

Darlene Prickett

The Front Porch

Our front porch was not an impressive structure.

Like most porches of the 1950s, it went from one side of the front of the house to the other. Huge wooden columns sat in each corner and one on each side of the steps. The steps were wide and long. Sturdy enough to hold five wiggly kids for family pictures.

A breeze always found us on that porch. It stirred the ferns and the American flag attached to the wooden column in the corner. The ferns were Mamma’s pride and joy. On the southern end, the red geraniums and blue sky competed for attention. Over the years, it provided a home to many plants and a few songbirds. The swing, wicker chairs, and rockers were a perfect spot for morning coffee, afternoon tea, and evening conversations. There is no place more peaceful, or that says “home” like our front porch. Our family spent countless pleasant hours there.

As we sat on it, neighbors on an evening stroll or those sitting on their front steps would join our family. Everyone considered our porch as the neighborhood meeting place. And, sometimes, a stage for budding actors and actresses. It became the center of family and community life from early spring until the middle of winter.

Once everyone had gathered, the storytelling by my parents and the neighbors began. They refined the art over the years. Some were what my daddy called “tall tales” and some concerned the politics of the day. Often my brother would bring out his guitar and we would all join in singing *Dooley*, *Wabash Cannonball*, and *This Train* (is bound for glory). These evenings of picking and singing would sometimes go until midnight. Mamma would say, “Sorry folks, I love the songs and singing, but we all must get up in the morning. We need to get ready for bed.” We would all groan and the neighbors would shuffle off to their own homes.

During the summer, I waited for Mamma to yell out the side door, “Come on over, Myrtle, I’ll be out on the front porch as soon as I get these beans on to cook.” Mrs. Gray (Myrtle) lived next door. It amazed me how she could hear Mamma from her back porch. But she did, because in a few minutes Mrs. Gray would settle into our swing. As soon as the other neighborhood ladies saw Mrs. Gray, they gathered. People started telling stories, discussing their day, and swapping recipes. I would sit and listen to the ladies of the neighborhood until a topic arose I didn’t need to hear.

“Mary, it’s time for you to go mop the kitchen floor.” I knew when Mamma said that, there was going to be some interesting news.



As I entered, I would stop at the front door and listen. I knew I shouldn’t, but any kid told not to do something will try awfully hard to do exactly that. That’s how I learned Mrs. Morris’s son, Alfred, was being drafted into the Army. His parents were really upset.

Wish I was old enough to enlist in the Army. I want to see the world! I thought as I went to the kitchen.

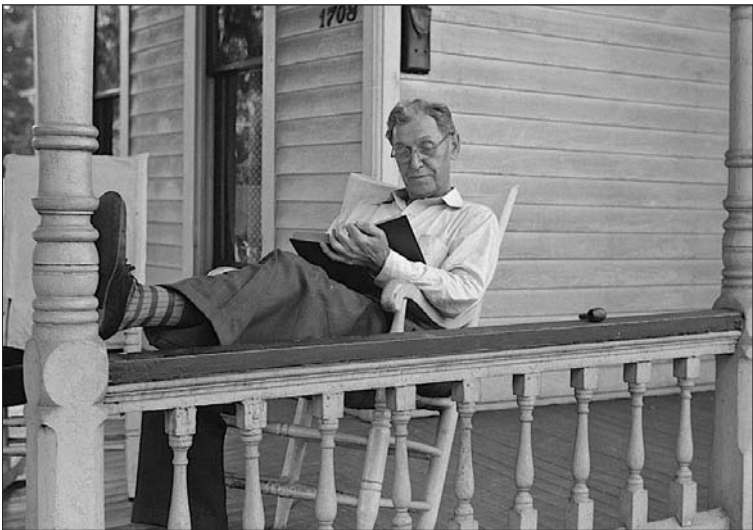
Thunderstorms were an invitation to go to the front porch. My daddy would yell out to whomever was home, “The show is starting on the front porch!” We would all try to outrun each other to get the best seat. And what a show it would be! The lightning streaked across the sky like a magic show or fourth of July fireworks. This was nature’s fireworks... but much more beautiful. The rain came down in enormous splashes. Summer thunderstorms were the most magnificent. They made the porch rattle and feel like the deck of a ship as the wind whistled and howled. The rain became horizontal and the whole porch would feel like it was moving. Some folks probably thought we were a little odd to sit outside during such a storm, but we knew we were safe.

One early afternoon in March, I visited Mamma and Daddy on my break from college. It was raining and 45 degrees. Unusual temperature for spring. After lunch, Daddy and I wandered out onto the porch to sit for a while. As we sat, it took only a couple of questions for him to talk, in great detail, about memories of his parents. His mother built this house after his father died. He was fifteen years old. He talked

about how the house used to look before she added the front porch. What the street looked like, who the neighbors were, the automobiles of that era, and the cousins,

aunts, and uncles who visited every day. Most of them were gone now, but his memories of them were vivid. I sat for hours, listening to his reminiscing and enjoying my time with him. It was pitch black when we finally went into the house.

I would trade all I have for one more day or night on that porch. Nothing is better than porch sitting, listening to the birds, and spending time with family. ♦



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FROM THE EDITOR

CHARITY BISHOP

Tell a Story, Don't Push an Agenda

I recently re-watched *The Hunt for Red October*, about a Russian submarine captain and his crew who want to defect but have no way of contacting the Americans during the cold war, so must take their chances and hope they don't get torpedoed to their deaths.

It is a nail-biting thriller, without an agenda other than to tell a good story. It's been a while since we've seen any of those, hasn't it?
Last year, *Barbie* dominated the box office. It's a satire about society, but hammers on the "patriarchy" with such merciless, undisguised intent, the heavy-handed message makes the last twenty minutes a cringe-fest. And it's not alone in its propaganda. How about *Doctor Who*? Instead of the 60th anniversary us fans deserved (full of spectacle and fun, as a celebration to one the longest-lasting sci-fi series in history), we got "preached at" about feminism, political correctness, and the Doctor was shamed for his outdated views and for being "male-presenting."

While many of the fans threw up their hands in disgust... I did not watch. I gave up the show four seasons ago, when they regenerated the Doctor into a woman, and every week became a "let's educate the unwashed masses on a lesson they need to learn" sermon instead of telling great stories from history and the future. *Doctor Who* is always progressive in its politics, but the three Doctors prior to making "he" into "she" were still the heroes, still the smartest beings in the universe (and the most merciless). Some episodes are the finest hours of television ever produced, ranging from the terrifying "Stone Angels" who kill you by sending you through time to Amy Pond trying to save Vincent Van Gough from killing himself (and finding out she can't change history). Between the patronizing attitude and race-swapping historical figures, the "new" *Doctor Who*'s ratings have tanked in the last five years, because in their eagerness to be "modern" they forgot one thing: boys who watch the Doctor want to *be* him, and girls who watch him want to be *with* him. Nobody asked for a female Doctor and nobody wanted one, particularly not with an agenda attached.

Stories have power. They change our hearts and our minds by capturing our imagination. A good story takes dusty figures from history and turns them into living people we care about. A story can make us think about something from a new perspective or change our minds on issues by asking us to walk in someone else's

shoes. We only get one life—ours. We cannot be anyone else, except through a story that carries us somewhere and asks us to make choices along with the hero/heroine. Good stories inspire us to become our best selves and to believe in heroism, courage, and that right will be done.

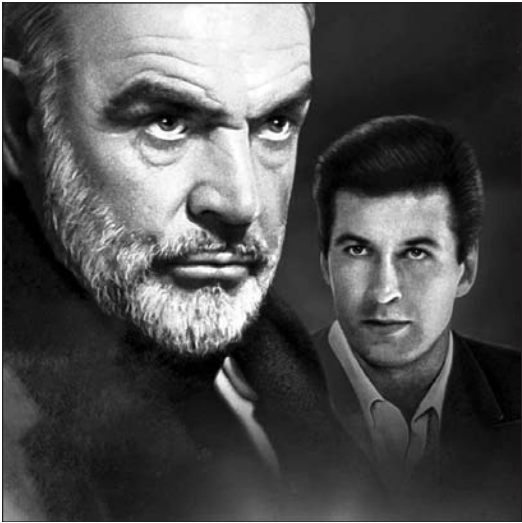
There is a difference between an author's beliefs coming across in their work's themes and pushing a "message" on the audience. Like in *The Lord of the Rings*. Director Peter Jackson said they tried not to insert their modern views or agenda into the film trilogy, out of respect for

Tolkien; they wanted his themes to stand firm and they do. Through his stories, you know what Tolkien believed—in good triumphing over evil, in fellowship and friendship, in self-sacrifice, and in forces beyond our control. It's woven into the *themes* of his work, not preached from the mountaintop (unlike in the "prequel" by Amazon Films, in which Galadriel is an unlikable "girl-boss" and whose selling point is the "diversity" Tolkien lacked).

I don't want to be preached at through entertainment, no matter whose side the agenda comes from. When I read or watch something, I want to immerse myself in a good *story*. There is a reason most of my movie collection dates prior to six years ago, because lately, "agenda" is *all* so many stories give us.

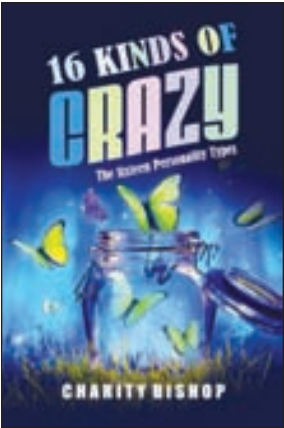
I want heroes and heroines who wrestle with their demons and choose to do the right thing when it's hard. Bad guys who are evil. Men who are heroic, not sidelined because girls *must* win every fight. Equality between the sexes. Do not treat me like I need to be "re-educated." Tell me a story that moves me because it is deep and full of life, not angers me because I can smell the patronizing condescension in every frame.

It hurts my heart that *Doctor Who* had to be a casualty of the culture wars, but at least I have the earlier seasons to enjoy—on discs, so no studio can decide what I am not allowed to watch and yank them away from me. ♦



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Grandma's Secret

On Christmas night, as three generations of family members said goodbye, Bill and I hugged, cuddled, and kissed them right out our front door.

We sent them into the cold, wintry night loaded down with presents and happy memories from spending a full day at Paw-paw's and Nana's house. Because we are a blended family, I have always tried to be fair with all the kids and grandchildren. I give generous bear hugs and positive affirmations to each one when they come to visit. This Christmas, however, I may have gone overboard trying to be fair and square with the entire gang. What I did is my little secret, and I still giggle every time I think about it.

As I watched the last car pull out of our driveway, I felt thankful for having our entire family together, since it rarely happens. Bill and I recalled the day's events, holiday excitement, and laughter as everyone played board games and card games.

Emotion overcame me when I noticed the things our kids had left behind: a toddler's handprint smudge on the refrigerator door, a Lego block that our "Boy-the-Builder" dropped under the coffee table. Stuffed between couch cushions, I discovered a colorful crayon drawing by our nine-year-old budding artist who has natural talent. There were half-empty cans of soda left by preteens with tin grins, who thought they were too big to hug each other upon arrival, but horsed around and wrestled all day. I opened the recycle bin and discovered empty peach tea bottles. I thought I had hidden well. The twenty-somethings, who competed in video games and engaged in good-natured ribbing—much like they did when they were youngsters—left couch cushions askew. Our guest towels were smudged, a sign everyone had felt comfortable making messes in our home. The rumpled bedspread in our guest room is where the girl cousins sprawled, shared secrets, giggled, and talked about their hopes and dreams. The few crumbs on the counter and under the table meant everyone snacked and ate a healthy meal. Tummies were full, and so was my heart.

All the women had hovered in the kitchen and chatted about husbands, kids, and life. As I caught snippets of their conversations, I realized when I was their age, issues seemed monumental to me, too. I smiled as I made my hostess rounds and sent up a silent prayer. "Thank you, Lord, for keeping every mouthy one of us women healthy."

I bounced a baby, patted grandsons, squeezed granddaughters, hugged grown kids, and made small talk with in-laws. I'd intruded on teens who shut the door the minute I walked out of the room. And I

comforted a slighted toddler. We were one big happy family for one whole day of togetherness.

Overcome with love, I decided on the spur of the moment to give each grandchild something special to cherish, something only theirs from Nana. During Christmas day, when no one was watching, I took each one of them aside separately, and I whispered a secret in their ear. "Shh! Don't tell anyone. YOU are my favorite."

Each one looked at me with wide-eyed disbelief. They couldn't imagine I would admit such a thing with everyone else there in our home. I squeezed them, snickered, and sneaked away to find the next child.

After our meal, the young children had scattered over every inch of the living room floor and waited for presents to be distributed. At the count of three, they simultaneously unwrapped gifts. Their noise and laughter delighted me as the wrapping paper went airborne.

By the time everyone left, the aroma of sage stuffing and Nana's famous potatoes had dissipated, replaced by a lingering cloud of teenagers' cologne which permeated our small ranch home. I inhaled deeply and tried to distinguish the girls' fragrances from the boys', who all used the same popular brand of canned spray.

During the day, all ages had been busy snapping cell phone pictures, posing for posterity, and posting their Christmas presents on line. It occurred to me how times and technology have changed. Bill and I use a computer, and we have cell phones, but we still have a lot to figure out. I don't completely understand clouds, chats, and messenger texts, but there is one thing I know: hearing Nana's voice



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whispering sweet some-things in your ear is better than receiving a Nana love note on your cell phone. Besides, typed messages can be traced and used as evidence. LOL... Bill and I can't agree on whether that acronym means lots of laughs or laughing out loud.

