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A good day spent with smiling Wisconsinites

By Scott Hughes
Publisher

EAU CLAIRE, WI - Yesterday was a lot of fun. Three members of my family went to Milwaukee for a Brewers game - something we get the opportunity to do once or twice a year. Friends of ours have season tickets and invite us along every baseball season, but this trip was to volunteer.

We worked at a Tailgate Party hosted by Explore La Crosse, which brings busload after busload of La Crosse-area Brewers fans in to enjoy a game at AmFam Field.

There were 17 full buses this

year, and part of our job was to set up all of the tables for that massive crowd, then make sure they had a cold beverage-of-choice - headlined by that renowned La Crosse malt beverage called Old Style. There was a really good live band, hundreds and hundreds of smiling, hungry and thirsty baseball fans, and lots of smiles and jokes.

Unfortunately, the Brewers lost to the Cleveland Guardians. But it was still a memorable day spent with people all determined to have a great day regardless of the game's outcome.

We need more of that, don't you think?



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Schedule of Events

Great Sales & Promotions In Our Favorite Places!

July

- 1Surf's Up Mega Mystery - River's Edge Quilt Loft - Hayward
- 1Crazy Day Sale - The Cotton Thimble - Wisconsin Rapids
- 1-3America 250 Patriotic Sale - The Paisley Star - Boscobel
- 1-13.....Sale After The Sale - Herrschners Outlet & Quilt Shop - Stevens Point
- 1-31All Iowa Shop Hop - Forest Mills Quilt Shop - Postville, IA
- 7After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 7-31Christmas In July - The Paisley Star - Boscobel
- 9-11Moving Sale - Rachel Ann Quilts - Little Chute
- 14After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 17-19.....Maxwell Street Days - The Duke's Stash - New Glarus
- 18The Duke's Stash Vending At
Cranberry Country Quilt Show - Eagle River
- 18The Needle & Quilting Workshop Vending At
Cranberry Country Quilt Show - Eagle River
- 21After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 2336th Fly-In Quilt Show By The Lakeside Quilters
Lourdes Academy - Oshkosh
- 28After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 30Downtown Sidewalk Sale - Barn Door Quilts - Sturgeon Bay
- 30Six Pack Party - River's Edge Quilt Loft - Hayward

August

- 1.....Hayward Piecemakers Quilt Show - Hayward Wesleyan Church
- 3-833rd Anniversary Celebration - The Cotton Thimble - Wisconsin Rapids
- 4After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 7-8Annual Tent Sale - The Needle & Quilting Workshop - Wausau

- 11After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 13-15I Love Fabric Days - The Paisley Star - Boscobel
- 16Milton Maker Market & Pork Roast - The Old Junction Mill - Milton
- 18After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 25After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien

September

- 1After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 1-30All Wisconsin Shop Hop - 45+ Stores - Statewide
- 2M50 Mini Mystery Day - River's Edge Quilt Loft - Hayward
- 8After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 8-13Quilters Business Academy - Woodland Ridge Retreat - Menomonie
- 10-12Quilt Kits & Beyond Vending At Great Wisconsin Quilt Show - Madison
- 11-12Yellowstone Art Trail - 9 Locations - Cadott, Boyd & Eastern Lake Wissota
- 15After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 22After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien
- 29After Hours Facebook Live At 6:00 p.m.
The Pickett Fence - Prairie du Chien

October

- 1-31All Wisconsin Shop Hop - 45+ Stores - Statewide
- 2-3Quilt Fest On The Mississippi - Omni Center - Onalaska
- 7-13Fall Warehouse Sale - Herrschners Outlet & Quilt Shop - Stevens Point
- 16-18.....Sweet Sixteen Virtual Retreat - River's Edge Quilt Loft - Hayward



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Weeding The Summer Garden

By Kerri Habben Bosman

I weeded our garden this summer morning before the swelter of the day snuck in. I worked beneath a nicely overcast sky, surrounded by a quiet breeze with the slightest hint of rain in it. I migrated from garden bed to garden bed, welcoming each arriving thought as I listened to the world breathe.

I talked to the tomatoes and smiled at the watermelon. I checked the cucumber plants, happy to see that more were growing after yesterday's harvest. I shook my head at the plethora of mint, swiping my hand across it to bring forth its aroma. I pondered the tiny purple flowers on the thyme. I transplanted seven pepper plants to a better spot, silently apologizing as I uprooted them. I secured them gently but firmly into their new place and watered them right away with a promise to come back soon.

My husband, Wayne, says it is an act of faith to plant a garden. Each winter as our seedlings sit in the front window, we eagerly await each new stage of their development. We plant dormant seeds with prayerful hopes, hoping that our care, their environment and uncontrolled circumstance will support their growth into the best plant they can be. We rejoice from the first tendrils to the last vegetable or flower when autumn is

coming upon us. We clear out for the last months of the year and wait to start all over again.

Much of our summer garden began on a winter's day in January when I brought out all the seeds we'd saved from last year. Zinnias, marigolds, peppers and tomatoes. The beans, carrots, sugar snap peas we had to buy. And of course, I bought plants. Except for spoiling grandchildren, we are frugal. With Scottish and German backgrounds between us, we cannot escape it. However, putting me in a plant nursery in late April with a credit card is possibly more dangerous than sending a shopaholic to the mall. Thankfully, I have a lot of willpower, but often something beautiful and new to me simply jumps into my cart.

We bought our cucumber plants from our 16-year-old grandson, Hunter. He grew them in his high school horticulture class and then they had a plant sale. Cucumbers don't always grow well here at the coast. Because he planted the seeds and nurtured them, we especially wanted them to bear fruit. Even if it were just one cucumber, his efforts would be a success. We are grateful to be enjoying many a cucumber salad.

And, like I said at the beginning of this article, I plucked out the ever-tenacious "Pflanzeichwillnichtus." (This is my very



Alina Sakhaltuieva Photo

own botanical name for a weed. It is a combination of German and Latin, meaning "plant that I do not want). Along the way, I made mental notes as to how the plants I do want are growing, deadheading as I go. I find a bit of irony in weeding, as I meticulously cull a concentrated area, I am also focusing on the entire garden. I feel the surrounding beauty and the grace of being alive. This creates a precious cohesion, an acceptance of all that is and all that is not.

Our garden of life these last few years has been partially fertilized by loss and sorrow. They churned up the soil of who we are and

these emotions are still breaking down into nutrients that will somehow serve us. Yet, through it all, we resettled our roots, trusting the journey in this strange soil, and we were given enough water and enough light to grow into a new season.

Now, I must go to check the transplanted peppers, smile at the cucumber plants and pause gratefully at the tender, tiny flowers of thyme.

Kerri Habben Bosman is a writer living in Cape Carteret, NC.

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12th Annual Yellowstone Art Trail Set For September 11-12

The Yellowstone Art Trail is celebrating its 12th year! This is a free, self-guided art tour consisting of 29 local artists displaying and selling artwork in their studios and participating businesses. We are fortunate to have the historical Yellowstone Trail, the transcontinental auto route that went right through these communities back in 1915-1930, winding its way through our towns (currently County Highway X), creating the route for the Yellowstone "Art" Trail.

The art trail includes Cadott, Boyd and the eastern Lake Wissota area of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin and is set for Friday and Saturday, September 11-12, 2026



from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. both days.

Many dedicated artists call this area of Chippewa County their home, with its beautiful backdrop of rivers and lakes, parks and gardens, country farmland and welcoming neighborhoods. The Yellowstone Art Trail features artwork for all ages and artistic preferences. It showcases the fine art and skills of wood craftsmen, metal sculptors, stained- and fused-glass

artists, plus handmade pottery, fiber art, fine art drawings and paintings, handmade jewelry, gourds, stones, baskets and much more.

The artwork is original and handmade and many of the artists give demonstrations, educating the public on their craft. Several of them are active in the arts within the local community, working with adults and youth alike with many projects.

There are nine art stops included on the trail, historical places of interest, specialty shops and area restaurants. The Anson Methodist Church, the ZCBJ Bohemian Lodge, the English Lutheran Church of Bateman and the Lafayette Town Hall are hosting several guest artists. Tour the historical Bohemian Lodge (plus check out their famous kolaches for sale), while tak-

ing in all the artwork.

In addition to that, five area art studios are also on the trail. Brochures with maps are available identifying the artists and their unique artwork. You can pick one up at area businesses in August, from the artists, or view it on our website: www.yellowstonearttrail.blogspot.com or at www.facebook.com/yellowstonearttrail.

Be sure to scan the QR code on our brochure and online. Each artist will be giving away one of their creations, so make sure to enter your name in a drawing at each location. Just grab a few friends, hop in your car and follow the bright yellow signs and sunflowers dotting the trail! We welcome you to experience the arts in our area.

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A Cup Of Tea With Lydia - A Milestone Nine-TEA-eth Party

By Lydia E. Harris

Colorful streamers, balloons and tablecloths waited to welcome the senior ladies who met weekly for tea and treats in the community room.

But this time they gathered to celebrate my sister Erna's nine-TEA-eth birthday. The rose and gold floral-print napkins and paper plates said: "90 Fabulous." Her three daughters and grandson had arrived early to prepare the setting.

Tasty Treats

The buffet table held a delicious array of foods, including cranberry brie bites, a variety of crackers and a charcuterie board loaded with an assortment of cheeses, meats and colorful dried fruit. But the main feature was a homemade gluten-free, three-layer vanilla cake with strawberry cream cheese frosting, topped with two large candles: a nine and a zero.

Other treats included homemade cranberry nut triangles, chocolate chip cookies, jam thumbprints and lemon crinkle cookies (see recipe). Oh my, what a wonderful tea time with sugar and spice and everything nice!

Big Surprise

Twenty women from the retirement community, plus friends and relatives, came to honor Erna. But the big surprise was that her oldest daughter and grandson had flown from California to Michigan to help celebrate this milestone. How I wish I could have flown in from Washington State.

As usual, the women could select a teacup and teabag and brew their favorite tea. But today, wearing her crowning tiara, Erna reigned as queen.

As the ladies sipped their tea, they chatted and honored Erna.

"You are such a blessing."

"Thank you for adding fun and humor to our retirement community."

"You bring the best treats to our gatherings."

"We love and appreciate you."

Erna was all smiles, feeling treasured and blessed.

Special Memories

Later Erna reported by phone, "The party was a lot of fun and very special!" At her apartment, she was surrounded by the party decorations and cherished the memories of a wonderful time.



Lydia's sister, Erna

Young at heart and very talented, my sister Erna has had a memorable life and has blessed many. She wrote a Bible study guide for the book of Acts and coauthored a musical, "Who Is My Neighbor?" Most recently, in 2025, with the help of her daughter Lois, she published a book. Strong in her faith and wanting to showcase God, "He Was Always There: A Book of Stories and Miracles," records events from her life, including our father's miraculous release from a Russian prison years before her birth.

