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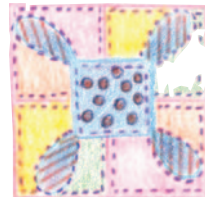
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My First Quilt Block

by Judy Sharer

Do you remember the first quilt block you ever attempted? You probably worried about matching the points and sewing over seams just right so everything looked good and matched perfectly.

Not me! My mother wanted me to enjoy quilting. My older sisters hadn't taken to sewing. I think Mom figured she'd started them too late, so she'd start me earlier. After all, I was ten years old.



Being the youngest and her last hope of having a child enjoy the finer things in life, like buying fabric and making it into a thing of beauty, my mother used reverse psychology on me. She could care less if my points matched or if my colors were what she would have chosen. She started me with the flying geese pattern and using scraps. Nothing to line up, just sew and go! I loved it! The geese were different colors and didn't have to be in a certain order. I sewed six panels with six geese in each.

I was hooked! I learned to wind and change my own bobbin, and I could thread the machine needle all by myself. I was allowed to use Mother's machine when she wasn't using it. Three rows of geese flew up and three down. No sashing, no points to worry about. It went together quickly. My sisters were impressed with my design, and Mother showed everyone who came to house what her little protege had done. Then I decided to add a border to make it a little bigger to fit my bed; a border that didn't need to match points. Mother suggested using the rest of the scraps, so I made a rail fence border. Again, the order of the fabrics and colors didn't matter. The border went together easily and sewing it to the quilt was a breeze.

How can I recall so vividly every step I took to create my first quilt, you ask? It's still a favorite cover-up that's draped over the end of the couch. Although not my most prized quilt, it's certainly one of my most memorable.

Judy Sharer is the author of a historical family saga romance series titled *A Plains Life*. This four-book series published by The Wild Rose Press is appropriate for the entire family. *A Plains Life* series is available on-line wherever books and eBooks are sold. Visit Judy's website judysarar.com and follow her on Facebook and Twitter.

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Back Porch Break

by Nancy Brummett

Facing Future Fears

Twenty-four years ago we were all in a panic over what might happen when the clock struck midnight on December 31, 1999, and we plummeted into a new millennium. Yes, it was two dozen years ago this January that we were told to store up gallons of water and batteries and everyone everywhere was talking about all the bad things that might happen in Y2K. Guess what? The clock struck 12:01 AM and nothing significant changed.

It's true there was some reason for concern that what was dubbed the "Y2K bug" would keep our computers from moving from 1999 to 2000 and we might find we all reverted to 1900 instead. Banking, telecommunications, and energy systems could have been affected. So computer experts updated software and replaced or modified existing systems to avert the crisis and it worked. A lot was learned about proactively preparing for technological challenges in the months leading up to that fatal tick of the clock. So the hard work may have paid off, but all the fear we found ourselves swimming in didn't contribute to the smooth transition at all.

Besides jugs of pure water and batteries, consumers were encouraged to stock up on medications and first aid supplies, flashlights, cash, fuel, battery-operated radios and basic necessities like toiletries and hygiene products. My husband and I gave in to fear enough to buy a stock of batteries and about five jugs of water. Over the years we used up the batteries but when we moved eight years ago we found a couple of jugs of Y2K water still in our crawl space. We laughed remembering that we went out to dinner on New Year's Eve 1999 to a very expensive restaurant we hadn't been to before (nor since). As my husband signed the check he quipped, "Well, we can come back here next millennium."

No doubt there will be attempts to whip us all into a frenzy of fear in the year to come. Certainly we see events in our country and our world that concern us deeply, but as in Y2K our fears won't contribute to solving the issues, only our hard work and optimism will make a difference. Fears can paralyze us, making us feel powerless over our lives. Better to choose faith over fear and slam the door on fear mongers.

Worry seems to be a basic failing of human kind however, and we worry about what we fear. Speaking to believers in the sovereign God, Elisabeth Elliot wrote, "We are allowed to plan for tomorrow but we are not allowed to worry about it."

Jesus also encouraged us not to worry in Matthew, Chapter 6, often called the "mental health" chapter of the Bible. He asks, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" (Matthew 6:27). He speaks of how God cares for the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field and then says, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

I need these reminders as much as anyone. Psalm 121:3 says, *He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber.* Let's resolve to move into 2024 facing any fears we have for the future head on and remembering that faith always overcomes fear. May you have a happy and fearless New Year!



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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Life's Recipe

by Becky Van Vleet

Not so long ago, I was going through my 45-year+ recipe box I received for a wedding shower gift. You know, the kind with tabbed dividers that hold three by five lined cards and you actually write out recipes! I had not browsed through it for quite some time, and I was hunting down a specific recipe for dinner. My fingers stumbled upon "Life's Recipe" on a piece of paper that was nestled in with other cards behind my "Meat" divider.

Recognizing it from years long gone by, I had a vague memory of cutting this "recipe" out from a church bulletin and adding it to my recipe box as a new bride. I paused a moment to read it. And then I drew a breath and pondered on the ingredients and instructions for "baking" this recipe.

Momentarily stalled from my recipe hunt for dinner, I decided to research this beautiful and profound life recipe. I discovered it was written by Ella Mae Wheatley in the early 1900s, an African-American woman from Kentucky. Her granddaughter, Tammie, is attributed to circulating it beyond the family.

Maybe you've never seen this, or maybe you have, but a re-read could be beneficial for many of us.

LIFE'S RECIPE

- 1 Cup good thoughts
- 1 Cup consideration for others
- 2 Cups sacrifice for others
- 3 Cups forgiveness
- 2 Cups well-beaten faults

Mix these thoroughly and add tears of joy and sorrow and sympathy for others. Flavor with little gifts of love and kindly service. Fold in 4 Cups of prayers and faith to lighten other ingredients, and raise the texture to great heights of good living. After pouring all this into your daily life, bake well with the tear of human kindness. Serve with a smile!

This life recipe sounds easy enough. But just like food recipes, if an ingredient is missing or there's too much of one thing and not enough of another, or you forget the flavorings, the whole recipe is skewed.

Life is tough, it's not always Easy Street, that's for sure. As we enter into a new year, I believe Ella Mae's life recipe may be just what we need to bake. I'd like a large portion, please!

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.beckyanvleet.com.






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Pieces From My Heart

by Jan Keller

Can the Afterglow Last?

The soft strains of Silent Night continue to echo in my mind. I'm still basking in the warmth I felt from the loving holiday companionship of family and friends. Yet, Christmas 2023 is past.

Burnt candles remain on the mantel but they have been snuffed out, leaving ugly charred wicks and dripped wax.

In the corner of the living room the Christmas tree still stands. Once it was beautiful with gaily wrapped gifts tucked beneath its branches. Now the gifts are gone—except for one to the neighbor. I ran out of time and failed to get it delivered. Somehow, the once gaily decorated tree has become an eyesore. The decorations are dusty, making the glitter and charm seem tacky. It's funny how packing "Christmas" back into the storage boxes is never as fun as the unpacking had been. The anticipation of Christmas seemed to dissipate just as quickly as the wrappings on the gifts were ripped off.

The days following Christmas come with sharp contrast, reminding me of the real world. Though the throngs of shoppers in the mall are in a hurry to exchange those slippers that didn't fit or the shirt that didn't match. There's no choice but to take a number and patiently wait. I also must remember to stop by the grocery store for milk, bread and potato chips to make sandwiches for lunch with the leftover turkey and ham.

I don't even want to listen to the news. It's upsetting and even discouraging.

