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Minnesota's Guide to Specialty Shopping & Fun Events

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January/February 2026





Minnesota's Guide to Specialty Shopping & Fun Events



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Special Events

January

1.....6th Anniversary Sale - Old Alley Quilt Shop - Sherburn
3.....Quarterly Stuffy Club - Old Alley Quilt Shop - Sherburn
22-28.....13th Anniversary Sale - Sewing Seeds Quilt Shop - New Ulm
23-24.....Cabin Fever Shop Hop - Quilt Haven on Main - Hutchinson
27 & 31.....Jelly Roll Rug Class - Up North Quilt Shop - International Falls
30.....Brown Bag Mystery Sales begin - Quarry Quilts & Yarn - Sandstone
30-Feb 1.....Winter Games Retreat - Old Alley Quilt Shop - Sherburn
30-Feb 1.....Retreat - Quilter's Cottage - Kiester
30-Feb 1.....5th Annual Quilt Games Retreat - Old Alley Quilt Shop - Sherburn

February

1-28.....Live Love Quilt Shop Hop - Old Alley Quilt Shop - Sherburn
3.....Pro Bolt Sale - Quilted Dog - Cloquet
13-14.....Sweetheart Sale - Quilt Haven on Main - Hutchinson



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Happy Valentine's Day!

A Primitive Place Magazine
Take a Step Back in Time



Take a step back in time with A Primitive Place, where history comes alive! Take a nostalgic journey through five beautifully decorated homes, each capturing a different style and spirit of early American life. In each issue, we feature five homes—each one filled with inspiration, history, and timeless design. Enjoy rich articles on antiques, primitive decor, and the stories that celebrate the beauty of the past.

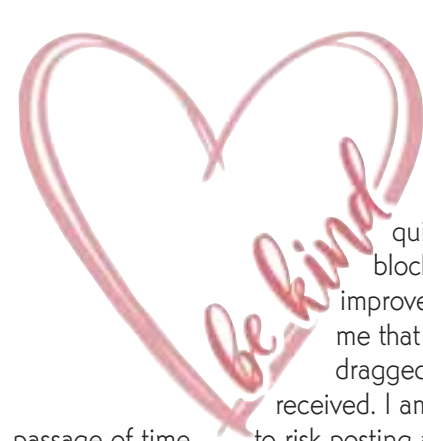
www.aprimitiveplacemagazine.com

Where in Minnesota?

Somewhere in Minnesota the image to the right can be found.

Where is it?

(Answer on page 12 of this issue)

Being Socially Kind

By Barbara Polston

I saw one of those Facebook posts again. A quilter posted a picture of her recently completed block, doing so to solicit advice with a desire to improve. Her post began, "Please be kind..." This told me that she had posted before and probably felt dragged over hot coals with the negative comments she received. I am sure it took a lot of courage, and perhaps the passage of time, to risk posting again. Sadly, I see these types of posts with more regularity than seems necessary.

It seems that our creative muscle is sensitive and easy to damage, sometimes beyond repair. I remember a grade schoolteacher criticizing a drawing of which I was proud. She found nothing worthy in my effort. I did not draw, other than doodles in margins, for quite some time after that.

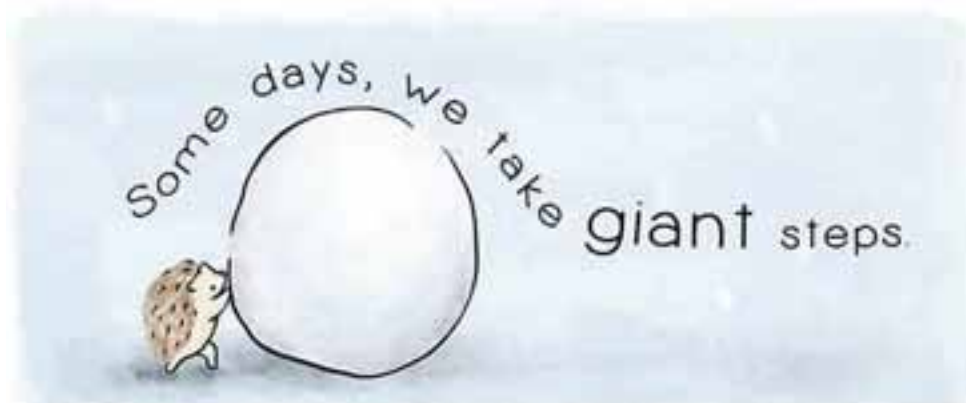
Several years ago, I designed and made a wall quilt to showcase a crochet doily my mother made circa 1939. The doily was made from variegated thread that, according to Mom, had just been introduced to the market. The thread changed through a range of soft colors – pinks, blues, greens, and yellows. The doily was set on a circle of white cloth in the middle of a blue and white log cabin pattern. Given the nature of the doily and its history, I chose to use the traditional red for the log cabin centers. Although my quilting was not perfect, I was happy with my quilt and entered it into a show. While there, I eavesdropped on two women commenting on it, only to be met with such hurtful negativity. My heart was crushed. Visiting with a friend, I shared what I had heard and how hurt I was. Her advice, "You did not make the quilt for those ladies. You made it for yourself and your family. If you love your quilt, if your family loves your quilt, that's all that matters." The quilt hung over my family room fireplace for many years; I loved it every time I saw it.

I have held on to my friend's advice and shared it with others feeling crushed by negative comments, more than once. But I remember the hurt inflicted by my grade schoolteacher and two anonymous women at a quilt show.

Of course, we do not like every quilt, every painting, every drawing, every embroidery that we see. Social media makes it too easy to share our dislike without regard to the person who will read those comments and have their creative muscle damaged, perhaps beyond healing. Maybe, if we see someone asking for advice, and we have nothing positive to contribute, we should just scroll by without comment. If we have something constructive to say that we believe will help the maker improve, perhaps we could find something to complement and frame our criticism gently. For example, "Love your central design. Consider stronger contrast against the background to really make it pop."

I hope we can all work together to be socially kind and keep those creative muscles healthy!

Barbara Polston, the author of *Quilting with Doilies: Inspiration, Techniques, and Projects* (Schiffer Press, 2015) and *Meet Puppy Brian and Puppy Brian and the Grey Cat* (www.puppybrian.com), lives in Tucson, Arizona where she has failed at retirement, but getting more time to stitch in a variety of forms. Contact Barbara at barapolstonquilter@gmail.com



Nancy Huberty of White Bear Lake won a copy of *By the Yard Comics for Quilters* calendar by Jen Lopez. Julie Walker of Carlton won a copy of *By the Yard Knit & Crochet Comics* calendar by Jen Lopez.

Congratulations Nancy and Julie!

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Wrapped in Love

by Janet M. Bair

Every quilt made is an act of love. We may have fallen in love with the fabric and want to make something unique. We may have a special occasion such as a wedding, graduation, birthday or Christmas gift in mind when we start sewing. We may be sewing for charity and will never see the recipient.

The amount of time it takes to piece and press the top, quilt it and sew on the binding requires a big commitment of time. Time that ends up being an act of love. As quilters, we love to sew and we love to bless others with our gifts. If we sew a lot, we have to find people to give our quilts to, or we would have no room in our houses.



Whenever I think of those blessing others with their quilting skills, I think of my mother-in-law, Leone Bair, who was a talented quilter. She loved to make small Sunbonnet Sue doll quilts. She made dozens of these little quilts for her family, friends and friends' grandchildren. She also made many items for her church's yearly Christmas fair. All gifts of love.

Although she passed away twenty years ago, the two doll quilts still at my house are in good condition even though my girls played with them while they were growing up. At that time, I was not yet a quilter.

I looked at the doll quilts more closely the other day. She hand-embroidered all around the Sunbonnet Sue girl appliqué and the four appliquéd hearts and then hand quilted the rest of the quilt with small hearts. I know it took a lot of time. The doll quilt is now forty years old. Dare I let my grandchildren play with it? I think I may set that one aside as there is another one, all machine appliquéd and machine quilted that is similar.

Without realizing it, I guess I have carried on her legacy. Last year, after practicing making half square triangles with a charm pack, I turned it into a dolls Christmas quilt. This year I am making teddy bear quilts using another charm pack of bears with guitars for my grandson. We all enjoy being wrapped up in a cozy quilt on a cold winter's night. Wouldn't a bear love one too?

