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Back Porch Break

by Nancy Brummett

Sunrise Hope at Easter

No wonder so many people love to attend Easter sunrise services. A sunrise represents hope, and so it is the perfect representation of the hope we find in the message of Easter.

Few events can be counted on to occur day after day, but the rising of the sun is one of them. Even on a cloudy day, when the heat and light of the sun may be minimized, we can still see that the sun did indeed rise once again!

And how grateful we are for the blessing of the sun in our lives. Without it, we would be in perpetual darkness. Without it, plant life on the earth, including the flowers and trees that bring us so much joy, would shrivel and die. All the beauty we look forward to this time of year when spring begins to bloom would cease to exist. In fact, all of life would eventually disappear from the earth, all because we lost the sun.

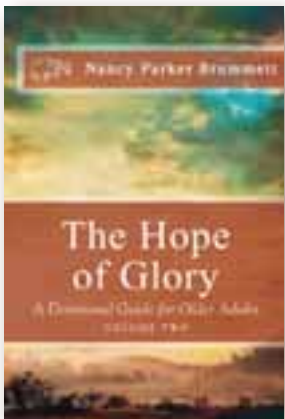
Our life on earth is marked by the number of sunrises and sunsets we experience, but do we really experience them? Do we appreciate the sun and the majesty of the Creation that allows it to shine day after day, or do we take it for granted? The first rays of a sunrise are subtle at best. Slowly the darkness begins to fade as the sun makes its way toward the horizon, but then as the giant orb of fire climbs up into view the entire sky changes color. The sunrise can look different each and every day, but because we can count on it to happen without fail, it's a wonderful symbol for the hope we have in Jesus Christ—the hope that is an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (Hebrews 6:19).

It was a dark, bleak day when Jesus was crucified on the cross—the worst day His followers had ever known. And yet when the grieving women ran to the tomb early in the morning of the third day, after the sun had risen, they were greeted with the glorious news of the resurrection! Praise God we can be sure that those who believe in His Son will also know the glory of everlasting life. We can be even more certain of that than we are of the sunrise! For no matter what darkness our life holds, one day we will be bathed in the light of heaven forever.

The next time we are blessed to watch a sunrise, and especially on Easter morning, we should bask in the hope that it represents. It's a hope that never fades, and never disappears.



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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## On this day in History

**March 12, 1933:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt gives his first national radio address called "fireside chats". Over Roosevelt's 12 years of presidency he delivered more than 30 Fireside Chats explaining his hopes and dreams for the nation, build support for his groundbreaking New Deal policies and wartime policies once WWII started. Roosevelt took great care to make sure each address was available and understandable to ordinary Americans.

**April 22, 1945:** Adolf Hitler admits to all in his underground bunker that the war is lost and suicide is his only recourse. This is after hearing there was no German defense to the Russian assault at Eberswalde.

Information found on [www.history.com](http://www.history.com)







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# Random Acts

by Maranda Jones  
Stages

Songs get stuck in my head, and sometimes I hear the correct lyrics on repeat in my mind. Other times, I make up the lyrics as I go, singing the words that I think are on key with the verified verses, only to be corrected by my children. The kitchen acted as my stage, and today I was certain I had the words right for a change as I sang into the spatula. Maybe it is my inability to sing the correct words and the correct notes that troubles my family most.

This morning's song happened to be "The Butterfly Song," which I learned from my mom as a little girl. I confidently sang "If I were a butterfly, I'd thank you Lord for giving me wings" as we got ready for church. This song I know by heart. My kids have been singing this song at home and in Sunday School since they were young, just like my sister and me. Mom made us a colorful poster for our room with the lyrics and the animals. I can still picture the robin, the kangaroo, and the fuzzy wuzzy bear that would thank the Lord for his fuzzy wuzzy hair. And the crocodile that would thank the Lord for his great smile always looked so charming! Although that robin would thank the Lord that he could sing, I cannot relate to that line of praise. I have never given thanks for my singing voice, and I am positive no one else has either! It does not stop me from singing though, and I just hope that it's a joyful noise to the Lord even though it is not one to those around me.

Perhaps I should sing to butterflies since they cannot hear. A flutter of butterflies would be the perfect audience for someone like me who loves to sing and cannot find the way to the right notes. Maybe my lousy sense of direction has something to do with my pitch accuracy problems. I just cannot find my way. Butterflies could teach me something about this too. They have an impeccable sense of direction and travel many miles. National Geographic notes that monarch butterflies fly 2,500 miles from the United States and Canada to southern California and central Mexico. Billions of butterflies arrive in the mountains of Mexico each year, visiting the same forests as their ancestors.

After the amazing metamorphosis from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis and finally to adult butterfly, these monarchs need protection from predators. Their poisonous bright coloring warns animals not to eat them. While the predator will not die from eating a butterfly, it will feel sick enough to avoid monarchs in the future. The butterflies get toxins from milkweed, their only food source in the caterpillar stage. As they grow, they gain nutrients by drinking nectar from milkweed, clover, and goldenrod.



We also go through stages, drinking milk and later eating solid food, necessary for our nourishment and protection. We grow and learn "as babies in Christ" who are fed "milk, not solid food, because we were not yet able to receive it." As we mature, we seek protection in God's word, develop our senses, and gain more understanding. We should be teaching others the elementary truths and basic principles of God's revelation. Hebrews 5:11-14 reminds us of this, just like Sunday School songs do. Whether it's a butterfly thanking the Lord for its wings or a wiggly worm appreciating its squirm, these spring creatures remind us to give praise. "I just thank you Father for making me, me."



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# Become Inspired

by Annice Bradley Rockwell

## Nature's Next Chapter

As the long months of winter slowly wind down, we begin to notice a welcome shift in our days. Our daylight hours stretch out before us now as if to remind us of the powerful promise of spring. An early spring walk through our yard provides us with glimpses into nature's next chapter as our lilac trees show their new buds and our friendly, vocal robins begin to appear with more frequency. Our herb gardens, which have appeared to be in hibernation all winter long are now about ready to reveal their strength, and remarkably, so are we.



## Nature's Reawakening

There is a special energy to spring that is seemingly contagious. As nature reawakens to the glory of spring, we feel a similar need to mirror nature's forward motion. And as we embrace the opportunities to observe the blessings of spring, we become beautifully connected to the joy that it provides.

Spending more time outside rejuvenates us and the cabin fever we had at winter's end is now a distant memory. We have energy now to happily plan fresh projects for our yard-like a new stone patio or an additional raised garden bed to enhance our country yards. We might consider getting baby chicks to add to our flock of chickens to provide even more delight to our days.

A weekend spent on decorating projects like making our own twig wreaths and topiaries or rearranging our porch with welcoming antiques and fresh vignettes often give us a sense of true satisfaction. Our homes can be freshened with the season of spring as well by incorporating elements like handcrafted Easter rabbits and eggs tucked into one of our favorite antique splint baskets. And with country candles in new scents like Lemon Butter or Lavender Fields, our home's interior takes on a whole new feel of spring.

## Sharing the Blessings of Spring

This season is the perfect time to plan a special outing with friends to enjoy some special Open House events. A morning spent going out for a country breakfast could be followed by a trip to some favorite antiques shops to find the ideal treasures to round out your displays. Storefront windows might be graced with an antique wheelbarrow in its original surface, filled with faux tulips in muted spring colors. Handcrafted signs in pastel tones might inspire you to create a spring vignette in your entryway. An antique wagon in dark green might be a perfect treasure to bring home to hold some of the pansy plants you purchased on your special day. You might even be inspired by some antique tin or woodenware that could be used as planters or wall hangings in your new displays. Your ideal day with friends might end with a beautiful walk along the boardwalk of a quaint, shoreline town as you reconnect, share ideas and enjoy meaningful memories.

