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December | January 2016/2017

Keeping up the Faith at Christmas in Prescott

McGregors Christmas Lights Display in Athens

Holiday Retail Hidden Gems in Small Towns

New Year's Resolutions Are Really Hard Work

Moments Shared with Saint Nicholas








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*Happy Holidays*

*Shelli Warren*

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## Bourbon and Dark Rum Eggnog

Makes 18 cups

### You'll Need:

- 9 large eggs, separated, whites at room temperature
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 4 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup bourbon
- 1/2 cup dark rum
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 2 1/2 cups milk
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- Garnishes: cinnamon and freshly grated nutmeg for sprinkling the eggnog

### To Create:

- In a large bowl with an electric mixer, beat the egg yolks with the sugar until the mixture is thick and pale with ribbons when the beaters are lifted.
- In another large bowl, beat two thirds of the egg whites until they hold soft peaks.
- In another large bowl, beat the cream until it holds soft peaks. Fold the egg whites into the yolk mixture until the mixture is combined well, then fold in the whipped cream gently, but thoroughly.
- Pour the mixture into a large punch bowl, whisk in the bourbon, the rum, the vanilla, the milk, and the salt. Chill the eggnog, covered, for at least four hours, or until it is cold.
- Just before serving, in a bowl, beat the remaining three egg whites until they hold soft peaks, fold them into the eggnog, and sprinkle the eggnog with nutmeg and cinnamon.



## Jonathan's Plumb Pudding Cake

Makes 9 Servings

### You'll Need:

- 1 cup flour
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3 tbsp. oil
- 2 cups washed and halved plums (pits removed)
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 cup boiling water

### To Create:

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt.
- Beat in the milk and oil. Spread mixture in an ungreased 8x8-inch square baking dish. Layer the halved plums on top.
- Whisk together the brown sugar and cinnamon, sprinkle over the plum-topped batter. Pour the boiling water over everything!
- Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour, until cake is browned on top. (The top layer should test done with a fork with only a few crumbs, if you're unsure.)
- Serve warm or cold. Perfect with ice cream or all by itself!



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Photo courtesy Lisa Crandall



Photo courtesy Tara Douthwright



# HOLIDAY GIFTS FROM THE KITCHEN

By Lisa Crandall

I live in a household of two these days and yet, I love to play and experiment in the kitchen. That makes the Christmas season one of my favourites, because I get to bake to my heart's content then package it up and share it. I don't have to eat all those calories myself. It's a win-win in my world.

Knowing this, I plan and experiment all year round, now it's time to figure out who gets what. Everyone will get maple syrup in their gifts. Some friends have already put in their requests for molasses cookies and short breads. Most households will get tomato sauce, made from my own organic tomatoes, hand pressed, slowly simmered and seasoned with our own onions, and garlic and other herbs, cut fresh from the garden while the pot is simmering. Other gifts include; jams and preserves, made from foraged apples, wild grapes or donated plums. It is fun to figure out who will enjoy what.

These are not the only gifts that can be made in the kitchen. I was totally impressed when one of my sisters told me that she makes cookies for her kids' teachers at Christmas. The awesome part of her idea is that she makes up packages of raw cookie dough, which she freezes, then delivers to the school at the end of the day (so they arrive in their new home still frozen and can go right back into the freezer). Each package contains 2-3 dozen preformed cookies of mixed varieties. The intent is that these cookies can be taken out, thawed quickly and baked up fresh any time they are needed. Holiday entertaining made easy or, if they last beyond the holiday season, who doesn't like warm cookies and hot chocolate at some point during the snowy days of winter. I just know those teachers love her cookie care packages.

My other sister also shares holiday gifts from the kitchen, but in a totally different way. She married into a huge family and has lots of

sisters-in-law, and every year for the past half-decade or so, she hosts a family sweet swap. Each year the theme is different, previous years have included squares instead of cookies, specific colors – white, red, green etc. This year the theme is Family Classics and you have to share the memory behind the one you bring. The requirement is that everyone contributes 6 dozen sweets. The sisters gather for an afternoon filled with coffee and games, then the goodies are divided up and everyone leaves with several different kinds of sweet things for their households to enjoy during the holiday season. I am torn between contributing molasses cookies or short breads.

