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Rural Memories
THE SILENT STARS

by Rob Siedenburg

Many of my best childhood memories are of time spent outdoors. We cared for animals, milked cows, gathered eggs, and raised rabbits and pigeons. The animals, of course, lived outside or in buildings separate from our house.

One Christmas Eve remains especially vivid. It was bitterly cold. Dad and I went out to feed the cows, unrolling small round bales over the snow. There was no moon, but the sky was crystal clear, filled with stars from the Milky Way. The quick-frozen atmosphere had caused the snow to sparkle like millions of jewels. The stars shone brightly, their light reflected from the snow. It was eerie: unlike sunshine or moonlight, the starlight cast no shadows.

We children were eager to sled down a steep hill south of the barn. Mom and Grandma had told us to be on time for Christmas Eve supper, which included fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and other favorites. Dad had promised to go sledding with us—a real treat: though we often worked together, we seldom played together.

I was already bundled up from helping with the hay. My siblings soon tumbled out of the house into the subzero night, pulling sleds across the pasture. Often, several of us piled onto one sled, one on top of another. With the extra weight, we really flew downhill. Then we climbed back up the hill and did it all again. I doubt I'd have the energy for that today!

We entered the house through the basement, sweeping each other free of snow and hanging coats downstairs to dry. Upstairs, bubble lights glowed on the living-room tree. Excitement built. After supper, we sang "Silent Night." Dad read the Christmas story from Luke 2 and prayed, thanking the Lord for our many blessings.

Then the youngest literate child passed out gifts, one by one, until everyone had one. We opened them in turn, repeating the ritual until all the presents were unwrapped. The wrapping paper was carefully folded and saved for the following year. It's still hard for me not to carefully fold and put away used wrapping paper.

Afterward, Dad wanted to open the holding pen in the barn so the cattle could go inside if they wanted to. The temperature had fallen to 44 degrees below zero and was still dropping. We called, and the cattle came eagerly into the barn to bed down for the night. Within minutes, the barn's interior was coated in something like hoarfrost. Oak beams and even old spiderwebs turned a beautiful white from the breath of the cattle.

Dad and I walked out to the field where we had fed the cows, checking that no young calves had lain down in the cold. All were safely inside. The air was perfectly still. We stood for a few minutes beneath the starry host, noticing how far the stars had seemed to move since we'd rolled out the hay earlier that evening. For a long time, we said nothing, content to enjoy the stillness and the cold, as farmers will.

On the walk back to the house, Dad quoted these simple words from "O Little Town of Bethlehem": "The silent stars go by."

We were tired, but happy. The livestock were sheltered from the worst of the weather, we had enjoyed our family's love and generosity—and the food prepared for us had been scrumptious. Dad's words seemed fitting—just right. As we walked back to the house, we basked quietly in our love and fellowship, beneath those silent stars. ◆

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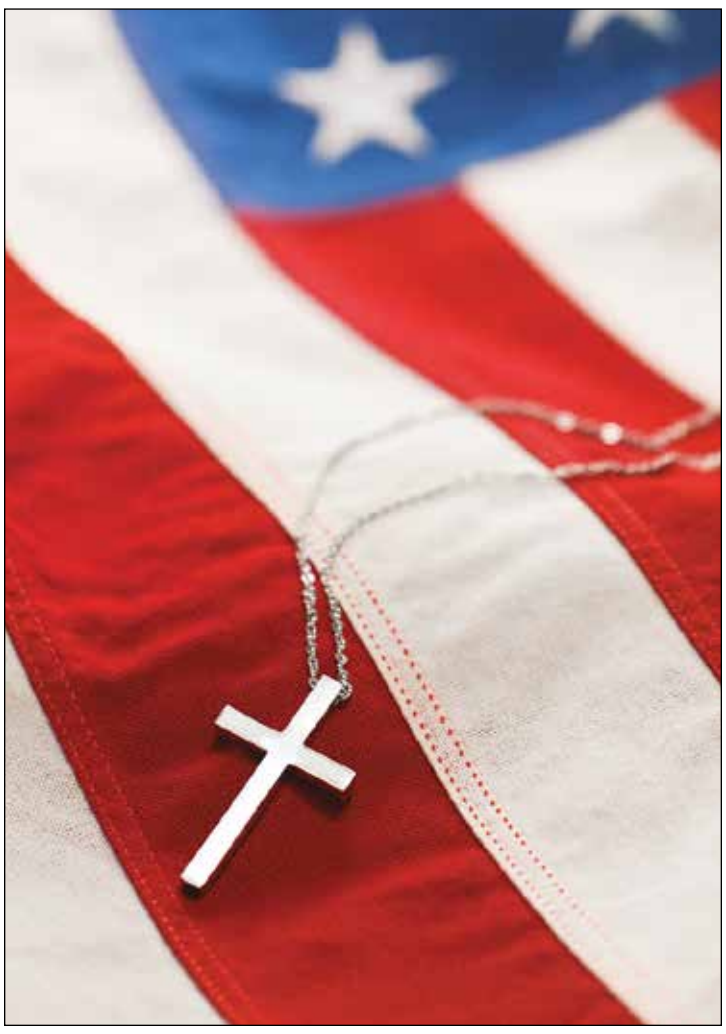
PEOPLE & PLACES

Mark & Friends

Rethinking How We Pray for Our Nation

Have you ever found yourself pointing a finger at elected officials or the state of our nation, wishing for immediate change from the top down? Human nature often tempts us to look outward, placing the blame for cultural or political darkness on others. Yet Scripture reminds us that genuine spiritual renewal always begins within our own hearts.

Scan to listen



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On a recent broadcast of *Mark & Friends*, host Donna Leland welcomed guest Delbra Pratt—a leader with the Illinois Prayer Caucus Network and co–state director of the Illinois Nehemiah Alliance. Together, they reflected on the core message of a 52-day prayer initiative inspired by the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Just as Nehemiah rallied the people to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem, this movement calls believers to first rebuild the walls around their personal lives before praying for their families, churches, communities, and nation.

Delbra shared how easy it can be to criticize public servants, but recalled a pivotal lesson taught to her years ago: elected leaders and their staff are human beings who need encouragement, compassion, and the love of Christ, just as with anyone else. Rather than expecting nonbelievers or government to replace the role of God, Christians are invited to bring light and sincere prayer into public spaces.

Through her ministry with the Illinois Prayer Caucus Network, Delbra sends short weekly Scripture passages and words of encouragement to Illinois legislators and their staff during legislative sessions. In those communications, she offers to pray for their personal needs. The response has been remarkable—legislators and staff frequently submit confidential prayer requests regarding family grief, health concerns, and marital struggles, which are then passed anonymously to a network of dedicated prayer partners.

Rooted in 1 Timothy 2:1–4, which urges us to offer supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanks for all who are in authority so that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, the conversation highlighted a practical blueprint for interceding with humility and grace.

Examine Your Own Heart First. Shift the focus from external blame to personal repentance. Ask God to reveal attitudes or actions in your life that need alignment with his truth before asking him to change others or your community.

Pray Across Differences. Offer respectful, nonpartisan prayer for elected officials and their staff, regardless of whether you agree with their policies. Recognize that public servants are people with real personal burdens who need wisdom, integrity, and God's love.

Offer Encouragement and Respect Confidentiality. Extend short, sincere words of support without political argument, handling any confidential prayer requests with strict discretion and faithful follow-through.

"God doesn't want us pointing the finger," Delbra noted during the broadcast. "His desire is that we begin by looking at our own hearts." ◆

For the full conversation and to explore a complete archive of broadcasts, visit www.greatnewsradio.org.

"Look, Daddy. Teacher says, every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings."

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by Joseph Landry





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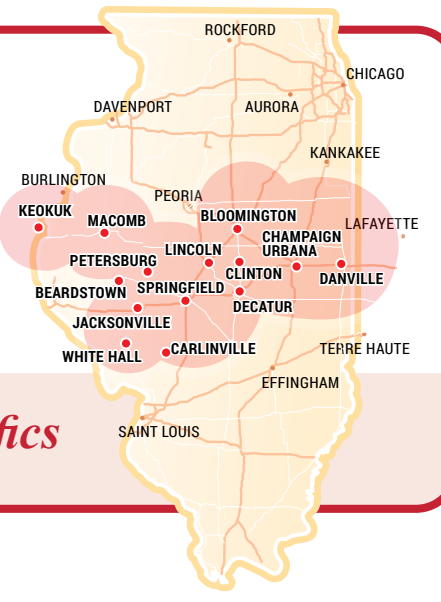

This December, be listening for details & specifics

www.GreatNewsRadio.org

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LIFESTYLES

thoughts to ponder

by Tim Barber

What would you say if someone asked, "What was your favorite children's song that you used to sing in church?" "This Little Light of Mine" comes to mind. And "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" is another all-time favorite. "The B-I-B-L-E" was sung quite a bit, too.