This season, take the time to observe nature's shift to spring. Enjoy the energized pace that accompanies the lengthening days. Make it a point to create something you have always wanted to create. And most importantly, share the transformative power of spring with those you love and when you do you will be reminded of all that nature continues to give.





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# Springing Ahead Without Falling Back

by Wayne M. Bosman

I have not been able to write much lately. Life does that sometimes. The holidays grab my attention, and then after the New Year begins I get to breathe out again. I figure out where I am and what I might have to say.

This year, life has added even more complications. Shortly after New Year's, my 40-year-old daughter went into the hospital for more chemotherapy, a last ditch attempt against the cancer she had battled for the last year and a half. The latest obstacle was a bout of pneumonia that had to be treated before any other treatment could take place. It was the beginning of a downward spiral that ended a week ago.

As difficult as all of this has been, I know that I am not the first or only one to deal with a loved one's premature death. My wife, Kerri, and I have been watching my daughter's fitful decline since she received the official diagnosis. We moved to our current home to be able to take care of things for her and her husband and their children—doing all of the little things that still needed to occur. Being available to pick up her children from school, shopping and preparing meals suitable for her family provided her with some relief knowing that they still were getting what they needed when she could no longer do the things that she loved to do as a wife and mother. As the cancer progressed and she was anchored more and more to the house, she was always happy to get the little messages that we had picked up her son on time and what we were cooking for supper.

Now that momentum, which had become the central focus of our lives, has come to a halt. Life is demanding a new momentum. Life always does. We are all still grieving and will be for a long time, but children need meals. The Marine Corps has gone above and beyond in providing leave for her husband, but ultimately he will go back to his full-time duties. Kerri and I will settle into the new momentum life demands of us.

That brings me to the theme of this article. While we are still mired in the middle of winter with remnants of last week's snow on the ground, it is clear that it will not always be that way. As the snow melts and we look out the back window at the garden space, our thoughts are already turning toward the next stage. Last year's garden was one of our most productive ever, and we are starting to dream of an even better one this year. Seed catalogs are arriving. Plans for starting seedlings indoors are pushing their way to the forefront of our minds.

Of course, some of this is what you might call a defense mechanism. Focus on growth and new life, so the sorrows from what is lost forever don't drag us under. Naturally. There is too much about the end of life that we can't comprehend. To me, the greatest act of faith is to continue to live—to plant seeds that I may or may not ever get to harvest. My mother is 104 years old now. If you ever want to get her talking, ask about her garden and all of the gardens she has tended over the years. Ask her about her mother's garden, and the bounty it produced that got her family and many neighbors through the Great Depression.

It won't be long now before the first signs of spring arrive—the silly daffodils that always seem to bloom between snowstorms. Time for me to spring ahead and not fall back.



Wayne Bosman is a retired auto mechanic living in Cape Carteret, NC.

# What in the World is That Thing

by Becky Van Vleet

I have been blessed to have this beautiful "thing" in the corner of my dining room for a number of years which boasts of a nostalgic time period on rural farms. (Refer to the photograph.) But, what in the world is that thing you ask? I really would not be able to answer this at all if not for my mother and other family members explaining this vintage domestic good to me.

First, my mother. She loved antiques in my growing up years, and especially if she had a memory of one's use in her family. So as her parents gradually got rid of things they were no longer using, she let it be known that she'd love to have certain items in our home rather than see them discarded. Yes, even a cream separator—that's what this thing is. After she freed the old separator of rust and had it painted and fixed up a bit, she donned her newly acquired farm item with artificial greenery, much like I have today, and placed it in the corner of our kitchen. And when company asked, what in the world is that thing, she explained exactly what it was and how it functioned to separate the cream from fresh milk from the cows.

A few years ago, I learned a little more about the Thomas family cream separator from my twin aunts, Sue and Mary.

My aunts shared that their father, my grandfather, bought some cows when they moved to a new house in 1942 in rural Indiana. Shortly thereafter, he purchased the cream separator to sell cream. The separator had three containers that were used during the separation process. The top container was used to hold all the whole milk from the cows, and once it was full, Mary and Sue would take turns turning the handle around and around. The rich, thick cream would separate from the whole milk and flow out of one of the spouts. The skim milk would flow out of the other spout.

It was Sue and Mary's responsibility to keep the separator clean with boiling water so the cream would be free of germs. The young twins smiled with pride every time they got a good grade and price for the cream they sold, after it was checked by the local inspector.

If you live in the Midwest, you may be lucky enough to find a cream separator in someone's cellar or a neighbor's barn. Since this area of the country has a lot of dairy farms, there are often a few separators at any garage sales you might stumble upon. As for me, I have a priceless remnant of pastoral America sitting right in my dining room. When we have company, it is not uncommon for someone to ask, what in the world is that thing? And I'm happy to talk about family memories and the good old days any time I can!



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.beckyvanvleet.com](http://www.beckyvanvleet.com).





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## Spring's Arrival

by Janet Young

Spring, a transition season between winter and summer, is when the world comes alive again, after hibernating for the past three months. It is a time when the days are longer, while the nights grow shorter. And, almost overnight the grass begins to turn green, the leaves begin to bud, and the birds have returned heralding with their glorious chirps to everyone that Spring has arrived!

As we welcome the warmth of a new season, we are mindful of all that this new season brings. For example, if you are a gardener, now is the time to plant seeds in your vegetable garden, or clean out your flower beds and fill them with colorful flowers. It is, also, the beginning of grass-cutting season, preparing your porch or patio for those summertime moments that make your heart sing as you languish in the splendor of a warm summer night, after being couped up all winter long.

After a long, cold winter, Spring brings its many virtues, as it ushers in an invigorating spirit that makes us come alive. Our tasks while numerous this time of year are accomplished with a new sense of enthusiasm. Suddenly Spring house-cleaning takes on a new dimension, as we fling upon our windows and let the refreshing warm breezes flow through our house.

Our spirits are lifted as we look forward to celebrating Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter, and maybe even April Fool's Day. Adding to that list might be making plans for your summer vacation if you have not already done so, or planning your first barbecue.

In addition to all the fun Spring affords, this might be a good time for reflection. For example, how are you doing with your New Year's resolution? It's never too late to renew those resolutions, after all this is a season of renewal.

As we enter this rejuvenating time of the year, my wish for you is that you will take a deep breath, throw open your windows, and let the celebration begin, for Spring 2025 arrives on March 25th!

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

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## 2 minute Lift

by Kathy J. Sotak

### Cleaning My Ears: The Hearing Method That Changed My Life



My father passed away this past year, marking a new chapter: both parents are now ancestors, whispering their wisdoms through the ethers instead of the phone line. I still feel them though, guiding me along my own yellow brick road with their hands gently on my shoulder.

If you are in this category too you know that the first holiday season is like no other. It is emptier. There is a deep wanting filling your space. It is just not the same as it was.

Amidst my sadness, I'm thankful that I received full peace on my father's life while he was still alive. There are no lingering regrets or mysteries to solve.