Some people think Valentine's Day is just for sweethearts but over the years, as I did pre-school story hours, I felt it was important to read stories about love to the children. The world can use more love and understanding.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God" 1 John 4:7 As we remind ourselves each February to love others, let us use our gifts of sewing lavishly on this hurting world.

© 2026 Janet M Bair of Ansonia, CT. You may contact her at librarybair@hotmail.com



Learning Sewing and Needlework with Grandma and Great-Grandma

by Nancy J. Nash

My father's parents passed away before I was born, but my mother's mother lived until I was a young adult. My great-grandmother lived until I was a sophomore in high school. Both were skilled seamstresses and together with Mom, they taught me basic stitches and techniques.

I felt like I was exploring a new land with comrades. As I made new discoveries, they kept pace with me and they cheered me on. There is nothing like sharing a project with those who love you and encourage your efforts. This may explain why, after all these years, I enjoy mending clothing. It brings back memories of working peacefully side by side, our minds solving problems and our fingers plying needle and thread through fabric. Varieties of textiles - with their endless range of designs, arrays of color and pleasing textures - continue to fascinate me and attract my attention. I learned to love such things at an early age.

I picture my great-grandmother sitting in a chair by a window, mending socks for the "menfolk" in our family. Her stitches are so tiny that we joke that they are machine made. My father pulls up a chair and she regales him with stories of her youth, like the time a few of her brothers ran out of town the young man hired to run their small village school.

She was a stately woman, fairly tall with ramrod-straight posture. Her white hair, soft as milkweed silk, was pinned up on top of her head. It had turned white in her early twenties from a fever she barely survived. To me, she exemplified perseverance. My mother used to tell me how my great-grandmother had walked home from weekly shopping trips in order to save her bus money to purchase a watch for my great-grandfather. When he later passed away before his scheduled retirement, she was denied any of his pension, so she rented rooms in her house and managed to scrape by. During the Great Depression, she made dresses for my mother to save money for the family.

She could be quite spontaneous. Once a year we'd invite her to a country fair in a nearby town. "I'll get my sweater," was her quick reply. With her love of life, no wonder she lived into her 90s!

My grandmother opened my eyes to new horizons. She instructed me as I tried my hand at crocheting and knitting. However, when my grandmother got bogged down attempting to turn the heel of a knitted sock, I came to the rescue by poring over the pattern's written directions. I managed to figure out how to do it



and told Grandma, and then she took over. She mastered the technique and gave away that first pair of heavy socks to one of the "menfolk." Outdoors in cold and snow, the socks kept feet warm and dry. Almost instantly, a waiting list formed for Grandma's winter socks, both menfolk and womenfolk cherishing their thick warmth.

Grandma introduced me to a pattern for a patchwork quilt called Grandmother's Garden. It intrigued me that scraps of cloth could be made to represent a house, a walkway and clusters of flowering plants. I delighted in how our imaginations could play with an abstract design. Years later, I came across an article that juxtaposed photos of old quilts with photos of abstract art by famous modern painters. There were amazing similarities between the intricate geometric patterns of the quilts and the paintings done on canvas.

Most of the quilt makers were probably farm women with little formal education and yet they produced designs strikingly similar to those of highly educated artists. It is not surprising that the art quilters of today produce work with the primary purpose of uplifting the mind and soul of the viewer.

As I look back, one of the main lessons I absorbed from my grandmother and great-grandmother was the importance of perseverance - the ability to plow through thick and thin to reach a goal. Perseverance is necessary for a child to learn skills and to develop vision for what can be done with them. It is vital to life's journey at any age.

© 2026 Nancy J Nash is the author of Mama's Books: An Oregon Trail Story and Little Rooster's Christmas Eve. She has a B.A. in English composition from Mount Holyoke College and an M.F.A. in Writing for Children from Simmons College. nancynash341@gmail.com.

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Over the Teacup

by Janet Young

Stages of Love



February is known as the Heart Month. This is the time when thoughts of love and blossom as we get closer to Valentine's Day. Of course, romance begin to is also known as Heart Month, reminding us of our cardiovascular health and how to stay healthy. But let's get back to the original meaning, the meaning that comes to mind when we think of Valentine's Day.

"The love in your heart wasn't put there to stay, Love isn't love till it's given away." This is a familiar quote that is often found on pillows or in catalogues or even posters. When I read that, it got me to thinking. From the moment of birth, we are beginning to feel what it is like to be loved. As an infant, we may not know the meaning, but we feel the love that our parents bestowed upon us the instant we were born. As we grow into childhood, it becomes evident that our parents love us, even when they punish us.

Fast forward to our teenage years. This is a time when we may experience what we perceive to be true love, only to experience our first heartbreak. Love can be the most wonderful thing in the world, but it can also bring pain and sadness. Does that mean we never love again? Of course not. As a young person, you will have many opportunities to date until one day you know that you know, this is that perfect person, the one you want to spend the rest of your life with.

Soon you start a family. And again, as you welcome that child into the world you will experience a love that you have never experienced before. And this love will be in your heart until your last breath. This love will take you on a journey unlike any love you experienced before, for no matter what that child does, even if it brings heartache or disappointment, you will always love your child. This is called unconditional love.

Years move on, you are now empty-nesters and perhaps retired and now you can devote your time and love for one another. Your many years of marriage is a testimony of how great love can be.

Unfortunately, there will come a time when you will lose a spouse. This is when you will feel a loss like you never felt before. Your life will never be the same. That is the power of love.

If love can bring pain and heartache, why do we love at all? I believe it is our innate nature to love and be loved. When all is said and done, I think you will agree you would have rather had life full of love than one of loneliness and sadness.

Remember not only on Valentine's Day, but every day, let your loved ones know how much they are loved. Remember: "The love in your heart wasn't put there to stay, love isn't love til you give it away."

A Broken Thread

by Wayne M. Bosman



Anyone who has read my recent articles in The Country Register will undoubtedly notice one thread running through them. One way or another, my mother has appeared in almost all of them. That thread is soon to be broken. I am writing this at the kitchen table of the house I grew up in, which we are clearing out in the time leading up to her funeral. She was 104.

Clearing out another person's home can be a deeply personal, almost embarrassing, task. Not so much here. She spent these last years preparing to make it easier. Little stickers with names appear on many of the potential keepsakes. She insisted that we take some things home with us after visits to reduce the burden after she was gone. Her army of admirers understood that presents to her were no longer a practical idea. That was her way.

Little handmade items were still welcome, if not too expensive to make. Kerri and I focused on crocheted or woven items that she might actually use because of the love they were made with. Shawls, scarves, lap blankets all worked for her, as did little heart-shaped coasters. She kept some things in her drawers or on display because they were too pretty to use. That also was her way.

Kerri and I are spending our days helping my sister sort through Mom's things, trying to make sure that every family member has some meaningful keepsake to remind them of Mom every time they see it. Many of these are little ornaments or pictures that were made for her when her grandchildren were very young. Mom lived long enough to have great-great grandchildren who made her little things. Kerri kept Mom's soup ladle. I kept a cake plate that had survived potlucks and large family meals. I also brought home a herringbone scarf I wove for her a few years earlier. She was proud of it and proud of me for adding weaving to my life skills while in my 60s. She never ceased being proud of her children and grandchildren. To some degree, our successes were hers.

My sister has a list that Mom wrote with her of things that she wants different grandchildren to have. She is doing her best to carry out Mom's wishes about keepsakes. Then comes the rest of it all. My sister has a list of charities to best use everything in the house. From clothing to furniture to kitchenware and knick-knacks, there is a place for everything. Almost nothing ends up in the landfill. That was how Mom lived.

Mom was a giver by nature and nurture. It made her happy to help my sister prepare things for the Giving Circle, a local project to give tangible help to people who needed it. As she got older and less able to make things herself, her job became to wrap up crocheted washcloths that went into each package. Age slowed her abilities, but not her desire to give.

My sister, Linda, inherited Mom's desire to give back. After the big push every year for the Giving Circle, the cycle starts again. By mid-January, the bin boxes are starting to get filled with scarves, hats, and other necessities for urban areas in the northern US. An active church group contributes year round to keep poverty at bay. For Linda, her friends, and for Kerri, the knitting and crocheting doesn't really stop, the focus just changes. Prayer shawls for the aging and lap blankets for people in Hospice are a never-ending need.

Mom lived a full and long life. Although her thread is broken, the love she wove into so many lives is still strong.