There is one kid's song that's even more familiar and just as loved: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." This short little verse was first published in the novel *Say and Seal*, written in 1860 by sisters Anna Bartlett Warner and Susan Warner. As the story goes, it was sung by a Sunday school teacher to a dying child, Johnny Fax. The four-line verse was put to music in 1861, when the two additional lines of the chorus were penned by composer William Bradbury. Perhaps you can sing along:

Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so,
Little ones to him belong,
They are weak, but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

Back in 1962, while in America, Swiss theologian Karl Barth was asked whether he could summarize his theological work in one sentence. Barth's response? "Yes, I can. In the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

Personally, I think it qualifies as a terrific Christmas carol. We are all loved! ◆

Copyright © Tim Barber. Tim is a retired pastor in the Champaign-Urbana area: tbarber@illinois.edu.



On December 3, Europa Clipper, which launched from Kennedy Space Center in October 2024, will pass close to Earth for a gravitational assist, one of several boosts on its long, winding journey to Jupiter. It is unclear whether Europa Clipper will be visible with the naked eye. The spacecraft will also swing around the Sun as part of its journey.

On December 4 through 20, the Geminid Meteor Shower will release up to 120 meteors per hour. These showers will peak on December 14. Geminid meteors tend to be slower than those of other showers and can thus appear to last a long time in our atmosphere. Meteors will appear to originate from the constellation Gemini but can show up throughout the sky.

On December 21, the winter solstice (North Hemisphere) occurs at 2:50 p.m. local time. This comprises the longest night, bookended by the two shortest days, of the entire year.

The year 2026 has only one supermoon, and it should be spectacular. The moon's closest approach to us (at perigee) synchronizes with a full moon to permit a supermoon, which will look about 14% bigger and 30% brighter than the moon does when farthest away from the earth (at apogee). This supermoon (Native Americans called it "the Cold Moon") will rise on December 23. ◆

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SHORTER DAYS
NOT SHORTER CONNECTIONS

by Cynthia Germain



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There comes a point each fall when you look up from whatever you're doing and realize it's already getting dark. It seems like just a couple weeks ago that we could sit outside well into the evening.

Fall gives us plenty to enjoy. But between admiring the leaves and figuring out where we put our warmer jackets, we begin making the familiar preparations. We put the garden to bed, bring things in from the porch, and think about what needs to be done before winter.

As we prepare our homes for the colder months, it's also a good time to think about how we'll stay connected to each other.

Some of our everyday contact happens without much planning. We stop to talk with a neighbor working in the yard. We run into someone at an outdoor event. As our routines move indoors, those opportunities change.

Staying connected can take a little intention. Fortunately, it doesn't have to take an elaborate plan. Here are some ideas:

Make the invitation specific. "We should get together sometime" is something we often say, with every intention of following through. Then life happens, and *sometime* never quite arrives. Try suggesting a day and an activity: "Would you like to have coffee Tuesday morning?" or "I'm going to the library Thursday. Would you like to come along?" A simple plan gives both people a place to start.

Create something you can count on. A Sunday afternoon phone call. Breakfast together once a month. A weekly walk while the weather allows. Small traditions give us something to look forward to and save us from having to start the planning process all over again. They also help us keep in touch when our schedules get busy.

Let getting together be easy. You can invite someone over before the house is perfectly clean. You can serve coffee without baking anything to go with it. A bowl of Campbell's soup, a kitchen table, and time to talk can make a very good afternoon. Sometimes we put enough expectations around having company that we talk ourselves out of it altogether.

Reach out when someone comes to mind. When you see something that reminds you of a friend, let that friend know. Text that picture. Write that short note. Make that call—even if you have only a few minutes. We don't always know what kind of day someone is having, and our small gesture can be a welcome part of it.

Make it easier to say *yes*. An evening gathering might be difficult for someone who no longer enjoys driving after dark. A noisy restaurant might make conversation challenging. Offering a ride, choosing a quieter place, or meeting earlier can help. It's worth asking, "What would work best for you?" rather than assuming a declined invitation means someone isn't interested.

Be willing to make the first move. This might be the hardest one. If we're wishing someone would invite us, it can feel uncomfortable to reach out ourselves. But another person might be having exactly the same thought. Suggest a walk in town, ask someone to lunch, or attend something you've been curious about.

We all have seasons when reaching out comes easily, and other times when we appreciate someone reaching toward us. Those roles change with circumstances, energy, and whatever else life has handed us.

As the days grow shorter, let's leave a little room in our routines for each other. Perhaps while we're making that fall list of raking the leaves, finding the gloves, and putting away the flowerpots, we can add one more thing: Call someone you've been meaning to call. You might both be glad you did. ◆

Cynthia Germain has an MBA and is an expert in the field of aging, nonprofit community-based organizations, and meaningful services.

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PEOPLE & PLACES

Getting Some Illinois Kicks on Rt. 66

by Leslie A. Woodrum

This year marks the 100-year anniversary of "The Mother Road"—Route 66. In Illinois, there are so many sites to see, one could spend days exploring the sites and history along Route 66. I have traveled to both Missouri and the Chicago area recently, so I decided to explore Illinois's Mother Road on these trips.

Route 66 begins at the intersection of Adams and Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago. I would recommend trying to see the sign on foot. One-way streets and lack of parking make this location difficult. Although this is the original starting location, for the one-hundredth anniversary, Chicago has also erected a start sign at Navy Pier.

Every town along the route has a Route 66 site to visit. Many sites are right on the road, but some are off. There are vintage gas stations, antique malls, museums, and restaurants in every town. Must-see stops should include the American Museum of Giants in Atlanta, the Cozy Dog restaurant in Springfield, and the Pink Elephant Antiques Mall in Staunton. I recently saw that the UFO at the Pink Elephant has taken off and has landed in the Museum of Giants.





Left: Historic starting point of Route 66, corner of Michigan Avenue and Adams Street, Chicago **Right:** Rocket Man, Wilmington, IL

Finding the right path when travelling on Route 66 can be both fun and at times rather frustrating. There are at least three different versions of Route 66 that traverse Illinois. Many sections of the road are gone, and you will be required to drive on I-55 or Illinois 53. There are also miles of old road sections that parallel the route. Many of these road sections are set up as parks and bike paths.

Some sites require you to venture off the Mother Road. One of these locations is the Oughton Estate Windmill in Dwight, IL. The estate features the town's public library, a mansion that is showing its age, and an incredible windmill.

A bucket list site I had to photograph was the Old Joliet Prison. I am the biggest fan of the *Blues Brothers* movie, so I had to find it. Be advised: The Old Joliet Prison is *not* on Route 66. I first found the Stateville Prison (by mistake) during a recent trip. I pulled into the parking lot and started taking photos. I quickly found that I was not welcome to take photos. I was educated to the fact that The Old Joliet Prison is on another road about six blocks to the east.

Route 66 finishes its journey through Illinois at the "Old Chain of Rocks Bridge" over the Mississippi River. The bridge is over a mile long. Today it's limited to foot traffic. The distinctive feature of this bridge is that it has a 30° bend about halfway across the Mississippi River.

Finding this bridge was a real problem this fall because of road construction. On the Illinois side, Route 66 to the bridge was closed because of construction. I wanted to find the world's largest Catsup Bottle in Collinsville, but road construction made that impossible. I-270, which runs parallel to the Chain bridge, was also under construction. We had to travel on some confusing side roads to find the bridge.

I have plans to tour the entire road. So far, I have traveled through Missouri and Illinois. Gas prices have limited my travel plans. On your next road trip, consider getting some kicks on Route 66. ◆

Les Woodrum has been a photographer for 50 years. He has worked as an educator, a scientific photographer, a corporate photographer, a commercial photographer, and a photo lab manager. He offers classes each semester at Danville Area Community College. Contact him at lesw@woodrum-media.com.