It wasn't always like that though. It took me most of my life to figure out my dad. He was a farmer and rancher, therefore worked from sun-up to sun-down. Because of his hard work ethic our primary conversations were at supper time. And those conversations were pretty lame, like "How was school?" "What gas mileage are you getting?" or "Let's play a game of cards."

I wanted to have rich conversations with him like I did with my mother. We could talk for hours and we were a lot alike. She was a writer, and I am now a writer. She was a photographer, and I am now a photographer. She found joy and curiosity all around her. For example, my mother brought me into her world of noticing wild baby's breath growing in the prairie ditches, or watching the tiniest of spiders weaving their home in the corner window. Most impressive, she could notice a hurting heart from friends and strangers alike, then did her best to share compassion and peace to brighten their spirit.

Naturally, when my mother died 21 years ago, I wanted to communicate with my dad just like I did with mom. I just could not figure out how to communicate with him though.

A few years ago, it dawned on me. He had been communicating this whole time – but I wasn't listening. You see, he did not communicate like my mother. He spoke in his own way: not through his words – he communicated through his actions.

I started watching his actions instead of his words, and a whole new relationship opened up. I listened as he loved unconditionally. I watched as he forgave those who hurt him. I saw how he let the little things go – all of them. Yes, he shook his head at some of us sometimes, but he never said a word in judgment. He knew it was our life's choices, and instead likely said a quiet little prayer. Above all of this, I watched as he gave thanks to God and Jesus throughout his life.

I rewound time even further to look back on his life with these new ears of mine. Despite working farmer and rancher hours, he ended early some days when it came to service work. He was an elder of his church, serving a vital role in the spiritual health of the community. He volunteered in many non-profit organizations and local services, such as being a volunteer fire fighter. My dad would always help others when it was the right thing to do and he had the means to do it.

Now that he is gone, I heard his wisdom loud and clear: every day God is expressing itself through our hands and heart.

We have no choice but to reflect on our own lives: how are our actions imprinting our legacy?

Let's not add to our new year's resolution list. How about we simply give gratitude for what we're already expressing through our hands and heart. Also, who do we have a hard time hearing today in our life? Let's take these expanded ears to them and I bet we will hear clear as a bell.

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# Pieces From My Heart

by Jan Keller

## The Interim

Heralded by cold Arctic wind during a late-summer blast of icy weather, fall arrived a little early last year. It didn't matter that I still had flowers blooming in my yard. The unseasonably frigid weather froze every bit of unprotected vegetation with its scathing record-breaking cold snap.

My pink petunias looked pathetic. Overnight their very life-force was snuffed out at the height of their season to blossom and bloom.

Nothing could bring restoration. In short, everything was dead and gone. If I want petunias to grow again, I'll have to plant new ones next Spring.

Near the petunias were some vibrant bright orange poppies. The poppies looked even more pitiful than the petunias. The poppies, which had grown large and tall, were transformed overnight into a mound of dark and murky mush.

One big and all-important difference, however, exists between the petunias and the poppies. That difference is a strong and sustaining root system.

When Spring returns, my poppies will grow again. They'll actually grow even bigger and better and brighter because they possess a strong core of inner strength.

Into each life a little rain must fall. Sometimes the rain falls gently to wash the earth and settle the dust. Often, driven by a harsh gale-force wind, the rain pounds down with enough force to erode away every weakness. On occasion the rain is accompanied by frigid temperatures and everything its freezing fingers touch becomes bone-chilling ice. No matter how the rain falls, the storm's passage always replenishes the moisture necessary to sustain and perpetuate growth.

The longer I live, the more I realize life equates to lessons and learning. As my days accumulate into weeks, and months, and years, I've learned and painfully relearned many of life's lessons. One of those lessons is we're all appointed a season to be born, another to grow, and finally a time to die.

In the interim, I'd like to live my life more like the poppies than the petunias. I'd like to possess the stamina to perpetually endure the cold harsh seasons life sends my way with enough inner strength and faith to continually be ready for each new Spring.



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

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# Of Time and Tides

by Kerri Habben Bosman

One afternoon last October most of our family was gathered on the beach. Most of the men were fishing, most of the women were sitting and talking, and the youngest grandson and I were building a miniature fortress some distance away from the others.

Quinn and I took turns going to the water's edge to get wet sand for our creation. We also gathered sea grass, shells, and small bits of driftwood to press into the walls of our fort. We were immersed in our work. After all, whether you are seven or fifty one, playing in the sand is captivating and affirming.

We took our time, packing the walls and smoothing them as the ocean waves grew closer. Suddenly Quinn stopped working and looked at me very earnestly. "I don't think this is a good idea," he said. "The water is going to come and take everything away."

I paused, studying his serious eyes. I listened to the ocean, thinking first that an entire philosophy book could be written based on his statement. What I was really waiting for was the right words.

"Yes, it is," I answered. "But we will always remember this moment, our fort, and how we made it together. The tide cannot take that away. I think we should keep building it anyway."

"Okay," he said.

So we continued on.

I have thought of this day many times since as my stepdaughter continued valiantly on in her battle to survive cancer. She did her best to thrive, packing all the goodness and love she could in the eighteen months after her diagnosis. Our family consciously made memories-going to the beach, watching her kids' sporting events, and often just sitting and being together. She loved to make charcuterie boards to feed our big family as we watched football games. We played yard games, like corn hole and bocce. When the time came that she was no longer strong enough to take part, she was still right there with us. Her spirit remained dauntless.

We all knew that the tide was coming in. How fast and how soon, that we didn't know. So we just kept treasuring the next thing we did together, knowing that these times would sustain us when we needed them to. They are now our real-life fortress.

For my stepdaughter, the tide came in on January 23rd.

Yet, for all of us who love her, she will never fully leave us. She loved all of us so steadily and with an inherent and unending kindness. It was simply the way she lived. Along with those gentle ways, she carried within her a resolute strength that bolstered those around her.

I will forever see her in everything she loved, most especially her three children. I will see her in the graceful motions of the hummingbirds that come to our feeders. I will hear her in our laughter when our family is all together.

I will feel her essence especially when our family is on the beach. She loved the ocean with a quiet and enduring passion. She happily spent many hours just sitting on the sand, watching the waves. She also loved being on the water, enjoying her stand-up paddleboard. She was happiest, though, when it was all of us together, taking in the sand and sea.

Perhaps during this new time, we'll all gather on the beach. It is highly likely that Quinn and I will build another creation even as we know the water will take it back. For we will always remember. And we will always love.

The tide cannot take that away.

So we continue on.



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





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Carrot Cake in a Mug

• 1 tbsp butter, melted

• 1 tsp oil

• 1 tbsp sugar

• 1 tbsp. Brown Sugar

• 1/4 tsp vanilla extract

• 3 tbsp milk

• 3 tbsp flour

• 1/2 tsp baking powder

• pinch salt

• 1/4 tsp cinnamon

• 1/4 cup finely shredded carrots

For The Frosting:

• 1 tbsp softened cream cheese

• 1/4 tsp vanilla extract

• 1 tsp butter, softened

• 1 tbsp powdered sugar

1. Combine the melted butter, oil, sugar, brown sugar, vanilla extract and milk.

2. Stir until blended well.

3. Add the flour, baking powder, salt and cinnamon.

4. Mix until just combined.

5. Cook on high for 1 - 1 1/2 minutes. Start with a minute and check for doneness.

For the Frosting:

1. In a small bowl, mix all the frosting ingredients.

2. Allow cake to cool for at least a minute before topping with the frosting.

Recipe by My Outer Life

# Life on Breezy Manor Farm

by Donna Jo Copeland, farmeress

## Steadfast in Changing Times

I'm writing about spring with ice and snow still on the ground--giving way to mid-winter thaw. Hard to guess what this illusive spring will bring but March in Indiana is a crap shoot. This farmeress is longing for a cool moist calm weather window but my 75-year-old bones yearn for 70 degrees and sun filled days.