After coming to America in 1929 with their two sons, her parents, Nicolai and Helena Siemens, added six girls to their family. I am blessed to be the youngest. Over the years, I've enjoyed many happy occasions and teatimes with my family and friends.

So how would you celebrate a special event or milestone birthday? However you make merry, I recommend rejoicing with family and friends over a cup of tea!

From Lydia's Recipe File: Lemon Crinkle Cookies

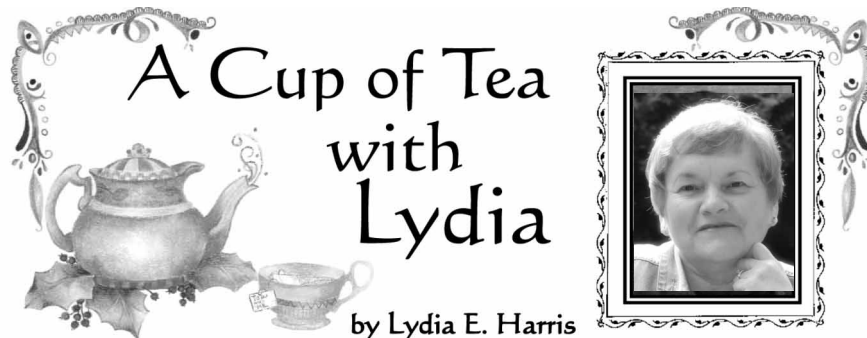
These are delicious, soft and lemony.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup (1 stick) softened butter
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. lemon extract
- 1 Tbsp. lemon zest
- 2 eggs
- 1¾ cups flour
- 1½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- ½ to 1 cup lemon curd, homemade or purchased (optional)

Directions:

1. In a large bowl, cream together the



by Lydia E. Harris

butter and granulated sugar until light and fluffy.

2. Stir in vanilla extract, lemon extract and lemon zest.

3. Beat in eggs, one at a time.

4. Mix together the flour, baking powder and salt.

5. Add the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture. Do not overmix.

6. Cover dough and refrigerate for one hour.

7. Preheat the oven to 350° F.

8. Shape dough into 1-inch balls and roll them in powdered sugar. Place them two inches apart on a parchment-lined cookie sheet.

9. Bake for 13–15 minutes until edges are lightly brown and tops do not look wet.

10. Cool on the cookie sheet for 2 minutes. Then transfer to a cooling rack to cool completely.

Recipe makes about 3 dozen cookies.

Variation: For a burst of fresh lemon flavor, sandwich two cookies together with a teaspoon of lemon curd just before serving.

Optional variation: Sandwich two cookies together with cream cheese frosting. If using cream cheese frosting, store cookies in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Lydia E. Harris enjoys serving tea to family and friends. Her books include: "Preparing My Heart for Grandparenting," "In the Kitchen with Grandma: Stirring Up Tasty Memories Together," and "GRAND Moments: Devotions Inspired by Grandkids." All are available at amazon.com or can be ordered through local bookstores.

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Age Matters - Only If You're Counting

By Barbara Kalkis

I was feeling pretty perky about the country's 250th anniversary and even planning a family gathering until I had a conversation with a casual acquaintance. In a somber voice, he mentioned that he is old enough to remember our country's 200th anniversary. The thought of clearly remembering a major event 50 long years ago made him feel old. Realizing that I also fondly remembered 1976, my perky attitude died as quickly as a mosquito hit by a bug zapper.

Rather than dwell on how I've spent the last 50 years, I decided to consider age in a disciplined, logical manner. Difficult to do. After all, society is consumed by the ages of everyone we know and those we don't

know but who are related to those we do know. We color our hair to hide the gray. We erase wrinkles with magic creams and medical procedures. We work out at fitness clubs with gusto and the determination of professional athletes. Health foods become meal staples. Conversations dwell on ways to stay healthy, what vitamins to take, how to maintain balance, how to be a "super ager," and avoiding unrefrigerated leftover foods that create toxic bacteria. (Cooked rice! Who knew?)

Taking a different approach, I took out a packet of 1976 quarters I still have. Remember them? Yes, you may admit it. A colonial patriot is beating a drum; adjacent, 13 stars representing the colonies encircle a flaming torch. Below it are the immortal

Latin words, "e pluribus unum," or "from many one," that beautiful concept of a diverse population united by love of country. The words, "United States of America... Quarter Dollar" circle the coin's edge. Every essential image packs just under 1-inch diameter.

Then I started to consider things older than I am. When in doubt, think about crafts. My first thought was that stitching things together had to have occurred on the final day in the Garden of Eden. On a more logical trend, I remembered spinning fibers and weaving linen into clothing and tanning animal skins into hats, coats, shoes happened in our earliest history. Anonymous painters like the one of Lascaux, France's ancient caves, covered the walls with vivid likenesses of racing horses, deer and bulls.

In America, weaving, shaping bowls and grinding grain were mainstays of natives and, later, Pilgrims. Quilting was a mandatory job to make blankets. Children embroidered alphabet samplers with decorative stitches. Cooking was required to survive.

In the late 1800s, astute homemakers wrote books that elevated every housewife's tedious role into "craft." Suddenly, it wasn't just cooking anymore. Authors instructed readers how to design nutritious meals, sew clothing and decorative items. Most impor-

tantly, the books explained how to create budgets and manage household expenses under the title of "home economics."

With that history in mind, I feel better about age. As with all the anonymous people who lived in North America or came to it, building, creating, designing, inventing, painting, "making do" and doing what was necessary to make a home was the start of crafting. Folks just didn't know it then. Today we have the luxury of crafting for comfort, beauty and celebrating our imagination to make something beautiful or useful. Crafting is the heart of every national anniversary. It's not about numerical ages on a personal or even a national level. It's about ensuring that the age we live in and our own stage of life build on the past, celebrate the present and gift the future with new talents and new perspectives.

Happy birthday, America! Here's cheers for the next 250 years!

©2026 Barbara Kalkis. Kalkis is a writer, teacher and marketing consultant. Her poetry book is "Little Ditties for Every Day: A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm." She believes happiness lies in not thinking about age — hers or anyone else's.

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Back Porch Break - Salon Sagas

By Nancy Parker Brummett

I had my first manicure in a nail salon when I was in my late 50s. I only went then because my two young granddaughters were visiting one summer and wanted to go. When the woman who answered the phone said she would give the girls a “free flower,” I thought that was very kind and expected them to come home with a long-stemmed rose or a carnation but no — it was a daisy painted on each small thumbnail.

That was about 30 years ago, but since then I’ve become a semi-regular client at several different nail salons. You may think that the best “people watching” may be found at airports, malls, or ER waiting rooms, but I assure you, the clientele at nail salons can be most amusing and amusing.

People become very loyal to their nail technicians, and I’ve followed my favorite to three different salons as his job changed. Along the way, I’ve noticed many similarities in terms of clientele at the different locations. It always warms my heart to see a faithful daughter or



Yakobchuk Olena Photo

caregiver bringing in an older woman to get a manicure or even more rejuvenating, a pedicure for her ailing feet and hard-to-cut toenails. I also like seeing men getting pedicures to make their wives happy!

But you can see some strange things in nail salons, too. One time a 40-ish business woman was on her phone the entire time she was getting her pedicure. She also had her laptop open on her lap and was conducting business as if she were

seated behind a mahogany desk in a high-rise office building. I actually overheard her offering a job to someone. They were negotiating salary, vacation time, job title, etc., and everyone in the salon could follow along with each discussion point. In the end the fellow on the other end of the phone evidently said he’d talk to his wife and let her know, so we were all left wondering if he took the job.

It’s been a while since I was in the cor-

porate world, but is this the new business etiquette? I hope not.

Keeping up with the life events of manicure seekers is entertaining as well. You overhear that someone wants bright orange because they are headed to Mexico on vacation, or you witness a giggly bridal party coming in to get their nails done for the wedding. Recently two little girls proudly held out their hands to show me the ice blue polish they got because they were to be flower girls in their aunt’s upcoming wedding.

Much of life can be witnessed in a nail salon, and seeing those two little girls reminded me of two others many years ago.

I guess salon sagas can be sentimental, too.

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



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A Celebration Of Strength

By Annice Bradley Rockwell

to honor history.

In 2026 with the approach of the height of the year, we have so much to be proud of. As our nation celebrates its 250th year, one of the best ways to proclaim our patriotic pride is through decorating. Our yards this time of year are naturally filled with the beauty of green lawns and gardens filled with color. The stands of red beebalm that attract the hard-working hummingbirds are in full bloom now. Our blue hydrangeas that are always lush and vibrant are all part of the backdrop of a spectacular and especially patriotic summer.

To decorate our porches, gorgeous primitive buntings of red, white and blue expand our décor and lend historic appeal. Small bicentennial flags lined along our fence let people know we are truly celebrating our nation's proud history.

To make our enthusiasm even more evident, we might even create historical decorative vignettes that are unique and have an even stronger colonial appeal. A huge copy of the Declaration of Independence paired with a Revolutionary cloak and tricorne hat can be placed next to an inkwell with a quill and American flag. It's a way to celebrate freedom and

Participating in the Past
Taking part in our town's 250th celebrations will no doubt be a time to remember. Whether it is a tour of the local museum's bicentennial collection curated just for this year, or a historic home tour designed with 250 in mind, the activities for this very special summer abound. Summer favorites such as the July 4th parade or the quaint shoreline town's boat parade will be received with exceptional fanfare and enthusiasm this year because this historic milestone deserves it.

Spirit of 1776
So as summer gets into full swing and festive events start to gain momentum, consider taking part and enjoying the "Spirit of 1776" fun. As people who are naturally passionate about history, colonial antiques and the legacy of our nation's past, this summer is a time to bring our absolute best.

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



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Clutter Happens - Relocation, Relocation, Relocation

By Julie Pirtle

Awwww ... summer! The season of no school, vacations, ice cream trucks and more! However, summer is also the peak season for relocating and moving. If you find yourself in this group, I've got a few tips to help make the transition smoother.

Moving is stressful, whether it's cross country or across town. Thoughtful packing will make your move-in much easier. To prepare yourself ahead of time, you will need a lot of self-closing plastic zip bags. From snack size to two gallon, these bags will be your best friend.

Get a special tote and mark it, "Hardware/Electronics." As you disassemble items, place the hardware in a zip bag, label it with a marker and put it in the tote. Other items that should be in this box are TV remotes, power cords, extension cords and hardware (including wall mounts).

It's common to disassemble furniture for a move, as it fits so much better in the truck. Again, have bags and a marker in hand. Put hardware for each piece in its own labeled bag. These will also go in the tote. When you move into your new home, you will know where all the parts and pieces are.

