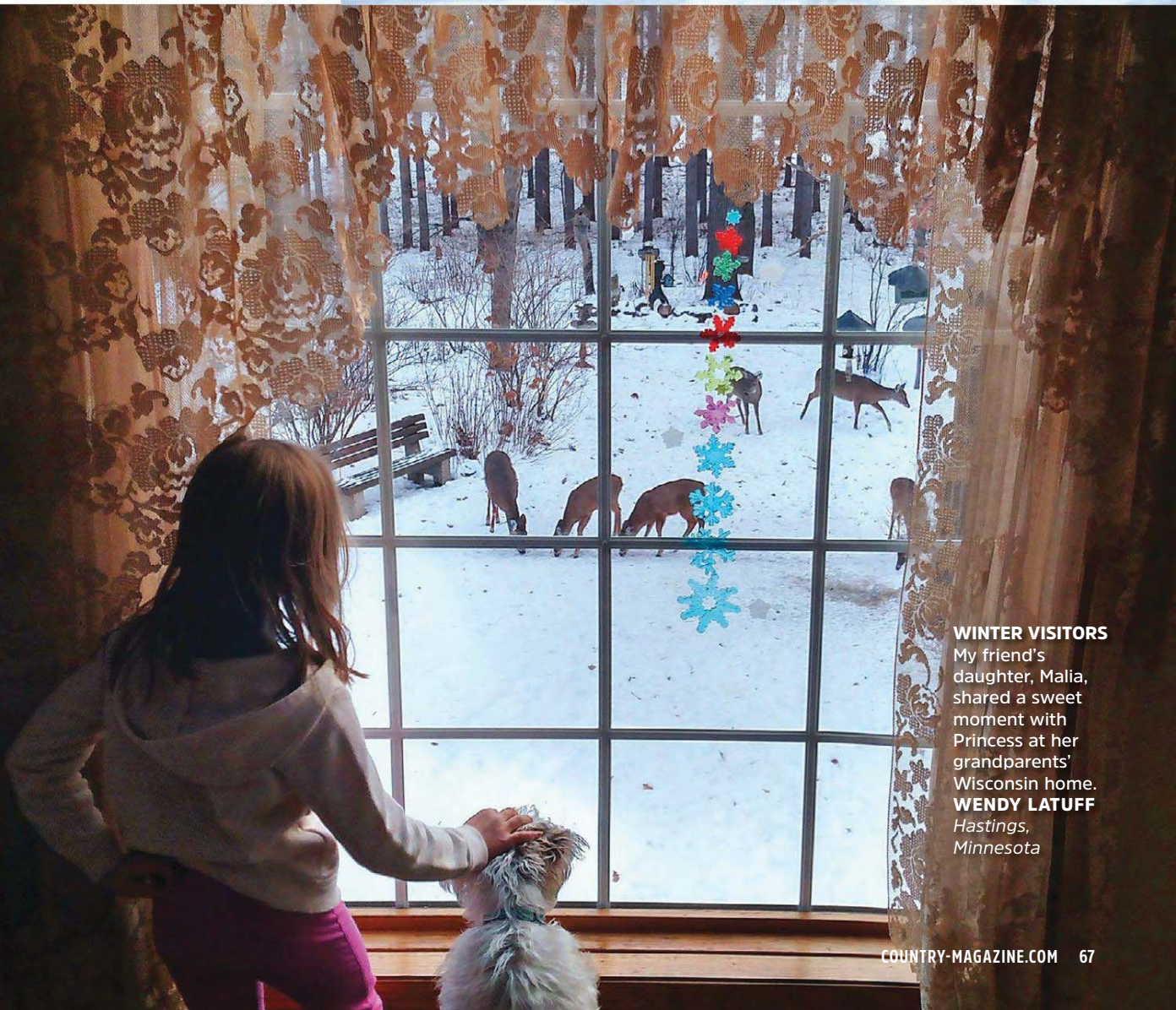
# Snow Angels

Experience the wonder of the season through the eyes of a child.

► **SPECIAL DELIVERY**

Our youngest son, Payton, was so excited to help bring the Christmas tree up to the house.

