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January/February 2025



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Minnesota's Guide to Specialty Shopping & Fun Events



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AND THE WINNER IS...

Linda Berndt of Blue Earth won a copy of *Detours*. Linda picked up her copy of *The Country Register* at Michele's Quilting and Sewing.

Faye Groth of Cloquet won a copy of *By the Yard Calendar*. Faye picked up her copy of *The Country Register* from The Quilted Dog Quilt Shop.

Patti Lee Bock of New Ulm won a copy of *The Crazy Quilter*! Pattie Lee picked up her copy of *The Country Register* at The Thimble Box Quilt Shop.

Congratulations to all our winners!



May Your Winter
Be Warm!

Special Events	
January	
1.....	5th Anniversary Sale - Old Alley Quilt Shop - Sherburn
10-12.....	Sargent's Nursery Quilt Show - Pumpkinberry Stitches - Red Wing
11.....	Rope Bowl Class - Up North Quilt Shop - International Falls
17-19.....	Monthly Sew-In - Up North Quilt Shop - International Falls
18.....	Stripology Class - Quilted Dog - Cloquet
24-25.....	Seams and Dreams Pajama Jam - Quilt Haven on Main - Hutchinson
27-Feb 1.....	12th Anniversary Sale - Sewing Seeds Quilt Company - New Ulm
31-Feb 2.....	Quilt Games Retreat - Old Alley Quilt Shop - Sherburn
February	
2.....	Pro Bolt Sale - Quilted Dog - Cloquet
7-8.....	Suberbowl Sale - Welcome Stitchery - Blue Earth
7-9.....	Super Bowl Retreat - Quilt Haven on Main - Hutchinson
14-15.....	Annual Sweetheart Sale - Quilt Haven on Main - Hutchinson
21-23.....	Monthly Sew-In - Up North Quilt Shop - International Falls
21-March 1.....	Snowman Shuffle - Quilted Dog - Cloquet
24-March 1.....	Buy the Bolt Blowout Sale - Prairie Quilting - Windom

Happy Valentine's Day!

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Where in Minnesota?

Somewhere in Minnesota the image to the right can be found.
Where is it?
(Answer on page 17 of this issue)



For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. - Jeremiah 29:11

Happy New Year from your Country Register!

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GIRLFRIEND WISDOM



Joyful

Joyfulness makes your Heart Sing!


Cheerfulness, Contentment, Merriment, Gratification, Exuberance, Jubilation, Enjoyment, Gladness - all synonyms for being Joyful! Many times we confuse Happiness with Joyfulness or vice-versa. We might not perceive the difference at first but after thinking more deeply about it, we will likely come to the realization of the difference. Happiness is temporary. It's a personal emotion that can change quickly depending on outward experiences in our day to day lives. Joy is an inward feeling, like gratitude. You may find a natural action of placing your hand on your heart. It is a deep and meaningful expression. Joy connects people to each other, while happiness consists of momentary connections. Finding true joy can be found through volunteering to help others in any way that highlights your personal gifts or experiences. In this time of new beginnings the **Girlfriend Wisdom** is: Make it a goal to seek ways that nurtures Joy and count the times when your hand automatically comes to your chest and honors your heart as it sings!

Joy & Blessings, *Jody*

Girlfriend Wisdom is written and illustrated by Jody Houghton®.
Color files of this writing and artwork are available: www.JodyHoughtonDesigns.etsy.com



Show us your finished projects!



Colleen finished up this beautiful handmade fall candle mat/mug rug. Quilting the candle mat as well as adding padding made it nice and soft!

Tell us all about a project you are proud of! Send in a picture to be featured in a future issue of The Country Register!
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Buy the Bolt Blowout Sale!
February 24 - March 1
20% off entire purchase when you finish 1 bolt of fabric
30% off entire purchase when you finish 2 or more bolts

Wide variety of quilt patterns and books, quilting notions, rulers, and approximately 3000 bolts of fabric.


Recipe: *Chocolate Graham Cracker Cookie*
submitted by MaryKay Hannan

Ingredients:

- 24 squares graham crackers, crushed
- 6 oz chocolate chips
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts
- powdered sugar for rolling

Directions:

Mix crushed crackers, chips, condensed milk and nuts together - spread in 9x9 buttered pan. Bake 20 minutes at 325°. Cool 20-30 minutes - while warm cut into small pieces, roll into balls, then roll in powdered sugar, twice!
Note: can double for a 9x13 pan. Makes 7 dozen.



2025 The Year of Dreams

by Janet Young

And so, it begins, another brand-new year. But even though January's cold keeps us in the house, it gives us an opportunity to dream, to relax, and even to plan perhaps another new adventure in our life. For example, what would you do differently this year? What changes would be necessary to achieve that goal? How can you make this year one of the most incredible years ever!

I know what you are thinking. Because your life is so overwhelmingly busy, you can't imagine making any changes. But that is exactly the point. This is the time of the year when the activities stop for the most part. So, what better time than NOW!

To get started determine to set aside time each day in January and February to relax. If that means curled up in a blanket on the couch, or sitting by the fireplace, or just enjoying a nice hot chocolate or a warm cup of tea, you are on your way to unwinding and freeing your mind. As an added bonus, play soft background music, and before long you will be in a comfort zone that allows you to think more clearly, and this is the time to dream about your future.

Do you want to continue going in the direction you have been going? And, there is nothing wrong if you are completely satisfied. Or, do you want to make some changes? This is your time to dream big, or to take baby steps. For by setting the course and striving each day to do something that will ultimately get you to that place, you will eventually realize your dream.

Attention Crafters: Do you dream of having a craft room? If so, is there a spare bedroom or attic or basement that could be transformed into your very own space? If not, is there a nook or small area that you could turn into a place to do your crafting? Already have a craft room? Then perhaps, it is time to think of how you can more efficiently use your space. Through reorganizing how you are storing your supplies, you may discover you have more space to work or to collect more materials.

The choice is yours. Don't delay. Make 2025 the year of dreams come true.

- © Janet Young is a Certified Tea and Etiquette Consultant, Co-Founder of Mid-Atlantic Tea Business Association, and prior owner of Over The Teacup

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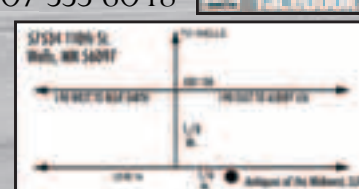
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Now I Understand

by Kerri Habben Bosman



As I write, our house is warm with the scent of freshly baked banana bread and soup simmering on the stove. My husband, Wayne, is setting up a warp on his floor loom. His current weaving project is a blanket for a new grandchild, due in April. I think, too, of the other milestones approaching this year; a granddaughter finishing middle school and two grandchildren graduating from high school.

For nearly six years now, I have had the privilege of watching our seven grandchildren grow and loving them more every day. I am a bonus grandparent, becoming a part of their lives when the youngest was only 1 1/2 years old and the oldest was 14. Now Quinn is 7, and Kaylie is 20. In between are Emma and Isaac (17), Laurel (15), Hunter (14) and Naomi (13).

In both our house in Chapel Hill and now our main residence at the beach in Cape Carteret, memories of them abound. While they are mostly teenagers now, immersed in their expanding worlds, I still feel all of the moments that forged bonds between us.

With Naomi and Laurel, it was tea parties. There were days at our Chapel Hill house with Isaac, Laurel, and Naomi, baking and doing arts and crafts together. The times we picked them up from school or took them to an activity. I can still hear all of them talking at once when we all had dinner together at our house. I often just listened to the cadence of their voices because I knew that free flowing catharsis wouldn't last forever.