Left: The Old Chain Bridge over the Mississippi River **Right, Top:** The American Museum of Giants, Atlanta, IL **Right, Bottom:** The UFO at the Pink Elephant Antiques Mall







LIFESTYLES

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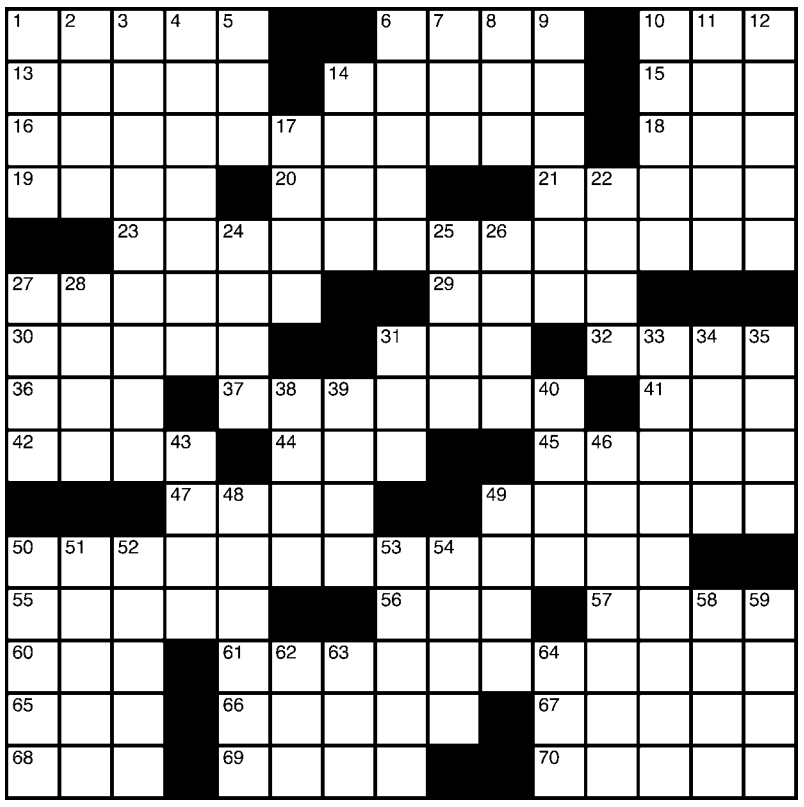

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Across

1 Wile E. Coyote's vantage points
6 Cantilever, sometimes
10 Brooding type?
13 Very angry
14 42-Across lane
15 Store in a wine barrel
16 Popular comic strip at a deli?
18 "The Commitments" loc.
19 Slushy treat
20 Italian three
21 Like hardened mud on tires
23 Popular comic strip on an ocean liner?
27 "That's for sure!"
29 Treaty partner
30 Some karaoke performances
31 NCR device
32 Mint and Snapchat
36 Portuguese feminine pronoun
37 Popular comic strip at a pub?
41 Garnish on uramaki sushi
42 No-frills supermarket chain
44 Lacuna
45 Figure of speech
47 "Gangnam Style" style
49 Future ENT's course
50 Popular comic strip at the White House?
55 Collection
56 Work on an order?
57 Point in the right direction?
60 Grumpy companion
61 Popular comic strip at a talk show?
65 Bird that can run faster than Usain Bolt
66 Day divisions
67 Finish off
68 Gentle touch
69 Brand that makes Froot Loops waffles
70 Sauce that originated in Genoa

Down

1 Skirt length
2 "True Blood" vampire Northman
3 Potential new client
4 If nothing else
5 Bi Visibility Day mo.
6 Went by tandem
7 Night school subj.
8 Drink made from hops
9 Drink made from agave
10 17-syllable poem
11 Bird that stands on cattle
12 Water and light, for plants
14 McMansion plot
17 Teensy
22 Actress Taylor-Joy
24 Anchor's position in a relay
25 Camino de Santiago element
26 Red Muppet
27 Notion
28 Quiet moment
31 African viper
33 Teens in tuxedos
34 Leader of the Holy See
35 Finch food
38 Open-mouthed
39 Daddy
40 To be, in Biarritz
43 Store with Sm√•land play areas
46 Free
48 Id, ego, and superego, collectively
49 Feel sympathy for
50 Tired of it all
51 Diffuser output
52 Nickname for Ernie Banks
53 Like some thrift store finds
54 Saturated __
58 Not open
59 Keyboard goof
62 Fail to share
63 Mo. before 5-Down
64 Sippy __

See Answers on A-15.

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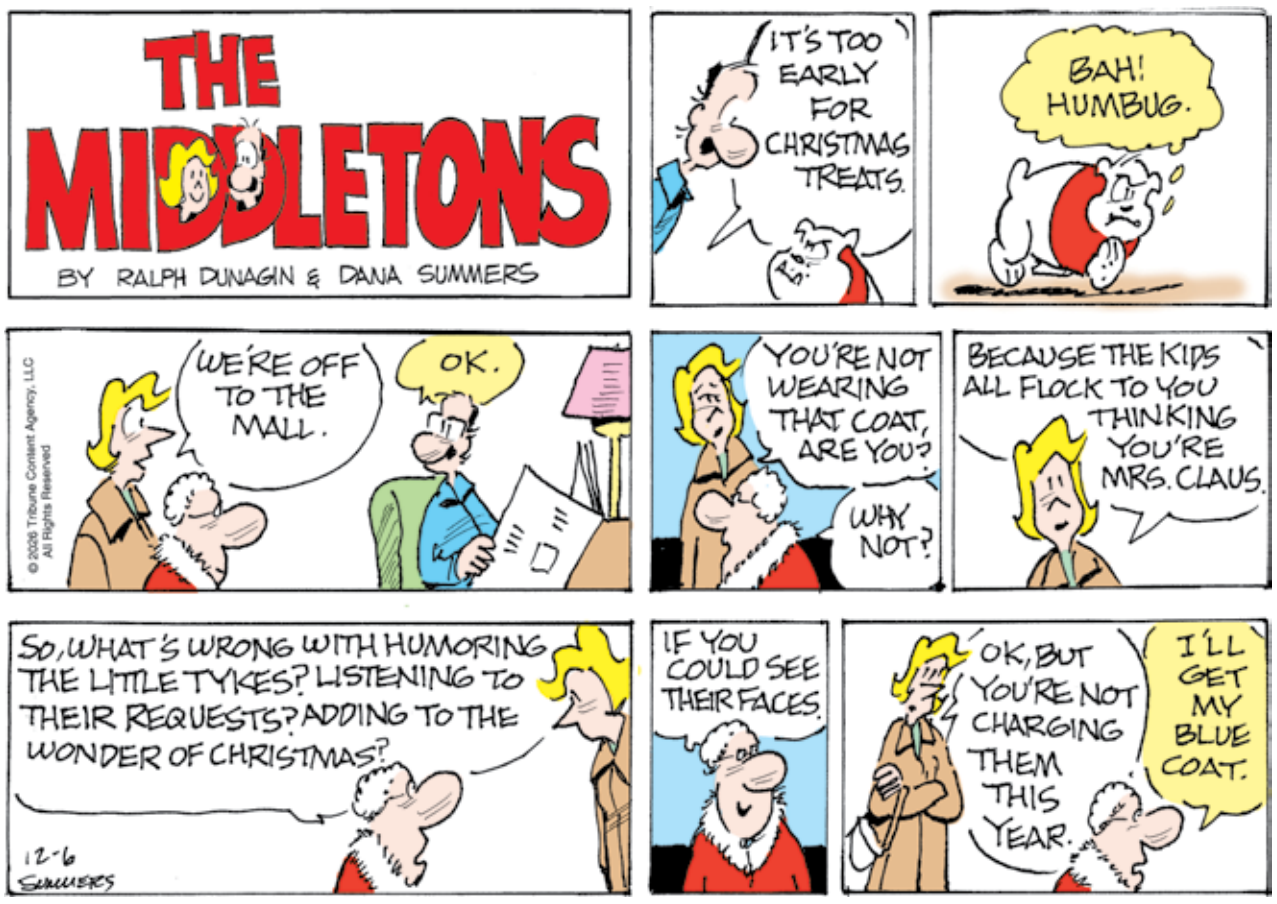
"Let's come to a compromise, Sims. If you stop asking me for a raise, I won't give you one."