Finally, once New Year's Eve is past, the holiday season is officially over. As the week progresses, every trace of Christmas is finally and completely packed away. Enlisting the family to rally around to undecorate is difficult and the chore is usually left for me. In solitude, reflections on the various "special" ornaments and decorations—gifts from loved ones or others we've enjoyed through the years, and yes, even for decades, are indeed satisfying. There's also the knowledge that when December 2024 comes there will be joy in their rediscovery.

Amid my musings, I find myself wondering:

Did Christmas 2023 hold any real and lasting meaning?

Were any lessons learned that I'll successfully apply into my daily existence?

How long into this brand new year can I cling to the challenge of keeping even a faintly glowing ember of the Christ in Christmas alive?

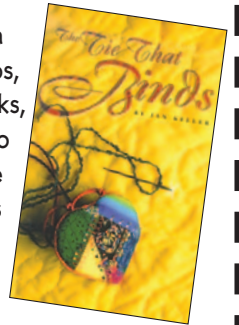


©2024 Jan Keller No reprint without permission Jan shares other pieces of her life in her books, *Pieces From My Crazy Quilt*, and *The Tie That Binds*. These books can be ordered by calling 719-866-8570, or writing: Black Sheep Books, 11250 Glen Canyon Drive, Peyton, CO 80831

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A Cup of Tea with Lydia

by Lydia E. Harris

Tea Parties that Say, "I Love You"



"Love Makes the World Go Round" is a song from the 1960s musical *Carnival*. Sixty years later, the lyrics still inspires me. In this new year, we have many opportunities—including Valentine's Day—to share love with others. Here are a few ideas for tea parties that say, "I love you," which could help us make the world go 'round.

TEA PARTIES AT HOME

Last year, when my extended family celebrated the engagement of my niece Lena and her fiancé, Dylan, the couple requested ideas for dates. I set a "date" for them to come for tea.

On a sunny afternoon, I served Dylan and Lena tea outdoors on our deck. A large red heart, a potted pink Gerbera daisy, and two wedding cake toppers decorated our setting. One came from my sister's wedding cake and featured a bride and a sailor—like the navy man she married. The other bride and groom had graced my cake 56 years earlier.

While we nibbled croissants filled with chicken salad and sampled other treats, I enjoyed getting to know Dylan and hearing about their wedding plans. In honor of their recent engagement, I had baked Royal Rings, a cookie shaped like a ring with sweet candy jewels. (See recipe from my book.) I also served several tea blends and rhubarb punch, a popular family beverage. We sipped tea from my mother's pink floral teacups. Since Lena was named after my mother, Helena, I gave her the set of teacups as a gift. And because this was a "date" for them, I offered them dates to eat.

I sent them home with the flowering centerpiece and a few favorite cookies. They said good-bye with beaming faces, anticipating the joy of their not-too-distant wedding day.

TEA PARTIES TO GO

My friend Barbara and I enjoyed making memories together in tearooms. But when I became ill and couldn't get out, Barbara made the hour's drive to my home with a tea party to go. In addition to a tea lunch, she brought a cheery yellow floral teacup. "This is your sunshine cup," she said as I sipped tea from my new cup and savored homemade goodies. The tea and her kind gesture warmed more than my body. It also warmed my heart and added joy to my life.

TEA PARTIES BY MAIL

If you can't deliver a tea party in person, you could share love by mailing a tea party. That's what I recently did for my friend Barbara. Now, years after she brought me a tea party to go, her health has declined and she lives in a skilled nursing facility. Since I can't make the long drive to bring her tea, I mailed a tea party in a box. I contacted her daughter in advance and arranged to have her share the tea party box and enjoy teatime with her mother.

The box included two floral china teacups, several tea blends, shortbread cookies, and other treats. I also sent paper plates, napkins, silk flowers, and a few small gifts. Just as Barbara's tea party brightened my day, now I could return the favor via mail and add cheer to her life.

TEA PARTIES IN 2024

As I recall the song "Love Makes the World Go Round," another song plays in my mind. During my childhood, I learned the song "Brighten the Corner Where You Are." I still embrace those words and seek ways to add love and joy to the lives of others. Teatimes are one way that works for me. And when I bless others, it also adds joy to my life.

Throughout the year, I hope you will join me and look for ways to show love to others. Perhaps we'll serve tea in our homes, deliver a tea party to go, or mail one in a box. Whatever we do, let's make the world go 'round with our love.

Lydia E. Harris is a tea enthusiast, grandmother of five, and the author of three grandparenting books: *GRAND Moments: Devotions Inspired by Grandkids* (2023); *In the Kitchen with Grandma: Stirring Up Tasty Memories Together*; and *Preparing My Heart for Grandparenting*. All are available online and wherever books are sold.

From Lydia's Recipe File: Royal Rings

Ring-shaped cookies with sweet candy jewels

(Recipe from Lydia's book *GRAND Moments: Devotions Inspired by Grandkids*, pages 213--14)

1/2 cup soft butter (1 cube)	2/3 cup sugar
3 egg yolks (save whites for another use)	1 teaspoon vanilla
1 1/2 cups flour	1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt	Multicolored sprinkles

Candied fruit or small candies that won't melt (such as Boston Baked Beans, Jujy Fruits, or Dots)

Preheat oven to 375°. In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar. Add egg yolks and vanilla to creamed mixture, and beat until light and fluffy. Combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Sift dry ingredients into the sugar mixture, and mix well. Shape into 1-inch balls. Push your finger through each ball to shape it into a ring. Make sure the opening is at least 1/2-inch wide so it doesn't close while baking. Dip the top side of each ring into colored sprinkles. Place on lightly sprayed baking sheet. Add a piece of candied cherry or small candy on each cookie for a jewel. Bake 10 to 12 minutes or until golden brown. Carefully remove cookies to a cooling rack.

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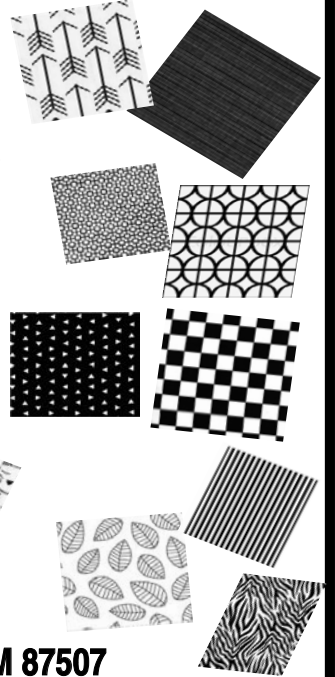
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Become Inspired

By Annice Bradley Rockwell

Peaceful Dwellings

As the festive, fast-paced excitement of the holidays draws to a close, we are given a chance to create a protective sanctuary of peace to enjoy the season of winter. Winter weekends might find us venturing to nearby antiques shops searching for perfect pieces to add to our room arrangements. Early baskets, blue decorated stoneware jugs, early treen and country lighting are all wonderful investments that add touches of warmth to our indoor vignettes. Tavern tables flanked with wing-back chairs can be moved closer to the hearth now for a cozy fireside arrangement in which to enjoy a piping hot meal of chicken pot pie and homemade cranberry chutney.



Symbols of Comfort

Our outdoor additions can be equally fulfilling. Setting up the evergreen tree that graced our keeping room during the holidays as an outdoor sanctuary for our wildlife can add visual interest and appeal. Adding natural decorations such as pinecones filled with peanut butter and birdseed can provide a special winter treat for our feathered friends.

As the snow falls and blankets the roads, our home takes on a whole new look against the new backdrop of white. Silhouetted against a stark landscape its features often stand out now as a symbol of comfort and shelter against the season's cold and blustery days.