Mom never took the flannel sheets off the beds and put away our long johns until at least mid-April. I can remember tugging up long underwear beneath my Easter dress several times.

January went by far too fast. With the very bitter temperatures I spent too much energy keeping body and spirit together, water thawed, firewood carried, barn tightening against strong winds. Had planned to weave on the two looms in the kitchen but I needed to close off all but two rooms due to the cold. And I can't get my hands to work at weaving when it's 48 degrees. Even changed to making Dutch oven salt rising bread as yeast won't raise when it's that cold.

I pursued other fiber activities. knitting, spinning, rug hooking, dyed some socks on the woodstove. Slept most nights in my chair. Us old gals are tough.

Sitting here in my old Windsor chair surrounded by spinning wheels, I look up at cob webs on the ceiling. They will stay 12 feet up until spring cleaning. Mom taught me that spider webs would stop blood flow if needed, just in case.

The deep snow did allow some cleaning. Snow is the best way to clean wool rugs and sweaters. A snow bath leaves them clean, soft and smelling fresh.

Early spring is always a good time to clean out, recycle, share things you no longer need or use. Many of my fiber friends have been hard at it. I'm more of a reorganizer, most farmeresses are. What if I need that very thing in 5 years? I can't just toss old clothes. Buttons, zippers are saved for another day. The cloth is cut up to weave rag rugs. One mess feeds another.

Needing to weed out my old spices, I just couldn't throw them out. So made some dye pots with oregano, rosemary and turmeric. I will dye with most anything.

The internet/technology and I are still feuding. The new phone is a beast. But have found some homesteading and sheep groups out there. It's neat that some young people are wanting to embrace a simple agrarian life. In the nick of time, I had almost given up hope.

I heard someone say the other day that one of the reasons a woman's child-bearing time was limited was so she could become a grandmother and impart her wisdom. I know I certainly learned a great deal from my grands, they had the time and the want to teach. I wasn't done learning when they all passed.

Sadly, my grandkids don't seem to want my knowledge or family history. They had better get their stuff together soon. Before I'm gone. I'm the elder in the family, the keeper of history and secrets. And I know some neat stuff!

In my realm I treasure old ways, knowledge, tools, furniture. And calm, quiet. Listening to sounds now I realize they are just sounds--complaining, selling, influencing. Constantly. I'm thankful we didn't have a TV until I was in the 5th grade and it wasn't turned on often.

I heard the voices of parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, grands, nature and farm animals. I heard the stillness of sunrise and the night music.

It saddens me to think of what sounds kids listen to now.

In my loom house, no electricity, sitting in the middle of the sheep pasture, I work with the sounds of sheep, birds, rhythm of loom and spinning wheel. Peace and contentment, touched by my ancestors. Good work, hard work.

With the new season, new adventures and promises, let's try to take a step back. Listen to the little sounds, be at peace, love. Plant a garden, maybe a rose bush.

No recipe this time, but garden tips instead.

DONNA JO'S GARDEN TIPS

• Take plastic feed sacks (pet or livestock), fill with barn leavings, punch a few holes in the bottom. Plant potatoes, easy and easy to harvest. I have grown tomatoes this way too, tying the bags to the fence.

• In sturdy cardboard boxes, fill with barn leavings, plant beans. Easy care

• And if you don't have access to barn cleanings, come down, bring your bags, take all you want!

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

Why not pick up an extra copy of

The Country Register

for a friend?





# A Cup of Tea with Lydia

by Lydia E. Harris

## Treasures from Talking Teacups

When I turned 50, a friend gave me a copy of the book *"If Teacups Could Talk."* I read it from cover to cover and became immersed in tea parties. Now after 30 years of sharing teatimes, I have learned that teacups really can talk and each one has a story.

### BLACK TEACUP

"Why would anyone want a black teacup?" Lydia asked when I came into her life. It was given to her during one of the blackest seasons in her life, when she was diagnosed with incurable cancer. She considered cancer dark and ugly. And since she doesn't like black, she called me her cancer cup. I could have been insulted, but I wasn't. I knew there was more to me than the outside. I had an inside too, with pretty flowers painted inside. And what's inside is the most important.

During Lydia's dark days of chemotherapy when her life was fragile, she learned God could take the adversity in her life and turn it into something beautiful. The seeds of hard times can sprout into beauty on the inside, if we accept the hard times and let God's love grow in our hearts.

Now when Lydia looks at me, I'm not rejected. I'm treasured. My story reminds her of Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV): "He has made everything beautiful in its time." Yes, God does make everything beautiful in his time. But sometimes it takes a while.

I give her hope that God is working on the inside and there are beautiful things yet to come.



### YELLOW TEACUP

Barbara thought Lydia's cancer cup was too bleak and wanted Lydia to think cheery thoughts. So, Barbara packed a tea lunch, wrapped me and drove to Lydia's home. "This is a sunshine cup," she explained. Since Lydia loves warm, sunny days, she liked me and sipped tea from me often. I reminded her of God's warm love for her.

However, Barbara bought me at an antique shop, so I wasn't new when I was given to Lydia. One day Lydia noticed a crack in me. "Oh, no, my sunshine cup is cracked."

What good is a teacup that can't hold tea? I wondered what she would do with me.

Lydia didn't want to lose the sunshine in her life, so she keeps me in her china hutch along with her perfect teacups. Then during tea parties, she finds other uses for me. Sometimes I hold sugar cubes. (I must be getting sweeter all the time.) Other times I hold a votive candle adding cheer and warmth. Also, she uses my saucer as a small plate for cookies or a trivet for a small teapot.

I taught her when we feel broken, we're still useful. We may be chipped or cracked, and life may take a different turn than we expected, but God isn't finished with us. He works through our hard times and he keeps working in our lives and creates new ways to bless us. In the Bible, Philippians 1:6 (NIV) says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God will keep working with us until we go to meet him. Isn't that encouraging?

### BLUE-FLOWERED TEACUP

Lydia met Joy more than 40 years ago while flying from California to Arizona. Since then, they have only met one other time. But they keep in touch with letters, cards, phone calls and gifts.

One day Lydia's sister called with hopeful news about new treatments for lymphoma. But there are many kinds of lymphoma categorized by different numbers, so Lydia wondered if this medicine could help her type of cancer. Alas, her number was not included.

"When will they come up with treatment for my number?" Lydia cried out to God. "Do you know my number?"

Then she noticed a package from Joy. Inside she found me—a beautiful teacup and saucer decorated with blue forget-me-not flowers. She exclaimed, "God, you're so sweet. So adorably sweet."

Lydia's favorite color is blue and through the forget-me-nots God spoke to her saying, "I know your number. I haven't forgotten about you." Inside the cup she read the word "friend." Not only is Joy her friend, but God is her friend too.

Isaiah 49:15–16 reassures us that God will never forget us. He has engraved us on the palms of his hands. Just as Lydia lovingly holds her delicate teacups in her hands, God lovingly holds each of us in his hands.