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E1 U1 U1 L1 N1 F4 S1		RACK 2
A1 O1 D2 L1 B3 D2 L1	3rd Letter Triple	RACK 3
O1 O1 U1 D2 T1 L1 H4		RACK 4

PAR SCORE 145-155
BEST SCORE 211

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TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

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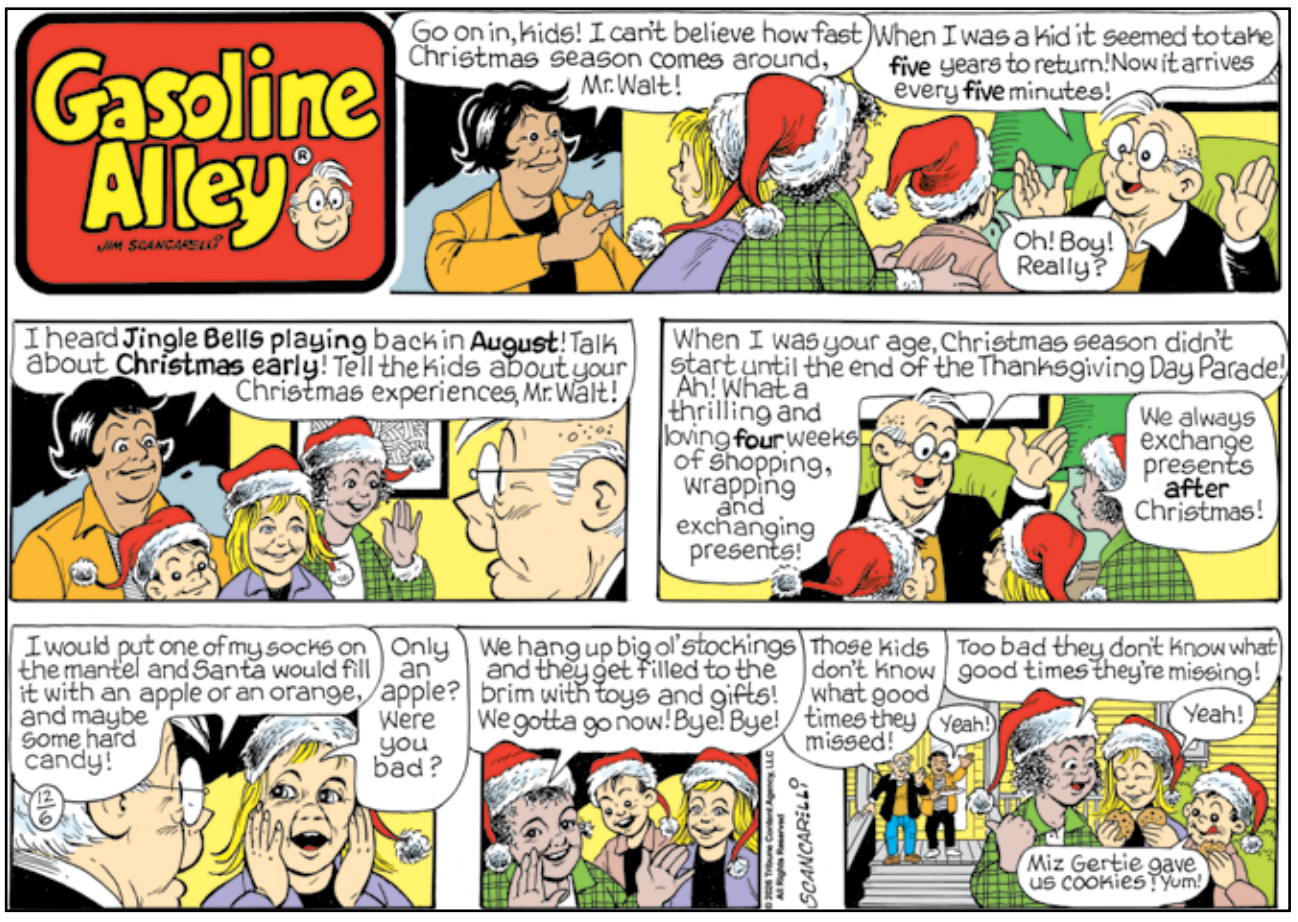
See Answers on A-15.



LIFESTYLES

Poetry Corner

"O Holy Night"

by Esther Aardsma

In late 1847, a Catholic priest of the small French town Roquemaure asked a wine merchant known for his poetry, Placide Cappeau, to write a poem for a Christmas song. In response, Cappeau penned the poem he called "Minuit, chrétiens" ("Midnight, Christians") on December 3 during a stagecoach journey.

Cappeau's acquaintance, Adolphe Charles Adam, an opera composer perhaps best known for composing the *Giselle* ballet, set the poem to music, and the song was called "Cantique de Noël" ("Hymn of Christmas"). This song was performed for the first time a few weeks later for the Christmas Midnight Mass in Roquemaure. After its introduction, "Cantique de Noël" became quickly popular among the French people.

The year 1848 brought France a violent revolution against the monarchy, which resulted in the abdication of the king and the founding of France's Second Republic. In the wake of the revolution, French church leaders were uneasy with "Cantique" 's militant tone and theology representing God as wrathful. After Cappeau left the church to join a socialistic movement, and Adam was falsely rumored to be a Jew merely seeking profit, Catholic church leaders banned the song from their church services and hymnals.

But the French people kept singing it.

Not quite ten years later, American writer and abolitionist John Sullivan Dwight discovered "Cantique de Noël" and identified strongly with its third verse, which addresses freedom from slavery. Dwight adapted the song to English and published this version in his periodical *Dwight's Journal of Music*, one of the most respected and influential publications of its type at the time.

Dwight altered "Cantique" 's text, rendering his version less of a translation and more of an adaptation. For instance, "Cantique de Noël" 's opening line roughly translates to: "Midnight, Christians! It is the solemn hour when the Man-God descended unto us to erase the original stain and to stop the wrath of his Father."

Dwight's version began: "O holy night, the stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth." Another example of his adaptation is that, in the refrain, Dwight replaced "Await your deliverance . . . Here is the Redeemer" with "O hear the angel voices . . . O night divine." This version, which Dwight titled "O Holy Night," became widely popular in America, especially in the northern states during the Civil War. Yet despite the increasing popularity of the song worldwide, Catholics still banned it in France for almost 20 more years.

Legend has it that on Christmas Eve in 1870, during the Franco-Prussian war between France and Germany, a French soldier suddenly climbed out of his trench and stood on the open battlefield to sing "Cantique de Noël". A German soldier, in response, also stepped into the open and sang Martin Luther's "Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her" ("From Heaven Above to Earth I Come").

The legend continues that this resulted in twenty-four hours of truce between the two forces, allowing them to celebrate Christmas. Perhaps this meaningful interchange played a part in the French Catholics accepting "Cantique de Noël" into Mass services again.

Although the following incident was not formally documented, it is widely believed that "O Holy Night" played a part in yet another breakthrough. Reginald Fessenden, a university professor, electrical engineer, and inventor who had worked with Thomas Edison, created a new technology that could broadcast voice and other sound over airwaves, which, until that point, had been used solely for telegraph codes. On Christmas Eve in 1906, it is said that Fessenden transmitted the first successful radio entertainment program using his alternator-transmitter. He broadcasted a biblical passage and several Christmas songs, including a performance of "O Holy Night" on his violin—possibly the first song ever played on the radio.

Today, "O Holy Night" is widely popular worldwide. It is broadcast on the radio for Christmastime every year, recorded by many popular artists, and appreciated in many church services. The song is a great reminder that the infant Jesus was born, not just to give us a holiday to celebrate, but for a purpose—to relieve people's slavery from sin. "His power and glory evermore proclaim!" ◆

Copyright © Esther Aardsma. *This creative mom of five remarkable children is a very busy lady, but she unstintingly gives her time and expertise to help us at the PrimeLife Times. We are blessed that she also contributes articles to these pages.*

PrimeLife Poets

Truth Came Down at Christmas

by Rob Siedenburg

Truth came down at Christmas—
The Truth, the Life, the Way.
Born in a lowly livestock shed,
In a manger meant for hay.

Born in a time of night and cold,
Within that simple place,
Came Jesus Christ, the virgin-born,
Full of truth and grace.

No earthly royalty to serve,
No palace guards arrayed;
Just Mary and Joseph with him there
Beside the bed they'd made.

Urgent the need, but scarce the room
In Bethlehem that night—
No booking at a five-star inn.
(Though one star shone quite bright!)

Yet never palace on this earth
Such holy treasure kept,
Though heralds in their finery
Announced, while most men slept.

Humble beginnings, dust, and dirt
Defined that quiet space;
A livestock dwelling, rough and mean,
With no fine silk or lace.

But hosts of angels soon appeared
Outside the city wall,
Yet before the chorus joined the song,
One angel spoke for all:

"Great news!" he cried, "For you is born
A Savior on this night!"
And what a Savior he would be
To vouchsafe us this right!

For all who will receive him now
Become the sons of God:
Redeemed from sin, they walk in grace
On this same Earth he trod.