With Kaylie, Emma, and Hunter, we more often visited them at the beach. We went to their cheerleading and sporting events. With Kaylie there were dresses altered for school dances. Living here now, we continue to watch Emma cheer and Hunter play sports. No winter sport this year, but all last fall there was football. We pick Hunter up from school sometimes and we are happy when we glean even a full sentence. I have learned to embrace the silence because I know deep down that our simply being there speaks volumes.

There is Quinn. Of the seven children, he is the only one who cannot remember before I became a part of the family. Every one of the kids receives handmade gifts for birthdays, Christmas and just because. Quinn's gifts have included crocheted dinosaurs and a stuffed turtle. He has a toy box in the corner of our TV room for when he visits. These times we cook together. He helps me make breakfast and enjoys carefully fixing everyone's plate just right. We have a regular ritual of making chocolate pudding pie because he loves to use the old-fashioned egg beater.

Like all the kids, he calls me Kerri. Except that sometimes when we are together somewhere, I will mention to someone that I am his bonus grandma. To which he smiles, shrugs a little and says, "she's just my Kerri."

And there is #8 grandchild on the way. While Wayne has been weaving for his or her arrival, I have been crocheting. Presently Baby Bosman has a sweater, a vest, two hats and baby socks already made. And my crochet hook and knitting needles have only just begun.


In some of these articles I have written of the man I called "Dad." He was my stepfather, but to me he was my father. This March it will be 25 years since he passed away. He loved me with an ever-deepening devotion. Every once in a while, I would wonder how he loved me so truly and completely when he hadn't been there my whole life. And when he technically didn't "have to."

I no longer wonder because I now understand completely.

Kerri Habben Bosman is a writer in Cape Carteret, NC. Her email is 913jeeves@gmail.com.



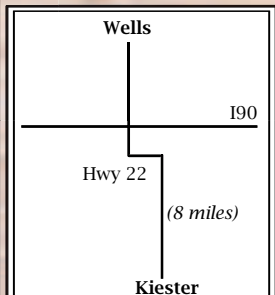
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Pieces From My Heart

by Jan Keller

It's in the Fabric!

"Do you love me?" is a question I incessantly asked my husband in the early years of our marriage. I asked him so often John must have tired of answering! It seems I not only needed to be told that I was loved, but I also appreciated being the recipient of demonstrative love in action.

Many years ago, John demonstrated his love beautifully and from time to time I like to reflect upon that day when we stopped at the mall to enjoy lunch and a movie. After eating, but before the movie started, we had a little time to shop. John headed off in one direction to look at men's stuff, while I went the other way in pursuit of any really great buy.

At the appointed time, we met for the movie. At the conclusion of the movie as we were strolling through the mall to get back to our car, I said, "There's a dress I saw I'd really like to show you. I kind of liked it and wondered if you would too. Do you mind if I show it to you before we go home?"

"Oh really," John replied. "I also saw a dress I thought you'd like."

I just knew he was joshing me. I couldn't imagine he would have taken time to look at dresses—much less find one he thought I'd like. Deciding to call his bluff, I coquettishly said, "Oh really? You show me the one you found first."

As we walked down the corridor, I tried not to indicate which direction to head or which store was the one where I found the dress I liked. Yet, when we got to the correct store, John turned in and led the way.

I looked at him in disbelief when he actually headed down the correct aisle.

As I was thinking, "Man, this guy is really lucky to come this close," as he stopped right in front of the T-rack where 'my' dress was on display.

After picking my chin up off the floor, I looked at him and said, "I can't believe it! That's the very dress I wanted to show you."

At his encouragement I tried the dress on. After modeling it, John said, "Get it if you want it. It could be your valentine present." Instead, after realistic consideration, I hung it back on the rack. It was expensive and I really didn't need it. Besides, this demonstration of his love is a treasured memory is a gift I'll always have to hold in my heart.

It's in the fabric of these seemingly simple day-by-day experiences over the last 57 years that the tapestry of a shared love becomes so evident the question of love no longer needs to be asked. In life's common and unremarkable events, love has a way of weaving an all-encompassing and vital web of sustaining support to relish and reflect on in times of challenge as well as joy.

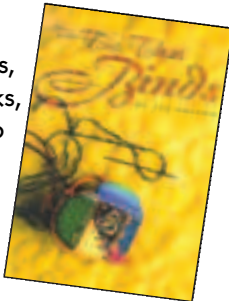


©2025 Jan Keller No reprint without permission Jan shares other pieces of her life in her books, *Pieces From My Crazy Quilt*, and *The Tie That Binds*. These books can be ordered by calling 719-866-8570, or writing: Black Sheep Books, 11250 Glen Canyon Drive, Peyton, CO 80831

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Cozy Quilting Days

by Janet M. Bair

When the days are gray and every morning looks like it is already four o'clock in the afternoon, I put on my yellow sweater, take my Vitamin D and make sure I have enough material to last me through the next snowstorm.

In winter, I sew for summer. Only the most cheerful and bright cotton prints will do. If there are no flowers outside, at least I can work with flowered fabrics. Crock-pot dinner cooking, I use the kitchen table to cut and cut more fabric. I usually cut out far more than I have time to sew. As the snow piles up, I turn my focus to sewing, rather than nervously watching people's cars slide dangerously down our hill. Even the snowplow got stuck one year on the ice.

I have only been quilting for a few years. Since my sewing room is not air-conditioned, I find it hard to quilt in the summer. So, the winter days are cozy times to work with a heavy quilt piling up on my lap. Last year I pieced several quilt tops in the summer but left the full quilting until winter.


Of course, after I finish a quilt, I need to make sure I have another project to work on. After a snowstorm, there is something special about getting shoveled out and driving off to the fabric shop. Going inside a brightly lit store with bolts and bolts of vibrant colors does something to my heart. Even if I don't buy anything, just seeing the colors inspires me.

I browse slowly through the various sections but I am always drawn to the batiks. Their brilliant dyes and abstract patterns spark my imagination as I try to think of what I could make next. I linger over the blue shades, which remind me of the ocean. I have bought far too many pieces of blue batik prints, just because they were beautiful. I can always find a new pattern to try. Or simply get a Fat Quarter. I reluctantly leave the fabric shop and go to the grocery store on my way home.

Inspired again, I start pulling out pieces to go with whatever new fabric I bought and lay it out on our living room rug. I really should have a design wall but our house has so many bookcases, there isn't room for one. The pieces lie there for a few days until I figure what colors go best together before I start cutting and sewing.

Quilting takes a lot more time than I realized. The winter season is perfect for catching up on projects, organizing and watching my local quilt shop's online tutorials to learn new skills. I am realizing that there are far more quilting projects than I will have time for in my life but I can honestly say, I will never be bored!





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Chamomile “The Herb of the Year”

submitted by Plants Herb Farm

Chamomile is the common name for several daisy-like plants of the family Asteraceae. Two of the species, *Matricaria chamomilla* and *Chamaemelum nobile*, used to make to make herbal infusions for beverages. This is a useful herb to use in baking, beverages, and more.

Fresh Flower Chamomile Tea

Ingredients:

- 1 handful of fresh chamomile flowers (increase petal amounts for stronger tea)
- 8 ounces boiling water
- 2 apple mint leaves OPTIONAL

Directions: Harvest the fresh flowers by removing the entire flower head from the stem. Rinse the chamomile flowers in warm water and pat dry. Chamomile tea made using freshly harvested flowers. If necessary, it is possible to store flowers in the refrigerator for up to 48 hours. Wrap the petals in a wet paper towel and store in an airtight container. Boil water in a tea kettle or large pot on the stove. Infusion tea kettles are the best option for fresh flower teas since they have built-in devices to keep the petals separated. Alternatively, you can use another infusion device such as a tea ball or cheesecloth as a makeshift tea bag. Always use pure or spring water and not hot tap water when brewing tea to preserve flavors. Place flower petals in an infuser and let the tea steep in the kettle or pot for 5 minutes. Remove the flower petals and optional mint leaves before pouring into a teacup. Enjoy!