The next tools in your arsenal will be two to three different colors of utility tape. I like to use red and yellow because they are easy to spot. This tape will be used to

"flag" the boxes that you will need right away. There is nothing worse than the first night in your new home and you can't locate what you need!

When packing bedding and towels, choose a set for each family person and place in a large, contractor-grade bag. Seal it tightly. Do the same for bed pillows. Putting them in bags before boxing them up will ensure they remain fresh and clean.

Seal the box with packaging tape. Using the colored red tape, run it across the top and down the two sides of the box. This will allow the tape to be easily seen from different angles. Label the box accordingly.

You can also use the bag strategy in your kitchen. Utensil drawers, baking utensils, storage lids and flatware can all be put into their own bags. This will keep them clean and easy to unpack.

While you are in the kitchen, assess what you would like/need to have access to on your first day of unpacking. The coffee pot, a couple of mugs, bowls, plates ... anything that would make things easier. These items should be packed separately from the rest of the kitchen and marked with red tape.

If your household items are going into storage, do not pack any kind of food (with the exception of canned food). Even a bland box of pasta will attract rodents. It's not worth it. (Yes. I am speaking from experience!)

Sometimes a move will take longer than

planned. That is why it's very important to be prepared, just in case. Here is where the yellow tape comes into play.

Use this tape to signify items that you may need while being stored. Yellow items should be packed into the storage unit last, giving you easy access.

If you have a file cabinet, go through and take out anything you don't want to lose. Licenses, tax information for the current year, passports and certificates are items that are best kept with you. Purchase a multi-pocket, closing accordion file to keep them organized and handy. This will also be useful for paperwork that comes your way in transition.

Another item to consider placing in the front of your storage unit is your tool box. You never know what you may need and it is frustrating when your tools are not readily available. (Again...speaking from experience!) Yellow tape it, my friend.

On a sentimental side note, if you aren't sure how long your household items will be in storage, I would also go to my Christmas décor and pull out stockings and perhaps a few items that are meaningful to your family. A touch of home and familiarity can make a tough situation a bit sweeter.

Last but not least, while you are packing (or preparing for others to do so), PURGE! Ask yourself if keeping it is worth unpacking it later. Don't be the person who constantly asks themselves, "Now why did I



Julie Pirtle

pack this?"

Relocating is long and tedious. Take deep breaths and keep reminding yourself that a new adventure is waiting for you.

Now grab the tape and those boxes and get to it! You've got this. I know you do!

Julie Pirtle lives in Eagle Point, Oregon. She is a Professional Organizer and owner/operator of Clutter Happens. She also works with clients nationally through video consultations. The Clutter Challenged can reach her at clutterhappens@gmail.com, on Facebook:/clutterhappens or her website www.clutterhappens.com.

The Summer My Father Built A House

By Nancy Nash

One summer, I helped my father build a house. Well, okay, I was only 4 years old, so I couldn't offer much assistance, but I think I provided inspiration. Dad wanted a home for his family, which involved tons of planning and work, and I loved to accompany him to the worksite. I believe he relished his children's excitement and awe as ground was cleared, foundation laid, and the house took shape.

As a young man, my father was a carpenter who took construction jobs in summer and sold Christmas trees in early winter. It was the tree business that paid for the materials to build our house. Dad took a course in preparing blueprints, and he designed a modest "ranch" house, as it was called. It had a cellar, a main floor, and porches in front and back. The living and dining rooms blended with no wall between them. Each had a window, so it was good for viewing songbirds in the front yard and deer in the back pasture.

In between whatever other work he had, Dad spent hours and days at the site, often laboring alone or with the help of

a relative or other workman.

One day when I was present, Dad took a pan and filled it with cement, sand, gravel, and water. He mixed it together with a triangular-shaped trowel to form concrete. Sometimes he pressed the trowel into the gooey substance and held it there for a moment. To my surprise, the result bore the shape of an evergreen tree! Then he pressed the trowel down multiple times in different positions to create an evergreen with overlapping branches. I was amazed and delighted. We called it a Christmas tree, and he made one each time he filled the pan. After I had admired in turn each new work of art, which is what it was to me, the trowel smoothed the pattern away. I believe the concrete was then used to set cinder blocks in place or to form the curving sidewalk to our front door.

Some days my brother showed up at the work site. As an older sibling, he knew more about the world than I did. He had heard of a Mount Suribachi in a far-off land called Iwo Jima. Upon eyeing a huge mound of dirt plowed up by heavy equipment, he dubbed it Mount Muchibachi. It was perhaps 15 or 20 feet

high and perfect for climbing. So now we had a mountain looming beside our house! I imagine my parents got a chuckle out of that!

Mount Muchibachi, like the evergreen trees formed in cement, eventually vanished. Dad leveled it and smoothed it into a patch of soil before we moved in. The following spring, he planted a lawn. Later, he located large rocks on the premises and built a stone wall. One autumn, on a trip to Vermont to buy Christmas trees to sell locally, Dad came across a large, dark brown rock laced with white quartz. He arranged to acquire it and bring it home. It still garners admiration from its place on the lawn.

The home remains in the family,

though my parents have both passed away. Visitors comment about how well-made the house is, with thoughtful touches and marks of ingenuity. I agree. Even better, I feel the comfort of my parents' love in a deeper way when I am there.

©2025 Nancy J. Nash. Nancy is the author of "Mama's Books: An Oregon Trail Story," and "Little Rooster's Christmas Eve," available on amazon.com. She has a B.A. in English composition from Mount Holyoke College and an M.F.A. in Writing for Children from Simmons College. She can be reached at nancynash341@gmail.com.

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A Dairy Tale – The Joy Of Evaporated Milk

By Colleen Gust, Publisher
The Country Register of
Manitoba & Saskatchewan

Evaporated milk is a versatile and long-lasting dairy product that has been a kitchen staple for decades. Known for its creamy texture and concentrated flavor, evaporated milk is essentially fresh milk with about 60 percent of its water content removed. This process results in a denser, richer product that can be used in a variety of dishes and beverages, offering a unique taste and consistency.

The production of evaporated milk dates back to the 19th century, but it gained significant popularity in North America during the early 20th century. It became a convenient alternative to fresh milk, especially in areas where refrigeration was not widely available.

In 2024, the evaporated milk market in North America generated approximately USD 1.59 billion in revenue. While specific volume data (e.g., liters or gallons sold) isn't readily available, the figures indicate a stable and modestly growing market for evaporated milk in North America. This growth is driven by factors such as the demand for shelf-stable dairy products and the versatility of evaporated milk in various culinary applications.

During World War II, evaporated milk really stepped up as a hero with its long shelf life and easy transport. It helped provide much-needed nutrition for soldiers and civilians alike. Did you hear about the milk that couldn't hold its water? It evaporated into thin air!

The process of making evaporated milk involves heating fresh milk to remove most of its water content. This is done under vacuum conditions to prevent scorching and to preserve the nutritional value. After evaporation, the milk is homogenized to ensure a smooth consistency and then sterilized to ex-

tend its shelf life. This meticulous process results in a product that retains most of the nutritional benefits of fresh milk, including protein, calcium, and vitamins A and D.

Why was the evaporated milk so calm? Because it knew how to chill under pressure!

Evaporated milk became popular on the prairies for several reasons. One major factor was its long shelf life, which was crucial in areas where fresh dairy products were scarce or difficult to obtain regularly. It was also versatile, usable in cooking and baking, making it valuable for households that needed reliable ingredients. Additionally, the concentrated form meant it was more affordable than fresh milk and could be diluted as needed, stretching food budgets further.

I confess that at present, I have a shocking amount of evaporated milk in my pantry ... the grocery store had flats of it on sale, and both my husband and I came home with a flat! But that's the great thing about it — it will keep until we use it.

In the kitchen, evaporated milk shines

in both sweet and savory dishes. It's a key ingredient in delicious desserts like butter tarts, flapper pie, and rice pudding, giving them that rich, creamy goodness we all love. Plus, it shows up in savory dishes like scalloped potatoes, creamy soups, and chowders. It's even a wonderful alternative to cream in coffee and tea, adding that nice touch of flavor without feeling too heavy! Evaporated milk was the go-to for my mom's one cup of coffee per day.

Back in the day, evaporated milk was even used to make homemade baby formula — parents would mix it with water and add sugar or corn syrup to provide essential nutrients. However, nowadays, modern baby formulas are specifically designed to cater to infants' needs.

Today evaporated milk is also used for calorie-reduced cooking because it provides a creamy texture and rich flavor without the high fat content of cream. Compared to cream it has 2 percent fat rather than 18-35 percent fat, which contributes to its relatively low calories per cup at 170 calories. Heavy cream can have 800-plus calories per cup.

Evaporated milk is an economical choice for Canadian households. Its long shelf life helps reduce food waste, and it takes up less storage space than gallons of milk. Popular brands like Carnation dominate the market, but regional brands also produce locally produced evaporated milk.

Though I've been milking this opportunity for all it's worth, I'll stop making milk jokes now; I think they are getting cheesy.

Stroganoff Soup

This was our supper one night while we were putting together the last edition of the Country Register. I can vouch that it doesn't take too long to make!

Ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp. butter
- ½ lb. beef top sirloin steak or beef tenderloin, cut into thin strips
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 4 cups beef stock
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 2 cups milk
- 1 can (8 oz.) mushroom stems and pieces, drained OR 8 oz./227 g sliced fresh mushrooms
- ½ tsp. dried thyme
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1/8 tsp. pepper
- 1/3 cup flour
- 1 can (12 oz./354 mL) evaporated milk
- ½ cup sour cream
- 6 oz. uncooked egg noodles or half of a 12 oz pkg

Method:

In a large saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Add beef and onion; cook and stir until beef is almost cooked through, 3-5 minutes. In a small bowl, whisk ¼ cup of the beef stock and tomato paste until blended; stir into saucepan. Add rest of stock, milk, noodles, mushrooms, bouillon, thyme, salt and pepper; bring to a boil and simmer 10 minutes or until the noodles are tender.

In a small bowl, whisk flour and evaporated milk until smooth. Gradually stir into saucepan. Return to a boil; cook and stir until thickened, 1-2 minutes. Cook until heated through. Top each serving with sour cream and, if desired, thyme.

Chocolate Cream Pie

This is a very rich dessert, at least to us. It's like homemade chocolate pudding in a crust! If you're in a hurry, just use a graham wafer crust instead of a pie crust. I recommend making the recipe first thing in the morning or the day before, as it needs time to set. I know this because I have an impatient husband!

Ingredients:

- Dough for single-crust pie
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 1/3 cup flour
- 3 Tbsps. baking cocoa
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 ½ cups water
- 1 can (12 oz) evaporated milk
- 5 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
- ½ cup butter
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- Whipped topping and baking cocoa, optional

Continued On Page 13



Chocolate Cream Pie

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Savory Or Sweet, Evaporated Milk Makes Recipes Better

Continued From Page 12

Method:

On a lightly floured surface, roll dough to a 1/8-in.-thick circle; transfer to a 9-in. pie plate. Trim to 1/2 in. beyond rim of plate; flute edge. Refrigerate 30 minutes. Preheat oven to 425°F.