But why should humble shepherd men
Be first to hear the word?
Because he is a Shepherd, too,
Whose saving voice is heard.

At Christmastime, a little boy
Within that manger lay—
The hope of all who walk this earth,
And in whose name we pray. ◆

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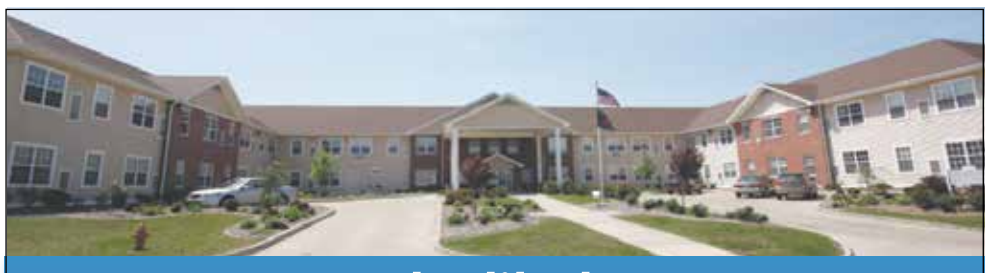

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PEOPLE & PLACES

Athens in Winter

by Ed Lewis

Standing atop the great, ruddy rock of Mars Hill, you are transported to the very spot where the Apostle Paul spoke nearly 2,000 years ago. All around you, the sweeping vista of Athens unfolds, while the gleaming Parthenon floats on its rise nearby, bathed in the warm afternoon sun.

It is breathtaking to stand in a place so deeply rooted in history. A winter trip to Athens lets you gaze across the airy Athenian plain from both Mars Hill and the soaring peak of Lycabettus Hill. Even in January, visitors can enjoy sunny, mild walks through the parks surrounding the Acropolis—and dine outdoors. These are just a few of the unforgettable experiences awaiting you in Athens during the quieter months.

Now the capital of modern Greece, Athens was once the leading city-state of the ancient world. Remarkably, many parts of the beautiful structures built 2,400 years ago still survive. Athens remains one of the world's unique cities, where a short walk from a bustling modern downtown places you directly among ruins that predate the time when Christ walked this Earth.



The sweeping facade of the Roman Odeon Theater on the southwest side of Acropolis Hill. It was built in 161 AD and survived intact. It is about a 5-minute walk from the Acropolis. You can see the amazing clear deep blue skies of Greece in winter!

Exploring the Historic Core

Nearly everything you will want to experience during your few days in Athens is concentrated downtown around the Acropolis. Syntagma Square features excellent museums and grand government buildings, and the surrounding area is packed with ancient ruins and historic sites.

The Parthenon, sitting majestically atop the Acropolis, is the most famous ruin in Greece. Completed in 438 B.C., this massive temple with towering columns shines prominently over the city, especially when illuminated at night. It anchors a fortress complex on a flat-topped hill, which rises like a great ship over central Athens.

Where to Stay

To make the most of your cultural experience, consider booking a hotel in the Monastiraki neighborhood. Staying here provides spectacular views of the Acropolis right from your window or rooftop terrace, along with providing easy access to ancient sites and museums. From Monastiraki, you can walk to the top of the Acropolis in about thirty minutes, with shops, cafes, and other epic ruins just steps away along the path.

Walking in the Footsteps of History

The Acropolis is the city's premier attraction. To beat the crowds, head out early in the morning. Start at the Agora Museum at the base of the hill to ground yourself in the local history.

From there, take a short walk past the Monastiraki Metro Station to Mars Hill. Acts Chapter 17 (in the Bible) records the famous sermon Paul gave here about the gospel and creation. Climbing to the top is free and open to everyone, offering incredible panoramic views—just tread carefully, as the ancient rock steps can be slippery.

Note that you will need a prebooked, timed-entry ticket to enter the main Acropolis archaeological site. Once inside, you can continue your journey through time by visiting the Roman Odeon, a striking amphitheater built in 161 A.D.

Winter Dining and Festivities

Greek cuisine is celebrated for being natural, fresh, and healthy. Even in the winter, afternoons are often warm enough to sit outside in short sleeves, enjoying a delicious meal in the sunlight against the ancient backdrop.

Athens takes on a tranquil, dreamy character during the cooler months. The season brings the vibrant energy of winter festivals, including Christmas, New Year's Eve, and the Feast of Saint Basil on New Year's Day. Visitors can sample traditional Christmas cakes and pastries spiced with local herbs. With January highs averaging a mild 13ºC (55ºF) and low average rainfall, winter is the perfect time to experience an authentic, uncrowded Athens. ◆

Copyright © Edward Lewis. Athens ranks ninth in Time Out's *"2026 World's Best Cities for Food."*

Laughing Matters

Q: Which is the least mannerly reindeer?

A: Rude-olf.

Q: What does a reindeer say before telling you a really funny joke?

A: This one will really sleigh you!

Q: What is an elf's favorite type of music?

A: Wrap music.

Q: What causes depression among Santa's helpers?

A: Low elf-esteem.

Q: Why was the antique ornament addicted to Christmas?

A: He had been hooked on Christmas trees his whole life.

Q: Why didn't Santa have to pay anything for his sleigh?

A: It was on the house.

SUDOKU

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JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

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LUFTA

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NODENT

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Ans. here:

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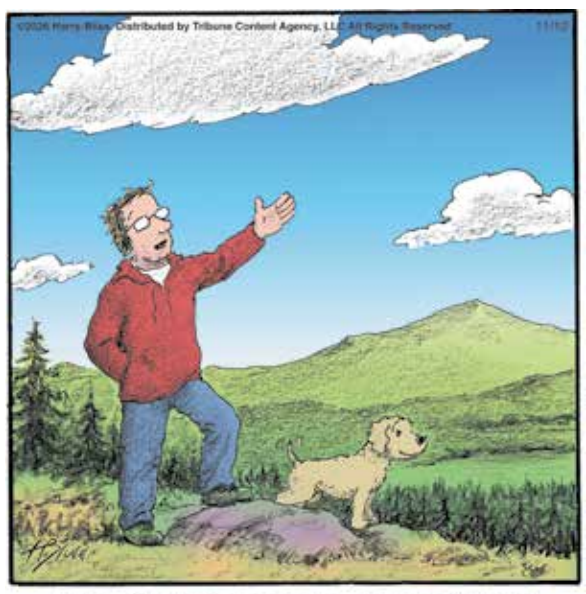
BLISS



"This, Penny, is where I come to get away from people like me."

PEOPLE & PLACES

"Muskrat Love," by Captain and Tennille

by Randal C. Hill



The muskrat, a semi-aquatic rodent, is believed by some to have been scampering around on the earth for about 4 million years. Who would have ever thought this little creature would become the subject of a million-selling single—or blamed for the reason that America's Secretary of State felt uncomfortable hearing about how these little mammals continue their survival?

Toni Tennille and her husband and partner, keyboardist Darryl Dragon (nicknamed the Captain by the Beach Boys, as Dragon always wore a yachting cap during their 1970s tours) had often performed "Muskrat Love" during their pre-stardom days at the Smokehouse, a Los Angeles night spot. When asked later about the ditty, Toni recalled, "People went nuts over it!"

Before A & M Records made them celebrities, Captain and Tennille first heard "Muskrat Love" as a little-known creation from Texas artist Willis Alan Ramsey. Toni loved the track at first hearing and enthused to Darryl, "This song is hysterical! Why don't we add it to our club act?" Sure enough, "Muskrat Love" quickly became a Smokehouse favorite before stardom came calling for Tennille and Dragon.

July 1976 saw Americans joyously celebrating two hundred years of independence, and life was good. All was going well with Captain and Tennille, too. "Muskrat Love" was in the Top Five nationwide, and the twosome had been invited to perform at the White House. (Toni later quipped, "Smokehouse. White House. What's the difference?")

Before their performance, she discussed their playlist with her partner: "I said to Darryl, 'We really should do "Muskrat Love."'" It was a huge hit, and I thought everyone would get a kick out of it."

The White House event was a July 7 state dinner that brought the performers to the East Room. To the delight of fans Gerald and Betty Ford, Captain and Tennille performed their hits—including "Muskrat Love"—before front-row dignitaries that included Queen Elizabeth II, who had been invited to take part in the celebration of America's bicentennial, and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Wait a minute. Would some folks there that night find the "Muskrat Love" lyrics controversial? Tennille had waved aside the idea as an absurdity. "Only a person with a dirty mind would see something wrong," she chortled. "It's a gentle, Disneyesque type of song."