**TRISHA GOETTLE**  
*Avon, Montana*



**WINTER VISITORS**

My friend's daughter, Malia, shared a sweet moment with Princess at her grandparents' Wisconsin home.

**WENDY LATUFF**  
*Hastings, Minnesota*



▲ **YOU BETTER NOT POUT**

My grandsons had different feelings about Santa. Kash (left) wasn't happy to see the man in the red suit again, Acen (center) wanted no part of it, but Ryder smiled because he knows this jolly elf brings goodies on Christmas!

**MELISSA ZWEYGARDT**  
*St. Francis, Kansas*

▼ **HOLIDAY JOY**

I took this picture of my kids (from left), Rylan, Caleb and Piper, for our Christmas card. My husband, Stewart, bought this 1955 Chevrolet 3100 truck years ago with hopes of restoring it one day with the kids.

**NICOLE FRASCHT**  
*Mason City, Iowa*



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Buttons**

# “My friends all hate their cell phones... I love mine!” Here’s why.

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|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
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| Voice Dial                        | FREE                    | FREE                    |
| Nationwide Coverage               | YES                     | YES                     |
| 30-Day Return Policy <sup>2</sup> | YES                     | YES                     |

More minute plans and Health & Safety Packages available.  
Ask your Jitterbug expert for details.

**“My phone’s battery only lasts a short time.”** Unlike most cell phones that need to be recharged every day, the Jitterbug Flip was designed with a long-lasting battery, so you won’t have to worry about running out of power.

**“Many phones have features that are rarely needed and hard to use!”**

The Jitterbug Flip contains easy-to-use features that are meaningful to you. A built-in camera makes it easy and fun for you to capture and share your favorite memories. And a flashlight with a built-in magnifier helps you see in dimly lit areas. The Jitterbug Flip has all the features you need.

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**BROTHERLY LOVE**

We've adopted Keegan (left) and Christopher, and will soon add little brother Cooper. This was the first Christmas we all knew we'd be together forever, and they couldn't wait to choose a tree.

**CHERYL STORK**

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## Mystery Photo Answer

Did you guess...**Leavenworth, Washington?** The scene on pages 38-39 is from the Bavarian-themed community's holiday lights festival.