Line crust with a double thickness of foil. Fill with pie weights, dried beans or uncooked rice. Bake on a lower oven rack until edge is golden brown, 20-25 minutes. Remove foil and weights; bake until bottom is golden brown, 3-6 minutes longer. Cool completely on a wire rack.

In a large saucepan, combine the first sugar, flour, cocoa powder, salt, water and evaporated milk. Cook and stir over medium-high heat until thickened and bubbly, about 6 minutes. Reduce heat; cook and stir 4 minutes longer. Remove from the heat. Whisk 1 cup hot mixture into egg yolks. Return all to the pan; bring to a gentle boil, stirring constantly.

Remove from the heat; stir in butter and vanilla. Cool slightly. Pour warm filling into crust. Cool for 1 hour. Refrigerate until set. If desired, top with whipped cream and sprinkle with cocoa to serve.

Old-Fashioned Oat Bread

This is just plain good bread, with this recipe making two loaves.

Ingredients:

- 1 can (12 oz) evaporated milk
- ½ cup water
- 2 Tbsp. shortening
- 2 cups plus 2 tsps. old-fashioned oats, divided
- 1/3 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 ½ tsp. salt
- 1 package (1/4 ounce) active dry yeast or 2 ¼ tsps.
- 1 cup warm water (110° to 115°)
- 5 to 5-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 large egg, beaten

Method:

In a saucepan over medium heat, bring milk, water and shortening to a boil. Meanwhile, combine 2 cups oats, brown sugar and salt in a bowl. Add milk mixture into dry mixture; let stand until mixture reaches 110°-115°F. In a small bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water; add to oat mixture. Add 3 cups flour; beat until smooth. Add enough remaining flour to form a soft dough.

Turn onto a floured surface; knead until smooth and elastic, 6-8 minutes. Place in a greased bowl, turning once to grease top. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 1 hour. Punch dough down; divide in half. Shape into 2 loaves; transfer to greased 8x4-in. loaf pans. Cover and let rise until doubled, about 40 minutes. Preheat oven to 350°F.

Brush loaves with egg; sprinkle with remaining 2 teaspoons oats. Bake until golden, 35-40 minutes. Remove from pans; cool on wire racks.

Tres Leches Cake

I like the cake more after it sits for a day, and the flavors have time to develop. Note that the cake will look a bit dry when baked so that it can soak up the milk syrup. I also only use half the frosting recipe when I make it, as this is a rich cake!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- 1 ½ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 5 large eggs
- 1 cup sugar, divided into 3/4 and 1/4 cups
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1/3 cup milk
- Three Milk Syrup*
- 1 can (12 oz/354 mL) evaporated milk
- 1 can (9 oz/300 mL) sweetened condensed milk
- 1/3 cup heavy whipping cream

Frosting

- 2 cups whipping cream
- 2 Tbsp. granulated sugar
- 1 cup berries, to garnish, optional

Method:

Preheat the oven to 350°F and butter a 9x13 casserole pan.

In a large bowl, sift together 1 cup flour, 1 1/2 tsp baking powder, and 1/4 tsp salt. Separate egg whites and yolks into two additional bowls.

Beat egg yolks with 3/4 cup sugar with an electric mixer on high speed, until yolks are a pale yellow (2 minutes). Stir in 1/3 cup milk and 1 tsp vanilla.

Beat egg whites on high speed until soft peaks form (1 minute). With the mixer on, pour in remaining 1/4 cup sugar and beat on high speed until egg whites are stiff but not dry (1 minute).

Pour egg yolk mixture over the flour mixture and combine gently with a spatula.

Gently fold in egg white mixture with the spatula until just combined. Pour batter into prepared pan and spread to even out the surface and bake at 350°F for 30-35 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.

Syrup:

In a large measuring cup (or a bowl with a pouring lip), combine the whipping cream, evaporated milk and condensed milk. When the cake is cool, pierce the surface all over with a fork. Slowly drizzle the milk mixture over the cake.

Frosting:

Pour cold whipping cream and 2 Tbsp sugar into a large chilled mixing bowl and

beat on high speed 1 1/2 to 2 minutes or until thick, whipped and spreadable. Spread over the cake with a spatula then decorate with berries if desired.

Creamy Black Peppercorn Sauce

We had a steak that we'd bought on sale, and it wasn't the best. Thankfully, I was testing this recipe anyway. My husband thought it greatly improved the steak!

Ingredients:

- Cooking spray
- 2 Tbsp. crushed black peppercorns
- 12 oz. can evaporated milk
- 1 Tbsp. beef stock powder or your favorite stock concentrate

- 1 Tbsp. cornstarch
- 2 Tbsp. water

Roughly crush the peppercorns in a plastic bag with a meat tenderizer or rolling pin.

Spray frying pan with cooking spray (or use the same pan you cooked your steak in) and heat over medium high heat. Add peppercorns and cook for 1 minute to release flavor.

Add milk and stock powder, stirring until boiling. Reduce heat and simmer. Combine cornstarch and water and add to sauce, continually stirring for 2 - 3 minutes, until thickened slightly.

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Go Take A Ride On A Train!

By Barbara Kalkis

Visiting family used to require enough driving to make me feel like a crunched-up candy wrapper at the end of the trip. I'd pack enough clothes and jackets for all four seasons and every eventuality, from hiking to yoga class to restaurant dining to slouching in front of the TV. Intent on filling every space in my car, I even packed camping gear: tent, sleeping bag, backpack and cookware. (Never can tell if the family wants to take an impromptu hike.) Finally, I'd throw in the necessities: maps, emergency road assistance supplies, snacks, chips, water bottles, a stack of CDs and my cell phone. Content that every contingency was addressed, I'd head off for several hours on seemingly always crowded highways.

The trips included stops at familiar cafes and

boutique shops along the routes. Although I passed through beautiful farm lands, I could only glance at the blossoming fruit trees, ripening tomatoes, corn, hops, sunflowers and golden wheat. At freeway speed, it was just a colorful blur. Occasionally I'd see trains in the distance, moving at pace with and then ahead of us when traffic slowed. It looked romantic and alluring, but I needed my car and all of my possessions.

That changed in one moment on a drive home one holiday weekend. Traffic was heavy but moving fast. I had just crested a hill and was headed into the valley when a small car blew a tire. The force of the blowout threw the car across three lanes of traffic and spun it around, facing into the cascade of speeding vehicles. Miraculously, every traveler in every lane hit the brakes and stopped in time. After a

collective gathering of breath and senses, the two young inhabitants exited the car and ran safely to the side of the road. It was a game changer.

On my next trip, I decided to try a train ride. I figured I'd hate it. After all, how could I get along without all my stuff? Downsizing is painful, whether it's a house or a roomy car. However, the freeway near-miss incentivized me. I packed only essentials in a backpack and carry-on. I am now a train loyalist.

While someone else "drives," I relax in the rolling comfort of a seat on the top level. I have high-speed Wi-Fi, so I can catch up on email, news and the daily crossword. Best of all, I have the luxury of time. I can study every aspect of daily life as it floats by. Trains capture the endless parade of sights: from smoking industries, to landfills, to condo villages, to mansions, to stunning wild lands, farms, forests, waterways and an endless sky. Graffiti "decorates" construction sites, yet the English teacher in me admires punchy philosophical bits of street wisdom and impressive artistic talent displayed in creative — almost three-dimensional — lettering that transcends calligraphy. Large-scale mural artistry is a real talent!

As we barrel down the tracks, the conductor sounds the whistle in a continuous shrill



Miroslav_1 Photo

scream. The stopped highway traffic at the cross-roads seems like a dream. We pull away and continue the blissful rhythm of the rails.

Driving requires stopping to "stretch." Plane rides are cumbersome. When I want to move on the train, I sashay over to the café car. The train alone offers us a close-up look at how we live our lives, place by place.

The fabric of America is not in the sky. It is on the land. And it is the train that shows us who we really are. Don't take my word for it. Go take a ride!

©2026 Barbara Kalkis. Kalkis divides her time between consulting, writing, and teaching. She's author of "Little Ditties for Every Day." Contact her at BarbaraKalkis01@gmail.com.

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Patriotic Punch

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My grandkids like this fun idea for a
refreshing punch. It's extra special served
on the Fourth of July.

Difficulty: 1 spoon • Prep time: 10 minutes
Freezing time: 2 hours • Gluten-free

Gather with Grandma
3 ice cube trays or 3 mini muffin pans
Red beverage, such as Kool-Aid, fruit juice, or punch
Blue beverage, such as PowerAde; or use blue food coloring to tint
lemonade, white grape juice, or clear soda
2-liter bottle lemon-lime or other clear soda
Clear drinking glasses
Red straws (optional)

Make with Grandma

1. Fill one ice-cube tray with the red beverage, another with the clear soda, and the third with a blue beverage. Freeze the cubes until solid. Chill the leftover beverages.
2. When you're ready to serve the punch, remove the ice cubes from the freeze and place 1 ice cube of each color in each glass, or place several of each color in a glass pitcher. Place the remaining punch cubes in 3 separate bags and store them in the freezer.
3. Pour clear soda over the ice cubes to cover them. Add a straw to individual glasses and enjoy this refreshing drink!
4. As the ice melt, watch for colored bubbles. Eventually, the punch may change colors.

Serves 4 to 6
Note: As the ice melts, the flavors will mix together. Select beverages that will taste good blended.
Tip: If you make one color ice cubes with a sugared beverage and another color ice cubes with an artificially sweetened beverage, place the heavier cubes (beverage with sugar) on the bottom. Then the colors will layer as the ice melts.

Visit: Neenah, Oshkosh

Food For Thought - Memories of Yesteryear

By Sharon Atkinson

Memories are such an important part of life. They ground us like roots of a tree. Enjoy the following memories of days gone by ... maybe you have some that are similar!

*Do you remember that on the farm, after dinner, when they didn't have company, they would have a lay down of half an hour before doing dishes or before the men went back to whatever they had been doing outside?

*Grandma would always call it a receipt, instead of a recipe.

*During seeding or harvest, Auntie Doris would deliver afternoon lunch to the field. Water in a quart sealer, sandwiches of thick homemade bread with baby roll cheese, or jam or baloney and usually some cookies.

*At Christmas, Grandpa loved the traditional homemade mincemeat pie. He just couldn't fathom the fact that I didn't like it. I think there was Christmas pudding with a sweet sauce offered as well. We would also have ribbon candy, nuts, and oranges for the afternoon lunch after the big turkey dinner.
Many years before turkey became the bird of choice, they used to have a goose

instead of turkey.
One particular year, they had a mother goose with baby goslings. The little goslings must have met a tragic end as they couldn't be found. They think the baby goslings were preyed upon by a skunk because when Auntie Doris, wearing a black skirt, went out to the shed where the car was stored, she was attacked by a very upset mother goose.
*Auntie Doris did a lot of canning of a variety of fruits for the winter months ahead. They also canned meat.