He's ticklin' her fancy, rubbin' her toes
Muzzle to muzzle now, anything goes
As they wriggle, Sue starts to giggle

Everybody enjoyed the evening's performance. Well, almost everybody. Dr. Kissinger made it obvious that "Muskrat Love" wasn't his cup of tea. As the song unfolded, Toni became aware that the statesman was feeling more than a little distressed with what he was hearing; his body language spoke volumes as he sat glowering, his arms folded tightly across his chest. Afterward, he failed to offer applause or thanks and became the first audience member to make an exit—a hasty one at that.

Later, whenever Toni Tennille performed "Muskrat Love," she never failed to dedicate it to Dr. Kissinger. ◆

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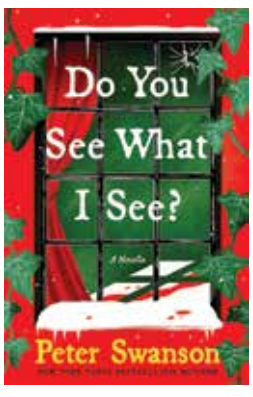
Book Reviews

Do You See What I See? by Peter Swanson

reviewed by Susan McKinney



Peter Swanson has released a mystery novella for Christmas. In the story, author Nicholas Child had a bestselling mystery six years ago. His second book was not as popular, and now his publisher has dropped him. His agent offers him a deal: go to the house of Marco Tavares, a well-known author, and help him salvage his current novel and get it published.

He accepts because the offer is $25,000 now and $25,000 when the book is published. Nicholas needs the money and is curious about Marco and his family. Nicholas doesn't have a family: he's a foster child who never really found a place to belong. He doesn't like talking; he would rather write what he needs to say.

When Nicholas arrives at the house on the cape, it's like the beginning of a Christmas murder mystery (which it is). Every single person invited to the house has a reason to kill Marco, including Nicholas. You'll find out that Nicholas and Marco had together done a residency for would-be authors ten years earlier. There was a third person, Johanna Abt. Nicholas had developed a severe crush on her and couldn't find the courage to talk to her about it. The last night they were at the retreat, Marco seduced Johanna and made sure Nicholas saw everything.

The interesting turn is what happens after the murder that occurs. The detective tells Nicholas to write it like a story and tell her everything. The rest of the novella is Nicholas's three versions of the same night. It's through those three versions that we learn more of Nicholas's life and how the story ends.

I like Mr. Swanson's writing style. He leaves the answer to the very last page—and no matter who you think it is, it will be someone else. ◆

Susan McKinney, Librarian at St. Joseph Township-Swearingen Memorial Library, earned her Master's of Library Science at the University of Illinois. An avid reader, Susan enjoys mystery, suspense, fantasy, and action novels.

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LIFESTYLES

Christmas Around the World

by Rob Siedenburg

Germany. Like Americans, Germans celebrate Christmas on the twenty-fifth. Yet, just as important as the first day, December 26 is full of traditions.. Festive outdoor markets and local town festivals are a holiday staple, typically featuring a "Christ Child" traditionally portrayed by a local young girl. (Never mind: we feature female angels.)

The Philippines. The holiday season kicks off as early as September with carols playing in stores and stretches well into January. Alongside standard traditions, Filipinos display the *parol*—a bamboo pole or frame supporting a lighted star lantern. Crafted from illuminated bamboo strips, colored Japanese paper, or cellophane, the lantern represents the star that guided the Wise Men and stands as the country's most popular holiday decoration.

Lithuania. In Lithuania, Christmas Eve (*Kūčios*) is more important than Christmas Day. *Kūčios* is also the name of the grand, meat-free feast families share that evening to mark the end of Advent.

Preparation for the meal is deeply symbolic. Homes are thoroughly cleaned, bedding is changed, and everyone bathes and dresses in clean clothes to protect against evil or disease. Even working men and farmers clean their tools and barnyards.

Before eating, straw is spread across the table and covered with a white tablecloth to represent the manger. A popular superstition holds that pulling a long straw from under the cloth predicts a long life, while a thick straw promises wealth. The meal begins when the first star appears in the night sky. Wafers featuring manger scenes are shared alongside Christmas greetings, and an apple is often sliced and distributed to commemorate the Garden of Eden.

The traditional feast features 12 distinct dishes—one for each disciple—free of meat, and often without milk or eggs. Traditional fare includes herring, *kūčiukai* (sweet pastries in poppy milk), *kisielius* (a cranberry drink), beet soup with mushroom dumplings, and wheat porridge with honey.

Trinidad and Tobago. Christmas is highly social in Trinidad and Tobago, defined by lively parties and a tradition where children and adults visit neighbors and relatives for food and drink. Radio stations blend American carols with local favorites, including *Parang*—an upbeat, Spanish-sung Venezuelan-Trinidadian hybrid music. Musicians known as *Parranderos* go house-to-house playing guitars, *cuatros*, violins, *chac-chacs* (maracas), and *toc-toc* (wooden blocks) in exchange for refreshments.

Leading up to the holiday, residents paint their houses, hang new curtains, put up lights, and often buy new furniture or appliances. Families spend Christmas Day at home enjoying a feast prepared throughout mid-December. The traditional menu features ham, turkey, homemade bread, *pastelles* (a local version of tamales), sorrel, ginger beer, and *ponche-de-creme* (a local eggnog). Homes also serve traditional black fruitcake, made with raisins and sultanas that have been presoaked in cherry wine, sherry, and rum for several months. Finally, New Year's Eve is celebrated as "Ole year's night" with vibrant fireworks. ◆



Singers performing for a Parang party

A vendor selling parol in the Phillipines







PEOPLE & PLACES

SEVENTIES FLASHBACK

The Sisterhood of Sleuths

by Randal C. Hill

"Charlie's Angels" was an ABC-TV crime drama series that showcased the adventures of three beautiful young women working at a private Los Angeles detective agency, who received assignments over a speakerphone from a never-seen Charlie Townsend.

The show was to be called "The Alley Cats" before cast member Kate Jackson noticed a picture of three angels hanging in the office of producer Aaron Spelling and suggested the name change.

Studio executives were concerned that the public wouldn't accept a trio of crimefighting ladies working on their own ("on their own" apparently meaning without male help). Those network honchos need not have worried; for the first two years of its five-year run, "Charlie's Angels" was a Top Ten triumph, enjoyed by 40 million viewers during peak times of its 115-episode tenure.

This never surprised Angel Jaclyn Smith: "I knew it was different—three women instead of three men, chasing danger instead of being rescued from danger."

Who were those original Angels in real life?



The Angels: Jaclyn Smith, Farrah Fawcett, and Kate Jackson

Farrah Fawcett (as Jill Munroe): Born in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1947, Farrah was voted "most beautiful" each of the four years she attended W. B. Ray High School. She later studied art at the University of Texas before deciding to relocate to Los Angeles and try her luck in the entertainment industry.

Jaclyn Smith (as Kelly Garrett): Born in 1945 in Houston, Texas, Jaclyn graduated from Lamar High School before studying psychology and drama at San Antonio's Trinity University. She moved to New York to work as a ballet dancer. As a child, she had taken dance lessons from Patrick Swayze's mother Patsy. Later, part-time modeling work and minor roles in TV shows and movies paid Smith's expenses.

Kate Jackson (as Sabrina Duncan): Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1948, Jackson attended the local Altamont School before becoming a college history major. In time, she moved to New York to study acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, then went to Los Angeles, where she became an NBC-TV tour guide before finding work in television films and low-budget movies.

Numerous critics grumbled that "Charlie's Angels" was merely a lightweight "jiggle show" (no explanation needed), aired primarily for the benefit of male viewers. Jaclyn disagreed. "We were not controlled by Charlie. We went into a territory that only men occupied. We got that bad guy and took him down."

Contrary to the doom-and-gloom forecast of the concerned studio bean counters, the show proved to be a runaway success. The on-screen law enforcers gathered numerous awards and landed on the cover of *Time*. Zealous fans snapped up Charlie's Angels merchandise that encompassed dolls, trading cards, lunch boxes, and hair care sets. Farrah's iconic 1976 red bathing-suit poster sold 12 million copies.

How did those ladies get along after the studio sets went dark? Were there any issues of jealousy or some other reasons for infighting? As it turned out, not a chance. "We loved one another," claims Smith. "It was a fellowship. A team. A sisterhood." ◆

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Randal writes at his Bandon, Oregon, home. He welcomes emailed questions and comments at wryterhill@msn.com.