For Mary A. Bosman (December 17, 1920-November 2, 2025)

Cloquet • Duluth • Sandstone

Become Inspired

by Annice Bradley Rockwell

A Silent Snowscape

When the busy days of holiday festivities draw to a close, we often feel a significant shift to the steady and slower pace of winter. Glancing out at a silent snowscape changes our perspective and suggests that somehow nature’s pause in the rhythm of the year might be a welcomed one for us as well.

Cozy Winter Days

On a frosty, cold weekend we might invite ideas of our own to come to the surface for a full day of country crafting. With a homemade meal of beef stew cooking on the stove all day, we can relax and begin planning an ideal, cozy winter day at home. We might decide to fashion some fully scented accents for Valentine’s Day made from the spicy notes of cinnamon and clove. We can decorate hand crafted twig heart wreaths with dark red “scarves” to adorn our doors for the season of winter. We might also delight in our “day off,” to happily dream of country outings that make the most of the snowiest of days.



The Wonder of Winter

An old-fashioned experience of family sledding and snowshoeing is one that is always memorable. Enjoyed by all ages, a day outside in the bright sunshine bundled up against the cold, can be a fun way to welcome winter. And after a few racy runs down an icy slope, a mug of hot cocoa can be enjoyed around a fire in the cauldron made with twigs collected from our country yard. Our warm treat can be made even more special with the addition of whipped cream and peppermint sprinkles to be relished by all.

And even the most familiar woodland hike becomes almost completely reinvented when blanketed with a beautiful fresh coat of snow. We can easily see tracks from our small animal visitors from their ventures into the new landscape of winter. The inland marsh takes on a unique mirrored glow on these winter days, hardening just enough to transform the entire view. All around us as nature shifts, nature is also quite active. Just underneath the surface of silence lives the spirited promise of spring.

This winter, savor the wonder of the season. Embrace the slower days to recharge and pursue your creative ideas. Take time to plan invigorating country outings for your family to appreciate. Shift your perception to see winter as a special and powerful blessing. And as you do, you will be reminded of the magnified magic that nature always provides.

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



Winter Word Search



submitted by Shirley Ross

I E A D D O S R O O N V A
C D C F T S S E R D H O C
N V A N R L A N T I O R S
S R V T A E D I E A C K N
M E W T E D A T G L K R H
L A I R H M G N I W E S B
S W N I E R I E O T Y N O
D I T S I H E L T T M B E
S S E R T S M A E S T V A
T H R O U L P V D V N U N
V C L O V E L L S T O O B
T C P A A E O I L G H H W
L S E W V C N E H S L O S

Words are forward and backward,
horizontal, vertical and diagonal.

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| boots | pattern |
| button | seamstress |
| clothing | sewing |
| cold | shovel |
| dance | skates |
| date | sled |
| dress | snow |
| farm | spouse |
| heart | thread |
| hill | valentine |
| hockey | velvet |
| love | winter |

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Happy New Year!

Recipe: Puffy Pancake
by Shirely Ross

Ingredients:

- 6 eggs, room temp.
- 1 cup milk, room temp.
- 1 cup sifted flour
- 1/4 tsp vanilla
- 1/4 tsp cinnamon
- 5 tbsp butter
- Optional items:
fresh lemon juice
confectioner's sugar
jam

Directions:

Preheat oven to 450K. Place a 10" cast iron skillet into the oven until sizzling hot. In a blender or other mixing bowl, beat the eggs until frothy. Add milk, flour, vanilla, cinnamon and blend until a thin batter forms. Pull the hot pan from the oven using hot pads - add the butter. As soon as the butter melts, pour the batter into the pan and return it to the oven right away. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until pancake is puffed and lightly golden on the edges. To Serve, cut into wedges. If desired sprinkle with lemon juice and confectioner's sugar or jam.



Blueberry White Chocolate Mug Cake

- 1/3 cup Original Bisquick™ mix
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 3 tbsp plus 1 teaspoon milk
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1/4 tsp vanilla
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup fresh blueberries
- 1/4 cup white vanilla baking chips
- Fresh whipped cream



1. In a medium bowl beat Bisquick, sugar, milk, oil, vanilla and egg until just a few lumps remain.
2. Divide batter into 2 ungreased mugs.
3. Top each mug with blueberries and white vanilla chips. (Do not stir)
4. Microwave both mugs at the same time for 2 1/2 - 3 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.
5. Cool Slightly.
6. Top with whipped cream and more blueberries.

Recipe by Betty Crocker

HAPPY
new year

Stress Relief

THE CHALLENGE

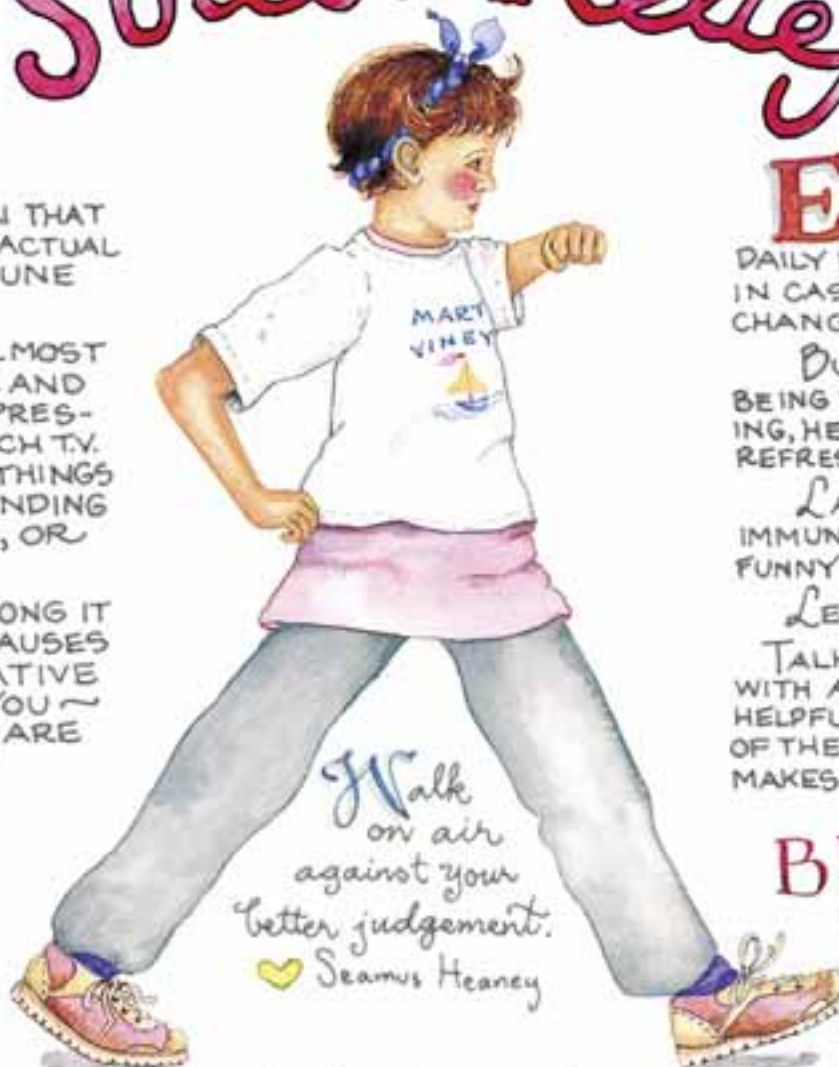
IT'S BEEN PROVEN THAT STRESS CAUSES ACTUAL CHANGES TO THE IMMUNE SYSTEM. **YIKES!**

IT'S CAUSED BY ALMOST EVERYTHING ~ DIVORCE AND DEATH; NORMAL LIVES PRESSURES, FEARS, TOO MUCH TV. NEWS ~ EVEN HAPPY THINGS LIKE CHRISTMAS, OUTSTANDING PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT, OR BUILDING A HOUSE.

IF IT GOES ON TOO LONG IT STEALS VITALITY AND CAUSES ILLNESS. IT'S CUMULATIVE AND IT SNEAKS UP ON YOU ~ ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE TOO BUSY TO NOTICE!

A New Beginning

BE TRULY GLAD. THERE IS WONDERFUL JOY AHEAD.
1 PETER 1:6



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♥ Seamus Heaney

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This month in Minnesota History

January 10, 1975: A fierce, three-day blizzard strikes, bringing one to two feet of snow (with some drifts reaching twenty feet) and winds up to eighty miles per hour, closing most Minnesota roads, stranding a train at Willmar, and killing thirty-five people and 15000 head of livestock. The St. Paul Pioneer Press reports that an offshoot of an Arctic storm has blasted into the Midwest, commenting that the "Wind ain't whistlin' Dixie."