Another gift idea from the kitchen is a homemade cookbook. This takes a little planning ahead, but these days it can be easily done with a computer and email. Send everyone a note asking for their favorite recipes. Sort them by category, print them out, add a cover and table of contents, then voila, a gift that will be treasured for years to come.

Holiday gifts from the kitchen can be as special as they are frugal. They are always well received. Though they sound like perfectly ordinary things, I have come to realize that, to friends who don't have time, or don't have the knack, a gift from your kitchen is a luxury and a sign of affection. Isn't that what Christmas is all about? My favorite sweet to receive is fudge. It's one of those things I just don't have the knack for making. **LH**





# KEEPING UP THE FAITH AT CHRISTMAS IN PRESCOTT

By Joan Rupert-Barkley

Christmas is a very busy time of year and sometimes the real meaning behind it gets lost in the hustle and bustle.

**R**everend Brenda Bailey of St. Paul's United Church in Prescott and Johnstown United Church believes that Christmas is a time for reaching out to people in the community. Family and friends are visiting and it's a great time to be together. St. Paul's and Johnstown United churches are all about community, and this year they are extending a warm invitation to all families to put Christ back into their Christmas. That is why an intergenerational church service is one tradition from her past that Reverend Bailey would like to incorporate into her Christmas Eve service this year. This is where children, young people and adults participate in the service.

"This is an opportunity for ministers to show the younger generations, that church is evolving and changing, but more importantly, to remember family traditions that make families strong" commented Reverend Bailey.

Christmas is not always a happy time for people. According to Rev. Bailey, Christmas is also a time of nurturing, encouragement and supporting one another, especially for those who have suffered loss over the past year.

"As Christians, we follow the moving and touching nativity stories, where one finds an authentic description of Christmas. We contemplate the mystery of the child born. Right from the beginning, God created

many opportunities for us to encounter God. What a gift! God wants to partake in our life, with all our imperfections and weaknesses," commented Reverend Bailey.

## **A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM REVEREND BAILEY**

*Spread the warmth of the Christmas season to all around you! May this season of Christmas awaken in us new faith in the truth of Emmanuel, God with us! Wishing you a peaceful Christmas that is full of the most important things, friendship and family.*

**Reverend Ian MacLean has been the minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Prescott and Spencerville for 19 years.**

During that time, he has seen many changes during the Christmas season. In his early days, Reverend MacLean commented the church was full during Christmas Eve Service with members, visitors and children. He recalls a particular year where the children participated in a Christmas pageant down the centre of the church. One little girl rode a wooden donkey carrying a doll.

"It was simple but profound. They told the story in a language that people could understand. It was the children's version of a historical document. The children brought the innocence to it," said Reverend MacLean.

Nowadays, MacLean believes that people are too busy multitasking that they do not have time to focus on one thing for very long. He thinks that many people focus on the family at Christmas and this involves cooking the turkey, trimming the tree, putting up decorations and buying presents. They gloss over the focus on Jesus and his birth.





**L-R:** Pic of Pastor Roger March from the Seaway Christian Church in Prescott. Reverend Ian MacLean has been the minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Prescott & Spencerville for 19 years. Reverend Brenda Bailey of St. Paul's United Church in Prescott and Johnstown United Church

Therefore during his Christmas Eve Service, Reverend MacLean realizes he only has a short amount of time to connect with young families who may attend. MacLean finds seniors are more spiritual during this time of year.

One Christmas Eve Service tradition that Reverend MacLean finds moving is the living Christmas wreath. Everyone in the congregation lights a candle and forms a circle around the inside of the church. The lights are dimmed and everyone sings.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Prescott will be open on Christmas Day this year for their regular eleven o'clock service and everyone is welcome.

#### **A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM REVEREND MACLEAN**

*Merry Christmas, brings a certain amount of stress to me. A reminder that there is a timeline that has to be met, gifts to buy, parcels to send, cards to sign and mail.*

*So, as I wish you a Merry Christmas, it is not the stress, it is the quiet moment when you find that the real gift of Christmas is not*

*bought at Walmart, but is the hope born to a refugee family 2000 years ago and hope for our future. Merry Christmas from your Presbyterian family.*

**Pastor March from the Seaway Christian Church in Prescott** not only has a Christmas Eve Service, but also gets his congregation involved in community activities during this season. Over the years the church, along with sponsors, have helped a family who is struggling to make ends meet at Christmas. This group buys groceries for Christmas dinner and gifts for the family members.