Shift to Stillness

Being outside in the elements to gather our seasoned wood for the fire, we are reminded of how blessed we truly are to have the safety of home. Unexpected snow days where a depth of snow provides a day off from our normal daily work provides us with time we can spend enjoying the pure beauty of nature. A winter walk enveloped by the stillness of winter is a country treat meant to be savored. Despite its initially withered and worn appearance, the woods are actually quite vibrant and alive. The sun's radiant rays on the snow create a brilliance that only belongs to winter. As it is enjoyed, we may catch a glimpse of small creatures endeavoring to forage. We might take advantage of a spectacular new view of our maple swamp as its bare trees allow us to see even more of its fringed beauty.

Winter's slower pace grants us the blessing of quiet time. Along with this calm rhythm often comes the ability to nurture our ideas and plan for the season ahead. Whether it is being excited about beginning a new business venture or repurposing a small room in our home to be used for a hobby we have come to love, the winter season is the ideal time to allow our concepts to come together and take shape. This season embrace the shift to stillness. Take in the slower moments that allow you to enjoy observing the beauty that abounds in nature. And when you experience that beauty, share that wonder with those you hold dear.

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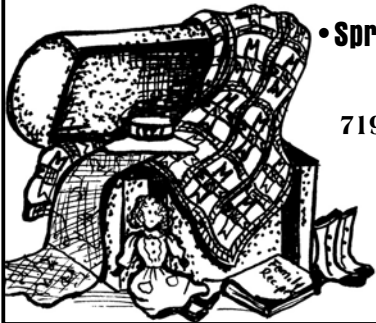
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Search for the underlined words in the recipe in the word search below!

Crock Pot Holy Moly Potato Soup

recipe by Taste of Home

- 4 cans (14 - 1/2 oz) diced new potatoes, undrained
- 2 cans (10- 3/4 oz) condensed cream of mushroom soup, undiluted
- 2 - 1/2 cups water
- 1 can (11oz) whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 can (10oz) diced tomatoes and green chiles, undrained
- 6 green onions, chopped
- 1 medium sweet red pepper, chopped
- 1 tbsp dried minced onion
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 pound spicy pork sausage
- 2 cups (8oz) shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 carton (8oz) French onion dip
- Tortilla chips

In a 6 quart slow cooker, combine the first ten ingredients. In a large skillet, cook sausage over medium heat for about 6-8 minutes or until no longer pink. Break it up into crumbles as it cooks. Drain the sausage and add to the slow cooker. Cook, covered, on low to allow flavors to blend for about 4-5 hours. Add cheese and onion dip in the last 30 minutes of cooking. Stir before serving. Serve with tortilla chips.

Freeze cooled soup in freezer containers. When thawing, partially thaw in the refrigerator overnight. Heat through in a saucepan, stirring occasionally. Add broth or water if needed.

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Interfaith Quilters of Longmont SPRING SALE

Friday, March 1st & Saturday, March 2nd

Interfaith Quilters of Longmont announces its 38th Annual Spring Sale! The Event will be Friday, March 1, 4:00 to 8:00 pm and Saturday March 2, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Doors of the Friendship Center at Longmont's First Lutheran Church, 803 Third Street, will be open to the public. Proceeds from our sale benefit the OUR Center of Longmont and Safe Shelter of St Vrain. A \$2 donation is requested each day.

Interfaith Quilters of Longmont was organized in 1986. Early members Lee Donaldson, Maxine Bunker, Tracey Murphy and others met at Messiah Lutheran Church on Francis St. The Lutheran Brotherhood offered to match IFQ funds—\$5000—for the OUR Center of Longmont, an auspicious beginning for a fledgling non-profit. Today Interfaith Quilters of Longmont also contributes to the Safe Shelter of St Vrain with the proceeds from our Holiday Boutique and Spring annual sales. Each year we donate quilts upon request. During 2023 appropriate quilts went to Mountain States Childrens Home, Longmont United Hospital—Roberta's Legacy, and Longs Peak Hospital—Palliative Care Unit.

Interfaith Quilters, an eclectic group, have observed some members return to their earlier art education Others have broadened their artistic leanings.

After 37 years of quilting and teaching, Tracey Murphy rediscovered Ceramic Art and Art History. She first painted botanicals in pastels. Now in clay she creates garden totems and structures.

Karen Stalgren has sewn since age 7. An Occupational Therapist, Karen's mechanical skills and crafting and sewing experience enhanced her therapeutic vibe. She began quilting in retirement, later joining two art quilt groups. She loves to experiment!

Janet Mason speaks of inspiration. Quilting since 1994, Janet sees quilting encompassing all aspects of design. Her art quilts feature pictorial scenes that are given texture and depth with raw edge and needle turn applique. The latest Halloween quilt depicted trick or treaters, employing crazy quilting, ribbons and buttons.

Please join us for the Interfaith Quilters of Longmont Annual Spring Sale, March 1st and 2nd, 2024!





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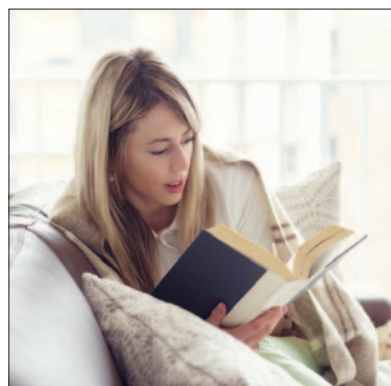
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Wit and Wisdom

Snow Place Like Home

by Cheryl Potts

Some people think I'm crazy because I like winter! There's something about that cozy home feeling, holding a cup of hot cocoa, and a good book that is so inviting and relaxing. There are a slew of indoor winter activities and projects that I can hardly wait to begin when temperatures plummet and the white stuff falls. This time of year, one of my most relaxing activities is to pull out my sewing machine and work on quilts, gifts, making clothes or trying out new craft ideas. With soft music playing in the background and a cup of tea to sip, I'm content to stay in my sewing sanctuary for hours.

After a while, I take a break from reading and sewing as I launch into writing. I enjoy writing poetry, short stories, and "teacher books." I've discovered the more I write the more ideas I get! Especially recording little things my children used to say and do that I don't want to forget. Someday they will be surprised to read about themselves in my journals and family poetry album. I even keep a folder of ideas and anecdotes to complete the next time I have some spare time to write.

An on-going hobby of mine is scrap booking. When my sister-in-law introduced me to this creative activity over ten years ago, I'm sure she never thought I would spend hours upon hours condensing and cropping 17 photo albums into five scrapbooks. In fact, since my family pictures are all caught up, I've been working on my parent's albums. It's been a great family history study as well! However, since I'm an organized and somewhat obsessive-compulsive personality, I've expanded the scrap book concept to my classroom scrap book, as well as, my church family album, my mother's Red Hatter's album, and even a scrap book for my parent's dog. Yicks!

And then there's playing the piano...a great emotional outlet. My parents made a very worthwhile investment, for I was a most unusual child. I loved to practice! Now it's a great past time and a skill I can use for church and school.

So, you see that's why I enjoy winter. There's never a dull moment. There's always something to write about, read, a project to finish, an idea to pursue, music to play and moments to savor! I thank God.

1 Timothy 6:6 – "But godliness with contentment is great gain."
Hebrews 13:5 – "...be content with what you have..."

Judyann Grant and her husband, Don, live in the snow belt region of eastern Lake Ontario in New York State

Strawberry Pop Tart in a Mug



Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp butter at room temperature
- 1 tbsp icing sugar
- 2 tbsp milk
- 4 tbsp all purpose flour
- 1 tbsp strawberry jam
- Icing
- Sprinkles

Directions:

1. In a microwavable mug, mix the butter and sugar together.
2. Stir in the flour and milk.
3. Mix until all ingredients are fully combined.
4. Make a well in the batter and spoon in the jam.
5. Smooth the batter over the jam so there is no jam showing.
6. Microwave for 45-60 seconds or until firm to touch.
7. Let cool.
8. Spoon over some icing and then decorate with sprinkles!