As my honey and I settled into our quiet and comfortable nightly routine, I chuckled. I imagined Christmas Future. Years from now, our twelve grand and great grandkids will be grown and gathered together. Someone will say, "Do you want to know a secret? One Christmas, Nana told me she loved ME best. I was her favorite!" Then they will all compare stories... "It was the Christmas I was eight (or twelve, fourteen, eighteen or twenty-two...) when Nana told ME that, too."

As they share memories, perhaps they will recall my voice from Christmas Past: "You're my favorite." Then they will do the math, figure out it happened to all of them on the same Christmas day, and everyone will laugh out loud. ♦

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How Did They Do It? The Women of the Prairie

Ardis Till Jackson

It amazes me how my mother and the women of her generation went about their chores without the modern conveniences we have today.

Mom and Dad arise with the sun. The heat of the hot summer sun isn't too warm yet. She grabs a milk pail and heads out to the barn to help Dad with the cows before breakfast. She takes the milk to the house and pours it into the separator, which separates the cream from the rest. Mom starts breakfast, usually hot cereal, eggs and either sausage or bacon.

On Monday, it's washday. Dad helps her get the Maytag ringer washer running. She scrubs out the hard stains (like his work clothes) on a washboard. It's time to hang them on the clothesline. As the summer breeze winds around the fabric, it dries quickly. Winter is harsher. The clothes freeze before she even pins on the clothespins. Before evening, she sets up the still-frozen garments in the living room to dry. Some items of clothing get laid out on the table next to a sprinkle bottle filled with water. After sprinkling the clothes, she rolls them up and puts them in the clothes basket to save for the ironing tomorrow.

The next day, Mom places the irons on the cook stove to heat. She needs at least two, one to iron with and another on the stove warming to replace the one she's using.

Having planted the garden a month ago, it's time to put the straw hat on and head out to weed the patch with the kids. As the peas, carrots, sweet corn, beets, cucumbers and other vegetables ripen, Mom prepares for canning. She fetches the jars and lids from the cellar (a place where lizards hide) and places them in the tin boiler with the wooden handles. I love seeing all the jars lined up on her counter, full of pretty reds, yellows and oranges.

Dad is a potato lover, so he plants many rows. The most hated job of the year will soon be upon us: picking potato bugs! He expects everyone to help. Dad gives us each a small can with a small amount of kerosene in it. Up and down the rows we go, picking the horrible bugs off the plants and placing them in the can. The kerosene kills them. When the potatoes are ready to be harvested, Dad drives down the rows with the digger; mom and us kids following behind. We put the potatoes in a gunnysack for storage in the lizard... err, cellar.

This is in the mid to late 50s and the oil workers' wives from down south love fresh eggs. Mom goes to the trailer park where they live and hopes to get there before another farmer's wife beats her to it. Earning this money from selling eggs means a lot to her. She spends it on a new pair of shoes for one of us kids or purchases material from the corner store. Most of our clothes are handmade with the treadle Singer sewing machine.

In the winter months, Mom looks over the Montgomery Ward catalog and if the crop was

a good one, she'll order what's needed. The brown stockings she makes us wear to school in the winter months are a must. They keep our legs warm while walking the mile to school. My sister always removes hers before we get there. I never dare. For Sunday school, we wear white stockings.

On Saturday evenings, we load the cream from the milk cows in the car or truck and go off to town to sell it at the local creamery. We store the cream in the water tank, in the coulee where natural spring water flows, until we take it into town. Money from this sale goes towards purchasing staples from the local grocer.



to wipe the sweat off her face. Sometimes Dad needs her to make a run to the equipment dealer in town fifteen miles away to get a part for a machine that has broken down. When the crops don't have a good yield, Dad must look elsewhere for extra income. He hears the

lumber mills in Idaho are hiring and goes off to make enough money to get us through the winter. That leaves Mom, my aunt, and us kids alone for a few months. Being the oldest, Adella and I must get up early and help with the milking before we go to school. It's hard to get up in the dark and go out to a cold barn before breakfast.

This is the life of the farmer's wife in the early days. I dare not go back in time even further, like my great aunts who traveled with a wagon train west to homestead. The stamina such women had is hard for me to comprehend. I so admire "the women of the prairie." ♦

Combining time has arrived. Combines cut down wheat or other grain. Dad and the other men first combine close to the house. Next, they go to the river bottom about fifteen miles away. We load up the car with what's needed to cook a meal for the combiners

that day and do the cooking at our neighbor's house. It's an old house with a cook stove. It gets so hot in that kitchen I think I'm going to melt. We must cook the supper meal before we go home. Dad will come along later when they're finished in the field for the day.

Branding is an exciting time for my siblings and me, for we have lots of company. Mom and a few neighbor women are hard at work in the kitchen, cooking the noon meal for the men. They bake pies for dessert. The men eat first, then the women and kids are next.

In the summer months, we put the milking cows out to pasture after the morning milking. In the late afternoon, we bring them in for the evening milking. If the cows' milk bags are uncomfortably full, they'll come home on their own, but most of the time we girls have to hunt them down. When the cows are hard to find or have wandered off too far in the pasture, or are in the trees, Mom will take us in the car to search for them—especially if the bull is in the pasture with the cows. Many is the time we have to make a run for the safety of the fence! After we find the cows, we must get them home.

Mom does a lot of baking; making bread is a priority since we never have store-bought bread. Cookies and cake are usually on hand for the company that often drops in.



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Susan Sundwall

ITS THE LITTLE THINGS

What if there was no such thing as paper towels?
My mind reels and my stomach clenches at the thought.

This results from having grown up with a mom who preferred rags to paper towels. A hole in any of dad's tee shirts doomed it for the rag bag. She forbid using paper towels for all, but the most sacred duties, like wiping bacon grease out of the frying pan. Ever the rebel, I vowed to have it otherwise in my future household.

It wasn't until 1931 that the Scott brothers, of paper products fame, got a glimmer of what a boon disposable paper towels would be to those who dwell in kitchens, moms, grandmas and servants. First used in medicine and then print ads, they soon manufactured them for home kitchens. Those first rolls were eighteen inches long and thirteen inches wide. Be still my heart! Nice job, boys. Gals like me can't imagine our homes without them. Good thing Mom has been gone for a while or she'd be giving me the skunk eye for my extravagance in having a dozen rolls on hand.

Velcro. Why didn't I buy stock in it when it poked its nose over the horizon in the 1940s? I wasn't born yet, but you understand what I'm saying. Who comes up with these marvelous ideas? A Swiss gentleman named George de Mestral did, while traipsing up a mountain in Switzerland. He noticed the tiny hooks of some cockle-burs were stuck in his pants and in his dog's fur. His curiosity got the better of him. How were these things so sticky? His engineer brain got into gear and the rest is all in the history books. So many of us are thankful! The stuff is everywhere. Recently I attended a wedding and wore a pair of shoes that had small old-fashioned buckles. As I bent over and struggled to get them just right, I suddenly newly appreciated all those Velcro fastenings our friend George came up with and perfected. Shoes, jackets, handbags, toys and gobs of other ordinary things are much more user friendly now.

How about those little pull tabs on pop top cans? Back in the 1960s, a man named Ermal

Fraze invented them. Breweries took notice and began using them. It didn't take long for other enterprises to use them in many other containers like tuna cans. I especially appreciate those. My go to lunch at least twice a week is a fat tuna sandwich and chips. I do, occasionally, have trouble getting my fingernail under the end of the tab. My best friend gave me a little tool to use, but I lost it. It's okay; when your tuna sandwich is on the line, you get those nails out and do your best.

I love emojis. What a fun job it must be to sit all day and create them so we can properly express our social media thoughts. Don't get me wrong. Words are great. I'm using them right now, in fact. Three cheers for words! But those fabulous little faces and images we hunt diligently for in order to get our point across with emphasis... well, they boost our words, don't they? The next best thing, yet to be imagined, is sound emojis. No doubt someone at your local community college, or maybe Yale, is working on that right now.

I don't know any woman who uses claw clips that doesn't love them. What a boon to our hair care! They come in all sizes and colors, are inexpensive and easy to use. They keep our hair out of our eyes and allow us to drive and eat and otherwise function so that we can see what's in front of us. I have them all over the house; keep a few in my purse and a couple in the car. When it's hot and humid outside, friends and family will often glimpse four or five of them holding back my super curly hair. I couldn't get through a summer without them.

We owe a lot to the people whose creative brains see a need, invent something to fulfill it, and bring it to market. I once had an idea I thought was brilliant. I've always hated getting lost while driving to a new location. Remember

the old game Tickle Bee? Players used a magnetic wand to guide a magnetic bee around the game board. I asked my husband why someone couldn't invent something similar to help drivers like me to navigate a new road, a guide from above, so to speak. Someone must have heard me, because in 1989, Magellan NAV 1000 invented the first handheld GPS. I should have bought their stock. ♦

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Remembering or Not

It's strange how we pick and choose our memories.

I remember little about astronauts in space, but I recall well the first rain I felt after I moved to the high plains area. It was cold! Where I came from, a summer rain was more like a warm shower. You didn't mind getting wet. This rain was like being hit with chips of ice. Was there no end to the indignities inflicted on humans in this area? I just stood there, getting cold, shaking, and mad as the proverbial wet hen.

I vaguely recall Elvis Presley but I vividly remember taking my oldest son to the neighbor for a medical exam. I thought he had a terrible disease or at least the mange when all he had was a dirty neck. For a kid with an affinity for water, how could this be? Whenever we went camping in the mountains, he was always the one who fell in the nearest stream.

I remember little about Reagan getting shot, but I remember the cat who adopted us. That was strange. What self-respecting cat would want to be adopted by a family of boys? Danger was her middle name. Her first name was Mud. She climbed trees and refused to come down. A matter of safety, no doubt. I often saw her tail move seconds before a boy's foot or school books came down (no one ever looked). I would sometimes count the seconds when her tail would move before the slamming of the back door.

I don't remember Mt. St. Helena's eruption, but I remember when our oldest entered the Marines. When he came home, he asked my youngest and I to pick up his duffel bag. When we got there, my youngest picked it up, slung it over his shoulder and promptly fell over backwards. A real feat for a boy six feet three inches tall and weighing 180 pounds. It took three of us to help him up and pick up the bag.


I remember little about Solidarity, the labor movement in Poland, but I remember when one boy went to college driving an old Volvo, which slipped and slid over the side of a mountain pass and rolled twice. Because he was tall, he braced his knees against the dash and his head against the roof and suffered no broken bones. He said, "I thought I had died because I heard music. His little radio slid across the floor and began to play. He added, "By the way, your jar of chili didn't break." Today, chili triggers the memory for me. I always thank God it wasn't worse.

The years since have flashed by in a blur—births, deaths, illnesses, accidents but no world event stands out in my mind.

Sometimes I look back and think: what have I missed and was it important? ♦


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MOVIE REVIEW BY CHARITY BISHOP

Journey to Bethlehem

The story of Jesus’ birth comes to life in this moving and entertaining musical, now available for rent wherever you stream movies.

Mary (Fiona Palomo) had different ideas about her future than marriage (she has studied and loved the scriptures so much, she hoped to become a teacher), but when her father arranges her engagement to Joseph (Milo Manheim), she resigns herself to doing what her family feels is best, even if she isn’t sure where God is going to take her in the future. Her life changes one night when an angel appears to her in a dream and tells her she has been chosen to carry the future messiah. No one believes her—not her family, her friends, or Joseph, though he feels inner turmoil about the whole thing. So, Mary heads off to be with her cousin Elizabeth, whom the angel also told her is expecting a child, little knowing that word of this unborn king has reached King Herod (Antonio Banderas), who has sent his eldest son Antipater (Joel Smallbone) to “find this woman and kill her.”



As the story unfolds, Joseph makes a decision that will change his life forever (“The Ultimate Deception”), Mary comes to rely on her faith now more than ever (“Mother to a Savior and King”), Herod heads down the road to madness, and Antipater questions whether he is damned because of the evil that runs in his blood (“In My Blood”). It’s a tremendous musical, with a wide variety of songs—there are joyful ones, witty ones, and deeply moving and meaningful ones. You can say more in a two minute song than an hour of character development, and the film makes the most of it. It’s just plain *fun* to watch, with larger than life characters and adorable quirks. The opinionated and

brave Mary has a sweet but stubborn donkey named Fig. Joseph wants to be an inventor, and can only cook one thing (stew). Nervous to be entrusted with such an important message, Gabriel practices his speech before he wakes Mary. King Herod sings a hilarious song about how it’s “Good to Be King” while people riot at his castle. The eyeliner-wearing Banderas

My Friend Harry

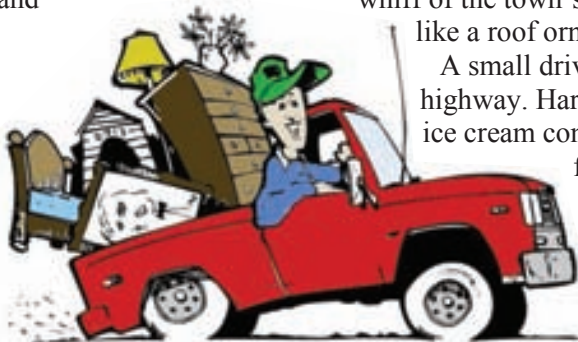
June Domes

As a child, I grew up in a small, farming town and worked a couple hours a day at my dad’s welding shop.