Congregational members also participate in Prescott's annual Santa Clause Parade. Their float depicts the birth of Jesus. Several members also walk beside the float spreading the word of God. This year the members will be handing out candles along the parade route with a message:

"Jesus is the light of the world. Hope this lights up your life. Think about it."

Pastor March, along with his family and other members of the congregation, will

be serving Christmas Dinner at South Grenville District High School at 1:00 p.m. on Christmas Day.

#### **A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM PASTOR MARCH**

*A Christmas Prayer*

*Lord, may each and everyone be loved and feel like they belong.*

*Lord, let this season bring lasting change in direction and destiny for all individuals.*

*And Lord, according to Your Word, help all of us to fulfill Hebrews 12:15a.*

*"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, Amen." LH*

*Editor's Note: Whether you are looking for fellowship, peace, light or hope this Christmas please visit and celebrate a joyous Christmas & Holiday Service at any of the local churches that serve parishioners and residents in our area.*

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# McGREGOR'S CHRISTMAS LIGHT DISPLAY IN ATHENS

By Sally Smid

When Laura McGregor came into the world as a premature baby, she was in a very fragile condition in Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa for some time. Her parents told her about the excellent care she received to save her life. Five years ago, her family decided to honour CHEO by creating an amazing Christmas light display at their home at 579 County Park Road, Athens, On near Charleston. It has now become an annual event with proceeds going to CHEO to help other families with young ones in need. Last year their Christmas display donations totalled \$6295.

The couple covers the cost of materials and hydro as part of their contribution. They do welcome the donation of decorations and power cords. Last year McGregor's' Christmas Light Show was even covered on CTV News. Could it just be that the popular display has spin-offs for businesses in Athens, as travellers may also stop in at local eateries and shops?

The display opened this year on Nov. 19th which closely corresponds with their daughter Reba's birthday. This year motorists can follow new signage placed on major routes which will direct them to the Christmas spectacle. Of course, there is a certain amount of noise and traffic in the area, which is especially challenging in such a rural setting, but measures are being taken to improve the situation this year. There will also be some parking made available for those who choose to explore the display. Those unable to walk onto the property can enjoy the lights by driving along the road. There are also walking



paths to get a closer look at the Light Show, which includes lighted inflatables, sculptures, Christmas music and more. Youngsters are always thrilled to find many of their favourite characters in the display. Mr. and Mrs. Claus will also make an appearance again this year and there is the possibility of hot chocolate being provided for visitors.

Laura and her husband Bill, plan and prepare all year long and many hours of work goes into construction, wiring, and arranging. This year the expansive lighted miniature village in the garage has been moved downstairs. Visitors are always amazed by the detail involved in the array of miniature buildings, vehicles, people and much more. With the addition of a ramp, everything will now be wheelchair and stroller accessible. It is a great way to spend some family time together in the holiday season.

There is no admission fee, but donations to CHEO are appreciated. It will be lit nightly throughout the Christmas season, until

the end of December from 5-9 pm, when weather permits. "We are not lighting up when the weather is such that it might be dangerous for motorists," explained Laura. While snow does add to the festive Christmas atmosphere, when it does snow a lot, it means that the walks and exhibits need to be cleaned off, which creates more work for the McGregors. More information is available on their Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/mcgregorschristmasdisplay](http://www.facebook.com/mcgregorschristmasdisplay).

Laura is also willing to help with directions or more info by texting her cell at 16132230041

Many visitors now attend from miles away as the display has become more well-known. "It is wonderful to hear the many stories of families who have been helped by CHEO," commented Laura McGregor. It must also be rewarding for the family to hear the cries of excitement and realize the enjoyment that so many visitors receive in experiencing their Christmas Light Show each year. **LH**





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L-R: Natasha Lux (owner) Magnolia Flowers Gananoque (pictured) in store ready for Christmas. Derek Ouellete (Owner) Ridgway Confections- Derek is the "Willy Wonka of Seeley's Bay".