Recipe by Gemma's Bigger Bolder Baking



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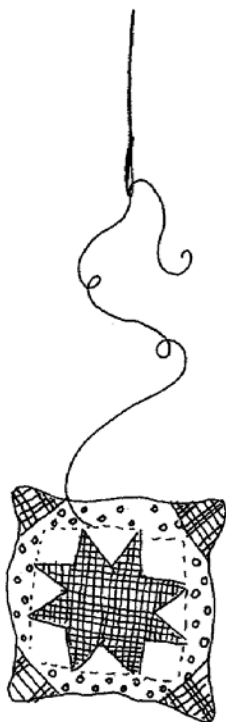
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Yvonne Hollenbeck

Nature's Church

Have you ever seen the prairie when it's covered up with snow,
or watched an evening sunset leave its purple afterglow?

Have you ever seen a newborn calf a-wobbling to its feet,
and though it's only minutes old it knows just where to eat?

You can't climb up in a saddle and ride across prairie sod,
or see an eagle on the wing and not believe in God.

A cowman may not worship in a building made of stone,
but worships with his Maker out with nature all alone.

His church is in the great outdoors; the valley, heaven's gate.
His favorite hymn's a coyote that is calling to its mate.

He doesn't do his tithing dropping money in a hand;
it's by being a good caretaker of the creatures and the land.

He makes his own communion while a choir of songbirds sing,
as he cups his hands to drink the fresh cold water from a spring.

From the budding of the springtime to autumn's goldenrod,
there's no better place to worship than to be out there with God.

So, when you hear a meadowlark that's singing from its perch,
it's inviting you to worship with it there at Nature's Church.

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>

Country Register Recipe Exchange Easy Crock Pot Winter Stew

From L.J. Roddy, St. Micheal, MN

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 3 small onions | 1/4 C. peanut butter |
| 4 potatoes, peeled and diced | 2 Tbs soy sauce |
| 4 carrots, cut into slices | 1/2 tsp ginger |
| 3 garlic cloves, minced | 2 C. chicken or beef broth |
| 1 C. tomato sauce | 2 C diced chicken or beef |
| 1 C. celery cut into chunks | |

Saute chicken or beef in small amount of olive oil, add onions and garlic. Add potato, carrot, and celery. Toss. Put in crock pot along with other ingredients. Cook on low for 6-8 hours. Serve with bread!





Consider One Word

by Cathy Elliott

Am I the only one who let go of her New Year's Resolutions before January was history? Not just let go, but set them free to pester a more disciplined soul somewhere? And slammed the door of failure behind them as they left?

I not only ignored those resolutions, I broke them. All. Eventually I quit making any resolutions when the time came. It continued for some years. Whenever asked if I'd made my New Year's Resolutions, I smiled and changed the subject.

Until our Quills of Faith Writer's Group Co-Leader, Kate Barker, brought a new idea to the first meeting of the year in 2017. Instead of that list of resolutions none of us kept, how about trying a new idea that was catching fire. "It works for me because it gives me a focus," Kate said, now a veteran one-worger. "And then I begin to see how things come together during the year."

An interesting concept. Just in time, too. I'd had a setback on my writing journey and a special, focus-word could serve as motivation to pull me out of my slump. I decided to give it a go and chose my first word—Forward (for 2017).

In typical Cathy-style, I began researching quotes and verses and memes with my word at the heart. Soon, I had a ten-page file with colorful pictures and encouraging quotes to flip through. Daily. Or anytime I felt a little crumbly inside. These truths came from many places and many people. They undergirded my writer recuperation in the best of ways. The repetition of wise thoughts and advice served to replace my nagging self-doubts. Embracing the one word thing worked for me.

The next year, I chose Brave as my word. Again, success. Then last year, I chose Wisdom. Another winner! Focusing on all three words mended my heart and amended my point of view. Like a compass, they guided my steps and directed me toward the person I long to become.

And...no broken resolutions left behind. Nothing to lament. Rather, the commitment to my chosen word is a positive in every way.

Rachel Olsen, co-author of *My One Word: Change Your Life With Just One Word* says, "A word can't be broken. It serves as a reminder; a filter. It's who you want to be instead of what you regret."

Considering my focus for the New Year, I don't feel so word-needy. I wonder if I have it already. My latest cozy mystery features some folks who will play an important part in solving the case. They are part of a group referred to as Plain. And in studying their ways, my non-Plain heroine is seeing something lovely in their lifestyle. Something restful and pure. So am I. Which made me wonder if my 2020 word was associated with them. I listened to the old Shaker Hymn, "Simple Gifts" for ideas.

SIMPLE GIFTS

Shaker Hymn by Joseph Brackett (1797 -1882)

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gain'd,
To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

Also, I found synonyms for the words plain and simple.

Plain: *Minimal, unadorned, unfussy, down-to-earth, unpretentious, homely, pure, homespun, honest.*

Simple: *Uncomplicated, trouble-free, undemanding, humble, natural, effortless, easy, elegant.*

My focus on the gift of being simple began months ago. Maybe it's been knocking on my heart for years and I'm finally listening. Recently, I started a board on my Pinterest site titled, "The Bounty of Simple." You can see where this is going.

So, I'm looking for a word for 2020 that keeps me focused on the beauty of less. But I can only choose one. Maybe "Simplicity?" That'll do.

© 2020 C. Elliott - Cathy Elliott is a full-time writer in California whose cozy mysteries reflect her personal interests from quilting and antique collecting to playing her fiddle with friends. Cathy's cozy plot-twisters include *A Stitch in Crime* released in tandem with the *RElease* (previously published) of a companion book, *A Vase of Mistaken Identity*. She also has contributed to *Guideposts*, *Every Day Jesus*, *All God's Creations* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books. For more information about Cathy, visit: <http://www.cathyelliottbooks.com>




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Kissed Quilts

by Marlene Oddie

Zen Garden

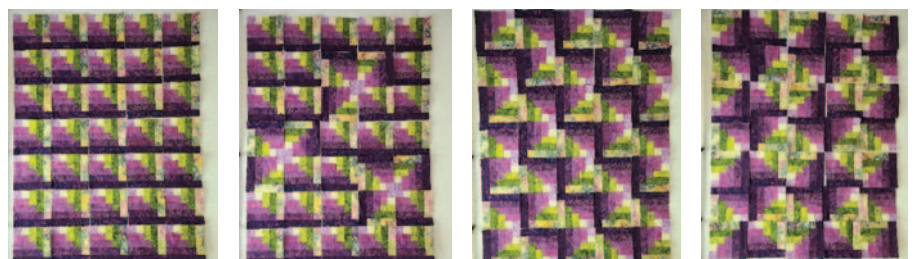
When I first started designing for Island Batik, I did a quilt called Woven Braid. I revisited that design recently with slightly different value colorations and using the new Zen Chic collection from Island Batik. The Zen Garden quilt emerged!

This quilt is made by two colorations of the same block. It starts with the first six logs being exactly the same fabrics. Then the blocks are split into two groups and each group gets their own fabrics (similar values but different prints) for the remaining logs. Each block is sort of a quarter of a log cabin block and the center is not the lightest value. By alternating the block colorations there is more interest to the eye. There are also lots of opportunities for other settings of the blocks.

The quilting is 'Jessica's Ginkgo' pantograph from Urban Elementz that was inspired by the ginkgo print in one of the fabrics.

The pattern includes yardages and directions for five quilt sizes.

Here are a few examples of the other settings:



Island Batik has created this beautiful Zen Chic collection. The fabric collection has beautiful shades of green and purple and some mixed color prints as well.