*They had a separator that they used when they still milked cows. It would be set up in the kitchen. Auntie Doris had a fondness for buttermilk. I don't know about you, but that was not my thing at all. I thought you might as well put melted butter in the milk. Not fond of cow's milk, period. We were town kids who were used to milk in glass bottles, delivered by a milkman and pasteurized.

*Just like the meals that were regimented, they didn't vary the menu much at all. Breakfast: puffed wheat in a big plastic bag might be on the kitchen table, or eggs or porridge and, of course, toasted homemade bread. The toaster had two sides that came down for you to insert the slices. The homemade bread was so thick

that they had to prop the sides up as the toaster couldn't accommodate the size of the slices.
*They might have bacon at breakfast, but when the price of bacon went up, they substituted fried baloney to go with the eggs. Usually, a chicken was roasted on Sunday for dinner. The rest of the week was roast beef. Supper was always boiled eggs and the mashed potatoes leftover from dinner, fried in a pan on the old cook stove with leftover carrots (if that was the vegetable for dinner). Of course, in the summer, they had lettuce, radishes, green onions, boiled peas or beans, all from the garden.
*No fried chicken, and no french fries ever (I still think of you, Ron, and traveling with Uncle Joe overseas with him wanting you to request mashed potatoes in a fast food restaurant!)

*The cake was usually a white cake. They made two or three kinds of home-made cookies. No experimenting with new recipes or types of food. No pasta, no cabbage rolls, no hamburgers, pizza, etc. Don't even think about Chinese food ever being partaken of. Grandma usually had consommé soup at dinner with a couple of slices of carrots floating in the soup. And it was always loose tea, not tea bags ever. The water was heated up on the cook stove. There was never the scent of fresh coffee enticingly floating through the air.
*I also remember the root cellar down in the coulees where they stored the potatoes and carrots, etc. There were sometimes salamanders crawling over the gunny sacks. (Salamanders and lizards make sense to me. They have legs. Snakes in my book don't qualify!)

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Dips To Delight In

By Meghan Diemel, Editor
The Country Register of Wisconsin

One of my favorite parts about warm summer nights is those kind of evenings when no one needs to be fed a three-course meal and we each decide to eat what we want. That might be a simple sandwich with fresh tomato, delicious leftovers from the night before, two sticks of string cheese (I kid), or in my case—pretzels, crackers or chips with dip!

It's one of those guilty pleasures that seem allowable when it is too hot to cook and you've spent a long day outdoors. Or perhaps you spent too much time indoors, and want to sit on the deck for the sunset instead, which is often how I sit and enjoy my little treat after long days of editing and writing.

A nice cocktail or mocktail, my favorite dip and chips, a nudge for a pet from our neighbor kitty, and I'm all set!

I've included a couple of our family's favorite dips and spreads, and I've added more traditional recipes to the grouping as well. My Aunt Lois' bean salsa is famous and a staple at every family gathering. The bright colors of the salsa were always front and center at our 4th of July celebrations, their own fireworks show in a bowl, and it transports well for boating afternoons. No visit to Nonny and Bop-bop's (my mom and dad's house) is complete without my dad's ground ham spread. We eat in their screened-in garage on the couch or around the table, young and old waiting for the magical hour where we're all able to get in their pool. He also brings it to every large family gathering — almost always making extra for his daughter's to take back home with them when the visit is over.

We're very lucky daughters.

Whatever the days of summer bring your way, let the reins loosen a bit on

the diet talk and enjoy a night of simple foodie fun. Try one of these dips to delight in!

Aunt Lois' Bean Salsa

Ingredients:

For the salsa ...

- 1 can of black-eyed peas
- 1 can of pinto beans
- 1 can of shoepeg corn
- 6 small jalapeños, 1 with seeds, chopped
- 1 bunch cilantro, chopped (I use only the leaves)
- 3 stalks of chopped celery
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 1 orange pepper, diced
- 1 yellow pepper, diced

For the dressing ...

- 1 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup olive oil (I use the light olive oil that is better for taste purposes.)
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 1 Tbsp. water

Method:

Boil dressing ingredients together in a heavy sauce pan. Once you hit the boiling stage, remove from heat and let cool.

Add the salsa ingredients to a bowl. Pour the dressing over the salsa components and refrigerate, preferably overnight to give the flavors to come together.

Dutch's Famous Ground Ham Spread

This classic, retro-style ground ham spread comes together quickly and makes a perfect summertime "dip." Every family holiday, from Christmas to these beautiful July and August days lounging by the pool has the ham spread front and center in our family. It's delicious with Ruffle chips or spread on a sandwich.

Ingredients:

- 8 oz. cooked ham, roughly chopped
- 8 oz. cooked corned beef, roughly chopped
- 1/4 cup sweet pickle relish
- 1/4 cup dill (regular) pickle relish
- 1–2 Tbsp. yellow onion, grated or finely ground (to taste)
- 1/2 cup Miracle Whip (add more by the tablespoon to reach desired creaminess)

Method:

Place the chopped ham and corned beef into a food processor. Pulse until finely ground but not pureed into a paste. Transfer to a medium-sized mixing bowl.

Grate or grind the onion using a fine grater or food processor. Add the sweet relish, dill relish, and ground onion together, and then add that mixture to the meat mixture. Stir in the Miracle Whip, starting with a 1/2 cup. Mix thoroughly. Add more Miracle Whip a little at a time if you prefer a wetter, smoother spread. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least an hour, preferably overnight. This allows the flavors to come together.

Fiesta Dip

Ingredients:

- 1/2 pound white american cheese, cubed to help with melting (We use Velveeta)
- 1/4 cup half and half, more to thin it out
- 1 Tbsp. butter
- 1 4 oz can of green chilis
- 1/4 cup cooked corn kernels
- 1/4 cup black beans
- 1 jalapeño, thinly sliced
- 1/4 tsp. cumin
- 1/4 tsp. garlic salt
- A pinch of cayenne pepper
- A few shakes of chili lime seasoning (like Tajin)

Method:

Place cheese, half and half, and butter in a sauce pan over low heat. Heat until melted, stirring frequently.

Stir in the green chillis, corn, black beans, jalapeño, cumin, garlic salt, the cayenne pepper and a few shakes to taste of the Tajin or other chili lime seasoning.

Add more half and half if you want to thin out the cheese, and then serve immediately with your favorite taco chip.

Boat Dip

This recipe became a viral sensation last summer, and our pontooning parties couldn't get enough of it.

Ingredients:

- 1 (16-oz.) container sour cream (about 2 cups)
- 1 (10-oz.) can fire-roasted diced tomatoes and green chiles (such as Rotel), drained
- 1 1 oz. envelope ranch dressing mix
- 1 1 oz. envelope low sodium taco seasoning mix
- 8 oz. pkg. of shredded white cheddar cheese or colby jack (about 2 cups)
- Tortilla chips or potato chips, for serving.

Method:

Stir together sour cream, diced tomato and green chili mix, ranch mix, taco seasoning, and cheese in a medium bowl. Let sit covered in fridge overnight or for at least an hour to help flavors meld.

Cheeseburger Dip

Ingredients:

Base of the dip:

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 lb. ground sirloin
- 1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. ground black pepper
- 12 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 1 8 oz. bag of shredded cheddar jack cheese, divided
- 1 cup thinly sliced lettuce, such as romaine
- 1/2 cup diced tomato
- 1/4 cup diced red onion
- 1/4 cup chopped dill pickle
- Kettle-cooked potato chips for serving

For the sauce:

- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp. mustard
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. ketchup
- 1/4 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/4 tsp. onion powder
- 1/4 tsp. smoked paprika
- 1 Tbsp. pickle brine (juice from the jar)

Method:

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

In a medium skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the ground sirloin, Worcestershire, salt, and pepper. Cook, breaking the beef into small pieces, until lightly

Continued On Page 17



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Continued From Page 16

browned and no longer pink, about six minutes. Remove from the heat.

Spread the cream cheese to fill the bottom of a 10-inch cast-iron skillet or similar sized oven-safe vessel. Top with half of the shredded cheese, the cooked ground beef, and then place the remaining shredded cheese on top. Bake until the edges are bubbly, 18 to 20 minutes. Let cool slightly, about 10 minutes.

In a small bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, mustard, ketchup, garlic and onion powders, smoked paprika, and pickle brine.

Top the dip with lettuce, tomato, red onion, and pickle. Drizzle the special sauce on top. Serve with your chips.

Caramelized Onion Dip

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 2 lb. yellow onion, sliced very thin
- 1 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 8 oz. block cream cheese
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 clove garlic, grated
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- Potato chips and crackers, for serving

Method:

Heat a 12-inch cast-iron skillet or

heavy bottomed pan (like a Dutch oven) over medium heat; add the butter. Once the butter is melted and starts to bubble, add the onions. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, for 2 minutes. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are deep golden brown, 45 to 50 minutes. Add the balsamic vinegar and stir to combine; cook 2 more minutes.

Transfer the onions to a plate or bowl to help cool completely.

Beat the cream cheese in a medium mixing bowl with an electric mixer on medium until smooth. Add the sour cream, mayonnaise, Worcestershire sauce, garlic, salt, pepper, and reserved caramelized onions, stirring until combined.

Transfer for a serving bowl and serve with potato chips and crackers.

Million Dollar Dip (aka Neiman Marcus Dip)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup crispy cooked bacon, crumbled
- 1/2 cup green onions, sliced
- 1/2 cup sliced or slivered almonds, toasted
- 1/4 tsp. garlic powder
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

(You can also blend in 4 oz. of softened cream cheese to cut through the mayo and make it extra thick.)

Method:

In a medium mixing bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, cheddar cheese, bacon, green onions, almonds, and garlic powder until completely mixed.

Taste the dip and add salt and pepper as needed. Cover tightly and refrigerate for at least 1 hour (if not overnight) to let the flavors meld.

Garnish with a few extra toasted almonds before serving. Serve cold with a butter-based cracker like Ritz or Club, or smear on a slice of baguette.

BLT Dip

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. bacon
- 1 cup mayonnaise or Miracle Whip
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 to 3 Roma tomatoes - diced
- Shredded iceberg or romaine lettuce for topping

Method:

Cook the bacon until just browned, either in a skillet or in the oven. Remove it from the pan or skillet and lay on a



Amber Lee Knight Photo

BLT Dip

paper towel-lined plate.

Whisk together the mayonnaise and sour cream. Stir in the tomatoes and cooked bacon. Top with shredded lettuce and serve with chips or crackers.



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Caramelized Onion Dip

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Scraps & Crafts - What Could Be Better?