# HOLIDAY RETAIL HIDDEN GEMS IN SMALL TOWNS

By Tanya Hammond

This holiday season, I urge you to seek out the hidden gems in your community when looking for that perfect gift. It is those small businesses that are owned by our neighbours and employ our friends that will take the time to listen and get to know us and greet us by name.

I recently had the pleasure of finding such a place in Gananoque. **Magnolia Flowers**, located at **192 King Street East** is, as their tagline says, **"a hidden treasure in the 1000 Islands"**. Much more than flowers, the name simply does not do it justice. The eclectic mix of vintage-inspired furnishings and one-of-a-kind creations is reminiscent of what you might find on the trendy streets of Old Montreal.

Seven years ago, owner Natasha Lux, followed her dream of owning a flower studio after a fourteen-year career in finance. Wanting a place to raise her young family after living in the big city, she fell in love with the popular tourist town of Gananoque. Natasha was quick to point out, "that you must love where you live and work where you love." There is no doubt that she is right where she belongs in a charming shop that captivates you with every step.

You will find handcrafted treasures, including antique chic jewellery, recycled purses and hand stitched nightgowns from local artisans, along with a classic glassware collection from

La Rochere, the oldest glassmaker in France. Pursuing her desire to create, Natasha has added a new line of Chalk Paint™ from Annie Sloan, and in true artistic spirit, organizes workshops to teach those interested.

Natasha and her helpful team, Marilyn and Joan, who she lovingly refers to as a family, take pride in their floral designs and cherished furniture transformations.

It is that same pride in craftsmanship that draws me to another locally owned business. This time, on the main street of Seeleys Bay, **Ridgway Confections**.

A large stately brick home situated at **159 Main Street**, houses the small chocolate shop that is big on flavour. Derek Ouellet and his wife, Cindy Healey settled in the quaint village of Seeley's Bay and quickly became strong supporters of the close-knit community. Their humble beginnings started by crafting sweet treats for family members and then developed into making fudge for a nearby gift shop using the gift shops kitchen. Soon it spiraled into creating chocolate for many area businesses in their very own commercial kitchen. Though wholesale is their main business, fortunately for us, Derek and Cindy open their showroom at certain times of the year. Be sure to check them out this holiday season.

Both certified Chocolatiers, Derek and Cindy, make fine handcrafted Belgian chocolates

with the freshest of ingredients, like real cream and butter, making sure to use only 100% sustainably grown cocoa beans. A perfect gift for that someone special, you will find brittles, bark, bars and boxed chocolates, including razzeberry bites, Irish cream, care a lot caramel, cherry buds, peanut butter bombs and more. Yes, they are as delectable as they sound! You can also order platters for your family or business get together. Imagine the impression you will make when you serve these melt in your mouth morsels.

At Ridgway Confections, they care about their customers, and they are always willing to create custom orders. That caring attitude extends to their community as they host what is known as "Ridgway Confections Truffle Shuffle" a 5 km run/walk through Seeleys Bay raising money for the local food bank.

There are many retail gems in our various towns and communities in our area. Take the time this holiday season and seek them out. You will unearth many great gift treasurers that will sure to delight that special someone this Christmas! **LH**

**For More information and store hours check out [www.magnoliaflowers.ca](http://www.magnoliaflowers.ca) or call 613-382-8181 and [www.ridgwayconfections.com](http://www.ridgwayconfections.com) or call 613-532-4468.**



# TRAVELING WITH A PURPOSE

*From left, Carol Tanney, Rachel Hoekstra and Cathy DeSouza pose with volunteers and dresses created for donation by the Sew n'Sews.*

By Sally Smid

While Christmas is a time of giving, for many in the area, the spirit of giving seems to last all year, through a variety of projects and travel opportunities. While lots of local residents escape to warmer weather each winter, many may not be aware of ways in which they could make a difference in the needy areas surrounding their destinations. Perhaps some have even felt sadness in realizing such contrasts. Numerous area travelers have found ways to make a difference in a variety of ways. It can be as easy as taking an extra suitcase containing clothing, school supplies, toiletries or other needed items. Some airlines allow a "humanitarian bag" without charge. Pack with a Purpose at [www.packforapurpose.org](http://www.packforapurpose.org) has a lot of information, including participants, what to pack, and drop-off places. Marsha Stadig of Brockville, has been involved with this program on numerous trips to Mexico, where she also visited a recipient school.