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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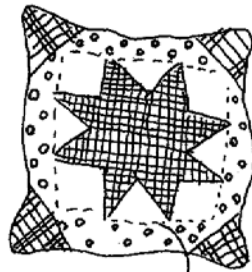
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The Sweetness of Life

by Kerri Habben Bosman

Late last year, I began a special project. My husband, Wayne, and I were driving home from Wisconsin after a visit with his 102 year old mother. He asked me how many essays I had written over the years and suggested that Mom would love to read all of them.

And just like that, I was finally inspired to put together a book of twenty years of essays. I have thought of doing this many times before, but as happens with me, bringing happiness to someone I love galvanizes me into action.

In 2003 I began writing what I called "Compass Points." My dad would have turned 90 that year, and I wanted to acknowledge that. In my rereading, I discovered a somewhat inept attempt at creative nonfiction. I winced a bit at the sheer sentimentality of it, but I was also affirmed reading my tribute to him. I felt a flash of grief so intense it revitalized me because for a moment, I could feel the entire journey.

Thankfully, over the next ten years, each of the ensuing forty essays steadily improved. And a style developed. Although each piece is different, common themes emerged. Everyone carries layers of joy, gratitude and love.

I used some of these essays as a portfolio, which brought further writing assignments, including becoming a part of Country Register publications in 2012. Along the way, the style of these articles grew both more concise and cohesive.

As I prepared the book, it took extensive restraint not to change very much. For this version, I wanted each piece to be an authentic representation of who I was when it was written. If I made everything perfect, Mom wouldn't feel the whole story. And neither would I.

The specific details carried me back to a time when both my own mother and grandmother were living. I could fully feel the moments, yet it was also like watching a movie. On the surface each essay appears to be about me, but they are also about people I treasured. Their precious presences linger softly between the lines.

I've felt following quote with ordinary and pivotal experiences since, though I originally wrote those words in the second article after my mother died:

"Sometimes the sweetness of life bends you in half. In those moments you are utterly and fully alive. When you stand up again, you are stronger, breathe more deeply, and experience the world with kinder eyes."

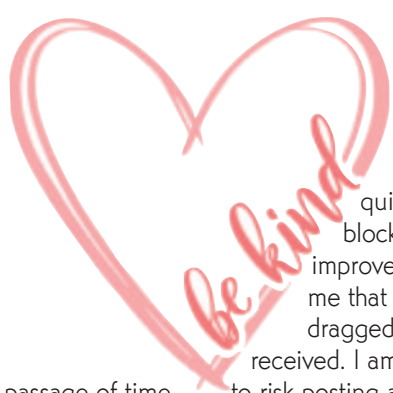
And in the ensuing 28 articles the next chapters of my life pour forth. Described in them is how I lived on my own and then the life Wayne and I share together. I write about him and the family I love like my own. Including grandchildren who become frequent "characters." Most of them are teenagers now, and as I reread the articles I realize anew how quickly and how much they've grown.

And, of course, the Mom that inspired me putting a book together is vibrantly there as well. Presently this book is in the works as a surprise for her. She embraces me and everyone with so much love, which brings me to what I've discovered during my project.

I've learned that the details of my life may have changed over the course of twenty years, but that the root of who I am is the same. I still count my blessings every day. I still believe life doesn't have to be perfect to be ideal.

Mostly I have learned that I love exactly the same way. Only with a deeper sense of how huge love truly is. With an open, grateful heart it only grows more. It expands with a redeeming sweetness that sometimes bends me in half.

Kerri Habben Bosman is a writer in Chapel Hill, NC. She can be reached at 913jeves@gmail.com.



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.

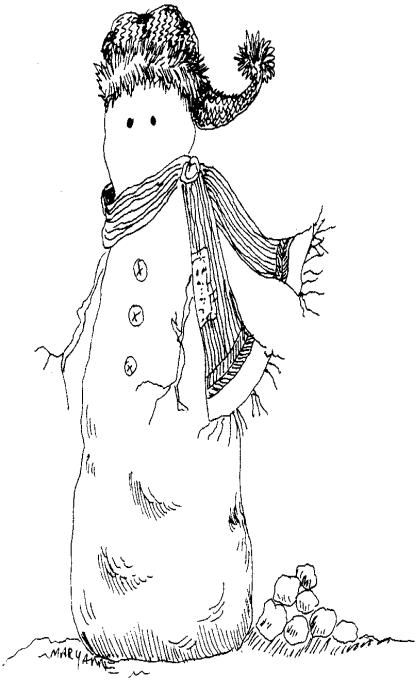
Of course, we do not like every quilt, every painting, every drawing, every embroidery that we see. Social media makes it too easy to share our dislike without regard to the person who will read those comments and have their creative muscle damaged, perhaps beyond healing. Maybe, if we see someone asking 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!

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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



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Making Choices Brings Change

By Barbara Kalkis

Sometimes it seems as if all the wise sayings in the world have already been said by those old standbys: the Bible, Einstein (Did the man ever say anything useless?), Confucius, various Greeks who all seemed to be philosophers and the wisest people known universally as "Mom" and "Anonymous".

As one year ends and another enters, I realize that Mom and "Anonymous" have given me some of the best guidance. Mom's advice was practical. If I asked to do something that all my friends were doing, she would reply, "Just because everyone else jumps off a bridge, doesn't mean you should." (While teaching me to think before acting, that comment ruined me for diving into pools or running freely into the ocean. I still tiptoe into the shallows and slowly edge my way to the deeper water.)

When Covid struck in 2020, we were forced into solitude and standing 6 feet apart. While online meeting software emerged to save our collective sanity, it was still a time of separation. It seemed that the silver linings to the covid 'cloud' were that we could slouch around in our pajamas, watch TV or browse the internet until the need for food drove us into the kitchen and postpone cleaning since visitors were not likely to show up on the doorstep.

That initial shutdown motivated me to develop a fresh philosophy about how I wanted to spend my time (or die of boredom). B.C. (Before Covid), I had been a sometime crafter – a dabbler making greeting cards, writing poetry, commentaries, or letters, sewing, embroidering and perfecting the art of single crochet. (Potholders for everyone at Christmas. Bonus! They double as a face cloth, hot pad, bar cloth and dolly's winter blanket.)

In those gloomy days, I discovered three wise-saying gems. The first was from the Bible: "In the world you will have trouble but take courage. I have conquered the world." That saying comforted me. The second saying came from Loralee in our cardmaking group. She sent an email telling us to embrace "Prolific Creativity." Her comment inspired me. "Anonymous" provided the third saying. It sits on my desk next to my computer, so I see it every day. The faded paper is curled and brittle. The advice says, "The Three C's of Life: CHOICES, CHANCES, CHANGES. You must make a choice to take a chance, or your life will never change."

If you recognize this saying, it's because it was published in The Country Register. I don't know the edition or publication date. I do know these words have guided me to focus on choosing activities I enjoy and enthusiastically pursue them. I more readily take chances to do something different. Mostly, I've learned that change is refreshing.

As we complete one year and welcome a new one, let's leverage our "Art Advantage" and resolve to play, create, dream, invent, design, decorate and build more. We love art, let's live it. Welcome inspiration, seek beauty in the world around us. And if it's not there, let's bring it in. Creativity energizes our thinking, opens us to visualize what can be, not just what is. Hobbies keep us searching for new ideas. They spur us to turn our appreciation of the world into art. We simply need to make a date with ourselves to play and be creatively prolific again and again.

A House can be an architectural achievement, but Home is where we find comfort, soothe our spirits and make the choice to set our heart and art free. Go for it. Happy New Year!