Lavender and Chamomile Tea

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup fresh chamomile flowers
- 1/2 cup fresh lavender flowers
- 1/2 cup apple mint leaves
- 2 whole lemons - juiced
- 1/4 cup honey

Directions:

Place flower petals in an infuser and let the tea steep in the kettle or pot for 5 minutes.

Spiced Chamomile Tea Latte Recipe

Enjoy this naturally caffeine-free, warmly spiced, aromatic chamomile tea latte recipe as a relaxing hot beverage any time of day. It is as easy to make as steeping tea!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup plain unsweetened almond milk
- 1 tablespoon looseleaf chamomile
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 pinch ground cloves

Sweetener to taste (such as honey, maple syrup, stevia, etc.)

Directions: Add the almond milk and chamomile to a small pot. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, and then cover the pot and let it steep for 5 to 10 minutes. Mix in the vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, and sweetener to taste. Strain the mixture 2 times through a fine mesh sieve. To make it frothier, you can use a hand-held frothier.



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Quilt Sampler

Recipe: Garlic Chicken Gnocchi Skillet

Ingredients:

- 1 pound boneless skinless chicken breast
- 1 pound potato gnocchi
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp dried Italian herbs
- Salt and pepper for taste

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken pieces and season with salt, pepper, and dried Italian herbs. Cook until the chicken is golden brown and cooked through, about 6-8 minutes. Remove the chicken from the skillet and set aside. In the same skillet, add the minced garlic and sauté for about 30 seconds. Pour in the chicken broth and use a wooden spoon to scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the skillet. Add the gnocchi to the skillet and bring the mixture to a simmer. Cook for about 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the gnocchi starts to become tender. Reduce the heat to medium-low and pour in the heavy cream. Stir gently to combine and let it simmer for another 2-3 minutes until the sauce starts to thicken. Add the cooked chicken back to the skillet along with the grated Parmesan cheese. Stir everything together until the cheese is melted and the chicken is heated through. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more salt and pepper if needed.



Happy Valentine's Day!

New Prague

Become Inspired

by Annice Bradley Rockwell

Quality Quietude

With the bustling holiday season behind us, there is no doubt we may feel a genuine need for a reprieve. And in many cases, that is just what winter provides. As we go outside into our yards during one of the first real snowstorms of the season, we may recognize the unrivaled depth of silence. The trees, the ground, all of nature is blanketed under the secret of snow and our world has been beautifully transformed. This stillness brings with it an opportunity for us to match nature's quality quietude.



Landscapes of Change

Creating our own interior landscapes of change is one of the joys of country decorating. It is at this time of year after the tree has been taken down and all our decorations have been packed away, we have a clean slate to reinvent our spaces and make them a secret sanctuary to ward off the chill of winter. New arrangements of furniture by the hearth invite intimate conversation and storytelling over a piping hot bowl of beef stew on a cold Sunday evening. A recent purchase of a schoolmaster's desk in early blue can turn a vacant corner of a room into a colonial vignette complete with a stately Windsor chair, early leatherbound books and a stoneware inkwell with a turkey feather quill. A small country cupboard that was found at a local antique shop can transform a room into a quaint winter retreat when it is filled with antiques like blue-decorated stoneware, early woven rye baskets, redware and antique pewter. Woven textiles in colonial colors like soldier blue or tavern mustard are a wonderful way to change the look of a room. They can be layered beautifully among our favorite pieces to lend the perfect country accent. Antique quilts can also be hung or folded to fit in cupboards to add dimension and style.

Perhaps one of the best investments for winter to create a serene environment would be lighting. Beautiful lighting in the form of stoneware lamps with hand-crafted hexagon shades, antique whale oil lamps which come in enticing forms or electrified tin candle lamps which create an inviting, primitive tone are all choices that create a signature country look. The ambiance that lighting can create is something that is a true blessing all winter and beyond.

Blessings of Time


The quiet of our winter months often provides time to dream and to plan. Sometimes our very best ideas come to us in the months of winter. We have time to spend thinking more deeply about things and often with less distraction, so our ideas have time to incubate and grow.

Another blessing of winter is the chance it gives us to view things in a different perspective. Just as the landscape around us affords us a completely new view of our world, it also gives us a chance to explore the different surroundings which in and of itself is restorative.

This winter, embrace the special moments of stillness. Experience the fresh-fallen snow in a wooded glen to feel the depth of its silence. Take days that are slower-paced and use them to create your own sanctuary to enjoy. And as you gaze out upon the beauty of winter, remember that Her secret is always the promise of the coming spring.

--Annice Bradley Rockwell is an educator and owner of Pomfret Antiques. She is currently working on her book, New England Girl. NewEnglandGirl2012@hotmail.com






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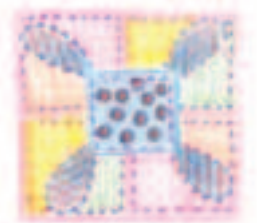
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Writing From Life

by Jeanette Lukowski



Technology

In a True Confessions sort of way, today's story begins with a truth about me: I have a Love / Hate relationship with technology. Perhaps one third of my days pass with me being indifferent to having a smart phone, one third finds me annoyed with the constant warning "pings" my 2023 car generates...but yesterday, the remaining one third celebrated an adventure with my elderly mother—brought to fruition thanks to the help of those two technological devices.

We were sitting in Mother's local public library, checking the library's computer for the next title one of her monthly book clubs will discuss. My job would be to climb the umpteen stairs to a very high second floor, extract the book from the shelf, and bring it back downstairs to Mother while she waited near the circulation desk.

Finding the title in the computer, Mother turned to me: "Where is Little Falls? North or south?"

"North," I quickly replied. I drive north to visit my mother several times a month; the town she was asking about is, in turn, further north.

"No one comes that way," she replied rather sadly. "The computer shows that they have one copy on the shelf."

Since I was already spending the night with Mother (to accompany her to an early morning doctor appointment the next day), I pulled my smart-phone from my purse—merely out of curiosity. I punched the town's name into the mapping program, and discovered: "It's 37 miles away. Want to go?"

My smart-phone clock had already displayed the time as 4:08pm, and the roads were still clear of weather—an important factor for a late November driving adventure.

Mother's interest was piqued...but she's still the pragmatist. "Do you have their number right there?"

Affirmative.

"Call them first, to make sure they have it in hand."

Again, the smart-phone made it easy. One finger's touch on the search engine's screen, and my phone switched over to dialing mode.

A few minutes later, the librarian confirmed that the book was in her hand. Without confirming the plan with Mother, I told the librarian we would be on our way, and disconnected the call.

Getting out of the city's traffic took a bit longer than I had anticipated though, and I began to get nervous about the time. (My map feature said we would arrive by 4:58pm.) Thanks to the Bluetooth connection between my car and my phone, I was about to call the librarian again at 4:41pm. "Would it be easier if I just gave you Mother's library card information now? That way you can leave the book outside the door, if we don't get there before you close."

The librarian graciously reassured me that everything would be fine, as they don't leave at exactly 5pm, but she took the library card information anyway.

Returning to Mother's apartment later that evening, I realized that I *am* pretty spontaneous. Technology was just the tool which aided me in accomplishing the task.

Next challenge?



© Jeanette Lukowski 2024. Jeanette is a mother, grandmother, teacher, and author who lives in Mankato, MN. She is inspired by the lives of strong women. Her email address is: writingfromlife@yahoo.com

Random Acts

by Maranda Jones

Always Will

The picture my mom painted when I was a little girl still hangs in the hallway. And probably always will. Its bright colors and clear message say everything our hearts have always felt. And probably always will. "There's no place like home...except Grandma's!" Even though we are moving in and making it our own, it still feels like Grandma's house and probably always will. There are stacks of memories in every room. This one welcomes us home and sends us on our way each day as we pass the knotty pine closet.