At first I did the daily cleaning, but as I got older, I assumed the responsibility of the bookwork too. As a well paid, shy child, I enjoyed listening to the many tales of the farmers. They all knew each other and seemed to enjoy their wait while dad or my brother repaired broken parts and machinery.

One of the almost daily visitors was a man named Harry. Harry was an older man, in my mind, anyway, but almost all adults looked old to me. He was the town junk man and usually had a load of this and that on his old pickup. As an everyday part of my life, we became friends immediately. He gave me hints on how to be more resourceful at cleaning. I was, after all, a kid and making a few mistakes. Because of our type of jobs, we had something in common right off the bat. Welding shop work is dirty and so is junk yard work, therefore, our clothes were always a mess.

Harry had a stray dog called “Speck.” I also had a stray and Harry liked those who liked



dogs. Harry drove his rusty old pickup so slow that Speck could perch on the roof of the cab. His balancing act wasn’t hard because of the “baby speed.” He appeared to be a statue up there, standing so straight, ears barely flapping and nose pointed ahead, taking in every little whiff of the town’s many aromas and looking like a roof ornament.

A small drive-in sat across the highway. Harry would say, “Go get us ice cream cones” while handing me fifty cents. I was glad to and got lemon drop ice cream. Harry was a wise man; he knew my sister-in-law worked there and since she favored me, she gave me double dips for the price of one.

I had built up muscles moving a lot of metal in the shop. Harry bet me fifty cents I couldn’t lift an old vehicle spring out of his pickup. I did it easily, took it into the shop and put it at his feet. I believe he knew I could. Every kid could use an extra fifty cents. He firmly believed in earning one’s money. I overheard him telling dad he had asked several kids to help him unload the junk out of his pickup. He said the first thing that came out of their

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has a blast stomping and snarling around his court. There are also nuggets for those familiar with history outside the Bible, such as Antipater’s final choice being a potential reason for his later alienation from his father. It has a talented cast that ranges from new actors to well-known Christian singers (Smallbone is half of the duo from For King and Country).

I enjoyed seeing a Mary character be likable and spirited, but always willing to obey God. The three wise men are pure camp, but they do kick up some laughs. And some of the songs are so good, I still have them cycling through my mind days later (okay, aided by my instant purchase of the soundtrack).

Since it’s not a Christmas film but a musical, you can enjoy it year-around. I know I will. ♦

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mouths was “How much ya going to pay me?” He said “I asked your daughter and she said, ‘Sure’ and wouldn’t take a dime.” I was secretly very proud he told Dad that.

Everyone liked Harry. To be honest, by the way he dressed and the state of his old pickup, I thought him poor. I later learned he was very wealthy. Guess he was incognito. Doesn’t matter. I liked him just the way he was, and still think fondly of my friend Harry. ♦

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Old Pete's Treasured Junk

Old Pete was a character. An eccentric who could fix anything. He was old when I was a kid, so you can imagine how old he got to be by the time I hit “grandpa” status.

He owned the farm across from ours, so I rode past his place every day on my way to school, and then as an adult coming back and forth from town. I sometimes dropped in with stew from my wife, who felt sorry for him after his wife died. Old Pete continued to mend fence, keep chickens, tend cattle, and attend auctions. He spent a lot of money over the years, buyin’ stuff and haulin’ it to the farm, where it sat all over the place, waitin’ for the day he’d fix it. Some of it he did, some of it he didn’t. And there came a time when he got too old to much care about it, and the weeds grew up around it.

About ten years ago, when he was still spry, I dropped in for a chat. We sat in his kitchen and drank a cup of coffee (nobody brewed it better) and stared out at the collection of heavy junk on the hill. Old combines, old tractors, old trucks that had seen better days, now a haven for snakes and mice. “You ever think about cleanin’ that up, Pete?” I asked.

“Nah,” he said. “Someone else can deal with it when I’m gone.”

Now, that struck me as a mite selfish, but I didn’t say nothin’. Old Pete was as stubborn as a mule, so there’ was no use arguin’ with him.

True to his word, when the 98-year-old went on to his divine reward, he left a real mess for his 68-year-old daughter to clean up. Pam had not been out to the old homestead for twenty years, so she got a turn when she showed up and saw the place. It wasn’t just the junk on the hill. Old Pete had a dozen outbuildings full of tools, equipment, chicken wire, and mowers. A bunch of big machines sat in one pasture and old parts in another (like combine blades). If a fence fell down, he put up a new one and didn’t bother to pull old posts or pick up rusted wire, so that lay all over the place.

My wife did what wives do best when Pam drove past our place on the way “home” a few days after the funeral—fret. “Maybe I should go over there and offer to help,” she said.

“You do that, you’ll regret it,” I told her.

Common sense said stay the heck out of it, but Christian charity said do something about it, so I drove over there to talk to her first. Pam sat on the porch, and I could tell she had more anger than anything else goin’ on in her head. Any pleasant feelings she had for her dad went south the minute she saw all his “darn junk.”

We sat on the porch with my dog and talked. Pam told me all about her life and her kids and her grandkids. She said how hard it had been when she got “the phone call” about her dad. And she admitted she was havin’ a real tough time not bein’ mad at him, because it would take a lot of time and money to get rid of the junk enough to sell the place. She looked at me like she expected me to condemn her, but I just said, “I reckon you have a perfect right.”

Well, her eyebrows about shot off the top of her head. Pam let a beat pass. “You do?”

“Yup. Old Pete had a lot of good qualities, but this wasn’t one of them. He had forty years after your mom passed away to clean up this place. He knew that he would not live forever. None of us does. He could have thought about the folks he’d leave behind, and worked away at cleanin’ up this place little by little before he got too old to do it. But he didn’t. That was mighty selfish of him, if you ask me.”

Pam did not say anything, so I added, “Grief does funny things to folks. For a while, we feel like we ought not to say anythin’ bad about them, but folks is real. We all have flaws and good traits. It’s okay to admit when someone let you down, even when they’re gone. It’s all

Prairie Parson

right to get mad at ‘em. Maybe they deserve it. And where they are, they don’t mind you expressin’ yer feelings. It’s better to deal with all the feelings, complicated as they are, than resent someone who is gone for twenty years. Life is all about livin’, and that don’t include bein’ mad at the dead.”

Pam nodded and stared at the shed, full to burstin’ with stuff she’d have to chuck into a dumpster. I let her stew on that a while, and then said, “Me and the boys will be over in the mornin’ to help you with the sheds, and my wife said she’d do the same in the house.”

This cheered her up a little, though it took us a good three months to get it all done. After our chat, I went home and called around to find somebody to haul off my dad’s busted tractor. I didn’t want to leave it for my kids to face after I’m gone. ♦

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Bobo and his new sister Kaluha

Jean Potter

Our farmhouse has become home to a black and white Newfoundland Landseer, the last pup left in a litter.

While camping up north, my hubby said, “Jean, I fell in love with a pup and guess what! He is for sale!”

I asked, “How much does he cost?” When John told me the price, I nearly fell on the floor! “John, are you crazy?”

He grinned. “Yes, I’m crazy in love with this eight week old pup! Please have mercy on him and look at him.

It’s the eyes.

Once you lock eyes with him, it’s all over. He’s cute, like your tan teddy bear. You will love him!”

John showed me a picture of the pup on his cell. I had to admit to his cuteness. “Okay, let’s go see him.”



Later that day, we drove to a town up north by Shady Nook Resort. The pup ran out of the house and jumped into John’s arm. His parents were on sight. I caved, and we bought him on the spot. The owner nearly cried. They couldn’t keep this pup because they had a toddler and we’re expecting a baby soon. She waved from the garden when we left their house.

Bobo’s dad is black and his mom is brown, but he’s black and white because sometimes every other litter there is a Landseer born. He is a sweet boy. A real gentle giant. At eight weeks old, he weighed twenty pounds. He grew fast and likes to take walks. When he

wants to eat, he curls his black lower lip. It sounds so funny when Bo talks, almost like he is singing a silly song. We sure wish we could understand dog language. He likes to eat everything in sight! He eats a lot of puppy food, hamburgers, popcorn, the list goes on.

Bobo gets excited and likes to jump up and down whenever farm dogs walk by the yard in front of our white ranch house in Wisconsin.

We soon added a four-year-old Yorkiepoo named Kaluha to our family. Kaluha is a white diva that hears a noise and zooms through the house. She has cream-colored poodle curls galore! Gets groomed every other month. I like to dress her up, but she is a real tomboy. I spend lots of money on designer clothes, but she immediately digs her head into the carpet until her colorful bow comes off. She got off her cute black bandanna and even the purple silk flower on her pink and white harness. When I dressed Kaluha in a pumpkin outfit, Bo grabbed her tutu. I dressed her in a warm coat this

fall and she fell in love with it, which made me so happy!

The games they play are amusing. Kaluha suns herself by the big window or on the sun’s reflection by the window. She is only eight pounds and owns the house. She barks when she hears a dog or the lawn mower in the summer. Both dogs dislike thunder.

Kaluha and Bobo’s favorite hiding place is behind a chair. They snore. Bobo loudly and Kaluha quietly. But they don’t sleep together. Bo loves to sleep on blankets and Kaluha naps in her favorite spot, an old white laundry basket. On special occasions, she gets to sleep with her mama (me). She sleeps like a person

on her side. It’s so funny to see. They like to fall asleep to music in our cozy living room.

My hubby is constantly cleaning for his beloved dogs. He launders their blankets and fills their water bowl. Watching Kaluha drink from the same massive



bowl as Bobo is a hoot (just not at the same time)! They both love bones, but the sizes are very different! Kaluha barks for more and Bobo just gives you a look! When she is feeling goofy or just wakes up, she will plant a tongue kiss on his face or sneak his food when he’s not looking. I think he likes her.

They are a big part of our family and provide a great comfort to our souls. ♦

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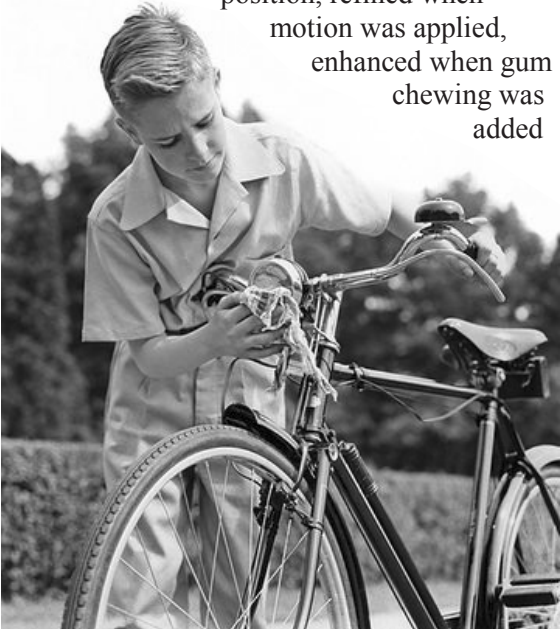
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Beginner's Luck

Robert T. Thornberry

The expression, “Once you learn to ride a bike, you never forget!” applies to many activities.

For me, many were very pleasant, but bike riding wasn’t one of them. My learning experience preceded “training wheels.” Balance was an art form developed in a stationary position, refined when motion was applied, enhanced when gum chewing was added



and reached the zenith when one could relax, lean back and shout, “Look, Ma, no hands!”

My legs are short, I am not well coordinated, and I’m clumsy. In short, I’m not a “jock.” Most of my training was riding on borrowed bikes. They always seemed to have a larger frame than I could handle, or else, the other kid had the seat set too high. For me, “pushing off” was hard. Gaining enough speed to quit wobbling was agonizing. To maintain momentum required pumping the pedals. To achieve that, my body had to be stretched to the limit. That proved to be my undoing.

Frequently, all too often, my feet would slip from the pedals. The crunch of hitting the cross-bar was extremely painful, often bringing tears to my eyes. Machismo prevailed, even dominated my common sense. Finally, I did learn to ride a bike. Looking back, if it had not been for that tenacity, I might have missed the freedom that wheels bring to all kids. ♦

Wild Bill Hickok

When I was a kid, I used to get Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody confused.

My dad liked to throw real Wild West figures from history into our games of posse-and-robbers, including them. I found their colorful names fascinating, but I could never remember which Bill was which. Eventually, I read junior biographies of them both, and then I could tell them apart because Buffalo Bill Cody was a buffalo hunter, and his name made sense to me. But I always wondered, why was Wild Bill Hickok not only called “Wild,” but also called “Bill” when his actual name was James Butler Hickok?

It turns out that, like so much about his legendary life, even Wild Bill Hickok’s name is more a matter of legend than of fact.

In reality, James Hickok was born to abolitionist parents in Illinois in 1837. Reportedly, the Hickok home was a station for the Underground Railroad when he was a child. An excellent shot even as a child, Hickok was renowned locally for his marksmanship with a pistol. At eighteen, James got into a fight with another young man that ended when they fell into a canal. Each of them thought they had killed the other one, and they both fled Illinois.

Hickok ended up in Kansas Territory. While riding with the Jayhawkers, an antislavery vigilante group, Hickock saved a twelve-year-old wagon driver named William Cody from a beating. The two struck up a friendship despite the difference in their ages. William Cody would become that other famous “Bill” from our posse-and-robbers games: Buffalo Bill Cody. They remained friends throughout the rest of their lives.