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

### From Lydia's Column: "Treasures from Talking Teacups"

What the three teacups in *"A Cup of Tea with Lydia"* taught us.

1. Black teacup: Even if things look dark today, expect and look for beautiful things to come. God makes all things beautiful in his time. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

2. Yellow teacup: God isn't finished with us and is always working in our lives. Even during hard times when we feel cracked, God continues to use us and bless us. (Philippians 1:6)

3. Blue-flowered teacup: God knows all about us and will never forget us. He tenderly holds us in the palm of his hands. (Isaiah 49:15–16)

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# Become Inspired... Join a Quilt Guild

by Susan Clay



Looking for new ideas for your quilting? One of the best things I did for my quilting was to join a quilt guild. When I joined a guild, little did I know I would not only meet new friends, but that I would also come away with new inspiration at every single meeting. Are you a beginning

quilter who would like to have some basic ideas for different projects? Join a quilt guild. Are you an experienced quilter who feels your design level has become a bit stale? Join a quilt guild.

Think of a quilt guild as the modern evolution of the quilting bee. A quilting bee is loosely defined as "a social gathering at which the participants make quilts." Imagine walking into a room where all the people there love quilting. Imagine five people huddled over a table comparing the construction technique of a specific quilt block. Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Well, trust me...it is.

We quilters all know quilting can be an isolating hobby. We go into our "spot," whether it be a dining room table, a special sewing corner, or an entire room dedicated to our love of quilting. Now, imagine sitting in a room full of people, all at different quilting skill levels, who share your love of quilting. Oh wait...does that sound intimidating? As a true introvert myself, it's really not. You have the common denominator of the love of quilting.

Just at a basic "Show and Tell" of a guild meeting, where members show off a project or pattern, we will find beautiful examples of design modifications. If there is a specific project being shown by all members at a meeting, the variety and interpretation of the project can be endless with color and fabric selection. Experienced quilters can often find that looking at a quilt pattern through the eyes of a new quilter gives an entirely new perspective.

Many quilt guilds meet just once a month. However, with the presence of social media, texting, and messaging in our lives, we don't need to limit our sharing just to the physical guild meeting. Most guilds now have a Facebook page and many have an Instagram account. We can share our love of the craft often if we so wish.

When a quilt guild friend recently told me about her new quilting project and sent a picture, it was inspiration for me. She had added a seasonal quilted piece to her front vestibule. Though I don't have a vestibule to decorate, I do have a perfect outside spot to hang a small quilted seasonal piece.

And that, my friends, is what we gain from belonging to a quilt guild. It's what "Show and Tell," sharing, and posting pictures does for us...it gives us inspiration and ideas. Never underestimate the power of your quilted project on one another. So when you have finished that special table topper, baby quilt, throw, or bed-sized quilt, don't hide it away. And remember "perfect is the enemy of finished". Please share it with your new guild friends. Be The Inspiration!

"Google" search for your local quilt guilds or some advertise in this publication. You may be surprised at the choices available to you. Many guilds have open membership and others begin membership in January. It doesn't matter when you join; what is important is that you join! You will always be inspired...Trust me.





# Exploring the World of International Quilt Festivals: A Global Journey of Inspiration Part 1 of 4

by Kim Caskey of Kim Caskey Tours

Quilt festivals are among the most inspiring and visually rich gatherings in the quilt and textile world, celebrating the creativity, artistry and cultural diversity found within quilting. From local guild events to prestigious international exhibitions, each show offers a unique glimpse into the evolving world of textiles and fiber art.

I host many group tours of textile enthusiasts through fascinating countries. We visit destinations such as Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the UK, France, Italy, Japan and parts of Canada, each offering an unforgettable quilting experience. In this series of articles, I will share highlights of quilt festivals, from local guild gatherings with strong community spirit, to major international events featuring juried competitions, themed exhibitions and displays from world-renowned artists.

## Local Quilt Guild Quilt Shows



A local quilt guild show is a heartwarming celebration of quilting, bringing together community spirit and artistic expression. Organized by guild members, these shows transform local spaces into vibrant displays of color, texture and pattern, where

quilters of all levels—from beginner to seasoned artists—showcase and celebrate their unique work. Each quilt tells a personal story, while reflecting the collective passion of the guild, making these gatherings a beautiful tribute to quilting as both a craft and an art form.

Guild shows have an open, welcoming atmosphere, often featuring themed categories like traditional, modern and applique quilts, as well as specialty categories such as seasonal quilts or “first quilt show entries.” Many shows offer interactive elements, with live demonstrations, workshops and a lively vendor marketplace selling quilting supplies. With raffles, door prizes and a chance to connect with other enthusiasts, local guild quilt shows are as much about community as they are about creativity, inspiring newcomers and experienced quilters alike.

## International Quilt Festivals

In contrast, large international festivals like Quilt Canada, the International Quilt Festival in Houston, the Festival of Quilts in Birmingham, and the European Patchwork Meeting in France elevate the art form to new heights. Juried-in competitions at these events highlight some of the world’s finest quilts, selected by expert panels for their creativity, technique and innovation. In addition to competitive exhibitions, these festivals often host themed displays and invited exhibitions from renowned textile artists, offering attendees a chance to witness cutting-edge

techniques and trends from around the world.

The process of being juried into a juried competition is highly selective, and acceptance is a significant honor for participants. The selection process begins with an online submission, where quilters submit photographs and detailed descriptions of their work. Submissions are reviewed by a panel of professional jurors, who are carefully chosen for their expertise in quilting, design and textile arts. These jurors evaluate the quilts based on a range of criteria including technical skill, originality, design composition, color use and overall visual impact. Getting juried into a competition, such as these, signifies a quilt meets a high standard of excellence. Accepted quilts are prominently displayed for attendees to admire. Winning entries receive cash awards and accolades in categories such as Best of Show, Excellence in Hand or Machine Quilting and Best Use of Color. Attending a juried-in competition quilt show is both an inspiration for viewers and an acknowledgment of the incredible talent and diversity within the worldwide quilting community.



Local Quilt Guild Show Bus Tour

The vendor mall at an international quilt festival is a bustling marketplace and paradise for quilting and textile enthusiasts, featuring an incredible range of products from quilt shops, specialty stores and online vendors. Spanning aisle upon aisle, these vendor malls offer everything from high-quality and unique fabrics in every imaginable color and print, to specialty threads, patterns and notions that cannot be found anywhere else. It is a grand meeting place for quilt shop owners, designers and artisans, who bring unique goods directly to festival-goers, showcasing items like hand-dyed textiles, rare imported materials, custom-designed patterns and the latest sewing tools and technology. The mall buzzes with excitement as attendees explore, sample and discover hidden treasures, often finding inspiration in the newest products, innovative kits and expert demonstrations. For many, the vendor mall is a highlight of the festival, where creativity and commerce intersect in a vibrant celebration of all things quilting.

We'll cover **Quilt Canada** and **The International Quilt Festival** in the next issue of *The Country Register*!

Kim Caskey, who is based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, is a professional longarm quilter and owner of Kim Caskey Tours. Kim hosts specialized textile-based tours in numerous international destinations with unique and exclusive textile visits and activities creating memorable experiences for quilters, stitchers, their family and friends. Everyone is welcome on Kim's tours! [www.kimcaskey.ca/tours](http://www.kimcaskey.ca/tours), [kim@kimcaskey.ca](mailto:kim@kimcaskey.ca), 1-780-288-9008.