My sister and I spent a lot of time with her in this house, spending the night often. Not just weekends and holiday breaks, but weeknights too. Since Grandma was the school secretary for all of my academic years, she had to be there before most, and our breakfast was ready bright and early on those mornings. I remember getting up prior to sunrise and watching her put on makeup in the mirror in the lavender bath. Those walls are the same color they've always been and probably always will. I had never given much thought to the walls and structure of her home until recently.

Moving our three children, and our two decades of collected items as a married couple, into her home has shown us how practical this house is. There is not an inch of wasted space, and everything has a purpose. The cabinets give us ample storage for towels, sheets, dishes, food, and more. The kitchen counters are lower than most because my grandmother was short in stature. This works to my benefit because I am too. My six foot tall grandfather thought of little things like this to make this life easier for my grandma, and she was forever grateful. In the nights I spent with her during her last week of life here on earth, still in her own home, she told me repeatedly, "Your grandpa built me the perfect house. This home has served me well."

These conversations carved their way into my mind and heart, and probably always will. In my lifetime, my grandma had never once referred to my grandfather as that title. She called him by his name, Vernon, in every story she ever told us, and she told us many, at least one a day. She only called him "your daddy" when talking to my mom and uncle. They have been missing him for over 50 years. He died at a young age but has always been in their hearts and always will. In my grandma's last days, he became my grandpa. This well-loved popular man, whom I never had the opportunity to meet, felt closer than ever.

I started thinking even more about them as she was still here in her home of over sixty years, a house that served her well in every stage of life. Raising two children, hosting her granddaughters, and enjoying her great grandchildren were all realized under this roof. My kids' toys were always within reach in the front closet, and they haven't been able to move them yet. So, there they stay. We are in no rush to clear out those little reminders of how welcome we have always felt. We feel so honored to call this our home, feeling comforted in our grief without Grandma, remembering the memories we made here within these walls and out.

As I look out the window I see the trees I attempted to climb in my younger days and the pastures where I learned to drive. Grandma's green Pontiac and the old blue Ford drove many miles as we checked cows, fixed fence, and caught falling stars as she said, "Money, money, 'fore the week's over!" Now my kids are taking those paths among the terraces during the day and counting more stars as the coyotes howl at night.

The days and nights at our new address have been filled with peace, quiet, comfort, and joy. I pray they always will.

© 2024 Maranda K. Jones

Maranda Jones' new book *Random Acts* is now available at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)
The book includes her acclaimed articles from the last decade!



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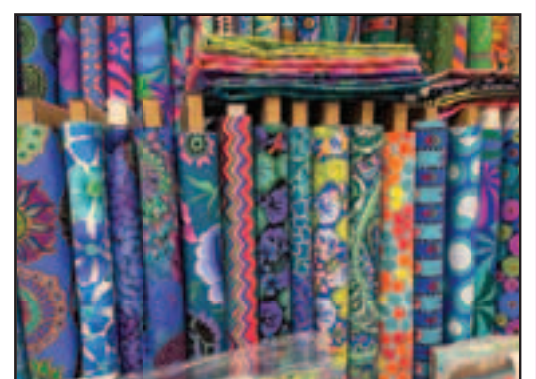
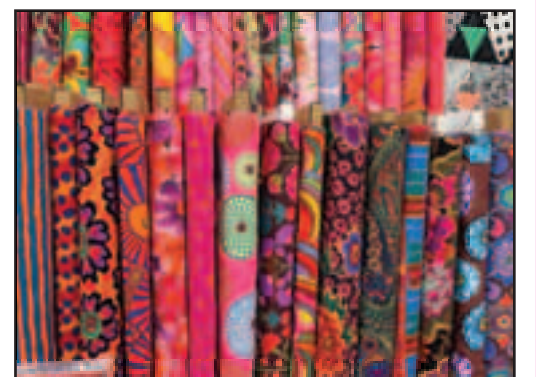


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Putting the Art of Patterns into Practice

By Barbara Kalkis

Life is full of ironies. For example, I'm a terrible cook but own more than 30 cookbooks and hundreds of recipes untouched by buttered and floured fingers. I'm the same way with patterns. In fact, I could be the poster-girl for patterns of every kind. My house is filled with them. They line cupboard shelves. They are stuffed into magazines and books. They are stacked in my craft room. Others stand in alphabetical order by subject in drawers meant for business: Cardmaking, Cooking, Crochet, Embroidery, Exercise, Knit, NOK (Next-of-Kin), Quilting, Sewing, and so on. You get the idea. It's not as if I toil at all these activities. I don't, but I can never tell when I will become interested enough to take up some new hobby and perhaps even excel at it. I'm very optimistic in that view.



Patterns are promises for success. Gifted artisans create patterns for the rest of us to follow in making a quilt, crocheting a sweater, or paper-folding an origami-style greeting card. Then every activity we tackle can supposedly be mastered once we learn the craft's unique vocabulary: mountain fold/valley fold; chroma, blooms; ch3, scx24, sl st; log cabin, double wedding ring, sawtooth, monkey wrench; flange and J bolts. Even recipes with their international vocabulary like "mise en place", "mirepoix", "the holy trinity" are simply a pattern for making

a dish that looks exactly like the one in the video or magazine photo. Supposedly, by following the pattern meticulously, you can glide to smooth completion of your project. (I, of course, do not know this by personal experience but have heard about it.)

These days, there are even patterns for preserving your wishes after you sail into the great beyond. A NOK kit tells you exactly how to assemble your crucial documents and records, so you can leave your affairs in perfect order for your successors. No beneficiary fights over who gets the silverware.

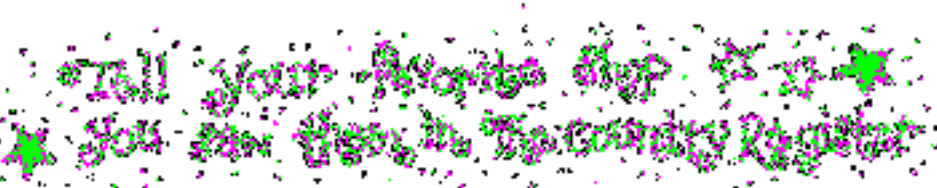
My mother taught my sisters and me how to use patterns for all kinds of crafts, but my collection really grew out of a lifelong love of reading harrowing mysteries and armchair spy novels. Yes, there is a connection. John LeCarré, Ian Fleming, Agatha Christie, Helen MacInnes, and an army of other writers all include the concept of patterns in their stories. The running theme in these two genres is that success in crime or espionage requires the ability to spot coincidences and understand the unique pattern they form. Ian Fleming, who worked in British Naval Intelligence, defined the discovery of patterns this way: "Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. Three times is enemy action." Andrew Horowitz, stated it more simply in his novel, Moonflower Murders: "Everything in life has a pattern, and a coincidence is simply the moment when that pattern becomes briefly visible."

Those quotes have stuck with me as words of wisdom. They reveal more than a twist on the crafter's definition of the word "pattern". They demonstrate the role that patterns play in our life experiences.

Everywhere in life, something nudges us to create a pattern. The seasons instruct us to plant seeds, nurture them, and enjoy the benefits of harvest. Work life enforces a pattern of how we spend our weeks. Patterns help us bring order to our everyday activities, going to the gym, taking the kids for lessons, lunch with friends.

While the new year is young and we are feeling fresh and energized with resolutions and visions for the months ahead, it's the perfect time to design new life patterns that will enrich our days. Here's cheers for every successful pattern you design!