©Barbara Kalkis. Barbara spends her time writing, teaching, and working as a marketing consultant. She's the 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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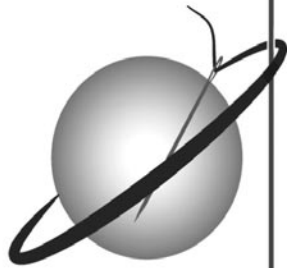
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COUNTRY REGISTER RECIPE EXCHANGE

Apricot-Glazed Short Ribs

From the kitchen of Ann Terrazas, El Paso, TX

- 2 pounds beef short-ribs
- 2 ounces soy sauce
- 6 ounces apricot preserves (good quality like Bonne Maman)

Prepare ribs, arrange in foil-lined baking dish. Pour soy sauce over ribs then spread with the apricot preserves on top of ribs. Bake uncovered in 350° oven for 30 minutes; then lower heat to 325° for an additional 30 to 45 minutes.

Cooking time depends on thickness of ribs.





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Do You Want the Whole Story or Just the Condensed Version?

by Colleen Gust

Condensed milk most definitely has its own identity and its not interchangeable with evaporated milk usually. My husband used to get confused when he saw it on the grocery list as he was never confident that he knew the difference between condensed and evaporated milk. To this day, in our house, it's usually just called Eagle Brand® as he knew that meant the sweetened milk!

Sweetened condensed milk is milk from which about 60% of the water has been removed and then heated to 185-194°F, and sugar is added. It isn't a diet food as it is about 45% sugar, and this sugar actually helps extend the shelf life of the product. In some countries, evaporated milk is known as unsweetened condensed milk, so I can certainly understand where my husband's confusion comes from!

Condensed milk has been around for about 200 years. Gail Borden Jr. started manufacturing this long-lasting without refrigeration product after a trip from England after witnessing the death of several children from poor milk from shipboard cows. Borden also introduced the "Dairyman's Ten Commandments" as a condition for farmers to sell him raw milk. They had to wash the udders before milking, keep the barns clean, and scald and dry their strainers morning and night. Between the canning of the milk and the increased hygiene, Borden's milk (Eagle Brand) was well regarded as a safe alternative to raw milk.



Condensed milk is used in various desserts from many cultures – everything from key lime pie to tres leches cake as it adds a smooth, creamy texture.

Did you know you can boil a can of condensed milk in water for about 3 hours to create a dulce de leche (caramel sauce)? I have to share the information that the internet is full of warnings that the can could potentially explode. The secret to preventing that seems to be ensuring the can is covered with water when boiling. I've never had any mishaps, and I've done this many times, but it is a danger. One year, for little Christmas favors, I boiled cans to create dulce de leche and made custom labels for the cans.

Dulce de Leche

1. Bring a large pan of water to a rolling boil. You will need enough water to completely cover the sweetened, condensed milk can.
2. Remove the label from the sweetened condensed milk can – it will come off when boiled anyway.
3. Submerge the sweetened condensed milk into the boiling water using tongs. Hint – if you place the can on its side, it can roll around, and set it right side up in the boiling water can cause it to roll around and make a rattling noise when it cooks.
4. Cook the can for 3 hours – make sure that the can remains covered with water at all times. Add more boiling water if necessary
5. Using a pair of tongs, remove the can from the boiling water. COOL. It's crucial to cool it down before opening it; otherwise, you could create a geyser of steaming hot caramel when you open the can.

In many parts of Asia and Europe, when drinking hot or cold coffee or tea, sweetened condensed milk is the preferred milk. That reminds me...cold condensed milk is always relaxed because it chills in the fridge.

I'll leave you with this recipe on how to make your own sweetened condensed milk?

1. In a medium saucepan, mix together 2 cups of whole milk and 1 cup of sugar.
2. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Stir to dissolve the sugar.
3. Once boiling, reduce the heat to medium-low. Simmer uncovered without stirring for about 45 minutes or until it is reduced to about 1 ½ cups.
4. Cool. Will keep about 1 week.

*If you want to use a 12 oz. can of evaporated milk, reduce the sugar to ¾ cup and cook for 30 minutes.

Colleen Gust is an avid baker and gardener and lives with her husband outside of Regina, Saskatchewan. Kirby and Colleen Gust are publishers of the Manitoba & Saskatchewan Country Register.

Random Acts

by Maranda K Jones

Love Letters—A Love Story

I love letters! I enjoy receiving letters in the mail, but I really love the letters of the alphabet. I spend a lot of time with those 26 characters while I work with first graders. We say the sounds, we write the symbols, and we put them together to make words. We read and write letters all day, and I cannot think of a better job. It never feels like work!

My love of writing started in third grade. Mrs. Martin taught us cursive that year, which was very exciting for someone who had been printing her entire life. I felt empowered by this change and wanted to perfect my penmanship. She gave us time to practice, and she gave us great examples. She showed us how to write a wave of connected c's between the dotted midline and the baseline. She swept up from the bottom line to the top, came down with a point and repeated twice before ending this exercise in a sweep to the right. My teacher praised my hard work and encouraged me to keep writing.

Just when I thought life could not get any better, we were given homework. I looked forward to working on my spelling homework in a brand-new red spiral notebook each week. I was expected to write each word, in cursive of course, use the word in a sentence that showed I understood the definition, and then go back and underline the word. After skipping a line, I would start the process over with the next word on the list. I felt so happy writing in my red notebook and wanted to construct the best sentences possible. I felt inspired to create something new that had not yet been written.

So, I started another notebook. This notebook had a plastic purple cover with three sections divided by manila folder pockets. Each section would have its own subject, and the first one was math. I made a multiplication table with a ruler and the preprinted lines. I wrote each multiplication fact, forward and backward. I stored the flash cards we had made in class in that subject's pocket. Mrs. Martin cut hundreds of orange construction paper rectangles, and I wrote math facts with a black crayon on each card. She met with me and made sure I had mastered each number's facts before I was allowed to make the next set. I was rewarded with a big rubber band to keep all the cards together when I reached the 9s. I felt such a sense of achievement and independence.

The next section held a record where I wrote down a list of all the books I read. It never filled the entire section because I checked out the same books from the library over and over again. I enjoyed reading, doodling, and rereading with the instructional drawing books. I borrowed every book by Lee J. Ames in the school library for most of my elementary years. When I was not filling the notebook with drawings, I was trying to figure out what was so funny in the books by Fred Gwynne. *The King Who Rained* and *A Chocolate Moose for Dinner* are so clever and the word play makes me laugh even harder today.

The third subject of this notebook was filled with stories and poems. I wrote acrostic poems for everyone I knew. I wrote lists of friends and family members. I rewrote fairy tales and illustrated my new characters. This was a place to get things out of my head and onto paper. This section was all mine, no right or wrong answers. Writing felt like such a treat to me, and I need to make more time to enjoy it again. It is my quiet time to figure out what I am thinking about. I like putting my thoughts into words and seeing a visual representation of what is going on in my mind, in cursive of course.

This year is a red spiral notebook with empty pages begging to be filled well.

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"New Year, Fresh Start: Organizing, Cleaning, and Maintaining Your Sewing Machines"

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Hello, fellow sewing enthusiasts, and welcome to the start of a brand new year! As we step into 2024, it's the perfect time to embark on a journey of organization, cleaning, and maintenance to set the stage for a fabulous year of sewing ahead. At Sew Downtown, we're here to guide you through these essential steps to ensure your sewing machines and space are ready for all the creative projects you have in store.

****Organize Your Sewing Space****
A well-organized sewing space is the key to a productive and enjoyable sewing experience. Begin by decluttering your sewing area. Sort through your fabrics, notions, and tools. Donate or repurpose items you no longer need to make room for new materials and inspiration. Consider investing in storage solutions such as bins, shelves, and pegboards to keep your supplies tidy and easily accessible. Create designated areas for cutting, sewing, and pressing to streamline your workflow. A well-organized space sets the foundation for a year of successful projects.