## The Daily Mentality

My house talks to me in the spring. It wants me to open all the doors & windows & let in fresh air, & it says “Clean me!” The hardest thing is to stay focused & not run outside to stare at the garden! ♥

Spring cleaning is GOOD, especially after it's done, after the comforters have been aired; after all the dishes & glasses have been taken out & shined up & the cupboard shelves are sparkling clean. Then I get to go outside, bring the bird houses out of the barn, & hang a flower wreath on the kitchen door. ♥

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

## Garlic Parmesan Chicken and Potatoes

recipe courtesy of Better Homebase

### For the Chicken:

- 4 boneless chicken breasts
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1/2 tsp paprika
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp black pepper
- 1 tbsp olive oil

### For the Potatoes:

- 1.5 pounds baby Yukon Gold or red potatoes, halved
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/3 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp black pepper

Prepare the Chicken: Pat the chicken dry with paper towels. In a small bowl, mix the Italian seasoning, paprika, salt and pepper. Rub the chicken breasts with olive oil and coat evenly with the seasoning mixture.

Prepare the Potatoes: In a large bowl, toss the halved potatoes with olive oil, garlic, parmesan cheese, salt and pepper until evenly coated.

Assemble on the Pan: Place the seasoned chicken on one side of the prepared baking sheet. Spread the potatoes evenly in a single layer on the other side.

Bake: Roast in a 400° preheated oven for 25-30 minutes. Flip the potatoes halfway through. Check chicken internal temperature ensuring it reaches 165°. In the last 5 minutes of cooking, sprinkle some extra parmesan cheese over the chicken and potatoes.

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## Ginger Cats

by Deby Heatherly

My mom always said that orange male cats had the most loving personalities. She has a picture of me around the age of 7 with sponge curlers in my hair, brushing my teeth and our big orange cat sitting on the bathroom counter beside me drinking water from the faucet. I think it's ironic that many, many years later, I still have a big orange boy that does the same thing. Every morning, he jumps on the counter and waits knowing that I'll drip the faucet just for him. The only difference from age 7 to now is that there are no sponge curlers in my hair.



As I look over at Monroe and Timmy, the 2 orange males who now share my life, I cannot help but smile. They both love to lounge near me in the crates that my husband made for them. This lets them be where they want to be, close to me while I work, but out of the way. Ok, maybe only out of the way 80% of the time because there are

just some tasks that they are sure I cannot accomplish on my own. Both think that sewing binding on a quilt requires a furry counter weight to hold the quilt in place. Likewise, they think that any papers sitting by my computer might blow away without feline assistance. Quilt tops placed on the floor for a quick photo also need weight, a furry model or both. Convincing them otherwise can lead to quite the conversation.

We adopted Monroe when he was 4 months old. He was in the gangly stage where his ears were too big for his body and his legs seemed far too long. He was quite the comical little guy who had to investigate everything, but once exhausted from his efforts, had to curl up with his fur 'less mom or dad where he felt safe and loved. If the loudness of a purr is the gauge for contentment, he was one happy little boy. Now at age 6, when not helping in the studio he can be found in front of the bathroom sink with his belly facing the heating vent. In the evening, he is on my lap so that he does not miss Jeopardy or Wheel of Fortune. At night, he is most often found sleeping behind my knees. He definitely grew into his ears and legs and is now quite a big boy.

Timmy was my unexpected blessing a little more than a year ago. Showing up in our yard but too timid to come very close at first, it was a waiting game on both our parts for many weeks. Once I could touch him and get him to the vet, I was thrilled that he was not microchipped so I could claim him as my own. That joy turned to heartbreak on the second vet visit when they scanned him again and this time found a chip. My heart did not want to let him go but I knew if he had a family who was missing him, that I had to try and get him back home.

I called the number given to me by the microchip company and at first was told that they were not missing an orange cat. That led to me texting a photo. Finally, the lady to whom I was talking realized that he was a barn cat she had adopted many years before who had been missing for so long that they assumed something had happened to him. I almost cried happy tears when she said that if I wanted to keep him I could and that she would transfer the paperwork for the microchip.

Of course, I wanted to keep him! I was in love with this fur baby who had found his way to our yard some 8 miles from the barn where he used to live and then carefully and cautiously chosen us. Added to the fact that he now had a warm bed inside where he was protected from the elements and predators, letting him return to being a barn cat was something I just could not fathom.

I read somewhere that when cats choose a person, like Timmy did with us, that it's a true sign of trust. For them, being around someone they fully trust means that they can completely relax and rest at ease because they feel safe from harm. My husband says that each time Timmy looks into our eyes, you can see the gratitude and love. He is one of those cats who lets every emotion show and I am totally smitten. I tell him often that he is my angel and my unexpected blessing.

And so, it is with our little furry family. Timmy and Monroe have become good buddies. Like human siblings, their occasional squabbles occur when they both want the same toy. That is easily remedied by showing them that there are duplicates and that they each can have one. Max, our other male does not like him but we are working on that and our two females Lacey and Little just ignore him.

As their mom, I love each and every one of them and try my best not to have favorites, but I have to admit that these two orange boys just have my heart. My mom was right about them being different. There is just something special about a ginger cat.

Deb Heatherly is a designer for Creative Grids® rulers and the author of eight popular pattern books. Creative Grids® fans are invited to join her Facebook group, Grids Girls, for tips and inspiration and two free mysteries each year. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/7704296498004571>. Shop Owners are invited to join her group just for you, "Grids Girls for Quilt Shop Owners Only" <https://www.facebook.com/groups/273593657256524>. Visit Deb's website at [www.Debcatsnquilts.com](http://www.Debcatsnquilts.com).





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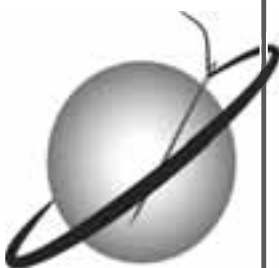
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# Open the Door! That's What They are For

by Barbara Kalkis

My doctor gets the credit for making me think about doors. No, it wasn't for therapy, although I sometimes wish someone would tell me what to do in certain situations. Mostly, however, I just wish I had a butler, the way some kids wish for a pony. But I digress. It was a busy day at the doctor's office. The nurse escorted me to the examination room, apologizing that Doctor was running a bit late. No problem. Alone time helps me settle into my surroundings and shake off a list of "what-if's", which is challenging when the counters are stuffed with bandages, gloves and other "tools of the trade", and the walls are plastered with cautions, warning signs of diseases and posters of body parts you forgot you had. And did not need a reminder of.

Crammed amongst the barrage of medical information, I was intrigued to see a huge, handsomely framed poster showing row upon row of doors. It was so completely out of place that I wondered if it contained some secret hidden message. In any case, it was a welcome change in the windowless room. There were no words, no title, just close-up photos of formal doors in every style and color that could grace the front of a house. Windows or no windows. Embellished decorations or plain. Stern glossy black doors fitted with gleaming brass handles, locks and kick-panels. Gray doors, suggesting owners who could not commit to a color. Heavily varnished doors showcasing the wood's grain.

Interspersing traditional styles were the flashy doors. The owners seemed intent to match door color to decorations on their porches. Grecian urns held massive red geraniums that exactly mirrored the door color. Green doors stood between boxwoods shaped into miniature trees with globes of tiny leaves. Bright yellow, pink, sky-blue, and lilac doors indicated cheery souls within who were brave enough to shun tradition or homeowner association color codes.