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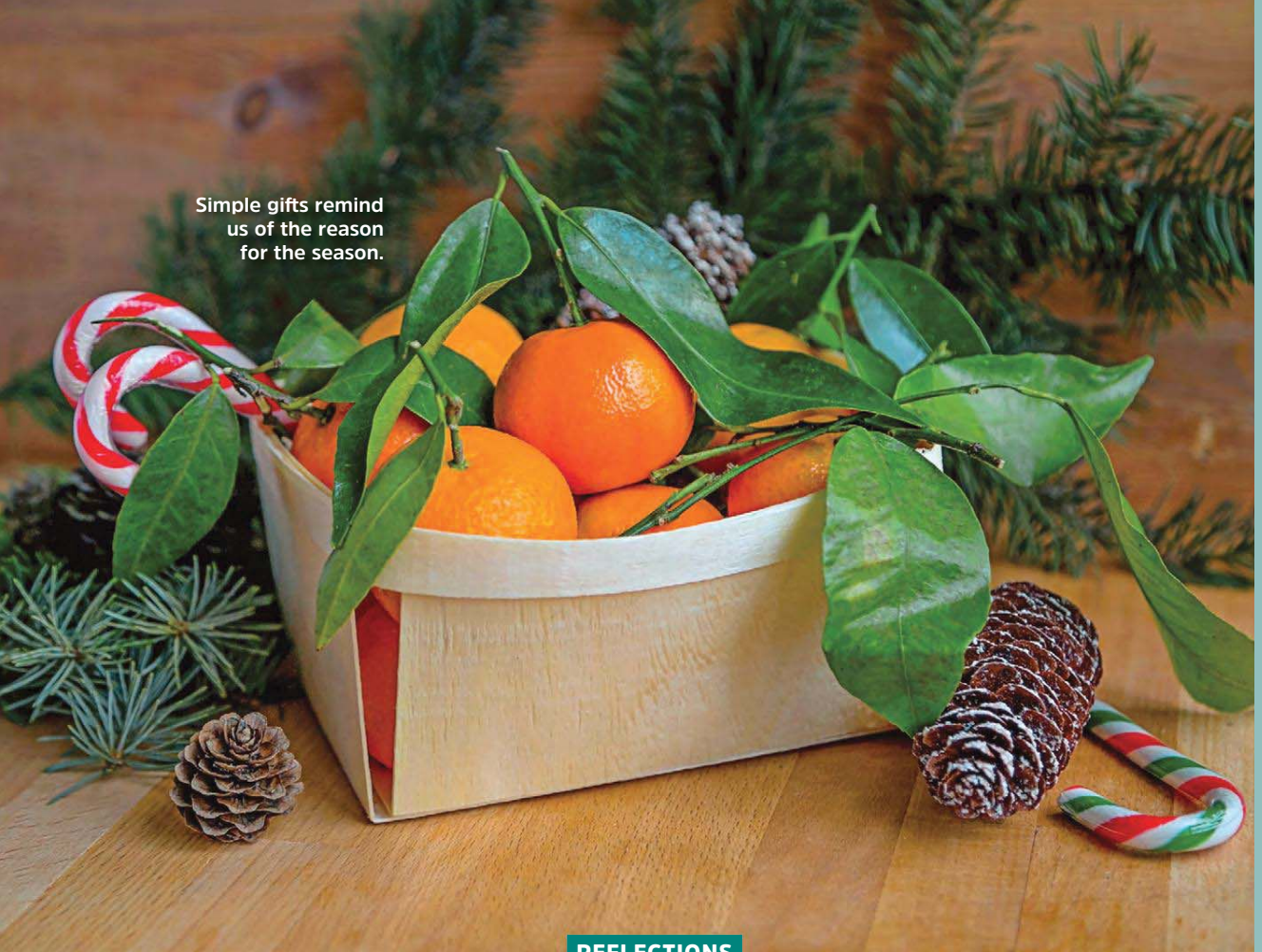
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## REFLECTIONS

# Time for a Change

**MY WIFE, DONNA,** and I had been out of graduate school a couple of years when we could finally afford the Christmas gifts that our little girls really wanted. We told them they could make a list and let them look through some advertisements. But soon they were overcome by the commercialism of the season.

I found myself longing for those simple Christmases centered on family as the girls fretted more and more about what they wanted. It was time to do something about it, so Donna and I found a struggling family who had children who were the same ages as our girls.

“This year,” I told my daughters, “we are going to give Christmas away. You will still get to choose some things, but they will be for a child your age who has greater needs than you.”

I was surprised at the eagerness my daughters showed for this. They spent even more time happily picking out presents: clothes, a nice coat and two toys. Donna and I bought warm clothes for the parents and a full Christmas dinner. We added a box of oranges and baskets of fruit and cookies.

On Christmas Eve, we loaded everything into our car and drove to the family’s apartment. Donna played Santa and took everything to the front door in three trips. We had our car windows open, and our little girls were listening intently. When they heard Donna’s loud knocking on the door and then her feet pounding down the stairs, they squealed with excitement. We heard a young woman’s voice call out, “Thank you.”

Donna and our girls yelled back, “You’re welcome!”

The next day we opened our few presents, played card games, built a snowman and went sledding. In the evening, I read stories to my daughters. We talked about how the Christmas season is about love, friends and family, just as it was two millennia ago when a baby became the newest member of a special family.

As we finished the stories, my daughters snuggled up in my arms. My oldest girl broke the silence. “Daddy, I want to give away Christmas again next year.” I replied, “Me, too.”

**DARIS HOWARD**  
St. Anthony, Idaho

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**WORDS of WISDOM** *You have to choose happiness. It doesn't choose you.*

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A serene winter scene featuring a wooden fence in the foreground, heavily laden with snow. The fence runs across the frame, with a path leading through a dense forest of snow-covered evergreen trees. In the background, a small stream flows through the woods. The sky is a mix of blue and white, suggesting a bright but slightly overcast day.

“Nature is full of genius,  
full of the divinity; so that  
not a snowflake escapes  
its fashioning hand.”

HENRY DAVID THOREAU



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