By Deb Heatherly

Summer is a great time to pull out your scraps and put them to use! Scraps not only make great scrap quilts but fun crafts as well. Here are a few ideas for scrap projects to make with your grandchildren or other young people in your life. You can also donate scraps to a friend teaching a summer camp or to someone teaching crafts at Bible school.

For the youngest, cut a variety of colorful squares, rectangles and triangles from the scraps. Add paper, crayons or colored pencils, ribbon or twine and a glue stick, and you have everything you need! These items will be like paint to a young artists mind.

As an added bonus you will be teaching about shapes. Small rectangles can be the petals and leaves for a flower. Triangles can be the sails of a boat. Small squares can be eyes and a rectangle can be a mouth on a funny face. The ideas are endless.

Older children, with a bit more patience, might enjoy using small snips in a collage. Tiny pieces can be glued to a drawing they create or use a coloring book page as the backdrop. Color the drawing or page first, then glue tiny bits of like colors on the page. Provide tweezers to help them carefully place the small bits and scissors for needed trimming. As a bonus, provide them with a small clear Christmas ornament in which they can place leftover bits.

This ornament will memorialize a fun day.

Those old enough to use a rotary cutter and sewing machine (with supervision of course), are sure to love making the popular "hot dog" pillowcases. If you are not familiar with these, just google "hot dog pillowcase" for a tutorial. The term comes from the technique of rolling up the fabric and then pulling it out on one end. When I owned my quilt shop, this was always a favorite project for my kids club. They loved making them for themselves and as gifts. If you have an embroidery machine, let them personalize them! The look of fascination and delight as they watch the machine stitch out their name always made me smile.

Another favorite of my kids club was anything that lets them play with buttons. This mini flag is a perfect project to celebrate our country's 250th. You will need (1) 6 1/2" square of blue, (3) 1 1/2" x 7 1/2" and (2) 1 1/2" x 12 1/2" strips of red, (2) 1 1/2" x 7 1/2" and (2) 1 1/2" x 12 1/2" strips of white. Sew the 1 1/2" x 7 1/2" strips together and add to the right of the blue square. Sew the 12 1/2" strips together and add below. Sew on buttons in the blue square in any forma-

tion. (I added some white chenille on the white strips but that is optional). You can make this into a mini quilt or add a back to make it into a pillow.

Summer is for memories and nothing could be better than creating those memories with the younger generation. When you take the time to instill the love of creation, you do more than just use up a few scraps, you plant the seed of creativity that will last a lifetime. Who knows, the craft you teach today could be a craft they will pass on for generations to come.

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

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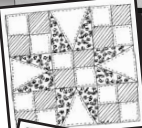
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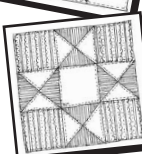
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GIRLFRIEND WISDOM



God makes
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in its time.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Summer is the time to see Nature in full bloom!

The sky is more blue, the green leaves are in their full glory!
 The brightness lifts our spirits and gives us more energy.
 Sunlight triggers the release of hormones in our brain.
 Those hormones boost our mood and helps a person feel calm and focused.
 Have you ever noticed that when you walk in nature you seem to notice the birds and other nature sounds more clearly? Slowing down to enjoy our neighbor's beautiful flowers is secretly lowering our blood pressure too.
 Beauty is often only thought of as external, like a person, a landscape, a moment of grace, but it is clearly connected to the mind, heart, and spirit.

GIRLFRIEND WISDOM: True beauty goes beyond what we see because it shines through in our actions, and our kindness. Let that smile come into full expression the next time you "feel" a thing of Beauty!

Joy & Blessings, *Jody*

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

Visit: New Glarus; www.susanbranch.com

Oh, The Place You Will Go!

By Shelby Kottemann

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

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

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

"Of course," I answered.

The still-dreary guest asked to come, too. "The more the merrier!" I replied.

Unbeknownst to me, the innkeeper's church was more than an hour drive away. The good deed took half my day and half a

tank of gas by the time I returned. The tag-along houseguest didn't like hiking and instead wanted to go out to eat and be brought back to rest.

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

This isn't a sad story though — in one of the downtown shops, I'd met a warm, wise woman with whom I'd shared a long, deep conversation. She struck me as one of those people who touched others' lives without realizing it, so it saddened me to hear that she struggled with depression. The following winter, I sent a Christmas card to her little store with a handwritten message inside telling her how special she is and that she'd been the highlight of my trip. I hoped my letter would bring her some light.

In February, I received a response! She'd been truly touched by my letter. We exchanged phone numbers and we have shared long phone calls twice a month for five years since! Sharing life's musings and

ups and downs, we've built a loving friendship that enriches both of our lives beyond compare.

In the beginning that solo vacation may have taught me about the burdens of being a caring person, but in the end, it showed me the everlasting gifts. For better and worse, wherever you go, there you are.

Shelby Kottemann is an author, reiki master and founder of "Love's Nature LLC" for the love of nature and the nature of love. Her email is contact@inlovesnature.com. To learn more, visit the website www.inlovesnature.com.



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1 c. black olives, sliced
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1/2 c. green onion, minced

1/3 c. green bell pepper
1/3 c. red bell pepper
1/4 c. fresh lemon juice
1/4 c. olive oil
freshly ground pepper
Parmesan cheese, to taste

In a large skillet, lightly toast the pine nuts in the butter; drain on paper towels & cool. Cook the orzo in boiling water; drain & rinse in cold water. (Be extra careful not to overcook the pasta.) Very gently, mix together all ingredients; cover & chill. ♥

From The Summer Book, by Susan Branch, with Love ♥ www.susanbranch.com

Visit: Boscobel, Prairie du Chien; Postville, IA

Appreciating The Value Of Photo Viewers

By Jay Mark

If you think about it, the collecting craze is as much status driven as it is personal satisfaction. I am sure you have attended auctions where two bidders are equally determined to own that status symbol — and drive prices to unbelievable heights.

“Mwaaahaaahaa!” those types say to themselves. “Even though I spent a wad, I got it — just so you didn’t get it.”

For most of my life in antiques, I’ve trended toward the things that are less desirable, and/or understood. Maybe that, in its own way, is about status. Often, I talk about things that I prize, only to be greeted by the response, “... yawn ... That’s nice.”

Now imagine a “status symbol” that few have heard of, let alone pronounce. Take for example, Megaethoscope or Le Taxiphote. Sounding interesting? I thought not.

But wait — read on. You might just change your mind. And if you have some extra bucks, you may feel like starting a new “status symbol” collection.

It all begins with photography. It’s difficult to imagine the reaction the first time someone saw their exact likeness permanently recorded on a copper plate. Kind of like 19th century AI. People were stunned.

Edgar Allan Poe summed it up when he declared the daguerreotype was “The most important and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science.”

From the very start, efforts were being made to improve the viewing experience of photographic images. Not long after the introduction of the daguerreotype in 1836, a stereoscopic version was developed.

All along, there was a strong desire to see enlarged photographs. Various stereoscopic viewers allowed images to be magnified and be seen in 3-D, another important novelty.

By the 1860s, singular, hard-cased images like daguerreotypes and ambrotypes were



Le Taxiphote stereoscopic viewer was in patented in France in 1899 by Jules Richard. The highly complex device used small, paper-thin glass slides protected in Bakelite trays.

being replaced by less expensive paper-printed photographs, allowing for new innovations.

In 1860, along comes Carlo Ponti, a Swiss-born optician, photographer and publisher of stereo views. His first invention was the alethoscope, a novel single lens viewer that added another dimension to the stereoscopic experience. Ponti’s images were printed on thin albumen paper, then hand-colored and often pin-pricked with small holes for creating sparkling light night images. They produced a strong three-dimensional effect from just a two-dimensional single image.

Two years after the introduction of the alethoscope, Ponti patented a larger format viewer he called the megaethoscope (large lens viewer). The approximately 9-by-13-

inch images could transform from day to night via reflected or transmitted light that gave a stunning impression of reality.

The large, impressive megaethoscope cabinet was an often elaborately ornamented, decorative parlor piece, mostly purchased as a “status symbol.”

The megaethoscope remained popular into the 1890s. By the turn of the 20th century, tastes were changing. Technology was further improving how best to view images, relegating this once important status symbol into a relic of the past.

Le taxiphote, “cabinet stereoscopic viewer” in translation, was a later luxury device developed in France by Jules Richard, who grew up in a family that manufactured optical and measuring instruments. (Another status symbol?)

In 1893 he patented the verascope, a “miniature” stereo camera that used glass plates smaller than the conventional stereo formats of the day.

That led to the patent of Le Taxiphote in 1899, a highly complex tabletop viewer for the “paper thin,” very fragile verascope glass slides. The plates were held in a Bakelite tray that was inserted into the viewer. The trays could be stored in an optional cabinet.

Using the verascope, amateur photographers could record their lives in stereo. In addition, much like paper stereotype views, owners could purchase commercially produced views of international locations and other activities of interest.

Because of the complexity of the operating mechanism, expensive cabinetry, delicate glass plates and maybe the Great Depression Le Taxiphote had a relatively short lifespan

of about 35 years.

So, there you have it. Two mostly unpronounceable photographic viewing instruments, that I guarantee will be a status symbol in your home. I am sure that none of your friends will have one.

Of course, cost is an important consideration. Status symbols don’t come cheap.

Both viewers are relatively scarce. For a megaethoscope, depending on elaborateness, expect to pay \$1000 to \$3000. One recently sold at Christies for (gulp) nearly \$10,000. The fragile unique views for the device will run another \$200 to \$300 each.

Taxiphotes are a bit less expensive, ranging between \$700 and \$1,500. A recent check of eBay showed listings for the delicate glass slides. A dozen for \$30. If you want the verascope camera too, they are generally under \$200. Finding the glass plates is up to you.

Finally, with books lacking, an exhaustive source of information and histories of the megaethoscope and Le Taxiphote is through a Google search.

When you acquire one or both, invite me over. I promise to admire your status symbols.

©2025 Jay Mark. *Virtually an antique himself, or maybe a collectible, Jay Mark, has more than a half-century experience in the antiques business. He owns Those Were The Days!, an online specialty bookstore. A recognized historian, he also teaches, lectures and frequently writes about antiques and history. Reach him at jaymark@gmail.com.*

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Prescription For Adventure - The Unopened Box I Moved for 35 Years

By Naomi Gaede-Penner

"I thought Mom saved only three years of letters — just the ones from CBA," I said to myself with surprise when I pried off the mailing tape and opened the large cardboard box. There, carefully organized, were 12 years' worth of letters! Most of them were written in a 5-point scribbled cursive font. The ones in pencil were nearly faded beyond recognition. I was dumbfounded! What should I do with these now historical documents? To try to read the tiny writing was daunting.