February 2, 1996: Residents of the small Vermilion Iron Range town of Tower shiver as the thermometer drops to sixty below zero, Minnesota's lowest recorded temperature to date.

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

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Writing From Life

by Jeanette Lukowski

Looking Forward



I am not an "eternal optimist." In fact, my adult son would likely tell you about the hours I waste focusing on the worst-case scenario of so many things, especially after the sun goes down. Be that as it may, there's no point in wallowing today. I'm promoting looking forward, after all!

Each January, society's collective focus turns to a New Year. Resolutions, hopes, dreams, and plans become the focus for many—as January days creep towards more minutes of daylight, football fans hope their team wins the biggest game of the year, and plans begin forming for dream romances, get-away vacations, garden or field plantings, births, and graduations.

This year, I hope to continue with the growth and learning I have been experiencing in my quilting journey. In the middle of 2025, for instance, I decided to engage with a weekly free-pattern-release program from one of the larger fabric houses. It began sometime in the summer, and ended two weeks before Thanksgiving.

Yep, that meant I made more than 25 quilt blocks! This doesn't sound like too much for those who are used to making quilts on a regular basis (as the "average" quilt might be made of five blocks across, and six or seven blocks down), but I was sewing "in the dark"! With no idea of how many blocks were to be released, or what size blocks were to be included, I just selected the random Halloween fabrics for each week's pattern based on the pattern's black and white image generated by my printer—and the mood I was in at the time.

I plan to assemble the Halloween blocks into some type of original design later this summer, when I visit a friend at camp.

Beyond that one plan-to-plan, I know of a baby due in May (no gender information yet), and an engagement (no wedding information yet). I also know what one of the two state-wide shop hop lines of fabric will look like. But that's it.

I used to be concerned about not having a full plan, fleshed out with details. I wanted a course of action for myself to take. But that was when I was a student, and/or a mom of young children who had a full slate of hopes, dreams, and goals of their own.

In 2025, I watched quilters' videos promoting "No Buy January," followed by "Sewing from My Stash," and "Finishing a Different UFO Project Every Month" as plans. Good for them, I cheered! I watched, but I cannot report that I was as disciplined. Oh well.

My 2026 goal? I simply plan to stay open to possibilities. Today, for instance, I innocently walked into a quilt store about twenty-five miles from my home, and overheard the owner sharing information with another customer. "We're going to do a scrap-buster program, which I haven't fully fleshed out in my mind yet, but it's going to...." Just like that, a new thing I can now look forward to. Yay!

© Jeanette Lukowski 2025. Jeanette is a mother, grandmother, teacher, and author who lives in Alexandria, MN. She is inspired by the lives of strong women. Her email address is: writingfromlife@yahoo.com



A Russian Love Story

from a Century Ago

by Ann Marie Stewart

My grandparents never kissed until their engagement. What a love story for Valentine's Day!

In 1922, two German Mennonites met in a Bible School in Tschongraw Crimea. My grandmother, Lena Martens, stepped off the train from Orenburg over 1500 miles away only to discover her luggage had been stolen enroute and she would have to attend classes each day in the same brown dress that she'd wash once a week.

She wasn't interested in showing off. Besides, the school frowned on romantic distractions. She hadn't planned on getting married; she'd already helped raise her ten younger siblings, recently fought a battle with typhoid fever and lost her hair, then lost her young father and two little sisters. She would focus on the education she'd so longed for.

Nikolai Siemens, on the other hand, had purchased gold rings before he had even set eyes on Lena Martens.

When Nikolai met the sweet girl with a heart-shaped face framed by short red curly hair, he began hoping the ring belonged to her.

But how could Nikolai possibly discover if Lena had a love interest back in her little village of Rodnitschnoje #10? The school had rules: no dating, no marriage, and there must always be six eyes in a room when there were two persons of the opposite sex. In other words, he could never ask her a personal question without someone else listening in.

Nikolai soon solved that problem by bringing his two-year-old niece to Lena's door to witness his odd question, "Is there somebody special back in Orenburg?"

But was this God's will? Nikolai wondered. One day when he saw Lena in the hallway struggling to unlock her door, Nikolai prayed, "Lord if I am to marry her, may I unlock the door." When she handed him the key, he inserted it in the lock, and the door sprung open. She was unaware why he almost skipped down the hall.

He had her ring; but did it fit? When he showed it to his sister, she slipped it on her finger and headed out to visit Lena. "Do you want to try on my ring?" she asked Lena. Ironically, the ring was a perfect fit.

But Lena would never wear it. Stalin had other plans and closed the Bible School and arrested the professors. To release the teachers from prison in Simferopol, students pooled their money, and Nicolai sold the two gold rings.

That summer Lena toiled on the threshing floor in Nikolai's village. As foreman, Nikolai kept an eye on her and asked if she would meet him that evening on the path behind the farms. Though they'd never spent time together alone, she had listened to Nikolai's preaching, sung under his direction, and learned much about him in her two years of Bible School. She wasn't surprised when he took her hand and asked, "Would you take this hand for life?"

She had no idea what was coming. That five years later they would have to flee Crimea and end up trapped in Moscow with Stalin threatening deportation. That her husband would be jailed in Lubjanka and that she'd hide out in a mother/baby home until her third child was born. That she would escape Moscow but would be forced to leave behind a toddler in Crimea. That two years later she would be reunited with her five-year-old first-born.

Or that fifty years later her seven children and twelve grandchildren would gather on their homestead in Blaine, Washington for a family reunion to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. And that at the church ceremony, their simple love story would be told and the congregation learn why Nikolai and Lena had never worn wedding bands.

And she couldn't know that her children and grandchildren believed in this love story. To celebrate and honor it, they surprised Nicolai and Lena with two golden rings. Two golden rings for the two hands that went through life empty, and two hearts that were full.



Ann Marie Stewart's novel, *THE REMNANTS: One Family's Escape from Stalin's Russia*, comes out in 2026. Please sign up for her newsletter for updates: AnnMarieStewart.com

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Spray your Tupperware with nonstick cooking spray before pouring in tomato-based sauces and there won't be any stains.



Recipe: Tossed Broccoli Salad
Patti Lee Bock

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds fresh broccoli, trimmed and cut into 1" pieces
- 1/2 pound sliced bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 medium red onion, chopped

Dressing

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tbsp cider vinegar

Directions:

In a large salad bowl, combine broccoli, bacon, cheese and onion. In a separate bowl, combine dressing ingredients. Add to salad and toss. Chill.



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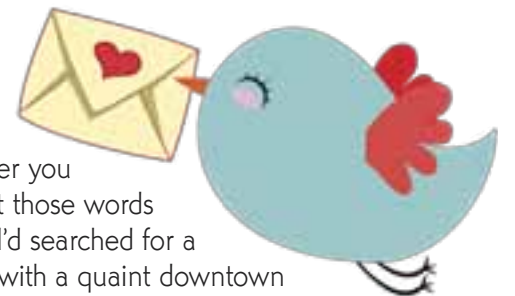
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Wherever You Go

by Shelby Kottemann



There's a saying that goes, "Wherever you go, there you are." I learned a lot about those words when I went on my first solo vacation. I'd searched for a small town in a state I'd never been to with a quaint downtown and a hike able arboretum. Northfield, MN fit the bill!

Upon arrival on a Friday, I realized the innkeeper was lonely, so I listened earnestly to her story late into the night. I explored downtown Saturday morning, but when I came back to get my hiking shoes, a melancholy guest, traveling for work, walked through the door. I stayed back hoping a caring talk might lift her spirits.

Sunday morning came. I was about to step out into the fresh morning air when the innkeeper rushed up to me in a panic. "My car is in the shop and I have no way to get to church. Can you give me a ride?"

"Of course." I answered. The still dreary guest asked to come too. "The more the merrier!" I replied. Unbeknownst to me, the innkeeper's church was over an hour's drive away. The good deed took half my day and half a tank of gas by the time I returned. The tagalong houseguest didn't like hiking and instead wanted to go out to eat and be brought back to rest.

Now it was Sunday night and I needed to go home. I had four long hours to think about how little fun I'd had. I hadn't seen the arboretum or even the rest of town! At every opportunity, I'd slipped right into my habit of putting everyone around me first. On my only vacation nonetheless!