LIFESTYLES

Thinking Outside the Box

Six Gift Ideas

by Esther Aardsma



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For most people, the year's end is gift-giving season. But gifting can be challenging, especially if you have limitations such as a small budget, low energy or physical capacity, extended geographic distance between you and the receiver of your gift, or simply a lack of ideas. How do you choose that perfect gift? Sometimes it's helpful to think outside the box (pun intended). Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Give the gift of your time. What is something you can enjoy *with* your giftee? There are plenty of low- or no-cost options, such as visiting a local museum, making a new recipe (homemade noodles? Great-Grandma's cookies? Angel food cake?), walking at a local forest preserve, or watching a movie together. Play chess or another board game together, with phones left in another room. Volunteer together at a local charity. Long-distance? Work on a craft together over a video call, or send letters (paired with a book of stamps for your pen-pal to write back)!

Give your memories. Whether a printed book, handwritten letters, or verbal recountings, consider gifting your personal story. These memories might just be treasured by posterity for generations to come. My grandfather's journal is unspeakably precious to me—I wish he had written *more*.

Gift an experience. For families with kids, indoor trampoline or amusement parks can be a blast. Also consider zoo or park memberships and museum or movie tickets. Looking for something a bit quieter? Art studio memberships, salon gift cards, conservatory or greenhouse admission, and class tuition are all worth a look.

Gift a subscription. When I was a child, my grandparents gifted my siblings and me with *Highlights* magazine, and an uncle gave us *Cricket* and *Odyssey*. We raced each other to the mailbox every month! In the current digital age, online subscription options are plentiful—movie and music streaming, grocery or shopping delivery, a meal kit service, news outlets, creative publications, building or crafting kits, and more. Also consider local art or music lessons, or a shopping club membership.

Share your favorite books. What books have been meaningful, impactful, or enjoyable to you? Whether it's a classic novel or a nonfiction how-to, your faves might just become theirs as well. Take kids back to what you enjoyed at their age, and pass to the adults the wisdom you wish you had known earlier.

Last but not least, **consider basic staples** in all their homeliness. Socks and underwear are notorious for being boring gifts—but hey, they're expensive! Adults especially are likely to appreciate the thoughtful generosity of things they would have had to buy anyway: a utility bill or housing payment, clothes and shoes, meat (or other food), a giant pack of toilet paper, laundry detergent. Other ideas: car washes or interior detailing, a housecleaning service, new linens, or frozen meals with accompanying disposable mealware.

As with all gift-giving, it's important to remember that no one gift fits all—everyone has different preferences, needs, and love languages. But at the same time, it's okay if your gifts miss the mark sometimes—it's your *thoughtfulness* that counts. Giving an unusual gift shows that while you were thinking outside the box, you were thinking of *them*. ◆

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The Beauty of His Truth

by Greg Williams

Psalm 96

O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen [those unfamiliar], his wonders among all people. For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared [greatly awed] above all gods. . . . Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. . . . O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. Say among the heathen [those unfamiliar] that the Lord reigneth . . . he shall judge the people righteously. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.



We cannot fully grasp the awe and wonder of Psalm 96 without the right mindset. After all, why would anyone sing praises to a God they do not know personally? This passage reminds us that God is the source of everything glorious, beautiful, and righteous. We are called not just to acknowledge him as the supreme authority, but to experience deep, overflowing gratitude for his active presence in our daily lives. True worship isn't found in empty rituals; it is born of humility. It flows from truly knowing who we are as his creation, and who he is as our Creator. Only from that posture can we begin to comprehend what God has done—and continues to do for us each day.

As the Creator and Sustainer of all things, God makes us privileged witnesses to the natural order he ordained. Every day, we see the steady, rhythmic order operating across creation. Glory is best understood as a reflection of God himself. Life quickly teaches us that our actions either contribute to a life aligned with God's glory or derail us from it. When we embrace his truth, it yields order, unity, wholeness, and peace. The true wonder of life isn't found in elevating ourselves, but in pursuing his truth as we live in harmony with others. This perfect balance is what the psalmist describes as beautiful and glorious.

Yet when truth is denied or discarded, the portrait of this beauty becomes a fractured puzzle. When we make ourselves the ultimate standard of truth, we remain confined by the limits of our own flawed understanding. We can never comprehend God's infinite glory if we fail to honor him as Lord. The evidence surrounds us: when a society dismisses God and attacks faith, chaos abounds. Those who forsake spiritual truth are left to pursue self-interested opinions that distort justice and promote division.

As believers, we can face resistance from those who promote discord and lawlessness. Yet those who deny God's truth will never experience the security and peace that only a righteous life provides. Because a holy God sustains all things in truth, we can rest confident that his righteousness remains our unwavering standard. Let us honor God as God, revealing his righteousness through the very way we live. ◆

Psychiatrist Greg Williams, MD, who loves the Psalms, lives west of Chicago, Illinois, with his lovely university professor wife.

MONEY MATTERS

Year-end Considerations

by Darrold A. Kennedy

As 2026 winds down, year-end planning offers a valuable opportunity to evaluate how your taxes, investment decisions, and wealth-transfer strategies work together.

Start with some self-reflection. Focus on your overall progress, how you feel about your financial trajectory, and the actions you might want to take in the coming year. If you have experienced personal, family, or employment changes over the past year, consider how those shifts might affect your long-term goals and your ability to achieve them.

Consider your tax situation. Work closely with your financial advisor and tax professional to identify time-sensitive tax opportunities. This could include tax-loss harvesting, where you sell investments at an unrealized loss in your taxable accounts to offset capital gains recognized throughout the year—including long-term capital gain distributions from mutual funds. Keep in mind that, starting this year, a new limitation can reduce the total value of itemized deductions for certain taxpayers in the highest (37%) tax bracket. Additionally, if you are age 73 or older, ensure that you have taken your required minimum distributions (RMDs) before the year-end deadline.

Maximize tax-advantaged savings. Evaluate whether you are making full use of your health savings account (HSA) and workplace retirement plans. It's also wise to review your current mix of pretax and after-tax retirement savings to determine whether you should adjust where your money is going. Depending on your unique circumstances, you might want to explore advanced strategies such as Roth conversions, backdoor Roth contributions, or mega backdoor Roth contributions. If education savings are a priority, a 529 plan continues to provide excellent flexibility alongside potential tax benefits.

Review strategic giving. If supporting others is one of your goals, consider charitable giving or annual gifting strategies. These moves allow you to champion the people and causes you care about while simultaneously reducing the size of your gross taxable estate. If you are age 70½ or older, you might be able to exclude up to $111,000 from your adjusted gross income (AGI) by making a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) directly from your IRA to an eligible charity. These distributions can seamlessly satisfy your RMD, effectively lowering your AGI.



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Note that the rules for other charitable donations have changed this year. If you take the standard deduction, you can now deduct up to $1,000 of cash donations (or up to $2,000 if filing jointly). Conversely, if you itemize deductions, you might not be able to deduct as much of your charitable giving as in the past. Be sure to coordinate with your advisory team on these strategies.

Revisit your estate plan. Changes in family dynamics, personal finances, or evolving estate laws can quickly make existing plans outdated. Review your beneficiary designations, account titling, and core estate-planning documents to ensure your assets will transfer precisely according to your wishes.

As your financial life grows more complex, the intersections among investment, tax, and estate decisions become increasingly vital. The end of the year is the perfect time to evaluate those relationships, uncover hidden opportunities, and strengthen the overall efficiency of your wealth strategy. ◆

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PEOPLE & PLACES

Musically Speaking

"Children, Go Where I Send Thee"

by Roger L. Wisegarver

"Children, Go Where I Send Thee," a traditional African-American spiritual, has long been a beloved Christmas classic. While the song features many regional titles and variations, its joyful core remains unchanged, echoing Jesus's instruction to his disciples to go out and spread the Good News.

As a cumulative song—much like "The Twelve Days of Christmas"—each verse introduces a new number and a corresponding Biblical meaning, repeating the previous lines in reverse order. Here is a look at the traditional verses alongside their popular scriptural interpretations:

One for the little bitty baby [Jesus], born in Bethlehem.
Two for Paul and Silas [the imprisoned preachers in the book of Acts].
Three for the Hebrew children [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace].
Four for the four that stood at the door [The Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John].
Five for the five that stayed alive [The five people in the New Testament raised from the dead].
Six for the six that never get fixed [The six waterpots filled at the wedding in Cana].
Seven for the seven that went on to heaven [Can refer to the seven churches of Asia Minor.].
Eight for the eight that stood at the gate [Noah, his sons, and their wives entering the Ark].
Nine for the nine that dressed so fine [A traditional reference to the heavenly host of angels].
Ten for the ten that couldn't get in [The matching half of the parable of the ten virgins, or the Ten Commandments].
Eleven for the 'leven that went to heaven [The eleven faithful original disciples].
Twelve for the twelve that couldn't get help [Humanity's need for mercy and redemption, or the twelve chosen apostles].