The Sew n'Sews who have met for 8 years at Centennial Road Church have been a big part of many such donations as well. Their mission statement is "to clothe a village one child at a time" and they have sent items to 15 different countries. This group of seamstresses meet weekly to sew clothing for needy children. "People planning trips contact us and we help arrange the donations of dresses, short sets, blankets and more" explained organizer Rachel Hoekstra. "Materials are often donated and we all enjoy socializing. It is so rewarding to know that our work helps so many needy young ones!"

Brian and Sherrie Davis of Lyn have been spending winters in Mexico. They have also given of their time and skills in making an impact near their villa. They met Manuel and Marie, who were living in very poor living conditions. They helped do some remodelling and painting and purchased bedding and kitchen items for them. While there were language barriers, it seems that

the concern, compassion and friendship experienced went beyond words. A group from their villa even helped replace Manuel's stolen boat motor to restore his fishing job. "Everything given is from our overflow," remarked Sherrie. They hope to help another couple this year and their friends are donating to help with the project. "We couldn't do it without that dream team!" Sherrie commented.

Martha and Rick Jackson, also go to Mexico each year. They have become quite involved in helping a school there, adding another dimension and enjoyment to their yearly trips. Perhaps it is easier to give to a project when the donors can see first hand that the help that is being given is directly benefiting those in need, without concern over large administration costs.

Local resident, Rita VanSpriel has been knitting Kenyan Dolls for many years, in order to raise funds for her mission trips to Kenya. Each doll is unique and can be given a name



by the donor before going to a child in Africa or being purchased and given as a gift to support her work there.

There are also others involved in what is more of a working vacation. Carol Tanney, a retired nurse, has long been involved in Project Reach Out's work in Ghana and has made many trips there with a variety of associates. "The needs are so great and everyone is so thankful for the small helps given," explains Carol. "Some may think that being there for such a short period wouldn't make much of a difference in people's lives, but who could say that to the mother whose baby would die from dehydration without proper medication, or to the family whose children might die from malaria when a three-day course of treatment kills the malaria parasite?"

PRO, now part of World Hope Canada, also has items available that make excellent Christmas gifts and certificates for alternate Christmas gifting. Many friends and family members would appreciate that a goat, a pig or more might be given to a needy family in their name. More information is available at [www.worldhope.ca](http://www.worldhope.ca)

Inspired by the commitment of a missionary couple, Jane and John Fournier and their son Matthew of Athens, travelled to Peru where they also took a vacation with a purpose. Matthew was connected with a sponsor child. It was a chance for them to see first hand the needs in that area, as well as a way for their son to better realize his many blessings and learn about sharing with others. They discovered that perhaps it would be better to bring money to buy needed items there which would also help the local economy. While they had anticipated making a change in the lives of Peruvians, they were the ones who had their lives changed. "Matthew has been to Disneyland and more, but he still says that Peru was his favourite vacation," reported his mother Jane. "There are so many ways to make a difference in people's lives right here in Canada," commented John. For him it may mean visiting with and encouraging a lonely, downhearted senior.

It is apparent that we don't need to travel out of our own neighbourhood to make a difference in the lives of others. Maybe it is helping to put together Christmas hampers, visiting a senior's home or serving at a community Christmas dinner. It is a time to be thankful for what we are blessed with and in turn give to others. That could just be the kind of stuff that makes for the merriest Christmas of all! **LH**



**Top to Bottom:** These photos speak volumes about the improvements made for Manuel and Maria in Mexico. Rita Van Spriel stands beside a display of her Kenyan Dolls which she has been creating for her work in Kenya.



# NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS Are Really Hard work!



By Uncle Buck

*It's that time of year again, as the Holiday season rolls in and we turn our thoughts to the upcoming year. As the New Year approaches, some people's thoughts turn to having New Year's resolutions. A symbol for some of wanting to change past mistakes or improve on resolving to do something better in the future. We at Living Here decided to ask an expert on New Year's Resolutions, "Uncle Buck" from Uncle Bucks News to give his insight on Resolutions.*

I can tell you from past experience, making New Year's lists are really hard work and they are meant to be fun, as they are bound to be broken. I have made resolutions just to make sure they were broken, so as not to disappoint myself and for my friends and family to look forward to hearing what I have in store every year, so I can be the subject of constant ridicule at family gatherings.