While living in Kansas, James Hickok began using his father’s name of William instead, possibly to remember his father, who had died when James Hickok was fifteen. In 1860, a bear attacked him while he was driving a freight wagon along the Santa Fe Trail and severely injured Hickok. He spent four months in bed recovering, then worked as a stable hand in Nebraska Territory for a way station. While there, Hickok was involved in a shooting with a disgruntled employee. This is the first instance

on record of Hickok being involved in a gunfight. Hickok joined the Union Army during the American Civil War, and his last name was sometimes spelled Haycock or Hitchcock instead. These name discrepancies have made it difficult for biographers to sort out the facts of Hickok’s life from the many legends that sprang up around him (or were started by him). Later accounts refer to him as Wild Bill during the Civil War, but there is no clear evidence for exactly when or why he earned the nickname.

The first recorded instance of a quick-draw duel, the sort we see between gunfighters in movies, occurred between Wild Bill Hickok and a gambler named Davis Tutt in Springfield, MO, on July 21, 1865. A disagreement over a pocket watch lost in a poker game led to the two men facing off in the middle of the street.

Tutt fired a single shot, but died from Hickok’s bullet to his heart. They arrested Bill Hickok for the murder of Davis Tutt, but the jury acquitted him. After the trial, newspaperman George Ward Nichols interviewed him about the incident for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. That interview calls Hickok “Wild Bill,”

which is the first definite record of the nickname. It’s full of inaccuracies and exaggerations, including the claim that Hickok had faced down hundreds of other men in duels. This seems to have been the beginning of the mystical legend that grew up around Hickok during his lifetime.

Over the next few years, Hickok served as a scout for General Custer with the Seventh Cavalry, a deputy U. S. Marshal, and a scout for the Tenth Cavalry, which was a segregated African-American regiment of “Buffalo Soldiers.” In 1869, he got elected as both the city marshal of Hays City and the sheriff of Ellis County, Kansas. During his first month in office, he killed two men in the line of duty, and was involved in other shootings during the next few months. With every new job, the stories about Hickok grew taller and wilder.

Hickok found work as a marshal for Abilene, a notoriously rough cow town. He was a



successful and popular lawman there until a tragic altercation, when Hickok accidentally shot and killed his deputy. Hickok never involved himself in another gunfight after that, and the accidental killing haunted him for the rest of his life.

Wild Bill soon left Abilene and tried his hand at running a Wild West show like his longtime friend Buffalo Bill Cody. When Hickok’s show folded, Cody offered him a spot in his, but Hickok hated acting and would sometimes hide behind scenery or refuse to come onstage at all. It’s no surprise he left Cody’s show after a few months.

In 1876, Bill Hickok married Agnes Lake, a widow who owned and managed a traveling circus. Only a few months later, Hickok left to seek gold in Dakota Territory. There, at a poker table in the boom town of Deadwood, Wild Bill Hickok met his legendary end.

On August 2, a man named Jack McCall entered the saloon seeking revenge. McCall had lost a great deal of money to Hickok in a poker game the previous day. He walked up to Hickok and shot him through the back of the head without warning. Almost the entire town of Deadwood attended Bill Hickok’s funeral. His legend grew larger and larger with every passing year, first thanks to all the dime novels published about him during and after his life, and then all the movies made about him.

The actor best known for Wild Bill Hickok is Guy Madison, who starred on the TV show *Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok*, which cemented Hickok in the imaginations of Americans as a heroic lawman. My dad loved that show as a boy, and it’s undoubtedly the reason he dragged Wild Bill Hickok into our games when I was a kid. Which means it’s also the reason I spent all this time researching Hickok’s nickname and writing this article! ♦

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Fiction by Jerry Bishop

Bijou Bob McCoy

Perched in his saddle, Bijou Bob looked down at the Brisco Ranch.

From high on the ridge, he could see the fine two-story ranch-house, bunkhouse, stable and the dark green alfalfa fields. A beautiful flower garden bloomed between the house and where the cowboys bunked. This spot had been buffalo grass and yucca when Ted Brisco first came here with his small herd of cows thirty years before. Ted had collected some strays, put his T / brand on them, and got into the cattle business. After a few years, he built a home, went back to Texas for his childhood sweetheart, and set up housekeeping on his Colorado ranch. Ted Brisco now had a prize herd of white faced Herefords.

Bijou admired Mr. Brisco’s success and felt keen to get to know Ted’s daughter Callie better. A tall, slender gal with flowing brown hair and sky-blue eyes, she had curves in all the right places. Bob had often seen Callie in town and liked the way she met his gaze and smiled while he talked to her. Her long dark eyelashes and full red lips made it hard for him to think, however.

Under the clear sky, Bijou pondered his situation. His last trail driving job had ended when the herd reached Denver. Why not ask Mr. Brisco if he needed a good hand? Bob was good at roping and branding. He could fix hay equipment or do carpentry. At six foot one inch

and 185 pounds, his tall lean body cut quite a handsome figure.

Better get it over with, he thought as he urged his bay gelding down the steep hill to the T/ Ranch. As he rode up to the house, he noticed a large black horse tied to the hitching rail. Fred Stamp sat next to Callie on the porch, the foreman at the neighboring J S ranch. Tall, dark and handsome, Fred considered himself a ladies’ man. Rumors were Fred carried a running iron, and he sure seemed to have plenty of money for a ranch foreman.

“Howdy, Miss Callie... Fred.” Bijou walked up to the front door.

“Hey, Bijou. Dad’s in his office. Go on in if it’s him you want to see,” said Callie, though the last part sounded more like a question.

Bijou paused a moment, looked at Callie’s pretty smiling face, then went in. Mr. Brisco glanced up from his ledgers, scanned Bijou, and motioned for him to have a seat. He returned to the documents and after a pause, asked, “What

can I do for you, son?” “I’m Robert McCoy Sir. Most folks call me Bijou Bob, because I know these hills inside and out and where every water hole or hidden place might be.” Bijou turned his stained cowboy hat in his hands. “I wondered if you might need a good hand with haying and all coming on. I can do almost anything.”

Mr. Brisco pushed back his chair. “Tell you what, young feller. I’ll hire you as a haying hand and if that works out, I might need your help to find my missing stock. The pay starts at \$40 per month and the grub’s good. We have a great cook. Bring your gear to the bunkhouse and start work on Monday.”

Bijou thanked him and headed for the door. He had a mind to ask Callie to the 4th of July dance, but she might say no. At nineteen, Callie had a mind of her own. Besides being the

prettiest girl around, she was as an expert rider and a crack shot who could hold her own against any ranch hand. There were no sons in the Brisco family, so Ted had taught his daughter everything about ranching.

As Bijou walked out to his horse, he smiled at Callie and said, “If I ask now, will you save me a place on your 4th of July dance card?”

She gave him a shy smile. “I’ll sure try.” Mr. Brisco noticed right off what a good hand Bijou made, so after a few weeks, he called him into his office. “Bijou, you told me you know this whole country inside out. What do you know about the badlands?”

“I sure know a feller could hide a herd of critters in there easy enough,” he said. Ted Brisco frowned across his desk. “I am missing steers on our east range. Why don’t you take a gander and see what you can find out? Might wanna take a rifle in case you run into trouble. My east pasture isn’t far from the



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JS ranch’s range, so keep an eye out for some of their hands. Could be some of the boys are helpin’ themselves to my stock.” Next morning, Bijou Bob saddled up his horse, filled his saddlebags with grub, tied on his bedroll, grabbed his model 94 carbine and headed out. Callie Brisco walked by the stable as he left, waved at him, and hollered, “Be careful, you hear? I saved you a spot on my dance ticket.” Bijou tipped his hat and smiled. Had her dad told her about the missing steers? Circling around and coming in from the south, it took Bijou a full day’s ride to get to the canyon into the badlands. Darkness fell and made it hard to see, but it looked like a deep trail had been worn into the prairie. Recent

tracks, too. Some large tracks like steers. *I'll camp over there in the pines where I can see the trail*, he thought. After checking the wind, he built a fire to make coffee and ate some grub. He staked his horse near the spring that watered the badlands.

Near midnight, Bijou woke from a light sleep to the sound of hooves and riders. Crawling up a knoll, he looked down and in the

moonlight saw forty white faced steers being driven by two riders on big black horses. Hearing the hoof beats, his horse whinnied. The two riders pulled up and scanned the ridge. Bijou saw them whip out their six guns and ducked. After a long time, they

turned and rode on into the canyon, following the herd. *So that's where Mr. Brisco's steers have been going*, he thought. *It's easy enough to alter a brand with a running iron and sell them to crooked cattle buyers in Denver.*

Since if they got caught, they knew they'd swing from the nearest trees, rustlers were mighty dangerous. Bijou saddled his horse, buried his campfire remains, and wiped out the tracks as best as he could before heading back for the T/ ranch for reinforcements. In the bright moonlight, he took care to ride where his tracks wouldn't be too noticeable, but had to stop at a spring for a drink. Stooping down to get some water, he heard a gun cock. He slowly raised up and stared down the barrel of a Colt 45.

"Drop your gun belt and don't make any fast moves or I'll shoot ya," said a big man wearing black clothes with a bandana over his nose and mouth. "Thought you were smart, but I circled back and trailed you. It's the end of your trail now, Bijou McCoy."

Bijou dropped his gun belt and put his hands up. "So this is how you get all the cash you flash around town, Fred Stamp. It's mighty stupid if you ask me."

The neighboring foreman slowly took off his hat and pulled down his bandana. "I didn't ask your opinion. Not that it matters. I reckon it'll be me who takes Callie Briscoe to the dance

and me who marries her before long and gets the T/ ranch when old man Brisco accidentally gets killed. Too bad you couldn't mind your own business. I might of even made you a foreman someday. Now get on your horse. We're goin' to take a ride into the badlands to a place nobody'll ever find. I'm tyin' your hands just so you don't try any monkey business."



After riding silently for a few miles up the canyon, Bijou got his chance. Somewhere, a horse nickered. It sounded like it came from on a bunch of cedars on the ridge. Stamp turned sideways to look. Bijou jabbed his boots into his horse's flank and they shot off like a rocket. With his hands tied, Bijou could only trust his

mount wouldn't step in a hole or throw a shoe. He heard the crack of Stamp's gun. Dropping into a dry creek, his horse ran like greased lightning. Looking behind them, Bijou saw the big black stallion dropping behind them. Suddenly, he saw a lasso drop over Stamp and jerk him off his horse. He skidded along through the grass and cactus until he crashed into a stunted cedar in a

cloud of dust. Using his knees, Bijou turned and galloped back to where Stamp lay sprawled. Mounted on her favorite mare, Miss Callie lay at the other end of the rope, pointing her pistol at Fred Stamp. Fred looked awful. His Colt 45 was lying somewhere back in the dry wash. His hat was missing; he was scratched, bruised and his usual handsome smiling face had the look of a thundercloud.

Bijou slid off his horse and let Callie untie his

hands while she kept her pistol on the prisoner. "Should we put your end of the rope over that yonder cottonwood and finish the job?" asked Bijou.

She shook her head. "No, I reckon we'll take him to the sheriff."

They tied him up and stuck him on a horse. Bijou looked at her in the moonlight. She seemed even prettier with her hair tousled like that. "How did you come along and find us?" he asked.

Callie checked her mare's cinch and grinned. "I was following you all along. Dad

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was a darn fool to send you out alone. He wanted you to prove yourself, I guess, but I have had my suspicions about Fred for weeks. Didn't want you to get killed."

It was a quiet ride back to the ranch. Here and there, clumps of red Indian paint brushes decorated the green prairie. Meadow larks sang and, as soon as dawn crept up on them, high above, a pair of hawks soared in the blue sky. Bijou thought it was mighty fine to be alive. He snuck a look at the pretty girl riding at his side, her posture perfect. "Sure am glad you showed up, Callie," said Bijou. "This night could have ended real different for me."

She blushed a little. "I'm sure glad Dad taught me to rope. Never can tell who you might catch and for what reason." ♦

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The Infamous Tear Gas "Incident"

Richard Whitaker

At the end of the summer of 1967, with the Watts Riots over and the mini-riots continuing, the Los Angeles Police Department issued patrol officers a small canister of tear gas spray.

Although the Department leadership felt they had stumbled onto a great idea, it would soon backfire, and we of the Wilshire Division Morning Watch didn't help matters much. After each Morning Watch officer received his own canister, John Marzullo decided to try it out. Although he and Buck Wright worked as partners, he didn't select Buck to help him with his prank. He selected me! We left roll call around midnight on a quiet Wednesday night. As we stepped from the station and walked into the parking lot, we heard the boisterous cries and moaning of a drunk who a patrol unit had booked earlier. Not only could we hear his wailing throughout the old brick station, but it filtered into the night through the barred jail window ten feet above the parking lot. When my partner and I walked from the station, I heard someone yell, "Hey Whitaker, come here. I need your help."

Looking behind me, I saw Marzullo standing just below the drunk's jail window. "Let me get on your shoulders, Rich. I'll silence that old drunk."

Being the new kid on the watch, I walked to the side of the building and watched as Marzullo removed a tear gas canister from his jacket pocket. As he pulled the cap, I put my head down and stared at the ground.