The exact origins of this spiritual are difficult to trace because it was passed down for generations primarily through word of mouth. However, music scholars believe it stems from a centuries-old global tradition of cumulative religious hymns. It shares deep structural roots with songs like the traditional Jewish Passover hymn "Echad Mi Yodea," which dates back to the 1500s.

When English folk music arrived in the American colonies during the 1700s, these song structures spread through the Appalachians and into the Deep South. There, African-American communities masterfully reshaped them. By infusing the old frameworks with their own rich harmonies, syncopated rhythms, and powerful storytelling, they created a distinctly American spiritual.

Over the decades, a vast array of notable musicians have recorded their own unique versions of the song. Iconic recordings span generations and genres, including tracks by Dennis Crumpton & Robert Summers (1936), Fred Waring (1959), Peter, Paul, and Mary (1966), Johnny Cash (1971), Ricky Skaggs (1983), Hall & Oates (2006), Mandisa (2008), Buddy Greene (2013), and Kenny Rogers with the Home Free Vocal Band (2015).

As we share glad tidings and celebrate the Christmas season, may we do so with the same vibrant joy, confidence, and peace embedded in this historic song. Peace on earth and goodwill to all! ◆

Roger, Monticello, Illinois, resident, combines his interest in music and history: roger_wisegarver@msn.com.

Adoration of the Shepherds by Matthias Stomer, c. 1650





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LIFESTYLES

WORDSMITH'S WORKSHOP
by Rob Siedenburg

Ways to Give Christmas Greetings

In the United States, *Merry Christmas* is our standard greeting—unless you are running from your politically incorrect shadow and prefer *Happy Holidays*. That phrase is certainly inclusive, sweeping in Hanukkah and even Kwanzaa.

In case you were wondering, Kwanzaa is a celebration of African–American culture observed December 26 through January 1. Invented in 1966 by activist Maulana Karenga, it blends various African harvest traditions and culminates in a communal feast called *Karamu*. By 2009, an estimated 2 million Americans were participating.

But I digress. You could also try *Happy Christmas*, as do some of our English cousins. *Good Yuletide* has grown archaic, though folks still revive it for a bit of historical fun. Then there is *Xmas*, a term some abominate and others defend. Proponents note that the *X* represents the Greek letter *Chi*, a historic symbol for Christ; critics argue it leaves Christ entirely out of Christmas.

Though we frequently discuss nativity scenes, I've never heard *Nativity* used in a seasonal greeting. *Noël* is still popular, though we are technically borrowing from the French when we use it. Still, it makes for some wonderful wordplay. A late friend of mine used to send me beautiful Christmas postcards with a message that at first puzzled me. It read simply:

A B C D E F G H I J K M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

Look closely at his alphabet, and you will find the hidden greeting: there is **No L**.

That missing *L* invites a closer look at the word *Noël* itself. It migrated into English from Old French in the late fourteenth century, originally spelled *nowel* or *nouel*, used to signify the Feast of the Nativity.

If we trace it further back, we find its roots in the Latin *natalis*, meaning "pertaining to birth," which the early Church used in the phrase *natalis dies* (birthday) to mark the arrival of Christ. The Latin *natalis* comes from *natus*, past participle of *nasci* ("to be born"). Linguists trace this all the way back to a Proto-Indo-European root, *gene-*, meaning "to give birth or beget." It also gives rise to our modern words, *gene* (through German), *genetics*, *genre*, *generic*, and *genome*.

As wordsmiths, we also see that ancient *gene-* root alive and well in such English words as *genealogy* (borrowed from the Greek *genealogia*). Interestingly, the Old English equivalent for family lineage was *folctalu*. That sounds remarkably like our modern phrase *folk tale*—a fitting reminder that our family histories are the stories of our people, passed down through the generations. ◆

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Puzzle Answers

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

Crossword puzzle on A-6

Jumble on A-8

Jumbles: GRANT FAULT STUDIO TENDON

Answers: They were willing to wait in a long line to eat there, because the food was — OUTSTANDING

Sudoku on A-8

7	9	6	1	4	5	2	3	8
3	5	2	6	7	8	1	9	4
4	1	8	3	2	9	5	6	7
6	3	1	7	5	2	4	8	9
9	8	5	4	3	6	7	2	1
2	4	7	8	9	1	3	5	6
5	6	4	2	8	7	9	1	3
1	7	9	5	6	3	8	4	2
8	2	3	9	1	4	6	7	5

Scrabble Grams on A-6

SCRABBLE GRAMS SOLUTION

W4	O1	O1	D2	C3	U1	T1	RACK 1 = 76
U1	S1	E1	F4	U1	L1		RACK 2 = 9
O1	D2	D2	B3	A1	L1	L1	RACK 3 = 65
H4	O1	L1	D2	O1	U1	T1	RACK 4 = 61

PAR SCORE 145-155 TOTAL 211

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LIFESTYLES

Be Joyful, Though You Have Considered All the Facts

by Marvin Weinbaum

"Be joyful, though you have considered all the facts."
—Wendell Berry

I'll get no awards, nor recognition, for pointing out the obvious: we live in stressful times. Duh.

Every day we confront many reasons to worry: political division, widening income inequality, homelessness, the rising cost of living, global wars and human suffering, concerns over the impact of artificial intelligence, the weakening of social norms and cultural institutions, and the often-toxic influence of social media. That's only a partial list, so it's easy to understand why so many of us feel overwhelmed.

Indeed, "If you're not concerned, you're not paying attention." I found that bit of wisdom on a bumper sticker.

Our concerns are real. Pretending otherwise accomplishes little. But neither does allowing them to derail us. The writer Wendell Berry has offered his perspective: We can acknowledge the facts without surrendering to them. He challenges us to remain joyful in a world that gives us so many reasons not to. He reminds us that there is another side of the ledger, one that gives us hope.

Here are some suggestions from me to you:

Practice Gratitude.

We can become so preoccupied with what has gone wrong, or what might happen, that we overlook the good in our lives. Gratitude shifts our attention from what we lack to what we possess. It doesn't change our circumstances, but it can change how we view them.

You can begin by giving thanks for

- **Our everyday gifts.** A home where we are safe and warm, enjoying hot water and food in abundance. Much of the world lacks these simple pleasures.
- **The people who matter.** A spouse, a child, a friend, a neighbor—anyone who takes the time to ask how we're doing.
- **The gift of another day.** Whatever our age or circumstances, each new day offers possibilities. We are still here.

Stay Informed.

Be aware of what's going on, but don't immerse yourself in the news. Follow trusted news outlets and recognize the biases of social media sites.

Take Good Care.

- Our bodies have gotten us this far. Care for them. You owe it to yourself.
- Follow the science, not the politicians. Do the research (ask AI for help). Get your shots.
- Stay fit. Develop and commit to a good exercise regime. Eat well. Walk everywhere; take the stairs. Stave off frailty.
- Get into nature as often as possible.
- Find good healthcare and practitioners who listen.

Stay Curious.

- Read books (especially ones that challenge assumptions), attend classes, visit museums.
- Discover a new interest and return to old ones. Work toward fulfilling your dreams.
- Welcome the unfamiliar.
- Find acceptance for the things you can't control. Approach them with curiosity.
- Feed your soul, making room for passion that might lie dormant within. Deepen your faith. If that doesn't work for you, get comfortable with uncertainty.

Grow and Savor Relationships.

- Many of life's deepest satisfactions come, not from what we accumulate, but from whom we love and who loves us in return. Relationships provide comfort in difficult times, companionship in ordinary ones, and memories that enrich our lives long after the moments themselves have passed.
- Make the phone call; someone will welcome it. You need not wait for a birthday, holiday, or special occasion to express affection.
- Smile at your neighbors and start a conversation.
- Practice active listening. Ask questions.
- "Be joyful, though you have considered all the facts." Not because the world is free of troubles, but because, even in a troubled world, there is still so much worth loving, appreciating, discovering, and celebrating.

The facts deserve our attention. But they do not deserve all of it. ◆

Marvin Weinbaum is a senior life coach and columnist. He writes about aging with purpose, dignity, curiosity and resilience, translating insight into practical guidance for everyday life. Feel free to send your questions to marvin@coachweinbaum.com.