This isn't a sad story though! In one of the downtown shops, I'd met a warm, wise woman with whom I'd shared a long, deep conversation. She struck me as one of those people who touched others' lives without realizing it so it saddened me to hear that she struggled with depression. The following winter, I sent a Christmas card to her little store with a handwritten message inside telling her how special she is and that she'd been the highlight of my trip. I hoped my letter would bring her some light. In February, I received a response! She'd been truly touched by my letter. We exchanged phone numbers and we have shared long phone calls twice a month for five years since! Sharing life's musings and ups and downs, we've built a loving friendship that enriches both of our lives beyond compare. In the beginning that solo vacation may have taught me about the burdens of being a caring person, but in the end, it showed me the ever-lasting gifts. For better and worse, wherever you go, there you are.

Shelby Kottemann is an Author, Reiki Master and Founder of "Love's Nature LLC" for the love of nature and the nature of love. Her email is contact@inlovesnature.com. To learn more, visit the website www.inlovesnature.com

Stories of a Farm Wife

by Tammy Page
Count Your Blessings

Counting your blessings does not mean the same to everyone. To some, it may mean achieving educational goals such as graduating high school and going on to college. To others, it may mean being the proud owner of things you've been able to acquire by working for a living and making good money.

I'm not going to kid you, I have lots of "things"—just ask my husband—but they are not necessities. To me, it means being thankful for what I have, being content with the fact that if my field of education were to disappear today and I lost my good paying job, I would still be able at the end of the day reflect on what I still have and not what I've lost.

Many of us today, myself included have gone through trials and tribulations throughout our lives but the one thing I can reflect back on is that I have always counted my blessings at the end of the day.

As I look upon the faces of my grandchildren, the love our family has for one another and the pride I see in my husband's face as he looks around the room at our family laughing and crying together, I count my blessings.

As the winter months are upon us and the stress of after-Christmas bills are piling up and the hype is dying down, I try to remind myself that life is not about things but about people, laughter, peace and sharing special times together.

Tammy Page lives with her family on a working farm in central Indiana. She enjoys collecting items remember from her youth, cooking and decorating her home and spoiling her grandchildren.



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Chicken Noodle Casserole
recipe from Sloane Layton

- 12 oz wide egg noodles
 - 2 (10.5 oz) cans cream of chicken soup
 - 1 cup whole milk
 - 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
 - 1 tsp ground black pepper
 - 1/2 tsp kosher salt
 - 3 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1/2 small yellow onion, finely chopped
 - 2 celery stalks, finely chopped
 - 1 (12oz) bag frozen peas and carrots
 - 1 1/2 cups crushed butter crackers
 - 2 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
 - chopped parsley, to serve

Preheat the oven to 375°. Bring a large pot of water to a boil over medium-high heat. Add the egg noodles and cook, stirring occasionally, until just al dente, about 7 minutes. Drain and set aside. Stir together the cream of chicken soup, milk, cheese, pepper, and salt in a large bowl. Stir in the chicken, onion, celery, peas and carrots. Gently fold in the egg noodles. Transfer to a 13x9 inch baking dish and spread in an even layer. Stir together the cracker crumbs and butter in a medium bowl. Sprinkle mixture evenly over the casserole. Bake until heated through and the topping is lightly browned. About 30-35 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley and serve.

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Wit and Wisdom
by Judyann Grant
Ready or Not



When covid became part of our daily reality many routine doctor appointments were replaced with tele-health visits. One of the first tele-health visits I had was scheduled one morning for 9:20 a.m. with my primary care physician. Thinking this visit would be akin to an in-person visit, (i.e., a long-time languishing in the waiting room) I figured I had plenty of time to get up, get dressed, fed and in my right mind before the call. I was wrong . . .

My loving husband was preparing our breakfast when the phone rang. The nurse was calling to complete the intake paperwork prior to my appointment. The phone call only lasted a few minutes. Then, just as Don put my warm breakfast plate on the table, the phone rang again – this time I heard my doctor’s voice.

I had planned to be pulled together, seated at my desk, prepared with all my vital information for the tele-conference. Instead, I was sitting at the kitchen table in my rumpled pajamas and bathrobe, my hair sporting “bed-head” and my breakfast getting cold.

Instead of the usual wait in the office, which always gave me time to collect my thoughts, the doctor called an hour and a half before my scheduled appointment. And I was not ready . . .

How are you feeling? *Fine (though I wanted to say hungry as I eyed my breakfast.)*

How have your BP numbers been? *I don't know! I didn't have time to find my record book.*

What was your blood sugar this morning? *I don't know! I haven't taken it yet.*

The pointed questions and vague answers went on and on. After the call, still in my pajamas, I ate my cold breakfast and contemplated how the pleasant scenario in my head differed drastically from the unpleasant reality that occurred.

Tele-health visits aren’t the only area of life that will be impacted by lack of preparedness. The Bible tells us that Jesus is coming again. Will this be the year? Only the Father knows the time and day (Matthew 24:37) so it’s best to be prepared.

God isn’t concerned about what I wear or if my hair is combed, but He is concerned about the condition of my heart. Am I devoted to Him? Am I living according to His standard? Am I letting my light shine so others are drawn to Him?

If you feel unprepared for the Second Coming, there are steps you can take: Read your Bible daily. Seek God through prayer and meditation. Worship in a Bible-believing church.

By keeping our hearts right with God, we will be prepared for His call.

Judyann Grant’s newest book, “Reflections: Walking in the Light of God’s Word” contains one year of daily meditations that reveal the hand of God at work in the ordinary and extraordinary events of life. For more information and to purchase, please contact the author at: witandwisdomwriters@gmail.com



Life on My Farm

by Donna Jo Copeland, Farmeress
My Vacation in Hard Times



To paraphrase Merlin when he counseled King Arthur, "sometimes the only vacation is the past." Pretty good advice in troubled times when life comes down hard. The comfort of remembering. Sitting in my drafty unwinterized old farmhouse with snow not too far off, I am vacationing in the distant past. Not just mine but also my ancestors.

Bringing to mind the stories I heard as a child, longing to hear them again. The women, men and children who managed thru hard times, wars, upheaval and somehow made a life.

When I feel beat up (as I age that is more often) stories from my great grandmother Ora come to mind. Her parents homesteaded in Kansas. Her father died after 18 months there, losing the land. Her mother was allowed to load one mule and walked back to Indiana with her 2 babies. I marvel at her strength. I also remember Grandmother Ora telling me a farmer's wife had no business wearing white. I think of that every time I get barn dirt and manure on my white t-shirt, and I never wear white shorts!

Another grandmother was one of four daughters who were given away by their father after the death of her mother, to anyone who wanted them. Fortunately, an older childless couple gave her a good education (I have her 6th grade Latin book). She married a nice man and raised two kids. But somehow there was always a sadness about her.

And I think of how hard my mother worked to raise us five kids in another drafty farmhouse. Quilts hung over windows and doors, rooms closed off in winter. Layers of wool clothes for barn chores. Lots of biscuits and gravy and pots of green beans.

Tonight, I laugh at my old quilts hanging over windows and doors. Rooms closed off. Even hung some up on these uninsulated walls. And the layers of wool I wear to the barn and get chores done even now. I learned well!

The old quilts are a comfort in themselves. Some are family treasures; some I've made and others from friends or estate sales. The estate sale ones carry their own grief --no one in the family wanted them. They are welcome and loved here.

I find it sad that textiles, the necessity of life, are so unappreciated. I'm one who patches barn jeans, replaces zippers. I keep a couple of good jeans for trips to town. I even darn socks; thankful Grand Dad taught me (and to mend horse harness.)

With the coming snow I think of walking thru deep drifts to the barn and out the lane to the neighbors to catch the bus at 7am, wearing plastic bread sacks over our shoes as we had no boots. I'm thankful today for my lined boots.

With a hot cup of tea and chocolate chip cookie I savor memories of conversations around the old kitchen table. Just daily life. As an older farm gal, I'm glad to have the memories, the family and generational stories. The very stuff of life. And I grieve for families today who don't have the comfort of kitchen table talk.

Walking through the past helps me face the future, reminded I'm of strong stock. And I know I need to do a better job of writing down these stories as I'm now the crone of the family. Damn, how did I get here so fast?

One thought while I'm on vacation, I really need to document our family textiles for whomever comes after (side note, the only thing I have from great-great grandmother Fields is her Prairie bloomers.)

May you all take a memory vacation, pause and remember, laugh, cry and be thankful. Deep winter can be hard but we can manage.