Marzullo climbed onto my shoulders. As he did, the wailing from the jail cell intensified. Suddenly, I heard the sharp spray of aerosol as the entire canister of tear gas emptied into the drunk's cell. Then, with the final sputter and whoosh, all became quiet. Laughing, Marzullo yelled for me to let him down. "Took care of that problem," he said as a grin crossed his face. We then walked to our cars and continued to ready ourselves for the night. Not two minutes passed when the station doors flew open and the building emptied. I

watched as Lieutenant Holmes bolted out the side door, coughing and spitting. On his heels, our sergeants streamed from the building, coughing as tears ran down their cheeks. The front desk officers and the jail personnel followed. "We're under attack!" yelled Sergeant Biddle. "Someone hit the station with tear gas!" bellowed Sergeant Turner. "Set up a command post and call the Chief!" shouted Sergeant Marty Schwartz as he stumbled into the parking lot. "We need to call a Tactical Alert and mobilize the city!" "Somehow they got it into the air conditioning unit!" yelled Lieutenant Holmes. "Everyone take cover!" "It must have been militants," Schwartz added. Our Morning Watch stood next to their cars and only smiled. Looking at each other, we could not contain it. The laughter began. Still laughing, each team got into their car, drove out of the parking lot, and hit the street.

About fifteen minutes passed before Porter and I received a radio call ordering our unit to return to the station. As we pulled in, a sergeant walked over to our car and said, "Whitaker, the Lieutenant wants you in his office." Porter glanced at me and didn't say a word. When I entered the room, Lieutenant Holmes sat behind his large wooden desk. The seat of honor sat

directly in front of it, which provided the Great Inquisitor a clear view of his subject. "Have a seat, Whitaker," the Lieutenant said, motioning to the chair in front of him. Sitting down, I quickly found that no matter how I moved, I could not get comfortable. I waited. Time passed. You could have heard a pin drop. Then Lieutenant Holmes spoke. "Whitaker, someone sprayed tear gas through an outside jail window into a cell tonight. It seems they wanted to silence a drunk, but he passed out before the gas could take effect and it ended up going

scenario, he now turned his collar and assumed the other role. "If I find out you had anything to do with this, I will recommend a twenty-one-day suspension!" "Yes, Sir, but I sprayed nothing into the station, Lieutenant, nor did I see anyone put anything through a window and spray it." More silence. I sat motionless while the Lieutenant did his best to give me the old evil eye, thinking that would intimidate me, but he didn't know me. "You're dismissed, but remember, I'll do my best to get you those twenty-one days if I find out you gassed the station or had anything to do with it!"

"Yes, Sir." Marzullo sat in the hallway, waiting. As I walked by him, I winked, smiled, and shook my head from side to side, and went back to work. I realized Lieutenant Holmes felt that if anyone would cop out and break, it would be the new kid on the watch. They were wrong. Marzullo told me all about it later. The Lieutenant told him to have a seat. Time passed. After ruffling through some papers, he looked up and, with a serious look on his face, said, "Whitaker copped out on you. He told me all about it."

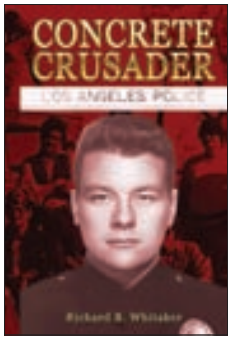
Marzullo sat expressionless. "I'm going to recommend twenty-one days for him. You come clean and your time will be less. You've got a career to think about... a family... promotions..." "Come clean about what, Lieutenant?" asked Marzullo. "Marzullo, don't play games with me. One of you sprayed a can of tear gas into the station tonight, and I want to know who it was!" "I know nothing about it, Lieutenant. About Whitaker copping out on me, he'd be lying if he said he saw me do anything that stupid."

Holmes slammed his fist onto the top of the desk. "Marzullo, Chief Parker expects me to find out who did this, and I am going to do that. I'll get you and Whitaker if you were involved. Trust me. I'll get you both!" "Yes Sir. Will there be anything else, Sir?" "Marzullo, you're dismissed!" As Marzullo walked out into the parking lot, he caught my eye. He nodded and smiled. In time, that incident became folklore, and although the rumor abounded that the Morning Watch had something to do with the gassing of the station, the investigation into the incident ceased. I always found it interesting that the Brass never inspected the tear gas canisters to check them. However, the following week, they affixed initialed evidence stickers across the top of each canister. ♦



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Toasting Grandma

Charles Oz
Collins

Conventional wisdom declares the longer two people live together, the more they think and even look alike.

That would suggest my in-laws, married for over six decades, should be twins. Conventional wisdom can be wrong! How much alike my wife's parents were at marriage, I can't say, but I see no evidence of a convergence of personalities or behaviors.

Grandma continues to be extroverted. She loves talking, and wants to know what is going on in the lives of all relatives and many folks who aren't kin. She also continues to be bossy. Grandpa is strongly introverted. His words are few and usually to the point. When he speaks, it's clear he spends a good deal more time planning his words than Grandma. He doesn't form opinions quickly, but once formed, they're not easily changed.

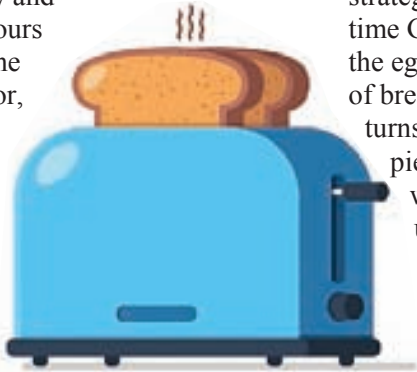
Take breakfast, for an example. Breakfast is, according to Grandpa, the most important meal of the day. Probably this opinion stems from his practice of rising early and working for several hours beforehand. Because he fills his days with labor, breakfast becomes a lot like feeding the work horses or fueling the tractors: essential if a day's work is going to occur. Grandpa doesn't shy away from the other meals; it's just that they are to him less important. Grandma doesn't have a favorite mealtime but faithfully takes part in each, though she favors "coffee time."

Grandpa can put away a breakfast that would leave a stockbroker in a day-long stupor and furrow the brow of most any bona fide cardiologist. It begins with cereal. The kind is not important as long as it fills a substantial bowl. Flakes, puffs, shredded or rolled, wheat, corn, barley or oats, it is all the same. The function of cereal is to carry the important stuff: atop this pile of roughage goes first a scoop or two of sugar. A liberal layer of cream holds this in place. We are talking straight-from-the-barn raw cream thick enough to resurface your driveway. If available, he covers all previous ingredients with a healthy helping of fruit. Peaches, pears, or bananas, though he especially favors prunes owing to their time-honored side benefits.

Once the bowl gets loaded, it is time for business. The rules about Grandpa's food are few, but critical.

1. There should be plenty of it
2. It is not to be wasted
3. It's not a treat for the palate but fuel for the stomach
4. It should be eaten quickly and completely, not discussed

After the cereal has disappeared, it's time for the heart of the meal. Eggs are well received, especially if they come in pairs. And since eggs are best fried in bacon grease, it'd be foolish to give all the bacon to the dog or to Grandma. Sausage or ham are welcome. Their grease works equally well to deep-fry "hen fruit." Since



he can eat all the above with one hand, this begs the question: shouldn't there be something for the other hand to do (idle hands, you know!)? The solution is to find some kind of bread to keep the off-hand busy and to push the eggs and meat toward the stomach more quickly.

What kind? Doesn't matter. Pancakes, thick American ones or thin slippery Swedish ones, are an occasional treat. The only problem with these is they aren't proper finger food and require more fork time, slowing down the entire meal. Biscuits are a rare occurrence since they take too long to bake (time better invested in the field or barn). Day-in and day-out, however, it's toast that most typically chases the eggs and meat. The chief advantage of toast, beyond its short cooking time, is it's the only food Grandpa can cook. And he can really cook it.

He places a two-slice toaster on the table, strategically near Grandpa's plate. About the time Grandma shuffles across the kitchen with the eggs and meat, Grandpa crams a single slice of bread into the innards of the bread-burner and turns his attention to his plate. An egg and one piece of bacon later, the darkened hunk of wheat hops up to a convenient grabbing level. Scarcely looking up, Grandpa bangs down the lever and sends the toast back down between the still-glowing coils. Smoke rises, both from the toaster and Grandma's head. Grandpa studiously ignores several short, brisk phrases worthy of a Marine drill sergeant (absent the profanity) as he moves to egg two and another chunk of meat. Smoke continues to rise, and from the toaster as well. Moments later, a rectangular mass rises from the throat of the bread kiln. The color of an Army boot and sharing a similar tenderness, the "toast" gets skewered with a fork to avoid

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second and potentially third-degree burns to the fingers. Allowed to cool for a briefest moment, Grandpa grasps the delicacy in one large, work-toughened hand while the other wields a kitchen knife. He scrapes the carbonized slab forcefully until a hint of brown appears. With a look of satisfaction, Grandpa mashes some jam on his toast and resumes the careful cleaning of his plate.

One or two well-done slices of toast later, it is time for coffee. This is best with a doughnut or sweet roll. These disappear with the same velocity as all previous fare, and Grandpa is set for the morning. Yes sir, breakfast is the most important meal of the day, especially when you had a hand in preparing it. I know this is what he is thinking as he exits the smoky kitchen, though he would never be so bold as to say so. ♦

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Herb Higgins is a Vietnam combat veteran, former prison guard lieutenant, successful business owner, and an accomplished public official. He and his wife Doris live in Elizabeth and have been residents of our county for 8 years.

Prior to coming to Elbert County, Herb served with distinction as a City Councilman and Mayor for 15 years, where he fought for his constituents against higher taxes, out-of-control government, and high-density housing proposed by greedy developers.

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14 Prairie Times Jan 2024

Sammy's Miracle

Adele
Seward

I am an Australian Shepherd named Sammy,
and I love humans, especially my master Dennis.

I go everywhere with him in his pickup truck. He is a Ferrier but everyone calls him a horse-shoer. I guess because he hammers steel things on the hoofs of horses. I play and nap around his truck when he is pounding those nails.

At home, my mistress is called Ember. She takes such good care of me. She lets me come into the house when it is too hot or cold outside and at night. I especially like nighttime because they are both at home having supper or watching TV. I lay on the carpet at Dennis's feet and snooze until he takes me for our walk and gives me a bedtime snack.

Oh boy, do I love it when I hear the can opener whirring! It means Ember is going to heat a can of that good beef gravy she puts over my dry food. It makes it taste better, so I eat a lot. Ember says it is a bribe to get me to eat it.

I don't see as well as I used to because my eyesight is blurry. The humans say I am old and skinny, but my hearing is still good, because I answer when they call my name. I don't know if what they are saying is good or bad, but I don't worry about it because they are always good to me and that's what matters.

On one visit to a strange barn, Dennis enters it to tend the horses. I explore around the truck to see what I can find. Sometimes it is an empty can that smells good and I can push it around the yard with my nose... or a stick I can carry around in my mouth... maybe I will take a walk. It doesn't feel as cold if I am moving. It's fun this time of year when there are pretty red and yellow leaves on the ground, and cute little bugs and caterpillars on the rocks and the fallen branches.

After nosing around and wandering off, I get tired. It's getting dark. I will rest a bit and then go back to Dennis's truck...

Sammy curled up in a heap and went to sleep. Meanwhile, Dennis had finished his job and called for her. After calling and calling with no response, he got worried and started searching. The temperature was falling fast... below zero. Sammy was in no condition to withstand the cold. She was used to being in a warm house with a wood-burning stove at night.

After searching for hours in the dark, he gave up in desperation and texted Ember he had lost

Sammy and he would go out first thing in the morning so he could search in the daylight. She had wandered off in Sedalia, which is a long way from where Ember and Dennis live in Agate. Ember immediately told son Tyrel in Denver and he called a group who put the info on social media where they notified people in that area and local veterinary and animal shelters.

She then called her mother, Adele (the author) in Arizona because she knew on Tuesday nights she had a group of Christian friends over to play Mexican Train (a dominos game). They quit playing and prayed for Sammy's safe return. Others getting the news also prayed for her safe recovery.

Sammy lay shivering on the cold ground as the temperature kept falling. Crying to herself, she tried calling for Dennis. She could only utter weak sounds. *Where are you, Dennis? Why don't you come for me? Don't you know it's time to go home? I want to go home to Ember.*

Amid a fitful nap, Sammy heard a soft voice in her ear. *Hello, Sammy. So many people are asking me to help you. Since I know you cannot survive the severe cold, I am sending you an angel to wrap loving arms around you and keep you warm. I will let it snow so you have water to drink in the morning. Now sleep peacefully until morning, my furry little one.*

When morning came, Sammy was delighted to see the snow. She ate it until it quenched her thirst. *I feel so much better after my nap and such a pleasant dream. Now I will find Dennis. I will walk downhill, as it is so much easier...*



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Brenda Flipse

you mad at me? Did I do something that made you angry? If you tell me what I did, I promise I'll never do it again!

Feeling dejected about losing Dennis, she just sank down whimpering. Before long, she heard the soft voice again. *Sammy, wake up! I am going to lead you home, as you cannot do it by yourself.*

You were careless the other day when you wandered away from the truck. There are consequences, but I lightened your burden by sending an angel to stay with you and I gave you snow for your thirst. You must do everything I tell you to do. Now I want you to get a good night's rest before we go home.

When morning came, she obeyed by walking, dodging scrub oak and rough rocks, and resting when the voice told her to. She asked God, *Do you know if I made Dennis mad at me because he didn't come for me?*

No, my dear little dog. You wandered away and got lost. Dennis has been searching for you and is so worried about what has happened to you. He has many people praying for your safe return. He will be so happy to see you and give you some food with that good beef gravy that you love so much. Now, go up the steps to that abandoned cabin. Rest beside that pile of firewood. I will send one of your own kind to lead you the rest of the way home.

Sammy was sleeping peacefully by the pile of firewood when the sound of a little dog barking woke her. Then she heard a soft female voice. "Oh, goodness! Gabbie, I would never have looked over at the porch if you hadn't barked. I see a dog by that pile of firewood. I'm sure it is cold and hungry. Let's take it home."