As I studied each photograph, I wondered what made this artwork more compelling than a simple scene. Dedicated to over-thinking things and having nothing to do while half-dressed, I decided that there is some deeper meaning to a door than a realtor's suggestion for "curb appeal." Scenes invite us to walk into an environment. Floral bouquets inspire appreciation of beauty.

Doors hold many more meanings. They are solid, sturdy, strong. You can count on a door for privacy. They provide security. They communicate the personality of their owners. They are the first indication of the kind of people that live behind them. Think of welcoming door wreaths at Christmas or circlets of spring flowers or 4th of July miniature flags and stars. Doors can keep us out. They also are the gateway to walk through.

In life, we all encounter many doors, real and abstract. The real doors are easy to deal with. We knock and hope they are opened. The abstract doors are harder to define. Those doors might stay closed to a new job or other opportunity. Many more doors are gateways to a new chapter in our lives – perhaps a move, the vacation of a lifetime, a new friend, or special person to share our lives with, a child or grandchild.

Whatever the door represents is up to each of us to decide. I like to think of a door as the entry to some new adventure, a new beginning, a new start, a new chapter, even a new season in the circle of a year. We just need to knock, walk through and the future will be open to us.

©2024Barbara Kalkis. Barbara Kalkis spends her time teaching, writing, and working as a marketing consultant. She is 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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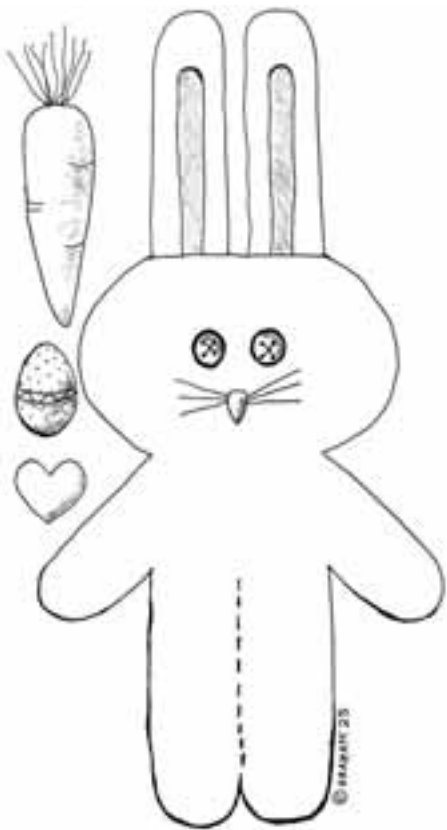
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Designed By Kathy Graham



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# COUNTRY REGISTER RECIPE EXCHANGE

## Marmalade-Mustard Glazed Ribs

From the kitchen of Ann Terrazas, Las Cruces



- 1 1/2 lbs. beef short ribs
- 1 clove garlic, minced fine
- 1/2 cup marmalade (good quality like St. Dalfour Orange Marmalade)
- 1 tablespoon dijon mustard
- Salt

Place ribs in baking pan then sprinkle with salt and garlic. Bake about 45 minutes at 350°, uncovered. Meanwhile, melt marmalade with mustard in a small saucepan, mixing just until heated. After the ribs have baked about 45 minutes, remove pan from oven and spoon marmalade mixture over each rib. Continue cooking uncovered about another 45 minutes to an hour, until done. Cooking time depends on the size of the ribs.



# GIRLFRIEND WISDOM



**"Bless You"** is often heard after a sneeze, even from a stranger in the grocery line. It feels really good and kind when we hear **"Bless You"**! How about the phrase **"A Blessing in Disguise"** referring to something that at first appears bad or unlucky but is actually good. We love it when that happens! **"Count your many Blessings name them one by one..."** an age old hymn from 1897 is a perfect practise to make a special effort to appreciate the good things in one's life. The Irish have a well-known blessing: **"May your troubles be less, Your Blessings be more, and nothing but happiness come through your door."** A wedding blessing: **May your marriage always bring glory to God, joy to one another, and Blessings to your family for many generations to come."** A House Blessing: **Bless this house, O Lord we pray, make it safe by night and day.. Bless these walls so firm and stout, Keeping want and trouble out... Bless this door that it may prove, Every open, to Joy and Love..."**

**GIRLFRIEND WISDOM:**  
May you add your own blessing to these examples each and every day!

Joy & Blessings, *Jody*

Girlfriend Wisdom is written and illustrated by Jody Houghton®.  
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# Writing From Life

by Jeanette Lukowski



## Reunions

When I think of the word, "reunions," the first images which come to mind are high school and family reunions. Although I have attended a number of family reunions over the years, I have never attended a school reunion. Was I invited to one? Great question.

This past weekend, my grown son and I attended an event which came very close to that sense of a high school reunion: the annual Show Choir Dinner Show at his high school.

It's been about twelve years since he last performed a show with his high school's show choir, but they had a year for the record books: after more than 15 years of the program, his group made it all the way to the National's Level of competition (after attaining 1st place in the Regional's competition).

As many do, my family eventually moved out of that community. My son left shortly after graduation, while I stayed only a few more years.

This, then, was our first return to the show choir circuit. We had talked about catching a competition in other towns over the years, but it's difficult to locate the schedule information without connections. We walked into the high school, wearing our spirit jackets with pride, and chatted with the strangers seated with us at the dinner table.

The show was nice. The dinner was nearly a carbon copy to what I had helped serve twelve years earlier. The team singers and dancers, however, looked so much younger.

While eating, one of our table mates (a current team member's parent) handed me the small flyer which had been sitting closest to her plate; it was announcing an "All Show Choir Reunion" this coming summer. She encouraged us to take it, as my son was the only alum of the program sitting at our table. On the long drive home, though, my son said while he might go to see the performance, he will not participate in the three days of rehearsals and such. "It will be fun," he explained, "to have them see me, and see that I'm not dead."

"What? Why would you suggest they think you are dead?"

"Because I'm not on social media. No one has kept in touch with me. In fact, the only person I've even seen from high school in the past ten years is..."

What do we gain, or lose, as the communication styles change from one generation to the next? Like my son, I have no social media accounts. I call my mother regularly, keep in touch with a small collection of people through text messages, and send a larger group of people the annual Christmas letter update.

My mother, who has never sent a text message (and can no longer recall how to access email), attends her high school AND college reunions. Invitations arrive in her mailbox, or come as phone calls from a committee chair.

We have my daughter to thank for this one; she sent me a text message.

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



# Sap’s Running! Head for the Hills!

by Nancy J. Nash

Every spring (or almost spring) we hop in the car and head for the hills. It’s unthinkable not to. Pancakes drenched in maple syrup and slathered with berries or chocolate chips await my relatives and me at a favorite sugar house, where the syrup is produced. The time-honored tradition of tapping sugar maple trees for sap, collecting it in pails, and boiling it into syrup has been updated to include lines of tubing and high-tech equipment, but the lure of hot pancakes in syrup never changes. The warm, thawing days and freezing nights have combined to make the sap flow in our part of Massachusetts, and we are ready to go. Our journey is a family ritual that helps us bid winter farewell and welcome spring.

A year has passed since the sap was running enough to send us forth into the hill country. We’re not sure of the route at first. Wasn’t there a horse farm along the way? What about the tiny library we just passed? By the way, how could it possibly hold more than five books? The sign by that simple wooden church says it’s 275 years old. It has a monopoly on picturesque plainness, an affordable form of beauty that farm towns seemed to specialize in back then. I think we’re on the right track.