Great Aunt Ethel's Cracker Jack

Pop about 2 gallons of popcorn, put in large bowl or pan. Set aside.

2 c sugar

1 c sorghum molasses

4 T water

2 T cider vinegar

1 t salt lump of butter

Mix into a heavy pan, cook until a drop forms a hard ball in water. Stir in a pinch of baking powder, stir well. Pour over popped corn, mix well, pour out on marble table to cool. Store in airtight container.

© 2026 Donna Jo Copeland writes from her farm, Breezy Manor in Mooresville, Indiana where she tends her flock and creates art from the wool. Being the 14th generation of farm owners/operators, Donna Jo brings alive the struggles of farm life



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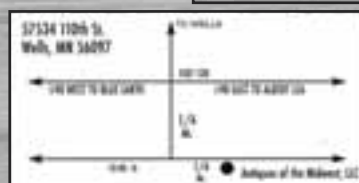
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Doilies - The Forgotten Fiber Art

by Barbara Kalkis

Doilies get a bad rap. We can easily admit to socially acceptable faults and find sympathy from our friends: Do you secretly gobble chocolate bonbons that you have hidden in a flour canister? No problem. You're in good company. Do you spend \$300 of your household "pin money" (yes, Cash!) purchasing fabric at a quilt show because you don't want your husband to see it on your credit statement? Get in line. Every savvy woman knows that trick.

BUT... if you tell friends that you have a collection (please, not a 'stash') of doilies and ... WORSE! ... that you've sprinkled them around your house, you will be a marked woman. Your friends will be shocked. They will laugh in that indulgent way that says you are completely old-fashioned and out of sync with life in the 21st century. You will be compared to their grandmothers or, worse, their great-grandmothers – and not in a good way. It's just easier to say you crochet and change the topic to something easy—like the weather.

Admitting that you love doilies is like saying you love dust collectors. Just saying the word "doily" raises eyebrows and giggles. It's truly unfortunate that the word sprung from the 17th century clothmaker who created the first doily "napkin". But doilies are so much more than fanciful clutter. These spidery webs of cotton, linen or silk fuse artistry, beauty, and practicality into one delicate form.

By now you have guessed that I have a doily collection. In fact, I have an entire drawerful of doilies to match the colors of every season, holiday, and just-because days. Following the fall frenzy of harvest, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, the blue doilies come out in January; red in February; violet and greens in March...you get the idea.



A TRIBUTE TO ART, PATIENCE AND INGENUITY

Doilies have some special characteristics. They are crocheted from fine threads – not yarn. Thin, small crochet hooks are used as the stitching medium. They feature lacy patterns that allow the surface beneath them to be seen.

What distinguishes the doily crafter is the talent to imagine and create the airiest designs as if by instinct. Delicate pansies, roses, fantasy posies, leaves, stars and whimsical stitches form unique patterns. These exquisite flights of fancy cannot be repeated except by the artist, much less found in a pattern book.

The wonder of doilies is not just in their intricate stitches and designs but in the ways artists adapt them for practical use. Doilies serve as centerpieces, like the 25-inch diameter one that sits on my dining table. Small ones serve as coasters for wine and water glasses and dessert bowls or plates. They give a frilled edge under potted plants, lamps, alarm clocks (okay, I may go overboard). With a small bar of soap or lavender seeds, they make perfect pomanders for towel and linen closets.

Crocheted in closed stitches, they become potholders and hot pads. When adorned with lacy borders, pillowcases, everyday tea towels and flour sack fabrics become formal guest items.

Every doily gets its time on display in my house. It is a small way to honor the anonymous women who created this lowly form of fiber art. Perhaps they did so out of boredom or necessity. Maybe it was the desire for a touch of finery in an otherwise functional home. Or – just maybe – doilies express the passion for art and beauty in a loving soul.

©Barbara Kalkis. Barbara spends her time writing, teaching, and consulting with high-tech clients. She's author of Little Ditties for Every Day: A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm. Contact her at BarbaraKalkis01@gmail.com.

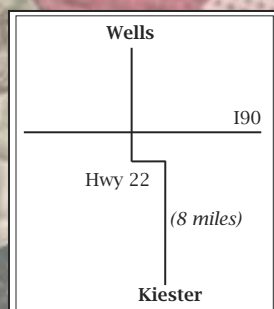
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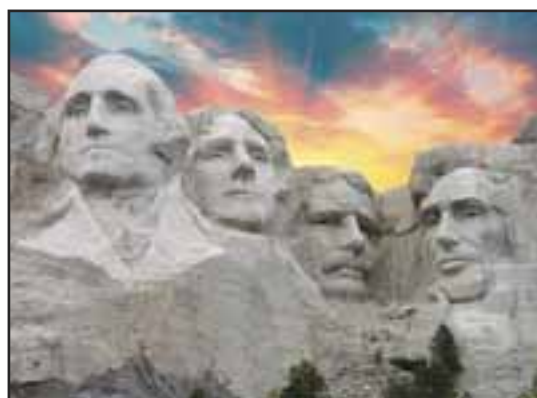
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Blue Earth

Pieces From My Heart

by Jan Keller

Last Times

I've always appreciated the mystique and charm created by the mere mention of past Christmases, birthdays, or any other special occasion celebrated together with family and friends. They're times when I seem to reflect on priceless memories.

This past holiday season I found myself reflecting on the bittersweet memories of a Christmas past. It was a wonderful day. Full of feasting, family and festivities. Yet, because of the reality of my mother-in-law's diagnosed cancer, just beneath the surface of conscious awareness lurked her uncertain future.

Following what had been a fun-filled day, Mable gave each of us a hug and a kiss while preparing to leave and head for home. It was then, as Mable collected her dishes from the kitchen, that I saw how hard she was struggling to hold back her tears. I sensed she was wondering if this particular Christmas would prove to be the last time she would have a physical presence at any Christmas celebration.

This particular Christmas also happened to be the last time I saw Mable adorned by her own hair. For, by the time a week had passed and the New Year arrived, chemotherapy had played one of its typical nasty tricks.

When we went to visit on New Year's Day, Mable greeted us at their door wearing her new wig and looking as if she wanted to break down and have a good cry. The tension of the moment was broken when she melted into my arms, saying, "If you want to see my hair, it's in the bathroom wastebasket."

That was the last time I ever saw her cry.

Many of the last times I remember were ordinary and typical. Commonplace. At least they seemed common at the time.

The last time she visited our home.

The last time she cooked us a meal.

The last time we talked together on the telephone.

The last time we got a note from her in the mail.

The last time I saw her sitting in her recliner, busying herself with her handiwork.

The last times I remember go on and on, and yet, there is one last time I especially like to think about—the last time I saw Mable smile.

It was the Saturday, one week after she walked with help into the hospital for what would be the last time.

It had been a week which brought with it rapid physical deterioration. Her arms had become useless attached appendages. While family and friends took turns being there to lovingly feed her, Mable's own arms and hands lay heavy and motionless at her sides.

Her legs, too, fell victim to cancer's vicious attack. No longer could they stand in support of her weight. Why, they couldn't even change their position under the covers on the bed.

Her vision had dimmed so much that the big schoolroom type clock could no longer tell her the time. Hauntingly it hung on the wall in her hospital room, constantly ticking away the moments we had left to spend together.

The relatives who gathered for one final visit filled her room to overflowing. Instead of being clear and distinct individuals, they had become shadows—recognizable to Mable only by the voices that accompanied them.

It was into this setting that one of Mable's nephews brought his beautiful baby granddaughter for a get-acquainted visit.

As all of the relatives gathered in the room and around Mable's bed took joy and delight in the baby, someone looked at me and said, "Take the baby close to Mable so she can touch her."

Obliging, I picked up the baby and carried her close to Mable, where I held the infant up and over the rails of the bed. Then, to allow Mable to feel the baby's presence, I firmly grasped her hand and raised it up to the baby's head.

The baby, who wasn't a bit happy about being interrupted in the middle of a bottle, decided to voice a loud protest amid all this commotion by starting to cry.

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Recipe: Italian Bean & Sausage Pasta

Ingredients:

- 6oz package of smoked sausage, halved lengthwise and sliced.
- 14 1/2 oz can Italian style stewed tomatoes
- 14 1/2 can Italian style green beans drained
- 2 cups cooked rotini
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese

Directions:

Brown sausage in skillet over medium heat, drain. Add tomatoes and beans. Bring to a boil for 2-3 minutes. Stir in cooked rotini and heat through. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese.