©Barbara Kalkis, 2024. Barbara spends her time writing, teaching, and working in high tech. In off-hours, she studiously follows patterns for making greeting cards. She's author of Little Ditties for Every Day...A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm. Contact her at BarbaraKalkis01@gmail.com.



Search for the underlined words in the recipe in the word search below!

Green Enchilada Chicken Soup

recipe courtesy of The Carefree Kitchen

- 2 cups cooked chicken diced into 1/2" chunks

2 - 15 oz cans white beans rinsed and drained

4 oz cream cheese cubed and softened

1 cup corn, canned or frozen

1 - 4 oz can green chilies

1 - 14 oz can green enchilada sauce
- 1 tsp onion powder

1 tsp garlic powder

1 tsp chili powder

1/2 tsp salt

4 cups chicken broth

- Optional Toppings:
- 2 cups tortilla strips

1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded

1/2 cup sour cream

1 large avocado, diced

fresh cilantro, chopped

Add cooked chicken, white beans, cream cheese, corn, green chiles, green enchilada sauce, onion powder, garlic powder, chili powder, salt and chicken broth to a slow cooker. Stir. Turn heat on medium or high heat for 2-3 hours, or until the soup is hot. Ladle into bowls and add your favorite toppings!



Recipe: Crockpot Sausage Casserole

Ingredients:

- 1lb smoked sausage, diced
- 4 potatoes, diced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 tsp paprika

Directions:

Add Sausage, potatoes, onion, bell pepper, diced tomatoes, chicken broth and paprika to the crockpot. Cook on low for 5-6 hours until potatoes are tender.





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Her First Quilt

by Deb Heatherly

Although I've been a quilter for more than 42 years, my younger sister Donna, has just recently caught the 'quilting bug'. It all started when she attended the quilt retreat, which I host annually each September. She had no idea what to expect and told everyone there that she was "not really a sewer." That thought soon fell by the wayside because during her time there, she pieced, quilted and bound a small quilt for her rescue dog Kalie. After she completed that quilt, she was ready to learn more, so I taught her to piece and trim half square triangles. She made numerous half square triangles at the retreat and then made more when she returned home. Not long after, she sent me a picture of the table runner she had made using them. I knew a quilter had been born.

As a bonus of her time at retreat, she made a lot of new friends and she and I made memories to last a lifetime. I don't think she realized just how happy my heart was seeing her discover what has been my passion for years.

Like a kid in a candy store, she was captivated by the colors and designs of all of the wonderful quilts being stitched by fellow attendees. So much so that her new found appreciation for quilting has led to countless trips to the fabric store, the purchase of a second sewing machine and the re-organizing of her spare bedroom into a wonderful place to create. Her husband, Shawn, has helped by repurposing an existing table for her second machine by cutting it to her specifications and painting it a wonder shade of teal.

Donna has always been creative, but this foray into quilting is totally new. Like a sponge she is soaking up every bit of information she can. Abbreviations like WOF and HST mean nothing to a beginner, but she now knows what they are. And, terms like "tone on tone" and "directional prints," what do they all mean? I am here to answer any and all of those questions.

I remember 40 years ago being stumped by WOF myself. I had purchased a magazine and fell in love with a pattern that looked pretty simple. That was until I started to cut and ran into the term WOF. I was stuck. WOF sounded to me back then like the noise a dog makes. How could that have anything to do with fabric? With no one to ask, no google or internet search that long ago, and no quilt shop nearby to pop in to find an answer, that pattern sat for weeks. I don't remember how I finally figured it out but eventually that quilt was ready to sew. The pattern did not mention anything about squaring up the units as I pieced and that is another story. That quilt ended up a little wonky.

Fast forward 40 years...it's those type of memories that I try to think back on when I teach and I try to explain every little detail to my students. We have to remember that our everyday quilting terms can be as foreign to a new quilter as the abbreviations the younger generation uses for texting is to me. Maybe I'll type my sister up a cheat sheet.

If you ever have the chance to nurture a new quilter, jump at the chance! Seeing our quilting world anew, with the freshness we had when we started, is more heartwarming than words can express. And, being able to share the adventure with someone special makes it that much more special.

And if, like me, you are organizing your fabric and notions in the new year, keep an eye out for things you no longer need and pass them on. I'm sure there is a new quilter out there who would love to have them. As a bonus, maybe you'll make a quilting friend and get to pass on your love of our amazing craft. Like that old credit card commercial said, "fabric \$12.99 yd, wool pressing mat \$40, quilting with friends or loved ones, Priceless!"

Deb Heatherly is a designer for Creative Grids® rulers and the author of eight popular pattern books. Creative Grids® fans are invited to join her Facebook group, "Grids Girls," for tips and inspiration, and two free mysteries each year. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/770429649800457/>.

Shop Owners are invited to join her group just for you, "Grids Girls for Quilt Shop Owners Only" <https://www.facebook.com/groups/273593657256524> Visit Deb's website at www.Debcatsnquilts.com.



Triggers

by Wayne M. Bosman

My wife, Kerri and I have been slowly working on the final step to complete our bittersweet move to the coast, deciding what to do with the house that we lived in in Chapel Hill. Leaving it is not as easy as I thought that it might be. This is the house that we started our life together in. It is almost empty now, but still packed with memories. It's a small house by modern standards, under 1,000 square feet, but all we needed really. Just enough space to enjoy the things that we really loved and wanted, but not so much space to encourage more "projects" without finishing the last one.

I am sprawling on the last remaining couch now. The one we aren't sure what to do with. What slows us down in making that sort of decision is memories and the things that trigger them. On the couch with me is a crocheted blanket. A crocheted blanket on this couch was the first thing that Kerri brought here from her old life - that and her sewing basket. I came home from work one day and they were just there. It was the first tentative step toward merging our lives, and I can't see the blanket on the couch without remembering that day.

This couch was one of the places where we sat and looked out the window at the steady stream of wildlife the overgrown yard attracted. As if on cue, a quartet of does and fawns just wandered into the yard grazing as they come and go.

Another trigger to the memories of all of the deer we have watched here.

The kitchen table is still here. We spent countless hours drinking our morning coffee and looking out at the bird feeder and the variety of birds and squirrels that it drew. We enjoyed the regulars, scrambling to figure out what it was when a less common bird stopped in. We hoped and wondered if it would stay. Kerri's favorite is a mourning dove. Mine is an Eastern towhee. For no obvious reason, seeing them made us feel that it was a special day and all was right with the world.

In the foreground outside the kitchen window are the lantana and the hummingbird feeders. Absolute delight from the first sighting in the spring until their migration in fall. Triggers of more memories that anchor me to this place.

During the pandemic, three of my grandchildren spent one day a week doing their schoolwork in this little house. It was a way to let them out of their own house when so many people were going nowhere at all. Kerri always made their favorite treats appear, and they developed little rituals with tea parties, baking and crafting. The best artwork was suitably framed and displayed. We can keep that to trigger those memories. Those grandchildren are teenagers now with not much time in their expanding lives for grandparents. That is the way of the world, yet one hopes that they don't forget those special times completely.

The old house was not without its flaws. The woods that nurtured wildlife also prevented us from growing any food that needed sunlight. When something did grow, the squirrels would usually get to it first. It is an old house with all the little issues that brings with it. Old pipes. Old wiring.

Still there are all of the memories and things that trigger them. My mom lives in the house that she and my dad acquired in 1946. How many memories and triggers does that house contain? We have been fortunate enough to get to choose where we live. Not everyone gets to. Some of the triggers will have to stay with the house while the memories move with us.

Wayne M. Bosman is a retired auto mechanic in Cape Carteret, NC. His email is wbosman1@gmail.com



I was going to quit all my bad habits for the new year, but then I remembered that nobody likes a quitter!