Sammy went with them gladly. The kind woman introduced herself as Diane and said her little dog is Gabbie and she would take Sammy to meet her husband, Louis. They were so good to Sammy. They gave her fresh water and a bowl full of food. It tasted so good she forgot all about the gravy.

Diane went to her computer and typed, "Does this dog belong to you?" and posted Sammy's picture. Almost immediately a friend saw the post and, well, that is the happy rest of the story. Almost. Sammy was sleeping peacefully on the rug with Gabbie when she heard the engine of Dennis's truck coming to get her and she sat up and barked.

Louis said, "That's Dennis's dog alright."

Thank you, God, for an answered prayer. ♦



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this is surely the way to Dennis's truck. Oh, I want to see him so badly... I know I will be home soon... but I'm getting so tired. I need to rest a bit.

Exhausted, she curled up and slept through another night in the cold and woke up starving. *Dennis, why don't you come for me? I'm so hungry! I need some food with that good beef gravy. Dennis, are*

Doggy Sam and the “Bomb”

Patricia
Ruppert

In the late 60s, my husband got stationed at Caswell Air Station, a radar site in northern Maine near the Canadian border and part of the Distant Early Warning System (DEW Line).

We were thirteen miles from Loring AFB, which was where we had access to commissary, BX and hospital services—a remote assignment. There was permanent housing for fifty families on the site and two barracks for the unmarried airmen.

As a Security Policeman in the Air Force, Bill had his own office. One day when I went in to see him, he opened his bottom desk drawer to rest his foot on it. I noticed a spray paint can covered up with white paper that had “BOMB” hand printed on it. “What’s that for?” I asked.

Bill explained that during security training exercises, the “BOMB” would get hidden somewhere on the site, and the team got tasked with finding it.

Sometime later, during his mom’s visit, I noticed that the front gate to the main part of the site had closed, which meant a security exercise was in progress. As his mom and I were at the front of the house watching and talking, along came the local stray dog. We all called him “Doggy Sam.” He had the run of the place and received handouts from those of us stationed there and from the chow

hall. My overly imaginative brain hatched an idea. I got an empty can from tomato puree, removed the label, replaced it with a piece of paper with “BOMB” printed on it, tied it to Doggy Sam’s neck and sent him on his way, not stopping to think this might cause consequences for my husband.

Doggy Sam trotted off, got past the guard at the main gate with a pat on the head and loped on to the chow hall. Sam was a medium-sized dog, about 40 lbs., so the can was not easily visible under his shaggy fur. That night at dinner I asked Bill how the exercise went and he relayed as how they had found Doggy Sam with a “BOMB” tied around his neck. No one knew who had done it and it caused a bit of a brouhaha how it happened. I sheepishly (and a bit proudly)

admitted I had been the perpetrator. Bill got somewhat perturbed with me and he had to admit the next morning to the site commander that I had sent the bomb in with Doggy Sam. Fortunately the Major had a good sense of humor and let the incident go. I never thought maybe I would get Bill into trouble over my housewife’s prank! ♦

© Katie Martin

THE PIANO STORY

If you’ve ever read a novel set in a bygone era, you’ll notice the women in the family either sing or play a musical instrument as a sign of accomplishment.

We all remember Marianne Dashwood in *Sense & Sensibility*, pouring over her beloved piano. This tradition continued up through the 1950s. Most girls received piano lessons if their parents could afford it. Some poorer people even bartered for them, offering to pay with eggs or goods. The music playing was for the enjoyment of family and friends, not about playing professionally.

Our friend’s Kate’s mother, Mary, was part of those years. She took lessons for eight or nine years or more. Mary played exceptionally well and had so much potential as a concert pianist that Juilliard offered her a full scholarship, but Mary turned it down since nursing was her first love. It became her career. Playing the piano remained a very important part of her life, but nursing came first.

Kate remembers her mother’s five foot, seven inch grand piano, but she never played the mahogany colored instrument. Only her mother did. Kate practiced on her own smaller

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piano. Her father loved to listen to Mary play. He would sit for hours and read while she fondled the keys. Mary played classical music from memory, and she often closed her eyes. It was as though she became part of the music. No one interrupted her with conversation; they

just enjoyed her talent. Sometimes the music consumed all but the air in the room. Mary played “whenever” she felt like it and “just felt the music.”

Kate took lessons for a short time, but since they moved a lot, her studies were incomplete. Now, as she ages, she misses the piano and plans on taking lessons again. You can hear her excitement as she talks about finding a teacher. The music from her small piano will soon fill the house. Like her mother, she also closes her eyes as she plays the pieces she knows by heart.

Time has passed, and she is now completing the music.

Listen. Slowly. Quietly. Can you hear it as the music and the pianist become one? ♦

A Ghostly Encounter

Janna Benkelman

The Twenty Mile House Hotel came into existence in 1864, when the new owner traded a team of mules for the one story building on Main Street in Parker Colorado.

Known as the Twenty Mile House for over fifty years, it got used as a shelter from Indians who would occasionally harass travelers navigating the Cherokee Trail. Mr. James Parker expanded the original stage stop into a ten room, two-story hotel, complete with a restaurant downstairs, and a ballroom on the second floor. He also built five hotel rooms on the second floor, two on the southern front of the building and three larger ones on the northern back side. The first floor had several other nooks and crannies, as well.

By the time I rented office space in one of the southern rooms on the second floor, a local coffee shop had taken up residence downstairs. A quaint and cozy venue, it had the original plank floors, dark barn wood walls, and overstuffed chairs or small tables tucked away in the corners and crevices. You could always find local folk sipping coffees and lattes while they chatted with friends or caught up on the news from a local paper.

To get to my office, I entered a door to the left and outside of the coffee shop. It required a climb up a steep staircase. The narrow climb proceeded up a long, creaky flight of wooden stairs with large, carved wooden handrails on either side. I loved the vintage light fixtures. The several decades old carpet on the stairs had a brocade pattern that carried through to the upstairs lobby (that used to be the dance parlor). Now the dance floor held only a long, gold velvet couch with wooden arms, and an antique glass topped coffee table. This served as the waiting area for my clients.

I had a charming office. Sun poured through the southern window and reflected off the creamy white walls above the wooden chair rail molding. Below this, the walls were a soothing mint green as a beautiful contrast to the warm

brown leather love seat and floral chairs I provided for my clients' comfort. On one wall hung a picture of red geraniums with lovely greenery in terra-cotta pots. A built in floor to ceiling bookcase occupied the opposite wall. A whitewashed barn wood cupboard that opened into an additional storage space served as the office's most unique feature. The back wall of the cupboard had an identical set of doors that opened to let me look into the room next door.

I saw clients from morning to early evening several days a week. My good friend and colleague followed a similar schedule. She had rented one of the larger back offices, which were too dimly lit for my taste. We often chatted over coffee downstairs and heard of alleged strange instances of the coffee shop music turning itself on at night, as did the light fixtures.

During our first summer there, my colleague experienced unusual events. Frequently during her therapy sessions, items fell or dropped off of her console table as if they had been pushed. On one occasion, her client exclaimed, "My

Gosh! The air has gotten cold! I feel as though an icy wind is whooshing right through me!" My colleague and her client were both taken aback by this turn of events!

We contacted a group of local paranormal researchers who arrived with several electromagnetic field detectors so they could scan the second floor. After completing their tasks and smudging our offices with burnt sage to clear out the negative energy, we resumed our normal routines. We were told they had found no

significant activity.

One late fall evening, I ushered my last clients in for their couples therapy session. Since the dim streetlights could not quite penetrate my office, I turned my lamps on high in protest of the black night outside. The couple had just begun to discuss their "issues" when



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suddenly all the lights went dark. Main Street sat clothed in blackness. My office was inky grey until I lit the scented candle on my desk and opened my laptop. It gave off a bluish glow that provided us enough light to wrap up our session. Candle in hand, I escorted them down the stairs through the darkness, their conversation still hanging in the air. I made my way back up the stairs to my office and as I entered, I heard a slight rustling. Stopping in my tracks, I listened more intently. I heard it again, coming from the empty office next door. I crept over to the whitewashed cupboard and silently pulled the barn wood doors ajar. Still

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holding the candle, I pushed on the opposite door and it slowly swung open. Squinting, I peered into the other room and could just make out a chair in the far corner. On it sat a gauzy white, ethereal shadow which bore a resemblance to a lady dressed in Victorian garb. *Perhaps*, I thought, *this was one of the rumored "ladies of the night" who lived in the Hotel many years ago.* I pushed my cupboard doors shut and fled the hotel. In the warm and comforting safety of my locked car on that chilly November night, I concluded the Ghost busters had been wrong. ♦

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A Bit About the Neighbors

Ima Klutz

Something exciting happened around here today.

I saw a truck pull up at 10am and unload furniture at the house across the street. About noon, I peaked through the curtains and saw a rather thin woman get out of a little car and walk up the driveway to the house. *She must be our new neighbor*, I thought.

I grabbed my coat and rushed over before she could go inside. After I introduced myself, we had a nice little chat. I told her all about my desire to become a counselor and go to school. I noticed her looking around at the neighborhood, so I told her about the families on the block. "The Peabody's are strange," I said. "They have four kids who are all rather homely. Every one of them plays a musical instrument. The old man runs a music store down on Main Street. Loraine, that's the mother, stays home most of the time. Once in a while she has company and she invited me over for coffee once, but I was too busy."

My new neighbor started to say something, but I called her attention to the house next to mine. "Those people are the Hathoways. They are the meanest people I have ever met. See that tree in their yard? Well, every year all those leaves fall into our yard. I rake them up and take them over and dump

them over the fence. I figure if their tree makes a mess of my yard, I'll make a mess of theirs. Wilbur scolds me and Patty makes them cookies, but our relationship has never been very good."

At this point, my new friend cleared her throat and said she had to get busy. I smiled and waved goodbye and trudged back through the snow to my house.

Back inside, I decided to make a casserole to take over for supper. I searched the cupboards and refrigerator, but there wasn't anything that would do. I ran to the store and left about

1pm, but it was 4:30 before I got home. You know how it is... errands to run, people to stop and chat with. It always takes me a long time to go to the store because of all the friends I have who like to talk.

Patty was home from school and had something from the freezer thawing in the microwave. She seemed a little upset with me but I never let things bother me, so I ignored it. Junior was in his room with the TV on. I wondered what he could be watching at this time of day.

"Hey, Patty," I said as I pulled off my gloves. "Somebody moved in across the street."

Patty pulled the curtain aside and looked out the kitchen window. It was nearly dark and we could see lights across the way as I joined her at the window. She smiled her cute little smile and said, "That's neat, Mom. Tell me what they're like."

"Well," I said as I sat down at the kitchen table, "I've only seen one person so far. She's about 40 and blonde. She had on an old sweatshirt and a baggy pair of jeans and is about 30 pounds underweight."

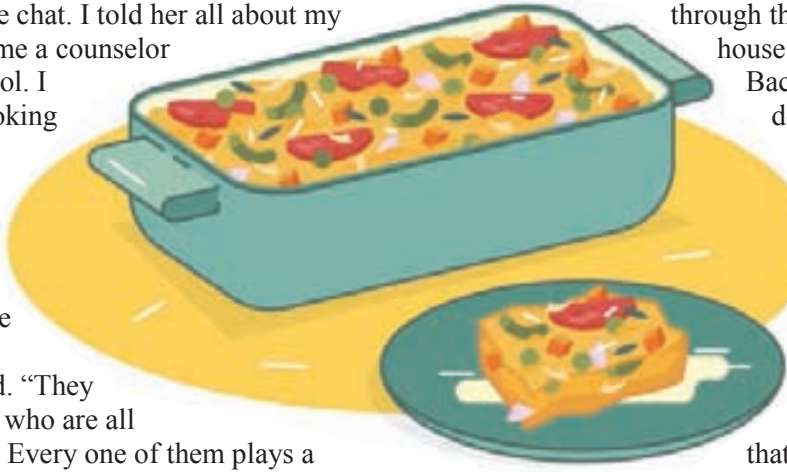
"Come on, Mom," Patty said, "I don't care what she looks like. I want to know about her. What is her name? Where is she from? Does she have a family? Why did she choose this neighborhood? Things like that."

My face must have gone blank because Patty said, "Didn't you talk to her, Mom?" I said I had, but we hadn't talked about those things.

"What did you talk about?" she quizzed. "Oh, I guess I just told her a bit about the neighbors."

She stared at me a moment, then went to the freezer. "Do we have anything I could take her for supper, Mom?"

I jumped up, almost upsetting my chair.





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"Yes, Patty. I was just going to make her a casserole and take it over."

We worked quietly for several minutes, then I watched the news. By the time Wilbur walked in, Patty had the table set, a nice supper in the oven, and the casserole ready to take to our new neighbor. She put on her coat, went out the door and across the street. I watched her climb the steps and ring the doorbell. The woman answered the door and invited her in. *Patty will find out*, I thought as I switched the TV channel. *There's something about Patty. People like her.*

"Must have got it from me," I murmured as I settled back down on the couch. "I'm one of the friendliest people I know." ♦

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My Dad, The Athlete

Don Boyer

My dad was a natural athlete when athletes weren’t being paid much.

During the Great Depression, he played one season as a pitcher with the St. Louis Cardinals minor league. He made \$36 dollars a month, which barely covered his medical bills. Baseballs hit him twice—they broke a rib and shattered his glasses, both times bad enough to send him to the hospital.