Finally, there it is—the sugar shack and the tantalizing aroma of sap boiling into syrup wafting our way. Patches of snow and old dirt ruts add to the charm of the small parking lot.

We unexpectedly meet friends who have found their way here. All of us head toward the rustic dining room, which is overlooked by a large evaporator in the throes of producing a fresh supply of syrup. Before letting us enter, a couple teenagers take our food orders and politely tell us to stand in line. We mingle with locals as well as tourists from far-away parts of the world. Then, as my dad used to say, we “chew the fat” (gab) with the owner of the shop, who has been harvesting maple syrup since he was a teenager. Now he is a grandfather.

Speaking of Dad and Grandpa, I remember the time they tapped a row of sugar maples and boiled the sap in a large pan in the back yard. Well, they got to talking, and the sap boiled too long and burned. After lamenting the loss, Dad retrieved a small unspoiled portion for me to taste. As a young child, I was quite satisfied with that treat. The burnt maple sap redeemed itself by its story being told and evoking laughter in the telling. Maybe there was a silver lining to losing that batch of syrup all those years ago. We get to remember how Grandpa and Dad made a sticky situation sweet by enjoying a joke on themselves.

As the cooks in the kitchen continue their labor, we talk in a cluster, speculating about this year’s harvest. What type of syrup, we wonder, will be served on our pancakes? Will it be amber or dark? Both are flavorful and will do just fine. Did you know it takes 40 gallons of sap to produce a gallon of maple syrup? Have you heard that some old-time farmers could identify which grove of maples (sugar bush) a supply of syrup came from by taste alone?



Now we settle into our places at the long, wooden table. A container of pure maple syrup is set before us, along with plates of steaming pancakes, some in piles for the heartier eaters. I pour maple syrup over mine, sending streams of liquid gold sliding along and sinking into its depths. I take a bite of pancake. It goes down easy.

© 2024 Nancy J. Nash. Nancy J. Nash is the author of *Mama’s Books: An Oregon Trail Story*, and *Little Rooster’s Christmas Eve*, each available on amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. She has a B.A. in English composition from Mount Holyoke College and an M.F.A. in Writing for Children from Simmons College. She can be reached at nancynash341@gmail.com






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Pieces of the Past

As time goes marching forward, and it marches oh so fast,  
it seems that only memories are all we have that last.  
They may be of a loved one, or a special time or place,  
or remnants of a wedding dress, some ribbons and some lace.  
The chair where mother used to sit and rock her babes at night,  
or piece a quilt to keep them warm, and all by oil light.  
The photographs of people that we didn’t even know,  
that have preserved a precious glimpse of life from long ago.  
So standing on the edge of life, we oft look back and see  
reminders of the days gone past and how things used to be.  
We cherish all these tokens made from want and made from will,  
and miss the hands that held them once, voices forever still.  
We’ll treasure that old patchwork quilt that once was on our bed,  
and keep around a few good books that some loved one has read.  
And it could never matter just how fine new dishes are,  
...they never could compare to grandma’s good old cookie jar.  
We know we can’t retrace our steps and live our lives again,  
but we can cling to treasures ‘cause that’s all that will remain.  
For all we have are memories, as long as they will last,  
in things we cherish most of all ... these pieces of the past.  
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Yvonne Hollenbeck, from Clearfield, SD, performs her original poetry throughout the United States, capti-  
vating 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  
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# Wit and Wisdom

## Spring Brings Hope

by Roxanne J. Ferguson



My favorite season of the year is spring. There is a freshness in the air that breathes new beginnings. When the little white snowdrops poke their heads through the wet soil, they seem to say, "Be gone, winter! You have been here long enough!" They are followed by the purple crocus who come with a smile and confidently say, "Spring is on its way!" When yellow daffodils open their smiling faces, we know that spring is here in full force. Then tulips, in their multi-color outfits, celebrate the triumph of spring. "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of the birds is come" (Song of Solomon 2:11,12 KJV Bible)

Birds were returning before the snow had left us. I wondered if they were disappointed when they arrived, but it didn't seem to deter them. Red-winged blackbirds and robins were the first to return. We have since enjoyed many visitors at our bird feeder and they enjoy the seeds we provide.

We have had fun this spring trying something new. We put eggs from our chickens into an incubator, keeping track of temperature and humidity. It was our first attempt at this endeavor and our hatching rate was low, but we were still happy to see a few chicks push their way out of their shells and find their way into the world. The little yellow balls of fluff just show us what determination can accomplish! My father decided those little yellow chicks needed some company. After a trip to the local farm store, he arrived at my house with a dozen chicks, adding a variety of color to my little flock. I have to say, chicks make me happy. They, too, represent the newness of spring. They are fluffy and busy and excited about life!

"Where flowers bloom so does hope." (A quote from Lady Bird Johnson) I would have to add to this...Where flowers bloom and little chicks peep, there is hope! Spring brings hope...hope of better weather and warmer days, hope of changing seasons and that life goes on, hope for better days. We all need hope in our lives. The Bible says, "Blessed is he...whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them – the Lord, who remains faithful forever." (Psalm 145:5,6)

I don't know about you, but I need hope. I like spring and new life. It reminds me of the hope I have in Jesus. By putting my faith in Him and the price He paid for our salvation, I have hope for new life in heaven and hope for eternity. I hope that you have this hope, too.

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# Everything's Coming Up-Crocuses!

by Janet M. Bair



I love spring bulbs! Out of the many flowers I have planted over the years, crocuses and daffodils are the most enduring. I can hardly wait to see our purple and yellow hyacinths blooming. Sadly, our tulips have not survived the squirrels' descent upon them.

What is especially fun is that my 'spring flower bed' is located right next to our house in a very sunny spot. In January, the daffodils and crocuses shoot their green tips through a frozen earth. Snow doesn't seem to stop their daring rise above ground.

This has been a most encouraging spot in our yard, for when all looks bleak and dead, the daffodils remain undefeated year after year. Surprisingly our crocuses somehow have become scattered all about our front lawn. I know I didn't plant the bulbs in the middle of the lawn. Who moved them? Only the squirrels know for sure.

Last year I counted 32 lavender crocus flowers blooming among the grass. I know I originally planted yellow and white crocuses too but I guess they taste better(?) because they have disappeared. It has been kind of fun to see where the flowers pop up.

With spring coming, maybe I will get busy like the squirrels. I'll sew some new flowered hot mats or cloth napkins. Or I could create a new wall hanging for the front door. It's time to finish up the larger quilting projects before our two spare bedrooms need to become space for summer visitors. The bedroom I sew in is not air conditioned which makes for uncomfortable quilting days in the summer.

I just finished an orange and yellow quilt top that needs quilting. Our quilt guild sews Comfort Quilts for The Hole in the Wall Gang Summer Camp in CT. The last collection day for quilts is in May. I have two other quilts in process besides the orange one to finish by then.

I thought the lavender quilt I'm working on would be easy. However, I bought the fabric two years ago and didn't realize there wouldn't be enough for the pattern I chose until after I cut it out. I will have to improvise something.

Isn't that what we all do with life—we improvise? Yes, the squirrels may have changed my garden design but it's still beautiful. My quilt will still make some little girl happy with whatever pattern I improvise.

What projects are you working on? What are your plans this spring? Even if they have to be changed around a bit, I hope that you find some colorful ways to make your days brighter.

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