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Book Review

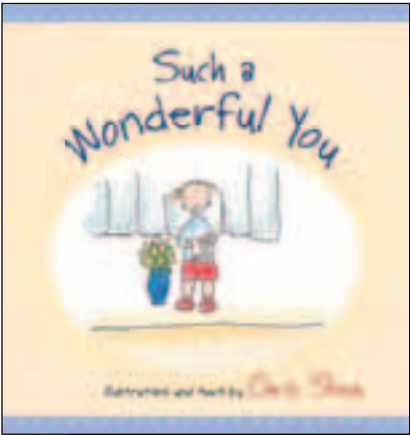
Such a Wonderful You

by Chris Shea

Artist and author Chris Shea, creator of the popular If God Used Sticky Notes series, presents her whimsical, pen-drawn characters and an inspiring reminder to speak those important, yet simple, words from the heart that are so easy to put off—words like:

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Recipe: Sausage Tortellini Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 pound ground Italian Sausage
- 1 small yellow onion
- 3 cloves minced garlic
- 3 tbsp flour
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1/2 tsp oregano
- 1 pinch cayenne
- 1 tsp hot sauce
- 1/2 tsp mustard powder
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 1 pinch red pepper flakes
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 5 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups kale, chopped
- 2 cups tortellini
- salt to taste

Directions:

Remove the casings from the sausage. Cook and crumble the sausage and diced onions over medium-high heat until the onions are softened and the sausage is cooked through. Drain grease. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add the flour and cook for 1-2 minutes. Add basil, oregano, cayenne, hot sauce, mustard powder, pepper, and red pepper flakes. Stir to combine. Add the chicken broth and use a silicone spatula to "clean" the bottom of the pot. Slowly stir in the heavy cream. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer. Add the kale and tortellini and simmer for 3-5 minutes. (If your tortellini needs longer cooking time, add the tortellini first, then the kale during the last 5 minutes.) Taste the soup and add salt if desired. Start with 1/4 tsp and add more after that if needed.



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This month in Minnesota History

January 11, 1909: Canada and the United States sign a treaty forming the International Joint Commission, a legislative body charged with preventing and settling disputes in the boundary waters region.

February 1, 1886: St. Paul's first Winter Carnival opens, hosting competitions in curling, skating, and ice polo and boasting the first ice palace in the United States. Built in Central Park, the palace is 140 feet long, 120 feet wide, and 100 feet high.

From The Minnesota Book of Days (Minnesota Historical Society Press)



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This Farm Girl's Life Was a Patchwork Quilt

by Nancy Nash

My Aunt Phebe grew up on a farm in Illinois prior to WWII. The farm lacked electricity until the late 1930s, and the house had no running water until after she had left. Her family was hard-working and loving, and she soon learned to cook, sew, and garden. She delighted in attending a one-room school for her elementary education.

At the age of twelve, she contracted pneumonia and landed in the hospital, where she almost died. The experience implanted a desire to become a nurse, which she subsequently did. In later years, she was employed in private duty, with her last client living to be 103.

When she was 15, young Phebe started driving her Aunt Margaret to town to trade the eggs her aunt's hens had produced for butter, salt, and flour. No drivers' licenses were required in the state, although that was soon to change. The process of obtaining one was simple: if you were tall enough to place 25 cents on a bank teller's counter, you were given a license. My Aunt Phebe got hers, and she remained an excellent driver all her life.

My aunt married and moved to Massachusetts, where my uncle owned a quarry filled with dinosaur footprints embedded in layers of rock. He sold footprints and presided over a museum/display room that attracted many visitors, including busloads of schoolchildren. My aunt delighted in working there, meeting people from all over the nation and occasionally from other countries as well. But as she and my uncle settled into a home and began to raise three sons, the skills she had learned as a farm girl were also much in evidence.

Aunt Phebe tended a small garden and cooked delicious hearty meals. Much of the cellar functioned as a pantry, with row upon row of canned goods and preserves and a freezer full of meat. It was colorful, well-organized, and neat. Her kitchen expertise earned her a role in many a church supper.

Sewing found its way into the house as she made her own clothes. One cold winter, she devised her own pattern for pullover shirts to be worn by my uncle and my father. This was before synthetic fleece was popular, and I don't remember the fabric she used, but I would guess it was a wool felt. Snugger than a sweatshirt, the garment fit well under a heavy jacket and was dense enough to protect against winter winds.

Aunt Phebe made quilts. She had started doing so as a young girl, using wool from sheep on the farm. For her children and grandchildren, she made patchwork quilts for use as bedspreads, even one with a dinosaur motif!

In later years, she and I travelled to other towns to look at quilt exhibits. I recall our amazement in viewing a beautifully hand-sewn comforter comprised of hundreds of small pieces of fabric forming an intricate geometric pattern. We learned that a petticoat in the 1700s might be quilted to trap body heat in cold weather. In my mind's eye, I see a "crazy quilt" consisting of bright patches that seemed to glow against their background of dark velvet, like stars in a night sky. It had been created locally in the 1800s and was truly a work of art.

In a sense, Aunt Phebe's life was like a patchwork quilt designed of varied images and an array of colors. She used skills learned as a farm girl growing up in Illinois to tend to the needs of her small-town Massachusetts family and friends. Her values of hard work, generosity, and kindness transferred into every setting she found herself in, much like patchwork images and colors spilling onto the "canvas" of a comforter.



Erosion on the Road: From Cursive to Texting

by Kathy J. Stotak

This week my friend Becky and I met up at a local park for a walk and talk. Not a fast-paced, exercise walk, but a slow stroll that matches the pace of our conversation. The park we love to meet up at is halfway between our houses. It is dotted with old stone building ruins – a side of a wall here, an old stone house frame there, and in-between is a zig-zag, up and down meander to the river and back. The river offers many inlets to take shoes off and let the water carry away both our worries and our wishes.

When was the last time you connected, really connected, with a friend? If it was recent, count ourselves lucky. We are suffering a communication crisis. Although connection is at our fingertips, we starve for depth and richness. We crave to be heard, seen and understood.

I learned the art of connection from my mother. She had several pen pals –



friends from many places that would take turns sending beautiful cursive, single space letters on their best stationary. Writing letters to far-away friends was a weekly activity. When I would glimpse at her during writing time, I could tell she was put in a meditative state as she selected pieces of her heart to place on the page.

My mother even had "round robin" pen pals; a group of former girlfriends who kept in touch over the years through their set of four letters in an envelope. Before they sent the envelope to the next friend, they would read the three letters from their friends, then replacing their own last letter with a new one. It was a sweet, slow drip of a meaningful exchange that kept their bond strong across decades.

Naturally then, I had pen pals too. Then when free long-distance became a thing, my evenings were spent on the phone in one to two-hour phone conversations. The only purpose of those calls was to chat. It wasn't to plan an outing, to ask a pointed question – it was just one soul talking to another soul.

Today, long and juicy phone calls are a rare occurrence. Letter writing is a lost art. Long, meandering strolls are something meant for vacation. For many of us, the only uninterrupted time we set aside for connection may be with a therapist.

How did this slow erosion happen?

1. When we stopped writing cursive and started to print.
2. When we stopped mailing hand-written letters and switched to email.
3. When life became too busy for a phone call so we switched to text.
4. When texting became cumbersome for our fingers, we traded it to click a "thumbs up" when scrolling.

Out of this entire dilution, I think it was texting that ruined it all. Texting created chopiness when thoughts are meant to flow. A spurting of words is no replacement for the continuous pour of heart and mind.

How has communication changed over time in your life? Is it different than five, ten even twenty years ago?

It's time to reclaim back our connection. It's a choppy world out there. Let's re-stitch our connection with others. Let's quit with the too busy-ness and build back slow conversations.