His talent with baseball got him the job at the glassworks. He saw a company game, and they asked him to join. After the game, they told him to come down to the plant. They needed him on the team. He got the job of washing the windows on the roof.

As a newlywed, his new job paid too little, so he supplemented his income at the pool hall. One night each week, my mom and he would walk downtown. Dad had twenty-five cents in his pocket, which he took into the pool hall. Since women weren’t allowed, Mom would wait on the sidewalk. After about fifteen minutes, Dad would come out and give her a quarter to go to the movies. After the show, she’d meet him again and he would have about five dollars; grocery money for the week.

My father talked about sports a lot while I was growing up. He said he held the record in Illinois for scoring the most points in a basketball game (116), but it was when the records were not well kept. (My dad didn’t always tell the truth, but I somehow believed him on this one.)

He won a shotgun while shooting skeet at the Sportsman’s Club when I was nine. He was on a bowling team and had an 179 average. In the early 1950s, he had to decide if he wanted to be a professional golfer because it was too expensive to play regularly for a working man with a wife and four kids. He would have done it, except the prize money wasn’t much. Later, when he turned 80, he was happy that he could shoot under his age. He couldn’t teach

people how to play golf. Either you had the swing, or you didn’t. The only thing he advised was “don’t swing the club like hitting a baseball.”

As a kid, his sports stories overwhelmed me. I was a natural book worm, skinny and

freckled. I had no interest in competing with my father’s reputation. The only game that interested me was pool. I enjoyed figuring out the angles and using English on the cue ball.

When I was in the Air Force, I spent a lot of time around a green pool table. I got pretty good. After a year, I went home on leave and Dad took me to the Sportsman’s Club to buy me a beer. It was empty when we got there, a fairly large space with a bar, tables and chairs, a dance floor and stage. Two pool tables sat in the side room. Dad went behind the bar and pulled two drafts. Then he put some money in the till. He sat next to me on the bar stool. He asked me what I did in the service. “Mostly, I



shoot pool,” I bragged. He accepted the challenge.

He told me he wasn’t allowed to play in the pool tournaments for the last five years, so he had never picked up a stick since then. He may be rusty. I countered with trash talk as he racked the balls for a game of 8-ball. After I broke, the balls scattered across the table, one dropping into a pocket. I sized up the table, caulking my cue, then drove another of my balls over the long green into a corner pocket. My third shot was a bank that missed ever so slightly. I stepped back, satisfied with my performance, eyeing the table where his balls were half-hidden by mine. Good leave, I thought.

Dad stepped to the table and picked off ball after ball. His cue ball tapped each target with precision and the target fell gently into its pocket, leaving the cue ball ideally positioned for the next in line. I gaped. After he ran the table, the cue ball sat sitting two inches away from the 8-ball, which was on the lip of a corner pocket. An easy tap-in. Then my father said, “We play out here that you have to bank the 8-ball. I’m calling a five-bank kiss-in.”

I looked at the table, and my remaining five balls scattering interference across the green. “Sure,” I taunted, “Which banks?” He pointed with his cue to each one, counting aloud.

“Then,” he said, “It will kiss the 8-ball into the pocket. It may also touch the sixth bank.”

“This I gotta see,” I said. And I did. I watched as my dad hit the cue ball, with hesitation or serious aiming. The white ball hit the first bank on target. Then the second and third, all the while interweaving the traffic of my balls as if they were not there. The fourth bank, then long green to the fifth. An inch away from the fifth bank, the cue ball tapped the 8-ball, which fell into the pocket. Then the white ball came to rest, a sixteenth of an inch away from the next edge.

“I didn’t think it would hit the sixth bank,” my father said.

“That’s it,” I said, putting my pool cue back on the rack. I smiled at my dad as we went back to the bar. All these years, I realized, I was the smart one in not trying to compete with a true athlete. ♦

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The List Maker

Susan Bishop

Why do I get more done when I make a list than if I don’t?

Probably because I’m a visual learner and keeping all that stuff in my brain is tedious and worthless. I like checking off the boxes because it gives me a sense of accomplishment.

Last summer I made a huge list of what was currently being stored in our “out buildings.” From there I made a list of the best qualities the building had and what should be stored there. Is it waterproof? Mouse proof? Can things be hung on the walls? Stuff like that. From there I went on to lists of items that belonged together.

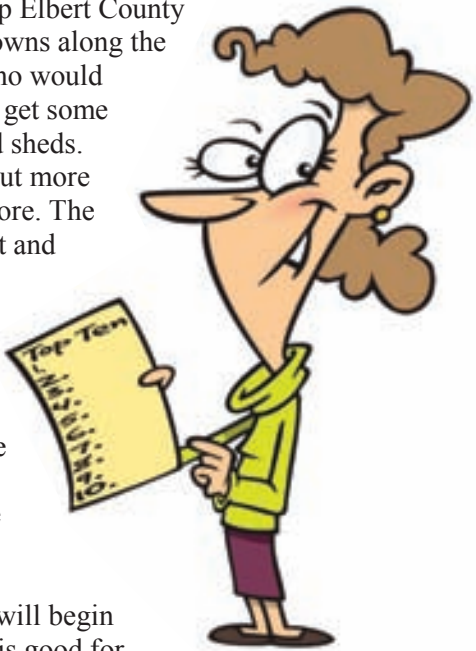
To make a long story short, I made a lot of progress. I had some help with some things, but a lot I did alone. What I did do (paint, clean, organize, build or install shelving, hang hooks, etc) is working fine, but I’m not done! Other projects took over and some of my ideas didn’t work like I thought. So, next summer I will make more lists and see if we can get rid of some more items.

Something this area needs are places to take donations, recycle electronics, refrigerators, and appliances. Why not see if Goodwill, ARC, or Salvation Army could park a truck somewhere once a month so everything doesn’t just go into the trash? Encourage businesses to start who could pick up and haul away metal, etc.

There has to be a way to clean up Elbert County responsibly, as well as the small towns along the I-70 Corridor. There are people who would gladly give away items in order to get some breathing room in their houses and sheds.

We live in a society of “more” but more doesn’t make us happy, it’s just more. The other day I went through my closet and pared it down. I have two small cabinets that used to contain shoes (most of which went into the trash). I originally thought, “hmmm... what could I put there?” I realized leaving the space bare made me happy. Every day I smile when I see them because the breathing space in my closet is wonderful.

I’m not done, so next summer I will begin again in the out buildings. Winter is good for going through rooms in the house. Life is too short to own too many things that can’t be organized or cleaned on a regular basis. So get out your favorite pen and make a list... if it suits your personality. ♦



Marion Tickner

Grandma Waited in the Car

In my first year at the Missionary Training Institute, I looked forward to going home for Christmas.

My friend Martha shared my excitement. We had become close friends during the summer. When I agreed to help with Vacation Bible School, they assigned me to help Martha teach the beginner’s class. We loved working with children and talked about doing a children’s ministry “some day.” The professors sent us away with plenty of homework to keep us busy, but my week wasn’t all work and no play. I had a joyous holiday with family, activities with the youth group at church, and time to study. All too soon, the end of Christmas vacation arrived.

I had to return to school. On the way to the train station, we stopped to pick up Grandma. All the shops advertise after-Christmas sales that mark wrapping paper, cards, and decorations down to half-price. Mom and Grandma wanted to take advantage of those bargains after seeing me off. As we pulled into the parking lot at the station, it became apparent everybody else was also headed elsewhere! Dad drove around the full lot until he found an empty spot, even though it was a tight squeeze. As a string bean, I had no trouble getting out of the car. My two heavy suitcases were in the trunk. We couldn’t get the door open far enough for Grandma to get out. She said, “That’s all right. Trains are always late so I brought a book to read. I’ll wait in the car.”

Inside the crowded station, I heard my name. My friend Martha was taking the same train. “I already have my ticket,” she said, “but I’ll stand in line with you to get yours. I sure hope all these people aren’t going in our direction.”

The train was late as usual. Finally, the loudspeaker announced the eastbound train for New York City. Dad grabbed one of my suitcases and one of Martha’s, both heavy with books, presents, and homework. The conductor stood on the platform, guiding people into the train.

Dad asked, “Is it okay if we carry the bags on for the girls?”

The conductor nodded and motioned us forward. Not only was the parking lot crowded, so was the train. We walked through the car looking for seats. Nothing. People were standing in the aisles. Mom and Dad walked ahead into the next car. That, too, was full. Finally, in about the third or fourth car ahead (or was it back?), they found seats, but by the time Martha and I got there, they were taken. I glanced out the window and saw buildings passing. *Oh no*, I thought, *it isn’t buildings moving, it’s the train*.

We hadn’t heard the “All aboard!” and Mom and Dad were still on board! What were we to do? Martha and I sat on our suitcases at the end of the aisle, hoping at the next stop seats might become available. That’s how crowded the train was. Soon we heard the conductor call, “Tickets!” Dad had some explaining to do. Non-passengers getting stuck on moving trains must have happened more than we realized, because the conductor understood the situation. He gave them a pass to the next stop and a free ride back to Syracuse.

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An hour later, we said goodbye to my parents as they got off at the next station. Fortunately, so did a lot of other passengers, so at last Martha and I had a comfortable seat on our way to New York City. In order to use their free pass, Mom and Dad would have to wait until later that afternoon to go home. They didn’t want to sit in a station all day, nor did they want to check out Utica’s after-Christmas specials. The next best thing would be to take the bus. After some quick thinking, Mom found a pay phone and called her sister collect.

“Will you accept a collect call from Utica?” the operator asked. Before Aunt Dorothy had time to wonder who’d be calling her from Utica, Mom spoke her name. She accepted the call and Mom explained what had happened. She asked her to send someone to pick up Grandma, who was still waiting in the car. ♦

Susan Davis

Showing at the Starlite Drive-In

In 1956, I was four-and-a-half years old. We had never owned a television set.

I was too young to know Sterling, Coloado, had a drive-in movie theater until Dad took Mom, my two siblings, and me to a show there. Awestruck, I stared at the huge white screen we could see through our front windshield. Why weren't there any pictures on it yet? Mom told me it wasn't dark enough to play the movie. They would wait until it got darker outside. We were facing west and I could tell the sun was about to set.

Dad had parked our black 1949 Chevrolet car beside a metal pole. He rolled his window down partway and hung a speaker on it. When he turned the volume knob, we suddenly had sound in our car. It amazed me! It sounded like a radio, but didn't look like the one we had at home.

When the film began rolling, I could hardly believe my eyes. The color seemed extremely bright to me. We were watching a Western, Dad's favorite type of movie. I felt like the action portrayed on the big screen could have been happening in the nearby countryside. For quite a while, the film kept my attention, but then the package shelf behind the back seat of the car looked more inviting to me. I crawled up there and fell asleep. The next thing I knew, Dad was carrying me inside our house.

Dad never took us to see a movie at the drive-in theater again. It could have been for various reasons. Maybe he didn't care for the movies

playing or didn't want to spend the admission price to see another one. Plus, he was a busy farmer and his family kept growing larger.

The next time I saw a show at the drive-in theater is when I went on my first date. We had a good time and enjoyed each other's company, but a special spark just wasn't there. Several years later, that changed for me when I met Ben. I knew on our first date he was special and I might marry him. We often went to the drive-in theater and watched whatever movie played that evening in his 1969 Camaro.

At intermission, they ran a popcorn commercial. We both loved popcorn, and it looked so good! Ben always went into the concession stand and bought us a tub of popcorn and a couple of pops to drink.

A few times we didn't care for the movie, so we left early. One time his car wouldn't start. Since he was a mechanic, he could get it to crank over by using an alternative method. All he had to do was open the hood and jump two wires together and it would fire right up.

Ben reluctantly got out of the car and tried to crouch down as low as possible. Once the hood went up, it blocked the view of the big screen for people parked behind us. They got annoyed and started honking their horns. Before long, we had a chain reaction going on. At least for Ben and me, it seemed like every car in the



parking lot was honking. After the engine fired up, Ben drove with his lights off toward the exit. We crossed over metal bars, which sounded like we were going over a cattle guard. The owner put them there so people couldn't drive in through the exit and watch a movie for free.

When I was a young child seeing my first movie at the Starlite Drive-In, I did not know someday I would watch lots of movies there with my husband-to-be and later with our kids. Amazing how one place can hold three very different memories.

Like so many other outdoor theaters, the Starlite Drive-In is no longer in business. It began operation in 1949 and closed in 2015. For 56 years, it "showed its true colors" by entertaining lots of outdoor moviegoers. ♦

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A Lesson from the Pasture

Pauline
Artery

Phantom came into our pasture as a guest, not a resident.

He arrived late one afternoon and my husband, Ralph, put him in our corral so he could begin acclimating to his new surroundings. He was pretty excited. There was hay available, but he was not interested in eating. Instead, he trotted around, often sticking his head and neck over the top rail of the fence, looking around, and whinnying loudly.

The other horses came to see what all the fuss was about. Dan, a retired Palomino, let it be known he was boss. Whenever Phantom paused long enough to stretch his head over the fence, Dan laid his ears back and tried his best to get in a nip or two. Lefty, the big gentle gray-white resident of our pasture, seemed unconcerned and went about the business of finding his own ration of hay.

As I watched Phantom make his rounds, I decided his unique name matched his personality and coloring. He is a paint, the product of a beautiful sorrel quarter horse mother and a dark-colored paint stud. He looks like his head got dipped into a bucket of white paint, stopping just above his blue eyes. The rest of his head, mane, forelock, neck, and shoulders are brown. The rest of him, including all four legs, is white.