The letters started when I was at Corn Bible Academy, a Mennonite boarding school in Oklahoma, where my parents had sent me from Alaska. I'd been transplanted from green moss beneath my feet to red Oklahoma dirt. From 40-below-zero to a humid 100 degrees — with wind. Climate shock. Culture shock. I arrived with shoulder-length hair and noticed the girls wore short bouffant styles with spit curls taped onto their cheeks overnight. Dorm and school rules about early curfews and strict dress codes for evening study hall seemed ridiculous. Homesick? Yes. Adapting? Yes. My non-stop involvement pulled me through my tears: new friendships, traveling in the back of station wagons to choir programs around the state, playing in the pep band, wildly cheering on the basketball team, clinging to motorcycles, and feeling the thrill and chaos of the state fair with double Ferris wheels.

Next, the letters came from Tabor College in Kansas, where I made college history as one of 14 Gaede (GAY-dee) cousins, the most cousins of any family in one year, and where one cousin would be the man I'd marry.

Postcards added to the letters I'd written when I took off a semester and traveled to Germany with two friends for a work program. Afterwards, we caught the Euro Rail and city buses to explore with the popular guide of the 1960s, "Europe on Five Dollars a Day": Eiffel Tower, Munich Glockenspiel, pom frites (thick French fries), skiing on the icy Zugspitze.

My husband-to-be had transferred to the Civil Engineering program at Colorado State University and pleaded for



Naomi Gaede-Penner as a senior student at the Corn Bible Academy.

me to return. I did. We married, acquired a hibachi, like everyone else, and brushed orange and gold paint on planter boxes for vegetables and on concrete blocks to hold 2-x-10-inch lumber for bookshelves. I enthusiastically sewed men's ties, cut on the bias, for every male family member. My bicycle transported me to the junior high school where I student-taught the Odyssey to an unruly group of students.

After graduating, we purchased a tri-level house on the east side of Denver for \$26,000, which was \$1,000 less than buying on the west side, closer to the mountains. The modern orange shag carpet and Harvest Gold appliances thrilled me immensely. In the saved letters, I found samples of gold paisley fabric for the pinch-pleated-lined drapes and matching reupholstered hide-a-bed I'd sewn, along with swatches for maternity smocks. Marrying a Gaede cousin amplified the genetic defect I carried, and our first child had club feet. As I read about the shortages during that time, I thought of the COVID era, though the absence was not toilet paper, but potatoes, chicken, raisins, antifreeze, and steel for construction. The 1973 gas embargo led to rationing and price spikes, from 39 cents a gallon to 43 cents. Meanwhile, amazing indoor shopping malls sprang up around the city.

Two years later, we sold our house for



The box of Naomi's letters from Corn Bible Academy.

\$34,000 and purchased a house on the west side for \$45,000, nearer to our church and family members. We added a second child to our family, and like his sister, he, too, had club feet. We spent hours planting an enormous garden and fruit trees, and I pureed pumpkin to freeze for future pies and bread. Sadly, for me, the large playhouse my husband built did not have idyllic red-checked curtains and flower boxes, but instead kept our son busy pounding nails into it, with the zeal of his commercial contractor father. In addition to being a "mountain" for the children, the backyard hill became a cemetery for pet hamsters, guinea pigs, and rabbits. The daily squares on our wall calendar filled quickly with dinner and overnight guests, Bible studies, Backyard Bible Clubs for children, swimming lessons, trips to the zoo, and Family Camp. A Chevy Vega filled our garage.

Thus ended the letters; yet, aside from a wedding album, baby books, and photo albums, I now had 12 years of details from letters written home at least twice weekly.

I typed up summaries and scanned photos; CBA demerit notifications run off on half-sheets of purple mimeographed paper; news articles; my children's clever birth announcements; and floor plans, and put these into Word Document folders. The folders arrived methodically in my daughter's inbox. She was astonished, curious, and eager to read about her parents' courtship and about her birth and early years.

In April 2026, I flew to Oklahoma City to visit lifelong friends from CBA. In our

class of 16, five of us girls had been widowed, and two classmates had died. We perused stacks of photos from "back then" and enjoyed lunch at Corn Café, which had once been Tena's, where we'd sipped chocolate Dr. Pepper and cherry Coke fountain drinks. As we nibbled on hamburgers, we giggled. "We need to drive past the girls' dorm," I urged. The old white house had become someone's residence. I wondered why it hadn't been condemned. Decades before, the sink and bathtub in the one bathroom for eight to 12 girls were chronically plugged, and at times, there was no hot water. In the crowded rooms, we had shared double beds or slept in bunks.

My CBA friendships were as rich and as valued as the treasures I'd found in the box, which had been shuffled among six houses and over 35 years. Little did my mother know how much those tucked-away letters would mean to me. Bless you, mother.

(Oh! One of my sisters just texted me. She found a bundle of letters I'd written home in the 1980s. Did I want them? Of course!)

Check out Naomi's website at www.prescriptionforadventure.com and her Facebook at Prescription for Adventure. You can find and purchase four of Naomi's non-fiction Alaska "Prescription for Adventure" books on Amazon, in both paperback and e-book formats. Her other two books can be purchased directly from her.



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A Retreat Suprise - And Rescue

By Deb Heatherly

In the most basic sense of the word, a retreat is a time in which one steps away from the cares of everyday life to reenergize and reflect. This is the time of year when quilters across the country are looking forward to doing just that. Most attend with friends and travel to various locations across the county to spend a few days laughing and stitching. I've often heard it said, "It's just good for the soul."

I've hosted quilt retreats every spring and fall for the past 15 years. I've made some amazing lifelong friends and the ladies who attend have done the same. Everyone keeps in touch throughout the year and it feels like a family reunion when we gather for the next event. Each retreat has its own special moments, but one definitely stands out above the rest.

This particular retreat was actually two back-to-back events, from Monday through Thursday on consecutive weeks. I did not go home between events, so I was on-site for almost two weeks. It was a crisp fall day and as we were finishing our lunch on day two of the first week, someone said, "There are three kittens outside!" Cat lover that I am, I had to see for myself. And, I just happened to take some chicken from the leftovers on my plate.

Sure enough, there they were. Three beautiful little faces peering down from the overhang of a door on a nearby building. They were very leery of this crazy woman who was telling them how beautiful they were, while she tried to entice them down for food. They did not budge. Breaking the chicken into small bits, I tossed the pieces up where they felt safe and my little friends hungrily gobbled it down.

This was the beginning, every day after lunch and dinner, I took them bits of whatever had been on my plate. Before long they came down from the roof and would eat about 8 feet away from me. There were two fluffy calicoes and one short-haired gray. Since the calicoes were sure to be girls, I assumed the gray one was a boy. When I asked about these precious babies, I was told that the mother had



Deb's retreat rescue, Lacy, aka Lou Lou

been caught, spayed and adopted, but no one could catch the kittens. They hoped that they could eventually be caught and find homes too. Challenge accepted!

This particular retreat had a 1950s theme and I had actually hired an Elvis impersonator to serenade and surprise the ladies at dinner the first evening. With that in mind I named the gray kitten Elvis and referred to the trio as "Elvis and his girls."

Each day when I took them food, they got closer and closer with Elvis being the most daring. On Tuesday of week two, Elvis came within a foot of me. It was that night that I called my husband and said, "I might be bringing home a kitten" and told him what I had been doing.

"How will you get it home if you catch it?" he asked. My answer was that I would just play it by ear.

On the final day, with my car packed to head home, I knew this was my one and only chance. Parking nearby, I went out to the spot where I had been feeding them and sat down to wait. By now they came when I called.

I had saved a lot of chicken for this attempt and to my surprise Elvis came right up to me and started eating out of my hand. As I held out the final piece, I thought to myself, it now or never. Quickly my left hand scruffed the kitten's neck, while my right hand reached under its body. I quickly tucked it under my right arm while I continued to scruff the neck. I really expected growling and hissing but to my surprise Elvis just gazed at me as if to say, "What do you think you are doing?"

This now posed a dilemma and careful

thought. If I just put him in the car and drove home, how would I catch him and get him in the house? I really needed a pet carrier to make this a success. Luckily, a friend saw me walking around with my furry capture and called another friend who lived nearby. If I could keep my hands on this baby long enough, a carrier would soon be there.

For 20 minutes I walked around with this little gray body tucked under my arm and whispered in its ear. "Don't worry little one," I said, "You will have a soft bed tonight and will never have to survive on handouts again." This resulted in more wiggles from my furry friend but not much of a fight.

Once home, Elvis had his own room for several days until a vet appointment could be made. After I knew that he was healthy, I'd introduce him to my two other cats.

Fast-forward several days to our visit to the vet. Judging from his size, I had written down 3 months on the form I had to complete. I was then informed by the vet that Elvis was actually about 8 months old — he was just small for his age. That makes sense when you've been surviving on handouts. Surprise number two came when the vet said, "Congratulations, it's a girl!" Oops, so Elvis will not work; I quickly renamed her Lacey.

That was almost 13 years ago. Her nickname became Lou Lou and she spends

most days on the cat tree watching the birds and squirrels outside the window. She is the oldest of our furry kids and she is the boss. After dinner, each night she has trained me to sit in my recliner and hold her while we watch Wheel of Fortune. This is the only time she wants to be held. She has trained my husband to give her treats when she sits on the coffee table and stares at him. And, each night as we turn off the TV, she jumps on the back of my recliner so that I can have the honor of brushing her.

Yes, she is a diva. She went from being a wild child to being the queen of the house and I would not have it any other way. Lou Lou was definitely the best surprise I ever brought home from retreat and she will always be my special girl.

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

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KISSed Quilts - Take A Ride Into The Countryside

By Marlene Oddie

For over a decade I have been designing quilts with Island Batik fabrics. They are now a division of Lumin Fabrics and I'm honored that they asked if I'd put my name to one of the fabric collections designed by Jerry Khiev. I selected this beautiful blue and yellow collection — Countryside Charm — as my first Signature Collection.

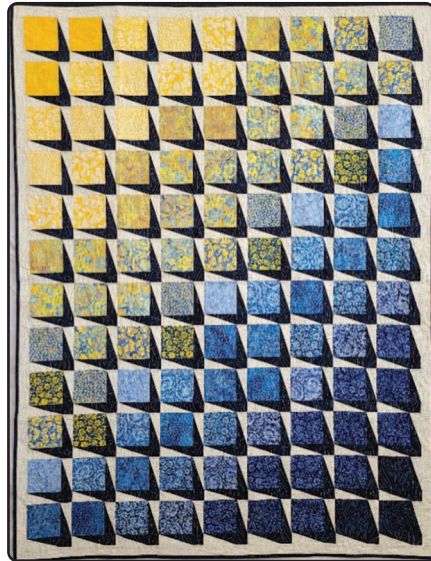
Various values of blue and yellow create a pleasing palette that is just happy! The motifs are a variety of floral patterns, leaves and small petal shapes.