We are going full circle, friends. Have fun with it. Instead of texting a friend, try calling and see what happens. Surprise them when you say, "I just called because I was thinking of you."

Instead of planning an outing with a friend, have them drop by to simply sit at the dining room table. Watch and feel what happens to your heart as you play with these ancient communication modes. Dust off that old stationary set and dig out a stamp. You'll likely make someone's day.

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A Cup of Tea with Lydia

by Lydia E. Harris

Pouring Out Love

The new year is a perfect time to turn over a new leaf—a tea leaf, of course. Let’s warm our winter days with favorite tea blends or try new ones. There are many choices: black, green, white, oolong, flavored teas, and herbal tisanes.

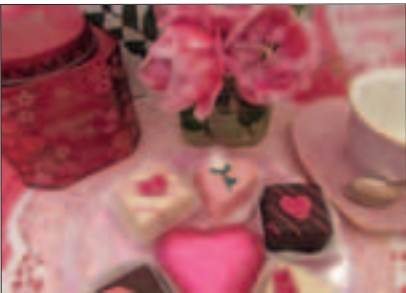
With virtually no calories and lots of antioxidants, tea is good for our health. Green tea, which is unfermented, is considered especially beneficial. If you haven’t developed a taste for it, try a flavored green tea such as Bigelow’s Constant Comment.

Besides the health benefits of tea, a tea break reduces stress. The ritual of brewing, sipping, and relaxing with a fragrant cup of tea provides a soothing interlude.

I especially enjoy sharing a cup of tea with others. When my niece stopped by to drop off a family Bible, I asked, “Do you have time for a cup of tea?” She did. A pot of Apricot Sunrise tea (Ahmad Tea) and homemade gingersnaps sweetened our visit.

With Valentine’s Day around the corner, a heart-TEA theme and a rosy brew sound inviting. Why not pour out your love to others over a cup of tea?

I’m reminded that “God has poured out His love into our hearts” (Romans 5:5 GNT). Now I’m ready to pour my heart into a teatime for someone who needs love. Will you join me?



From Lydia’s recipe file:

Turkey and Cranberry Tea Sandwiches

Make plenty. Guests will gobble them up.

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 4 slices wheat bread | 4 slices white bread |
| 8 slices deli turkey | Jellied cranberry sauce |
| Mayonnaise | |
1. Lightly spread wheat bread with jellied cranberry sauce.
 2. Top these 4 bread slices with 2 turkey slices on each.
 3. Lightly spread the white bread with mayonnaise.
 4. With mayonnaise side up, cut out four tiny hearts with 3/4-inch cookie cutter, one in each corner of the slice.
 5. Place the white bread on the turkey, mayonnaise side down.
 6. Slice cranberry sauce the thickness of the bread. Cut tiny hearts from the cranberry sauce and slip them into the heart-shaped holes cut in the bread.
 7. Trim crust and cut into four square sandwiches. Chill until ready to serve.
- Makes 16 sandwiches.

Lydia E. Harris is a tea enthusiast and the author of three books for grandparents: *GRAND Moments: Devotions Inspired by Grandkids*, *In the Kitchen with Grandma: Stirring Up Tasty Memories Together*, and *Preparing My Heart for Grandparenting*, all available at amazon.com.

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Stories from a Southern New Jersey Farmer

by Ed Cuneo

Memories of Grandmom's House

While sitting and reading in my living room this winter, my mind was diverted by the wind that blew against the house. My first response was to pull the wool blanket up a little tighter to my lap. I did. But then I smiled and reflected back to a time when that sound was comforting to a young boy growing up on a farm.

I know there are people out there who abhor winter winds. I do not happen to be one of them. It reminds of the days growing up and spending time at my grandparent's house while I was sick and home from school.

My grandparents' house is situated on a rise in the front of their property so naturally it is subject to windy conditions. The bedroom in the front of the house where I convalesced was in the direct path of the westerly blows that found their way across the farm.

There were no TVs in the bedrooms at my grandparents' house because the rule was that TV was to be used only on certain occasions such as watching the news or sports. My grandfather made the call on those programming choices. (Later in life he relaxed his iron fisted attitude as he and Grandmom watched game shows after dinner for entertainment).

Even though those days were over 50 years ago, I remember them as if they happened yesterday. Grandmom would tuck me into bed and bring me some tea. Sometimes she would read scripture from the Bible or a story from a children's story book. Then I was expected to rest by either reading a book or sleeping.

Reading a book lasted only so long so I spent a lot of time listening to the sounds of the farm. One of those was the wind blowing, a beautiful combination of pulsating currents that blew against the storm windows, gently rattling it back and forth which caused it to whistle. It may seem to some as ominous but to me it was as gentle as a mother rocking me to sleep.

Between the homemade quilt and sheets on the bed, there was no better sleeping pill. And when I awoke the sickness most of the time was gone or on its way to making me feel better.

The rhythm of the weather has always been a welcoming occurrence to me. Whether it was the wind that blows against the house, sleet banging off the siding or rain pelting the roof in the middle of the night, these sounds provide a sound track that is comforting.

I've read where it has been suggested that this is a primal reaction to a time when our ancestors had to live with the natural causes of the earth. Maybe one of my ancestors found it to be a time of great reflection like I do. So, it may be it is in the genes. But I like to think that a combination of a grandmother's love, a warm bed and secure home make those natural sounds more alluring.



Ed Cuneo is a "Jersey Farm Boy" born and raised and still residing in Southern New Jersey with his wife, Teresa, daughter Anna and her rescue dog Henry. A retired school teacher, he owns the last 14 acres of his grandparents' farm where he has a market garden which serves as much as a place of quiet reflection as it does for its bountiful food supply.

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At Least We're Not Living at the North Pole

by Becky Van Vleet

Fierce gusts of frigid wind whipped through the air, carrying with them huge snowflakes that danced and twirled in a white blur. The Colorado skies opened up where we live and dumped more than two feet of snow in an autumn snowstorm, necessitating three consecutive days of school closures. As my husband and I ventured out of our house five days later, we were met with mounds of snow that towered eight feet high and more, scattered all over the city from plowing efforts. We were finally able to make our way to church, picking up our granddaughter Amara, age six, along the way. As soon as we backed out of her driveway, I couldn't help but comment on all the snow and how bad the roads were at our house. How difficult it was to even get out of our neighborhood. Amara's immediate response was simple yet profound: "Well, Nana, at least we're not living at the North Pole!"



What? Out of the mouths of babes. Another lesson to learn from a grandchild! Mine keep me humble. I reflected on Amara's comment later in the day. I believe her point was, let's look on the bright side of things. Yes, indeed.

In the last ten years, anxiety has become a growing concern, not just among adults, but children as well. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America reports that 3.1 percent of Americans are affected by some anxiety disorder. While this may seem like a small percentage, it equates to approximately 6.8 million people in the United States. Yikes. Not good.

I like what Helen Keller advised. She said we need to be like sunflowers. When we keep our faces to the sunshine, we won't see the shadows. This inspiring woman was blind, yet she still offered this gem of wisdom to strive for positivity.

I've heard it said when we exercise appreciation, our gratitude muscles will respond. Speaking of muscles, it only takes 17 muscles to smile but 43 muscles to frown. Could frowning lead to unwanted facial wrinkles? (I don't think I want to go there.) On the other hand, I've never heard of any negative side effects from smiling and laughing. Have you?

I like what the apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:4. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again; rejoice!" There must be something to this. Paul repeated it. I think he'd appreciate Amara's outlook. When we choose to look on the bright side of life, we'll empower ourselves to lead a happier, more fulfilling existence.

As the new year begins, many of us are making resolutions. We have various aspirations and goals in mind. Perhaps if we all resolve to focus on the bright side of things, we'd experience more peace and joy. Thank you, Amara, for this reminder!