He had been through some training but would need a firm hand. Given a free rein, Phantom ruled his corral. He had tried to bite a farrier who was trimming his feet, and frequently kicked at both people and other horses. My husband had agreed to bring him to our pasture to decide what might be best for both the horse and our friend, who was afraid of him.

The first night was a noisy one. Until long after midnight, Phantom continued to whinny and run round the corral. Finally, he quieted down, and we got some sleep. Early the next morning, we took a walk and saw why. He had gotten out of the corral and was standing alone on top of the hill behind our barn. The other two horses were 150 yards beyond him, grazing placidly. We hadn't planned to turn him out into the pasture so fast, but the fact he

was still there showed us it wasn't a problem. As soon as he saw us, he walked toward us. We climbed over the fence and went to meet him.

Both of us began whispering to him, inviting him to come closer to be petted. He ignored Ralph's outstretched hand and came directly to me. I stoked his neck and patted his shoulder. Everything was okay until I walked away. He wanted more attention and crowded up against me. At that point, I told him to go on and waved my hand at him. Thinking I had convinced him, I turned and started for the barn. I had taken only a few steps when I sensed him coming after me and I sidestepped in time to feel his chest brush my right shoulder in what felt like a deliberate attempt to knock me down.

I can't tell you how fast I made it to the barn; Phantom didn't really chase me, but he followed close enough to feel his aggression. He was threatening me. When I reached the barn, I told my husband to waste no time in getting that horse out of our pasture. He didn't actually agree to that part, but he said I should stay away from Phantom and he would take care of the horse related chores until we could make other arrangements.

Over the next couple of weeks, Phantom ran at him on two occasions. When he tried it a third time, Ralph stood his ground, and the horse seemed to know he could no longer intimidate. During that time, Ralph noticed sometimes Phantom would put his head down and stand pressing his nose against the ground. "I think that horse has a headache, and we need to have Mick come look at him."

We called the call an examination revealed two teeth that had curved over and were biting painfully into his gums. A shot and teeth filing took care of the problem. The change in Phantom was phenomenal. Gone was the pacing and the aggressive behavior. He nibbled at Ralph's cap or his hand whenever they come into contact, stood quietly to be brushed or sprayed with insect repellent, and tolerated being saddled and bridled. He even made a positive impression on two prospective buyers, though neither took on the responsibility of



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ownership. Phantom became the resident pet of the golfers who stopped to pat him or feed him a handful of grass as they made their way from the number eight green to the number nine tee box.

I would like to say it restored my trust in Phantom and all his bad habits disappeared, but it is not true because I still felt a little wary of him. If I raised my voice or tried to make him do something he didn't want to do, he sensed my fear and took advantage of it. Back went the ears as he threatened to charge me. Yet if I spoke firmly but quietly and gave him praise, he did what I wanted him. I suspect if I had ever stood my ground and not been afraid to call his bluff, he would have stopped the aggressive behavior altogether, but I preferred a fence between him and me.

When July came and the rain did not, we began looking for alternatives to feeding an extra horse. We decided the best place for Phantom would be with our friend Lee Ann,

who works for a huge cattle feeder in Kansas and is the ultimate horse whisperer. I am happy to say the decision was a good one, and Phantom is well on his way to becoming the good horse he was intended to be.

The experience with Phantom got me thinking about the fourteen-year-olds I teach. How very much like Phantom they are. They come to me as guests, not permanent residents. Most

respond to quiet directions but become aggressive when they are yelled at. Some have been allowed to do, go, and be whatever they choose. There has been no firm hand to guide, no one to set limits. More of them than I want to think about experience pain of the unspeakable kind that results from abuse and neglect at the hands of those who are supposed to love them. Is it possible those kids don't have a way to tell anyone they are in pain so they strike out in anger? Is their misbehavior a way to get someone to pay attention, to question why?

When our new school year started last fall, I looked at kids with fresh eyes, and tried hard to be less quick to judge or label them. I didn't always succeed; old ideas and habits die hard. But because I now have insight, change is possible. And it's all because Phantom came to visit in our pasture. ♦

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Mark Eklund's Story

Sister Helen Mroska

He attended the first third grade class I taught at Saint Mary's in Minnesota.

All thirty-four of my students were dear to me, but Mark Eklund was one in a million. While quite neat, he had a happy-to-be-alive attitude that made his occasional mischievousness delightful. Mark talked incessantly. I had to remind him again and again talking without permission was not acceptable. What impressed me, though, was his sincere response every time I had to correct him for misbehaving—"Thank you for correcting me, Sister!" I didn't know what to make of it at first, but before long, I became accustomed to hearing it many times a day.

One morning, my patience grew thin when Mark talked once too often. I made a novice teacher's mistake. I looked at Mark and said, "If you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut!"

Ten seconds later, Chuck blurted out, “Mark is talking again.”

I had asked none of the students to help me watch Mark, but since I had stated the punishment in front of the class, I had to act on it. I walked to my desk, opened my drawer, and took out a roll of masking tape. Without saying a word, I went to Mark's desk, tore off two pieces of tape and made a big X with them over his mouth. I returned to the front of the room. When I glanced at Mark to see how he was doing, he winked at me. That did it! I started laughing. The class cheered as I walked back to Mark's desk, removed the tape, and shrugged. His first words were. "Thank you for correcting me, Sister."

The next year, I taught junior high math. Before I knew it, Mark was in my classroom again. He was more handsome than ever and just as polite. Since he had to listen carefully to my instructions, he did not talk as much in ninth grade as in third.

One Friday, things didn't work out as planned. I had worked hard on a new concept all week. The students were frowning, frustrated, and edgy. I had to stop this crankiness before it got out of hand. So I asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name.

Then I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down. It took the rest of the period

to finish their assignment and as the students left the room, each one handed me the papers. Mark said, “Thank you for teaching me, Sister. Have a good weekend.”

That Saturday, I wrote the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper and listed what everyone had said about that individual. On Monday, I gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. “Really?” I heard whispered. “I never knew that meant anything to anyone!” “I didn’t know others liked me so much.”

No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. I never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another. That group of students moved on. Several years later, after I returned from vacation, my parents met me at the airport. As we were driving home, Mother asked me the usual questions about the trip, the weather, and my experiences. At a lull in the conversation, my father cleared his throat. "The Eklunds called last night," he began.

“Really?” I said. “I haven’t heard from them in years. I wonder how Mark is.”

Dad said softly, “Mark was killed in Vietnam. His funeral is tomorrow and his parents would like it if you could attend.” To this day, I can still point to the exact spot on I-494 where Dad told me about Mark.

I had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. Mark looked so handsome, so mature. All I could think of at that moment was, “Mark, I would give all the masking tape in the world if only you would talk to me.” Mark’s friends filled the church. Why did it have to rain on the day of the funeral? It was difficult enough at the graveside. The pastor said the usual prayers, and the bugler played taps. One by one,



a soldier who acted as pallbearer came up to me. “Were you Mark’s math teacher?” he asked. I nodded as I continued to stare at the coffin. “Mark talked about you a lot,” he said.

After the funeral, Mark's former classmates headed to the farmhouse for lunch. His parents were there, waiting for me. "We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark. We thought you might recognize it." Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn

pieces of notebook paper that had been taped, folded, and refolded many times. I knew without looking the papers were the ones on which I had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him.

"Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother said.

“As you can see, Mark treasured it.”

Mark's classmates gathered around and one confessed, "I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home."

His wife said, "He asked me to put his into our wedding album."

"I have mine too," a woman said. "It's in my diary."

Another classmate reached into her purse, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. “I carry this with me at all times,” she said without batting an eyelash. “I think we all saved our lists.”

That's when I finally sat down and cried. I cried for Mark and for all his friends who would never see him again. The density of people in society is so thick we forget that life will end one day. And we don't know when that one day will be. So please tell the people you love and care for that they are special and important. Tell them before it is too late. ♦

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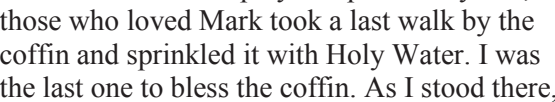
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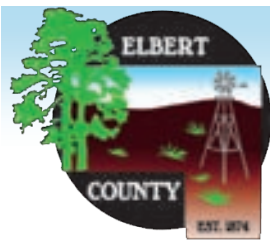
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ADDRESSING THE PROPERTY TAX SPIKE

Statement from the Elbert County Treasurer

County Offers Short Term Relief and Supports Long Term State Fix

While the County has addressed the spike in its collections for 2024, the time is now to simplify and add predictability and reasonableness to Colorado’s property tax structure. While the devil is surely in the details, we already have the tools to fix what has been broken.

Applying the revenue restrictions of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) to property tax collections ahead of other revenue sources would limit property tax growth to inflation and population growth. Coupling this with an appropriate cap on annual increases (such as the 5.5% restriction provided by the “Annual Levy Law”) would dampen spikes during periods of high inflation or rapidly rising property values. While we must address other aspects (such as the proliferation of “property classes” and the disparity between residential and business property assessment rates), we can build on what has worked in the past to set our path for the future.

After decades of constitutionally enforced stability, the repeal of the Gallagher Amendment turned property taxation in Colorado into a confused mess of ever-changing rules and exceptions. Unpredictable for taxpayers and unsustainable for local governments, statutory “fixes” have resulted in a readily predictable crisis for homeowners in Elbert County and across our state.

While local boards of elected officials can mitigate local property tax spikes when they set annual mill levy’s (your taxes are a product of actual value (set by the market), assessment rates (set by statute), and the mill levies (set by local governments)), the legislative majority saw the recent sharp rise in property values as an opportunity to foist a “solution” that hid large state revenue increases behind a tiny amount of property tax relief seasoned with a bit of wealth redistribution. That dishonest “solution” was Proposition HH, and it was rightly voted down statewide and by 81% to 19% in Elbert County.

Rather than accept the overwhelming rebuke of the voters, the Governor called a special legislative session the week before Thanksgiving, which passed a watered-down version of Prop HH that provides only a single year of very minor tax relief. At this point, the Governor publicly called on local governments to provide the relief many of us had already planned to offer our citizens.

On the 27th of December, the BOCC approved

the budget and mill levies for 2024. By focusing on keeping expenditures as low as possible (a constant goal of the county) and allocating two million dollars of unrestricted fund balance, in combination with recent legislation, we lowered the potential tax increase most homeowners will see by three to four hundred dollars in the coming year. Balances remain healthy and our “rainy-day funds” are still in place, which will allow relief in future years as well.

While the special session did not offer long-term property tax relief, it opened the door to potentially develop actual solutions. It created a Property Tax Task Force to study and recommend a property tax structure that protects the people from rising property taxes while meeting the needs of governments that rely on property tax to pay for local services.

Our own Commissioner Richardson was appointed to represent the counties of Colorado’s eastern plains on this 19-person Task Force. This

We wish you
all a Happy
New Year!

group will develop proposals to provide long-term solutions for the citizens of Colorado by mid-March for the legislature to consider before their session ends in May. His goal, shared by many members of the group, is to help the state adopt changes that ensure a

predictable and reasonable level of taxation, insulated from sharp spikes, that provides adequate revenues for critical local government functions.

Any solution, or set of solutions, must protect TABOR and the voice of the people in how their money gets spent. It should be as simple as possible. And it should reduce or eliminate the disparities between residential and non-residential rates that place a drag on new and small businesses. It must be able to function without constant legislative meddling.

Obviously, the answers will not be easy to find, and consensus will be difficult, but that is the nature of addressing changes to public policy. We believe our citizens are worth every effort and are glad that Elbert County will have a strong and experienced voice in this process.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve the citizens of this county. If you have any questions or suggestions regarding this effort or any other county issue, please reach out to us.

Respectfully, Chris Richardson (District 1), Dallas Schroeder (District 2), Grant Thayer, (District 3).

TAKE THE WATER MASTER PLAN SURVEY!

In 2018, Elbert County took a deep dive into its water supply with a comprehensive study. Now, the County is taking its next steps to plan for its water future through the Elbert County Water Master Plan!

You can participate by taking the County’s survey at <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7615247/ElbertCountyQ1> or scanning the QR code. The survey is 11 questions long and will get input on how you use water and how it should be managed in the future.



STATE CHANGES DELAY 2024 TAX ROLL CERTIFICATION DATE

Legislative changes enacted by the Colorado Legislature passing SB23B-001 to accommodate property tax relief will delay certification of the County tax roll. The new deadline for the later tax roll certification is January 24, 2024.

The reason for the delay in the deadline calendar by the legislature is to allow taxing authorities sufficient time to certify their mill levies, allow county assessors more time to process the changes and to meet the state’s reporting requirements.

Please be aware that these changes do not alter any payment deadlines. If paying in halves, the first-half payment due date for property taxes is February 29, 2024, due to Leap Year, and the second-half payment due date is June 15, 2024. If making a full payment, the deadline is April 30, 2024. The Colorado Legislature chose not to extend the payment deadline to ensure that special districts such as fire departments, school districts, health districts, hospitals, and other public entities receive the revenue to continue their services.

Once the tax roll process is complete, property owners will receive their statements by mail, which could take approximately two weeks. Property owners may also print a statement of taxes due from the Elbert County Treasurer’s website at <http://services.elbertcountycolorado.gov/treasurer/treasurerweb/search.jsp>. The certified 2023 tax amounts payable 2024 will be on this statement.

As always, if you have questions, please contact the Treasurer’s Office at (303) 621-3120. Sheryl (Sherry) L. Hewlett
Elbert County Treasurer

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