I've designed four primary patterns and a couple of them have bonus designs included.

Angled Shadows — You may recognize the block that I designed last year as part of our All-Pacific Northwest Shop Hop event. This version of it doesn't include any sashings and has a consistent background throughout the quilt. This is easily constructed when using AnglePlay® templates for the half rectangle triangles. Having angled shadows is something new to our industry! Enjoy the 3D effect.

Honeycomb — Used my newly designed Half Hexi template, that maximizes the use of a 10" square and can cut a half or whole hexi, the setting elements and corners, to make this quilt. The template has holes where the ¼" intersections are to help facilitate marking your seam start and stop points. Bonus: Make a simple wallhanging with your favorite fabrics. This concept could be used with any collection.

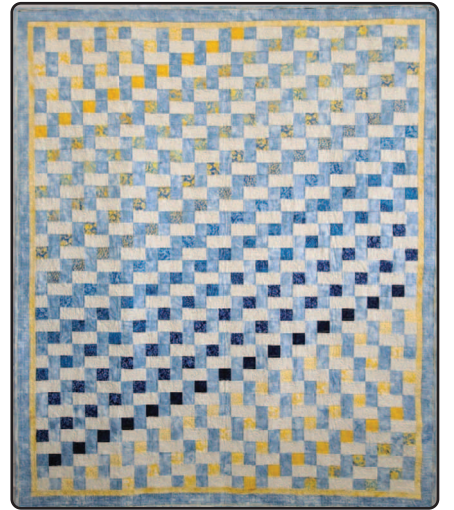
Sintra Entrada — This one may be familiar, but looks quite different than one



Angled Shadows



Hearts-A-Bloom



Sintra Entrada



Windy Pinwheels



Honeycomb

you might have seen a few years ago. This is because I'm using a light medium value blue consistently for the vertical rectangle instead of a darker value. This may look difficult to construct but uses strata techniques to make it simple. This tile pattern can be found at the entrance of Sintra Palace in Portugal. I've chosen to color it quite differently.

Hearts-a-Bloom — Using the corner-to-corner technique you'll get bonus half square triangles. So I used them in a bonus design — *Windy Pinwheels*. You could also just make one block set and frame it as a wallhanging.

These fabrics, templates and patterns are shipping to your local quilt shop now. If you need patterns, templates, fabrics and/or kits — please ask!

Marlene Oddie, of Grand Coulee, WA,

is an engineer by training, a project manager by profession, and a quilter by passion. At her quilt shop, KISSed Quilts, she quilts for hire on a Gammill Optimum

Plus and especially enjoys designing quilts and helping create meaningful keepsakes. Fabrics, patterns, kits, and templates are available at kissedquilts.com. Follow Marlene's adventures on Facebook and Instagram.



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Summer & The Specter Of Holiday “Bots”

By Barbara Kalkis

Aah ... summer! The glorious days we spend frolicking in July. The languid, lazy August nights that refresh us like no other time of year: picnics, BBQs, family vacations, reunions, days at the beach, and camping under the stars. It's in these deliciously long, hot days that a crafter's mind turns to Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Yes, the kids need clothes and shoes for school, but let's keep our priorities straight. Summer is the perfect moment to think about new designs for quilts, wall hangings, decorations, greeting cards, handmade gifts in handmade packaging. Holiday crafts and tasks require focus, concentration, preparation, planning. There's even a competitive element: spotting trends, comparing notes with friends, grabbing the perfect fabric — or paper — and patterns in stores, as well as getting everything done on time. Compared to this challenge, the kids can dress themselves. (Just kidding ... sort of.)

The festive days from October through De-

cember used to be known by their colors: orange, gold and black for Halloween; burnished browns, haystack hues, and pumpkin-pie colors for Thanksgiving; and red and green, silver, white, and gold for Christmas. No longer. New colors have invaded traditional color palettes. White and green pumpkins decorate front porches; angels herald Christmas in bubble-gum pink; and beady-eyed elves sport aqua uniforms.

The bottom line? Days in July and August may seem luscious and long, but they're not. June had the longest day and it's gone. Time's a wastin' and so's daylight. It's enough to boost blood pressure readings and require mantras and yoga breathing.

Welcome the New World of “Bots”

But wait! Not to worry! New technology has arrived to simplify your life. Crafting will soon become easy and carefree, thanks to a team of high-technology geniuses.

A computer software application (“app”) in development aims to become your personal robot — or “bot” for short. The bot can per-

form many tasks: write, research, analyze, synthesize, personalize information, and much more. (Sort of like the butler I've always wanted, but without the British accent.)

Bots can search and find massive quantities of information — called “data” — stored in computer databases around the world, analyze it, and deliver it on your computer screen.

You're a crafter, an artist — what's in it for you? More than you think. Let's say you want a quilt with a rose pattern. Type the words, “Show quilts with rose patterns.” The bot will scan databases of designs, select ones with roses and display them on screen. You can select one design or combine designs to create a new look. You can change roses to sunflowers or daisies, add birds or trees, and elect your own color palette or quilt size. You can tell the bot to perform changes until your ideas come to “life” on your computer screen.

Technology fans believe bots simplify design processes, save time and research, offer ideas we wouldn't have had, and even inspire creativity.

What Bots Don't Do

Bots are a type of technology known as “artificial intelligence.” It's important to remember that term because bots are not intelligent. Their intelligence is man-made, it's artificial. They gather data from various sources and spew out what has already been thought of and shared in some form with the world. We humans just pick and choose what we want. Bots cannot discern, so they may provide information that is incorrect, incomplete, biased, or misleading.

Creativity is a human talent. *True art* communicates emotion. Thinking and brainstorming are uniquely human gifts. Crafting in all its forms demonstrates intelligence that cannot be machine made.

Bot or butler? I'll take the butler.

©2026 Barbara Kalkis. Barbara follows her heart writing, teaching, and consulting with high-tech clients. She's author of “Little Ditties for Every Day; A Collection of Thoughts in Rhyme and Rhythm.” Contact her at BarbaraKalkis01@gmail.com.



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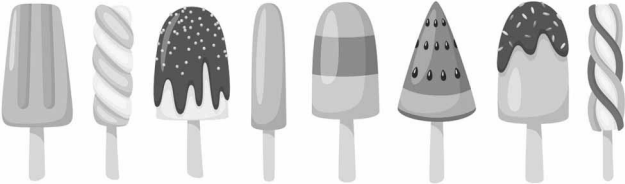
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Building Harmony - Look Out For Your Neighbors

By Jeff Capps

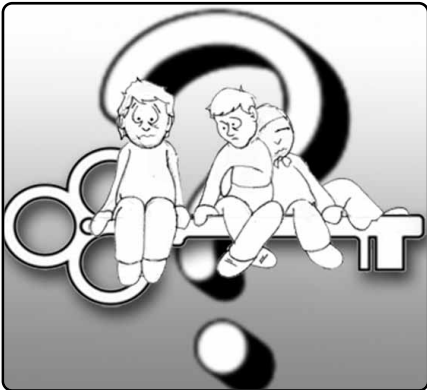
It's good to check on your neighbors once in a while and that's what we all do. One day I decided to visit our neighbors two acreages down. Their names are Roscoe and Mary-Louis Cornwall. A while back they had problems that involved a lightning strike, a burning tree, a henhouse, flaming chickens, a house fire and a dog who to this day still farts smoke. There always seems to be a dark swirling cloud over their house, but they take their challenges in stride. (See episode #79).

On this day I stopped by to find them both sitting on the step in front of their house.

"How are you guys doing?" I asked as I stepped out of my truck and swung the door closed. Something seemed amiss.

"Roscoe locked us out of the house," Mary-Louis said. "The bone head locked the door behind us now we can't get back in."

Roscoe gave her a dirty look. "If'n ya don't lock the doors behind ya, robbers can git in." They shared a look for a mo-



ment, then they both looked away.

Offering some constructive advice I asked, "Did you check the back door to see if it's unlocked?"

"We got a back door?" Roscoe demanded. Mary-Louis and I both nodded. Roscoe grumbled, "New-fangled houses. Who ever heard of a back door." He got up and disappeared around the house-muttering to himself.

"We've been sittin' here for two days. I can't believe he locked the door." We quietly watched the clouds go by for a spell. The dog farted a smoke ring. Eventually Roscoe came back and sat down

next to Mary-Louis.

"I take it the back door was locked," I asked.

"No, it was open. Who can keep track of all these doors!"

"So, you went in?"

"What fer? No, I locked the door. Don't want robbers to get in." Then he looked at me sideways. "What if they figure out this house has a back door like I did."

"Now no one can get in," I replied.

Roscoe gave me a dirty look. "That's what locks are fer! God, how dense can you get?"

I decided maybe giving out advice right now was a bad idea. But I had to ask ...

"So, you don't have a spare key hidden somewhere?"

"Yup," Said Mary-Louis. "We keep it under a rock by the door." Now, I should have kept my mouth shut, but I had to know.

"So why don't you use that key to get in?"

"Roscoe wants to use the key pad, but he can't remember the code."

Roscoe chimed in ...

"I know the code!" he said in a controlled rage. Then he yelled, "It's your birthday! 61-02-01!"

Mary-Louis yelled back, "That's your birthday! Mine is 62-03-03!"

They both calmed down and looked at each other for a moment. Then Roscoe got up and unlocked the front door.

"Thank God," said Mary-Louis. "Now I can close all the windows in the house. They're all wide open and it looks like rain." She got up, slid open the balcony door. "I need to go find a bathroom." Then she went inside.

Mary-Louis was right. It started to rain. So, there I was, sitting on their front step thinking about this whole stupid situation and in the end, I just had to laugh.

It's a good practice to look out for your neighbors. If there's something I learned from this situation, it's that you can help the people around you even if they don't appreciate it and that's good. After this interruption Roscoe and Mary-Louis got to go on with their lives.

At that point I would have gone home, but I'd locked my keys in the truck.

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2-Minute Lift - Building Our Future & The River Bank Exchange

By Kathy Sotak

For years, I've gone to the river bank to put love in the water. Five years ago, a woman would go to the river bank to get love.

Years later I met a new friend. She shared her healing journey, which included how she would go to the river — my same spot — to get love.

She's been cancer-free for five years.

For years, I've watched a petite, gray-haired woman working at our organic food store. I never talked to her, but was touched by her smile and grace. Years later in her retirement, I met her at a Reiki exchange class. I learned that she sent Reiki energy — a loving, healing energy — to everyone who walked into the store.

I was the recipient of her love, along with thousands of others. She

was doing her work with a capital W.

Perhaps why they call it a river bank. Only instead of exchanging money, we are exchanging energy.

Throughout life we are always in an exchange, both giving and receiving. What kind of energy are we giving out today? On those days we need to receive; don't worry, help is nearby.

The help may be invisible, but close your eyes and feel the deposit.

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