At that moment, in response to a sound ringing clearly with promise for the future, an unmistakable and memorable smile spread across Mable's face and brightened her countenance.

Recalling how difficult and different life was after Mable's passing still brings tears to my eyes. And yet, through my tears, I catch sight of a rainbow. This rainbow of promise for the future comes in the form of my memory of the last time Mable smiled. By smiling in the midst of her personal pilgrimage through the valley of the shadow of death was as if Mable gave a sweet benediction to life and all it represents.





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Life in Skunk Hollow

by Julie A Druck



The Day That Frosty Melted

This week I undid the house of all its holiday finery and put the Christmas decorations away for another year. That is all except Frosty. I have a vintage plastic blow mold Frosty decoration from the '50s. Every year for decades he stood sentinel next to the front door of my grandparents' home. As a little girl I often had a Christmas picture taken next to him. When my grandfather died 13 years ago, I inherited Frosty and he has proudly stood sentinel on MY front porch for those years. But alas, Frosty has begun to melt.

I noticed how bad he was last night. We had an extremely windy day, and Frosty had blown over. When I went to set him back up, I saw what I have been unwilling to acknowledge for the last several years. Frosty's base was becoming more and more brittle and cracked. My husband has been telling me for a while that Frosty's time has come, but I didn't want to hear it. Last night, I couldn't deny the truth.

It sounds crazy that I'm mourning the loss of a Christmas decoration. But, in my mind, Frosty represents something much more intangible than a hunk of plastic. I lived with my grandparents for three years as a little girl and then for another ten years right next door to them. Their home was a haven of comfort and peace and joy to me. Every day was a holiday with my grandmother. Our supper table always looked like a lay-out from a vintage women's magazine – deliciousness and simple beauty were always on the menu. And when any holiday rolled around, my grandmother went full tilt into making it special in every way. As for my grandfather, he was a bright beacon of warm light who loved me – not for what I did or didn't do – but simply because I was his Julie.

So, you see, in my mind, Frosty is a symbol of all the love and joy I received in my grandparents' home. But as I set Frosty upright again, I knew it was time to say goodbye. I went in and tearfully told my husband that Frosty could go with three stipulations: that he would take one last photo of me with my snowman, that he would dispose of the remains without telling me how or when or where he did it and that he would remove Frosty's little metal shovel and save it for me as a keepsake.

As I contemplated my decision further, I realized that just because Frosty goes, doesn't mean that the memories he represents have to go. I still hold all the dearness and love of my grandparents in my heart that I can access at any time. And so, though Frosty won't be back again someday, he, and all that he stands for, will forever hold a warm place in my heart.



Julie Druck is from York, Pennsylvania and writes from her farm in Skunk Hollow. She'd welcome your comments at thedrucks@netzero.com.

Love is the beauty of the soul.

Recipe: Banana Crumb Coffee Cake
by Margaret Hoase

Ingredients:

- 2 cups sugar
- 1/2 cup butter at room temp.
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 3 bananas mashed
- 2 cups flour
- 3 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup milk

Crumb topping and filling

- 1 cup butter, cubed
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 2 cups flour

Frosting Recipe

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1-2 tbsp milk

Directions:

By hand mix together sugar and butter. Add eggs, vanilla and bananas. Stir until blended. Add flour, baking powder, salt and milk and blend well. Set aside. Use pastry blender to combine until crumbly. Pour 1/2 of batter into a 9x13 pan. Spread 1/3 of topping on the batter. Pour remaining batter on top of the topping. The rest of the topping goes on top of the batter. Bake for 50-55 minutes at 350°. Mix together frosting ingredients and drizzle over coffee cake.



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Sweet History of Conversation Hearts

The story of the conversation hearts oddly enough began in a Boston pharmacy! In 1847 pharmacist Oliver Chase invented a machine in order to simplify the way to produce medical lozenges for sore throats and other illnesses. The result was America's first candy making machine! Chase soon shifted from making lozenges to candy. Chase therefore formed the New England Confectionery Company or Necco. The lozenges became what we know as the Necco wafers. Hearts weren't available until 1902.



It wasn't until 1866 that we got the sweet printed messages on the conversation candies that endure us today. Oliver Chase's brother, Daniel Chase, started printing the sentimental messages on the candies as a way to get into the growing market for Valentine's cards. These early candies were much larger than what we are used to today and therefore had much longer messages. Some of the first messages included "Married in white you have chosen right" and "How long shall I have to wait?"

By the turn of the century conversation hearts were a Valentine's day staple. Over the years the hearts got smaller, and gained smaller phrases.

Today more than 8 billion hearts are manufactured each year. It takes all year to make the 8 billion candies! However, in 2019 no one could get their hands on them. In 2018 Necco went out of business and sold the Necco wafers and conversation hearts to Spangler Candy. Due to manufacturing needs to produce 8 billion candies, Spangler Candy was not willing to not meet consumer expectations and therefore waited until they could produce them right.

Over the last few years Spangler Candy has introduced new sayings to the famous Sweetheart candies to include words of encouragement and animal-themed phrases like "Love Birds", "Purr Fect" and "Big Dog".

For nearly 180 years conversation hearts have been a standard part of Valentine's Day. To this day everyone still loves to get a heart that says "Love You".

©Good HouseKeeping



KISSed Quilts

by Marlene Oddie

Inspiration Comes From Service Time Love Letters

As we approach that annual day when valentines are shared, I wanted to share a new and special collection from Lumin Fabrics/Island Batik called "Missing You". This was designed by Terri Vanden Bosch of Lizard Creek Quilting in Rock Valley, IA.

"This fabric collection is a tribute to enduring love, heartfelt devotion and the quiet strength found in life's most tender moments," says Vanden Bosch. Her father-in-law was a veteran. During his military service he and his wife wrote daily. These letters were found, wrapped in a cotton string and served as inspiration for this collection.

Terri created a variety of tjaps with the following themes: mail, cross stitch hearts, morse code words, ribbon meander with bows, ink splat and air mail love.

"This collection is my tribute, to love that lasts, to moments that matter, and to the quiet beauty of hand-written words. May these hand-drawn fabrics evoke your own cherished memories and offer comfort, connection and peace to all who use them."

Terri has put together several beautiful quilt designs, including "Mail Call Block of the Month", "Hometown Hearts", "Linen Letters", "Care Packages" and "Convictions". Other designers have also used the collection to create additional quilt patterns. I've used the collection to make up two versions of my Hugs and Kisses pattern originally designed to send a subtle hug and kiss from a mother to a teenage daughter. Do you see a large X and a large O in both of these? Squint at the picture. One has a blue X behind a light O and the other has a burgundy O in front of a light X. Placement of colors and values makes all the difference.

Ask at your local quilt shop that carries Island Batik fabrics for these fabrics and patterns. Check out Terri's website at lizardcreekquilting.com. The Hugs and Kisses pattern can be found at KISSed Quilts.

Marlene Oddie (marlene@kissedquilts.com) is an engineer by education, project manager by profession and now a quilter by passion in Grand Coulee, WA at her quilt shop, KISSed Quilts. She quilts for hire on a Gammill Optimum Plus, but especially enjoys designing quilts and assisting in the creation of a meaningful treasure for the recipient. Fabric, patterns, kits and templates are available at <http://www.kissedquilts.com>.

Follow Marlene's adventures via <http://www.facebook.com/kissedquilts> and <https://www.instagram.com/marlene.kissedquilts>



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Try a Round Robin Quilt!

by Judy Sharer

The excitement of making a round robin quilt is creating it with friends and not knowing exactly how it will look once completed. If you are in a quilters guild or have a social group of friends who sew this could be a great project.

There are two ways to create a round robin. First is as a single quilt that begins with a themed center, which is usually made by the owner. The center is passed from person to person each adding

another border to the quilt contributing to the theme the original person chose.

To complete this add a border quilt, whenever the quilt top is in your possession, you choose what to add to all four sides of the piece. It can be appliqued or pieced. Each quilt is usually passed within the group one time around the circle of members as



the masterpiece grows. A certain time frame for the piece to be passed to the next person is set by the group. As you exchange the quilt top the group decides whether to show the progress that's been made or keep it a secret until the end to show the owner of the original block.

The second way a round robin can work is each member in the group makes an individual block for the original person to assemble into to a quilt top. Smaller groups may choose to make more than one block per person, but each person makes a block for the other people in the group. The original person chooses the block size and a pattern for the block or they leave the pattern up to the people making the block for a scrappy quilt look.