****Cleaning Your Sewing Machines****
Regular cleaning and maintenance are essential to keep your sewing machines running smoothly. Dust and lint can accumulate over time, affecting their performance.

****Routine Maintenance Checks****
In addition to cleaning, it's important to perform routine maintenance checks on your sewing machines and we work on all machines here at Sew Downtown!

****A Year of Creative Sewing****
By taking the time to organize, clean, and maintain your sewing machines and space at the beginning of the year, you're setting yourself up for a fabulous year of sewing in 2024. Your machines will run smoothly, and your organized space will inspire creativity and efficiency.

Stay tuned for more sewing tips, project ideas, and inspiration right here at Sew Downtown. We're excited to be part of your sewing journey this year, and we can't wait to see the amazing creations you'll bring to life. We also want to thank you for choosing our small business here at Sew Downtown. Happy sewing, and here's to a fantastic year ahead!

Cheers,
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SCAN ME TO SHOP

Writing From Life

by Jeanette Lukowski

Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!

For those of a certain age, the ring of that name repeated three times can only mean one person: Marcia Brady. Although her co-star, Eve Plumb, spoke the words, it's Marcia's face which appears in my brain every time. Imagine my surprise when I discovered Maureen McCormick—the skilled thespian behind the character's name—had designed a line of quilting fabric!

No kidding. I learned about it during the pandemic lockdowns of 2020/2021, so I veered from my usual path of only purchasing from a brick-and-mortar quilt store: I purchased a small quantity of several designs from the line available through a reputable online retailer.

Working with a small budget allotted for quilting fabric (as I already have so much, please and thank you), I reviewed the choices carefully. "This one looks like the fabric in a dress my mother made for me when I was about 6 years old, so a half a yard will be lovely. That one looks like the flowery fabric of a dress one of the girls wore, so I'll take a half a yard of it. Oh, and that one? That reminds me of..."

A modest collection, it fit nicely into a small shoe-box sized plastic box in my sewing room. My plan was to make myself a "flower garden" quilt some day, using a simple 9-patch block and Kelly green sashing between. (Maureen McCormick had made her fabric line display quilt using hexagons, I believe; I am not there yet, skill-wise, but 9-patch is definitely in my skill-set.)

I moved before I had a chance to start that quilt, though, so the fabric remained packed, and the priorities for unpacking boxes re-shuffled the order of projects to be worked on next.

Back in Minnesota for the Shop Hop in brick-and-mortar stores during 2022, I spotted the end-of-bolt sale for one of McCormick's fabrics! I didn't hesitate: I purchased the remaining yardage. Yes, I had the same fabric at home...but it was on a clearance rack! I had to have it, especially when the purchase included an end-of-bolt discount.

That was the day I devised the plan: every woman in my family of-a-certain-age were going to get something made with some of that Maureen McCormick fabric. Some day.

Discovering a second set of fabrics designed and released by Maureen McCormick during the 2023 Minnesota Shop Hop, I got on the task (once again limiting my purchases to one yard of just two of the newest fabrics).

Welcome to my year of Marcia Brady table runners! It's the surprise birthday gift I'm quietly making and popping into the mail for three women in my family,

and two of my best friends. I'm using the same clearance-rack yardage for all five, but the coordinates and approach to my three block Disappearing 9-Patch table runner are creating some really fascinating differences! So far, one has included Gnomes, the second is three-color, and the third is scrappy. They look so different!! And I'm having fun.



© Jeanette Lukowski 2023. 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

COUNTRY REGISTER RECIPE EXCHANGE

Candy Flavored Cocoa Mix

Bobbie Gulick, Las Cruces, NM

- 1 3/4 cup of non fat dry powder milk
- 1 cup sifted powdered sugar
- 1/2 cup of powdered non dairy creamer
- 1/4 cup of sifted unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 cups miniature marshmallows
- 8 candy canes or 4 peppermint sticks



Place in a medium bowl and combine dry milk powder, non dairy creamer, powdered sugar and cocoa powder. Totally stir and mix all DRY ingredients. Place in an airtight container, such as a glass jar with a lid or a metal tin. Will keep in an airtight container for up to 3 months.

FOR GIFTS TO GIVE

Fill containers large enough to hold at least 2 1/2 cups of cocoa mix. If space remains in the container, top of with additional miniature marshmallows. Tightly seal the container and tie 2 candy canes or a peppermint stick to each container.

INCLUDE A RECIPE CARD THAT SAYS: This makes 4 servings. for each serving, add 1/3 cup of cocoa flavored mix and crushed candy in a mug. Add 3 cups of Boiling Water and stir. Top with miniature marshmallows and serve. Great as a holiday gift or to enjoy on any cold winter day.



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Chronic Illness

by Barbara Polston

A very young friend is very ill. He has missed weeks of school, been in and out of the hospital and had more tests than anyone his age should endure. Sadly, medical professionals are stumped.

He told his mother, "There is no hope and, if this is how my life will always be, what's the point if I will be living sick every day."

Hearing this broke something inside of me. Both of my daughters and I live with chronic health conditions. My daughters struggle more than I, but not feeling on top of our games has become an ever-present fact of our lives.

Here is what I believe I have learned:

- It is possible to adjust and live a full, meaningful life. You get to know your body, recognizing when it will be a good day and when it will not.
- You take advantage of the good days and do the best you can on the not so good.
- There are things, like travel, that may no longer be a possibility or need to be planned for to the highest degree.
- It is easy to feel sorry for yourself.
- You are not being punished for anything you did or did not do. It just is.
- It can seem bad until you hear others' stories. You will choose your own troubles when you hear some of the things that others deal with.
- You learn to be honest, ask for what you need and are unafraid to say "no" when you cannot.
- You learn more about employment law, know your rights and stand up for them. Some diagnoses put you in a "protected class" and employers must make "reasonable accommodation."
- Sometimes, you back out at the last minute. You apologize. Those who respond with anger are not worthy of your time. Those who respond with empathy are true friends.
- It is important that you eat healthfully and get good rest.

What, you may ask, has this to do with quilting? Just this—my last bit of learning is that you need to find things to do that feed your soul. No surprise, for me that is quilting and sewing. For one of my daughters, it is the creation of fine art; for the other, immersion in the worlds presented in video games.

Engaging in those activities moves you out of your physical limitations into a different head space where the fullness of your imagination is your only constraint. If I am sewing a gift or a quilt that will be donated to support others, I think about the person who will end up with my creation. Thinking about and doing for others is a tremendous help for me. The act of simply creating something wonderful out of fabric is a tremendous help for me.

Please hold my young friend in your good thoughts.



©Barbara Polston, Tucson, Arizona, November 11, 2022Barbara Polston, the author of *Quilting With Doilies: Inspiration, Techniques, and Projects* (Schiffer Press, 2015) and *Meet Puppy Brian* (2022 on www.puppy-brian.com), lives in Tucson where she has failed at retirement, but is getting more time at her sewing machine. Contact Barbara at barbarapolstonquilter@gmail.com.

The Power of Hope & Positivity

by Lesley Nuttall

As we begin another new year, some of us like to make New Year Resolutions, such as losing weight, doing more exercise or to stop smoking. But does anyone ever think about making ourselves happier?

I will admit that the stress of living through the last several years with more violence in our streets, war, losing family and friends, and of course loss of jobs or businesses can cause anyone to lose Hope. I like to encourage everyone to have patience! We must live one day at a time and being patient will increase our inner peace and give us more Hope to continue onward to "happiness!"