Becky Van Vleet, a retired school administrator, lives near Colorado Springs with her husband, Troy. They are the parents of four grown children and enjoy spending time with their nine grandchildren. Becky is a children's picture book author, and her website is devoted to family stories and creating memories: www.beckylvanvleet.com.

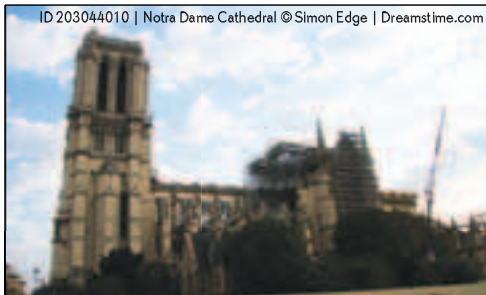
Back Porch Break

by Nancy Brummett

Restoring a Grand Old Lady

As enjoyable as the holiday season may be, we can all feel the need for physical renewal once it's over. The "new year, new you" mantra strikes a chord with many of us.

We can glean inspiration from a story of amazing restoration. On April 15, 2019, a devastating fire extensively damaged Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The crowd of onlookers gasped as flames shot through the roof and her iconic steeple toppled to the ground, with debris even spilling in to the Seine River nearby. To see this beloved medieval Catholic cathedral, built from the 12th to the 14th centuries, crumbling before their eyes was a horror beyond imagination.



But hope sprang from the ashes. France's President Emmanuel Macron declared that the grand cathedral, visited by thousands of sojourners yearly, would be rebuilt and restored to her original glory in five years.

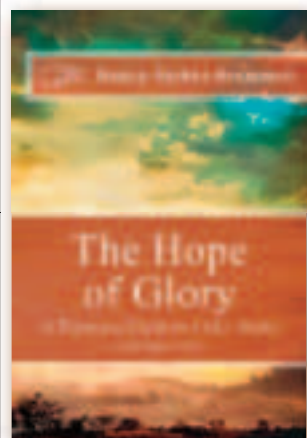
My husband and I were privileged to walk the streets of Paris in July of 2023. As we looked up at the massive scaffolding surrounding the majestic cathedral we shared our tour guide's view that Macron's deadline would probably not be met. Naysayers were many, yet thousands of diligent artists, artisans and craftsmen began the pains-taking work of cleaning and repairing stained glass windows, recreating stone and wooden carvings from photos, restoring centuries old paintings and murals, and resurrecting the damaged organ—the largest in France. The billion-dollar project was funded in part by donations from all around the world—with 57 million coming from the United States.

And so, taking just a bit longer than Macron predicted, Notre Dame Cathedral was rededicated in December 2024, welcoming thousands of worshippers and curious tourists through her doors. Photos reveal that the cathedral is lighter and brighter than before. And it truly is restored to its original beauty with attention paid to every minute detail. Now the gasps are those of awestruck visitors and worshippers attending mass.

Europe is full of amazing cathedrals, Notre Dame perhaps being the most famous, but the Bible reminds believers in Jesus Christ that we are the temple (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV), indwelt by God Himself through the Holy Spirit. We the people are the church, not the buildings.

So if our temple needs a bit of restoration, let's get started. Let's pay more attention to what we do and don't eat, lace up those walking shoes, and enter the New Year grateful for the bodies we have and in anticipation of where they may take us next.

Nancy Parker Brummett is an author and freelance writer in Colorado Springs, CO. Follow her on Facebook, Instagram and Linked In or subscribe to her blog posts at www.nancyparkerbrummett.com.



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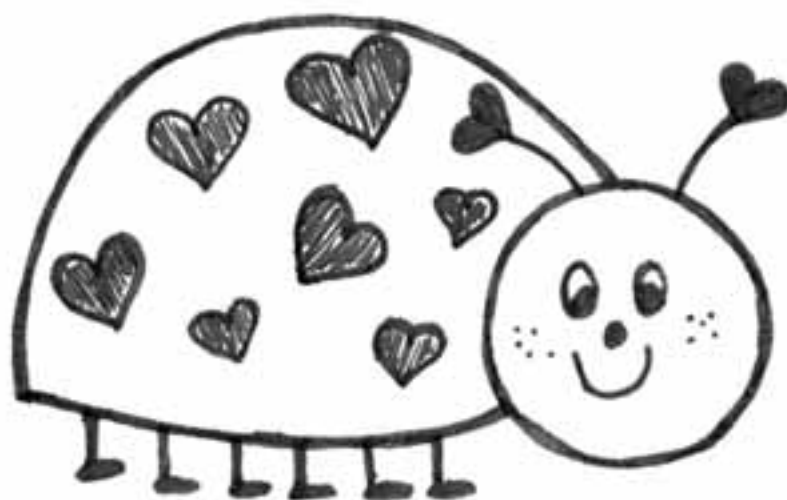
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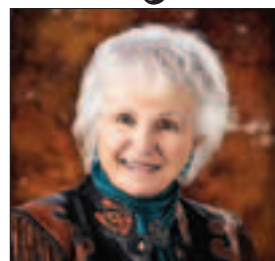
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Yvonne Hollenbeck

The Mystery Quilt

Who was that special lady? I would really like to know;
who cut and pieced this pretty top so many years ago?

I'm sure she planned to quilt it before her time on earth was through,
but oftentimes we leave this life with so much left to do.

We wonder, did she live alone? Was their children in her care?
Was family grown or was this sewn with a cradle by her chair?

Some pieces are from feed sacks; there's scraps of stripes and plaid.
Did she salvage them from outgrown clothes or cut from cloth she had?

Perhaps the little checks are from a tiny baby's clothes,
but we'll never know the story . . . Heaven only knows.

So, we'll finish what she started and let's hope we do her proud
as we stitch on her old patchwork quilt in which we've been endowed.

Perhaps her spirit's with us as we gather 'round the frame;
the maker of this Mystery Quilt, though we'll never know her name.

Order Yvonne's new book, "A Stitch in Rhyme" at
www.yvonnehollenbeck.com — just \$15 + \$3.50 postage.

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Yvonne Hollenbeck, from Clearfield, SD, performs her original poetry throughout the United States, captivating audiences in her wake. She is one of the most published cowgirl poets in the West and is not only a popular banquet and civic entertainer, but also co-writes songs with many western entertainers. Yvonne also pens a weekly column in the "Farmer-Rancher Exchange" and writes articles about life in rural America in various publications throughout the West. For more information, visit <https://www.yvonnehollenbeck.com>

All Minnesota Shop Hop



Lasagna in a Mug

- 2 pasta lasagna sheets
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp pizza sauce
- 4 tbsp ricotta cheese
- 3 tbsp spinach
- 2 tbsp cooked sausage
- 1 tbsp shredded mozzarella cheese

1. Break the pasta sheets into large pieces and place in microwave safe mug.
2. Cover with water and oil.
3. Microwave for 3-4 minutes or until the pasta is tender.
4. Once cooked, drain the water and remove the pasta from the mug.
5. Add 1 tbsp pizza sauce and spread on the bottom of the mug.
6. Add a layer of the pasta followed by a layer of the spinach, sausage and ricotta.
7. Repeat the layers all the way to the top of the mug.
8. Once you get to the top sprinkle with shredded mozzarella cheese.
9. Cook in the microwave for 2 1/2 - 3 minutes or until the lasagna is heated through. (Always keep a close eye on your mug so it doesn't over flow.



Recipe by Gemma's Bigger Bolder Baking

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An illustration of a family of three (a man, a woman, and a child) driving a tan car on a winding road through a lush green landscape. In the background, there are rolling hills, a blue lake, and evergreen trees. A signpost on the left side of the road reads "ALL MINNESOTA SHOP HOP".