In both cases often the original person chooses the colors and can even give each member a cut of fabric to use in the border or block they make. The colors and fabric help tie the quilt together as they add to the border or make the block to grow the quilt into a piece of art.

Over the years I've been involved in making several round robin quilts and it's always fun. It can also be a little nerve-wracking at times as you worry whether or not the final owner of the quilt will like what you've made. Then on reveal day you wait on pins and needles to see what your finished piece or quilt blocks will look like.

One of the members in our small group was pregnant and we decided to make a round robin baby quilt to surprise her. You could also do a round robin quilt with family members as a birthday present or make one for a family reunion. Clubs can also use this method to make a raffle quilt. Regardless, if it's for yourself or to give away, give it a try! This technique is a fun and exciting project to make with friends.

-© Judy Sharer, who is the author of a sweet historical romance family saga series titled A Plains Life. This four-book series published by The Wild Rose Press is appropriate for the entire family and is available online wherever books and eBooks are sold. Visit Judy's website judysharer.com and follow her on Facebook and LinkedIn. Please leave a book review if you enjoy the writing. Look for Judy's next release titled Secrets in Room Four coming this spring.

Cowgirl Poet, Quilter, Entertainer



Yvonne Hollenbeck

Grandma's Aprons

I remember Grandma,
and I guess I always will;
I remember how she welcomed me
to her house up on the hill;

Her homemade pies and cookies
were the best I've ever ate
and I loved her pansy garden,
and the roses by her gate.

But the one thing I remember
most about those days of yore,
was the homemade cotton aprons
that my grandma always wore.

All the grandmas wore them;
be they slender gals, or fat;
those aprons kept their dresses clean
but they were more than that.

They always had a pocket,
where she kept her handkerchief,

and peppermints for grandkids
and she'd wipe our little cheeks

With the tail of that old apron,
when a tear would happen by
from a fall or from a skinned up knee
things that'd make a young one cry.

She'd gather up the ends of it,
and use it for a bag
when picking garden produce,
even used it for a rag.

She made her pretty aprons
from feed sacks she had picked
when buying special chicken feed
or starter for her chicks.

What happened to those aprons?
No one wears them any more;
those homemade cotton aprons
that our grandmas always wore.

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

© Yvonne Hollenbeck; 2025

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>

Happy New Year!

Love at First Sight

by Becky Van Vleet

"How do I look, Mildred?" Alberta fluffed her hair and stood on tiptoe next to her bed at the shipyard.

"Just lovely, sweetie." Mildred pulled her hand.

"Come on. Time to go. I want to beat the boys."

When the girls arrived at the St. Julien restaurant in San Francisco, Alberta scooted into the half-circle cushioned burgundy seat surrounding a round wooden table to wait for her blind date. Had she done the right thing? Mildred had twisted her arm, that's for sure.

When two sailors meandered toward them, Mildred elbowed her. "That's them. My boyfriend, Robbie, is on the left. The other one, umm, the other one must be your date."

Alberta gulped. She rubbed her damp palms on her skirt beneath the table. She whispered, "He's so handsome. What's his name?"

"Walter."

I'm passionate about family stories and preserving them, one at a time, for the next generations. I tap into my imagination for how events may have happened. Sheer fun for me. Moments I never actually witnessed come alive in vivid color in my movie mind.

As a baby boomer, I grew up with parents who occasionally shared relics about the Great Depression and World War II. Truth be told, I wish I'd asked more questions. At the time, I had no idea historians would one day crown their resilience as the Greatest Generation. But now, I esteem their stories more than ever.

My parents' WWII romance narrative is unique. A whirlwind romance if I've ever heard one. For some background, my mother, Alberta Thomas, hitchhiked from Indiana with her best friend, Mildred, to California after high school to serve the WWII effort. Her friends had scattered. Boys had joined various military branches faster than sparks flying from a fire. Many of her girlfriends had joined the female military counterparts.

But my mother's adventurous spirit took her on a different path. She set off across the country with her thumb up to hitch rides to eventually arrive at Mare Island Shipyard. Of course, hitchhiking during the early 1940s was much safer, and even somewhat common for women without cars. Upon arrival at the shipyard, she converted to a Rosie the Riveter with her welding assignments.

In the meantime, my father, Walter Troyan, served as a young gunner on the USS Denver in the South Pacific, enlisting at age seventeen. When a torpedo severely struck his ship, the vessel traveled to Mare Island Shipyard for major repairs which lasted from January to May 1944.

Although the sailors were still required to work during the overhaul time, they were granted a 30-day liberty leave. The 50,000 civilians working at Mare Island, mostly women, also had some time off from their six-day workweek. Sailors itching for dates with female employees was not uncommon.

Robbie, my father's friend, had already linked up with a new girlfriend, Mildred. He convinced my father to go on a blind date to meet Mildred's girlfriend, Alberta. My father thought, why not? Still a teenager, he'd already witnessed more battles and carnage than he ever imagined.

My parents fell in love instantly at the restaurant where they met. Between their working shifts, more dates followed, sometimes with my father's shipmate, Eddie Page, and his wife Emma. At the Japanese Tea Garden in San Francisco, my mother eagerly accepted his proposal, barely a month later, when he slipped a diamond ring on her finger. Within days, my father's parents hosted their engagement party from their home in Santa Rosa.

Before his ship left Mare Island to reenter the war, the couple squeezed in a few more dates, cementing their commitment. From May 1944 to November 1945, they exchanged letters for the remainder of WWII. Wasting no time, they married on December 2, 1945, just eleven days after my father stepped off the ship. We've all heard the expression, love at first sight. It was for them. Their unwavering commitment, staying married until their deaths, remains an inspiring example to me.

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.



Walter & Alberta Troyan
Newlyweds after WWII

The Memory Box

by Susan Baldani

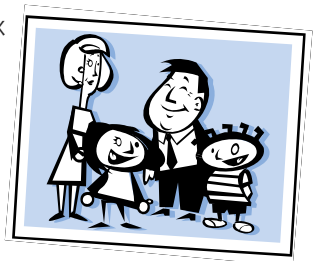
When I was a little girl, my grandmother kept a big box of pictures in her sewing room. Being the curious child that I was, I loved looking through it and seeing family and friends and how they had changed over the years. However, it was the people I didn't know and had never met who intrigued me the most.

Fortunately for me, Grandma Helen never minded when I interrupted her sewing (or crocheting, knitting, baking, or cooking—yup, she could do it all) to ask her who those people were. Some of the pictures were really old, and although the details weren't very clear, I remember loving them the most. I especially liked the ones with the fancy scalloped borders around them. Why did they ever stop doing that? Anyway, my grandmother would sit down with me and patiently explain who everyone was and where and what they were doing. I got to know relatives whom I had never met, like my great grandmother who died when my grandma was only thirteen, along with others I had only heard about. These times we spent together were not only special for me, but I believe for Grandma Helen as well. She got to relive her special memories as she was passing them on to my siblings and me. These photos were a gateway into the past, and reminded us how everyday events such as birthdays, weddings and baptisms helped form our family's history. I also loved that these pictures were all jumbled together in a big box, rather than arranged neatly and orderly in photo albums. That's nice too, of course, but for a kid who liked to explore, being able to dig down into the very bottom to find one that I hadn't seen before made it much more fun.

Today, due to the proliferation of online photo albums, there seem to be fewer and fewer printed pictures to keep in a box or put into an album. Sure, online digital pictures are great. The clarity cannot be beat, plus you can pick and choose which ones to keep. Still, there's something about those old black and white pictures in your hand that make you feel as if you're holding pieces of the past.

My mother and uncle now have these pictures, and just recently my mom and I sat in her bedroom going through them. This time my mother got to relive her own special memories with me. Although, when some of them were taken, my mother was not even born yet. But I could see when she looked at her ancestors how special they were to her, even though she never got to meet them all. This, in turn, made them special to me.

Why not make your kids or grandchildren a picture box so they too can hold a tangible part of your family's history? Be sure to pass on stories about the people and places to make them come alive in their hearts and minds. You could even write a little story on the back of each one. I know I will never forget the times spent looking through that old box of memories.



Susan Baldani has an MA in Education and a BA in Psychology. She enjoys writing and in addition to writing articles about small town life, is currently working on her second book. You can contact her at suebaldani@yahoo.com or through her website at www.mywritingwall.com.

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