My husband is one of the happiest people I know. Sometimes I hear him half humming/whistling and I ask, "what is making you so happy this morning?" He smiles and answers, "I'm alive!" (He's 86!) What a good example of Hope! Did you know that Hope combined with positive thinking releases a potential strength within us? Another wonderful way to happiness is "giving." That doesn't always mean monetary, especially in these hard times, but giving of yourself. By that I mean helping a neighbor, a friend or even a stranger. A smile, or a "good morning" to a stranger may just change or enhance their mood. In a grocery store, offer to reach something up high on a shelf for a senior, or offer to lift something heavy into their cart. My husband does this every time we are shopping. (It's a wonder we get any shopping done!) But it makes him happy to help!

I think back to when our son Tom was a cancer patient in Toronto and was undergoing a stem cell transplant. I admit he was a very unhappy fellow. The Hospital Technician needed to extract 5,000 cells from our son's body to have cleaned and transplanted back into him. They extracted 13,000 cells, but only need 4,000 to put back in. Tom donated the remaining 9,000 to the research lab. This immediately changed his complete outlook and was smiling and happy because of his contribution!

At an early age, I was blessed with the talent to play the accordion. I taught myself to play as there was no extra money in the family for lessons. I have been playing, by ear, for 70 years and love to volunteer to entertain residents in the long-term care homes, other groups, or just play along with friends. At Halloween I liked to sit out on our front step and play. I would dress up in a character costume and play as the children came for treats husband handed out. The little ones were so amazed to see me (in a cat costume) playing and would be laughing and I would let them touch the keys to hear the different sounds. So much fun! My music gives me so much happiness!

I followed in my father's footsteps to become a part time writer for more than 30 years. I love to write poetry. In 1989 I published a "Party Book," and I was asked in 2004 by a publisher of The Country Register in our city to write a column for them. I have been submitting my articles as well as my poetry for over 20 years. During the pandemic many stores were closed, and publishers weren't buying as many articles, so I offered my poetry free for the last three years. Now things have normalized again, and I am submitting my articles again. I am so happy when I receive their magazines with a small payment check in appreciation of my work!

Happiness is infectious! You can bring happiness to others by making a phone call, a text or email, or a card or letter. I love to send cheery "thinking of you" cards. It's like sending a smile to show you care!

"Give and it shall be given unto you!" Luke 6:38



© Lesley Nuttall loves to write poetry and lives with her husband in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada.

I Found A Quilted Heart

I was walking the dog around a lake one beautifully warm day this past fall. The leaves had pretty much all fallen from the trees leaving them bare for the upcoming winter. As I came up a hill I saw in the distance a bright red object hanging in a tree. As I got closer I noticed it was a quilted heart that had been left hanging in the tree! Someone had taken the time to make this beautiful quilted heart and leave it for someone else to find and brighten their day. I took a picture of it and sent it to my cousin who loves to find hearts in nature such as rocks and leaves and clouds shaped in the heart form. They hold a special place in her heart and are very symbolic for her. I thought this would be perfect to share with her! She delighted in the heart as I had hoped she would, but she also filled me in on what it was! While I hadn't taken a closer look at the heart and left it hanging for others to find, my cousin said it is part of "I Found a Quilted Heart"! I hadn't heard of this before so I quickly googled it!

Come to find out "I Found a Quilted Heart" (IFAQH) has been around since 2014 when three sisters found a quilted heart while on a hike through Valley of Fire State Park in Nevada. They weren't able to find who had left the very first quilted heart, they were inspired to help spread the joy that their heart had brought them. They began quilting hearts to take out on day trips and leave them around for strangers to find. All these years later IFAQH has grown out of Nevada and is now international!

If you would like to participate in spreading the joy you can visit the website www.ifaqh.com and find more information about quilting your own hearts and leaving them to be found. You can also see hearts and stories from around the world!



SLEEPING WEATHER

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- ♥ Make a pancake breakfast
- ♥ Take a bubble bath
- ♥ Make something wonderful in a crock pot for good smells when you come home
- ♥ Use left-over spray snow to put hearts on your windows
- ♥ Sleep with the windows open for

SWEET DREAMS

With LOVE from the Heart of the Home & me... Susan Branch
www.susanbranch.com

GIRLFRIEND WISDOM

Achoo! ~ Bless You!

Hummm....

Ever wonder why we "Bless" people who sneeze?

It is unknown exactly why we say "Bless You" in response to a sneeze. There are many theories, and some believe it started to ward off demons and spirits or to bless someone with good health. Research shows that the response remains commonplace because of its connection to good manners.

The tradition of blessing someone after a sneeze is so old that even Roman scholar Pliny the Elder wrote about it in Natural History (77 AD) and puzzled over its origins. When a person sneezed it was to expel evil spirits from their body, and the blessing was given to prevent them from going right back in!

GIRLFRIEND WISDOM:

Whether it be ancient tradition, or good manners, expressing a Blessing is positive, uplifting, and spreads good will to friends, family and strangers alike!

Positive thoughts bring healing thoughts that all will be well in time. When sharing a blessing, a blessing is also received. Give it a try at your next opportunity and share some good will!

Joy & Blessings, Jody



Members 02-4-26
The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you PEACE.

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

Chipso Soap Was Early Blessing

by Rachel Greco

Before there was a laundry soap called Tide, there was Chipso, the first laundry detergent advertised as "doing the hard work" for the modern housewife.

Chipso, created by Proctor & Gamble, appeared in the 1920s and was popular until 1946, when P&G's newest detergent Tide became an overnight sensation, causing sales of Chipso to die off.

Originally produced for commercial laundries, Chipso was touted as a flake brand in a box that promoted the use of safe suds for washing. The company was quick to note its mildness, declaring that it was soft on the hand and did not contain lye. As a result, it did not deteriorate clothing. It was good for woolens, silks, and dainties, and it did not fade colors.

Soap powders at the time Chipso became popular tended to form into balls, whereas the new product was made into chips that easily dissolved in water. Magazine ads in the 1920s and 30s promoted Chipso as a "new dirt-loosening method" that made "light work of washday!" These ads described how women had to loosen the dirt before they could remove the dirt in clothing. They stated that by not having to manually loosen dirt on washboards, Chipso could be used to soak clothing. After soaking, women who used Chipso merely had to squeeze the dirt away.

Declaring that by washing "the Chipso way," a housewife would save time and energy. Ads also promoted the fact that in hot water Chipso became instant suds. They soaked clothing clean, and made washing dishes take one-third less time.

Chipso was made at P&G factories in Ivorydale, Ohio, Kansas City, and Port Ivory, New York. Before gaining popularity, Chipso had been part of a lawsuit brought by a company whose product was called Chase-O. Chase-O claimed Chipso was too close in name to their product. The outcome of the suit must have been favorable to Chipso because the product continued to be sold from the 1920s through the 1940s.

When Chipso first came onto the market, laundry could take as much as two to three days to complete. 1920s-era housewives used washboards, beaters, brushes, prolonged soakings, and pre-treatment. They used boilers to boil the clothing, wringers to get water from the clothing, and clotheslines for drying everything. This made for back-breaking work. Since Chipso made everything so much easier, it is no wonder that the product became so popular.

One unfortunate set-back for Chipso was that the compounds in the product included phosphates which threatened drinking water supplies and commercial fisheries. As a result, phosphates were banned from use in the 1970s and Chipso was no more.

Rachel Greco owns Grandma's Attic, a traditional quilt shop in Dallas, Oregon. A quilt historian and avid reader, she gives talks on needlework, the role of women in American history, and their connection to fabric. Rachel has written several books and patterns and runs Grandma's Quilt Club, a monthly quilt class where participants collect quilt block kits, learn about quilt history, and make new friends. Contact her at <https://grandmasatticquilting.com>



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