**"Hey Buck, nice job on the weight-loss, I knew you were going to be a light eater, but didn't know you were going to start when dawn breaks and dusk falls!"**

**So, to help you get in the spirit of New Year's Resolutions for 2017, here are some of my Resolutions for the coming year! Feel free to use any of them for yourself!**

- 10 I will stop sending e-mails to my wife!
- 9 I will watch more TV. It's very educational. Catch up on all those programs you missed down the years!
- 8 I will think of a password other than "password" or "hello" or "1234"

- 7 I will play more computer games. Scientists say they're good for me and improve my visual skills!
- 6 I will consider taking up a new hobby, such as procrastination. Or maybe later!
- 5 I will find that damn manual and actually read it, just as soon as I press this button...
- 4 I will no longer waste my time reliving the past. Instead I will spend it worrying about the future!
- 3 I will go with "Homer Simpson's 3 rules of life" - "I didn't do it!" - "It was like that when I got here" - "Gee, great idea boss!"
- 2 I will consider apple martini's part of my "daily fruit intake"
- 1 I will exercise more self-control, though I already have a rule not to drink anything stronger than bourbon before breakfast!

So, dear reader take my advice, resolutions are for suckers! If you really want to set out and do Resolutions, then make them life goals and set challenging goals that will improve the quality of your life and those around you. It doesn't have to be earth shattering, but start with the simple stuff and build upon it.

**Here are some truly simple yet inspirational goals that you can achieve almost on a daily basis...**

- 5 Smile! Everyone has one, and yet do we do it often enough... try it and watch it catch on!

- 4 It doesn't cost anything to say "Please" and "Thank you" or "Sorry," even if you weren't in the wrong. The "Golden Rule" in our society today has started to become a lost symbol on how society should be based. We are constantly on the run with technology and work, that we have forgotten the little things that make us who we are.

- 3 Pick up a phone a call your family or friends and stop texting all the time. Human contact, even by voice is so important these days. So much is lost in translation by 140-word character messaging and yet, it seems this generation doesn't even know what a Landline is!

- 2 Think about others before yourself! 'It's all about me' is becoming too much of daily refrain in today's society that I see all too often.

- 1 Saying "I Love You" to the most important person in your life everyday does mean something and yet, there are those who totally forget or don't say it... Start today and show the person in your life that he or she is important to you.

So, Happy New Year and all the best in 2017. Remember, that whatever you want to achieve in The New Year you can do it! If not, your local Procrastinators Club will be holding it's next meeting sometime in the future. Plan to attend, you never know, you might see me there! [LH](#)





*Pictured are Sam Dixon 7yrs, Sidda Dixon 20 months and Evan Dixon 3yrs*

# MOMENTS SHARED WITH SAINT NICHOLAS

By Tanya Hammond

Last month I received a surprise phone call from a friend of mine who took a job years ago making toys at the North Pole. This old friend had a special message for me from someone I've been trying to interview for over ten years. That's right, Saint Nicholas himself was going to be visiting Brockville, and he was willing to meet with me to give this once in a lifetime interview. "Why me?", you must be asking, "why not me?" After all, Saint Nicholas (or Santa as many of you know him) knows I've been good this year.

We see his helpers visiting neighbourhood malls throughout the country, but there is only one Saint Nicholas. Meeting him face to face I am impressed to see how well he has aged, after all, he is close to 200 years old. I asked him what his secret was, but he simply smiled and with a twinkle in his eye he said "magic my dear, magic." I had so many questions; I wasn't sure where to start.

He must have known just what I was thinking as he began telling me what it was like back in the 1800's, when he secretly set out to bring joy to all the little girls and boys. For years, his secret was safe as he delivered parcels on Christmas Eve, until a gentleman by the name of Clement Clarke Moore spied

him one Christmas Eve and wrote a poem entitled, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," known today as "Twas The Night Before Christmas."

That was the beginning of Santa's popularity, so he had to enlist the help of more elves to work in his shops at the North Pole and even had to employ a "keeper of the Naughty and Nice lists." Santa says, now technology is a big help with computerized lists, automated assembly lines, and GPS to help guide him. However, he wouldn't give away the magic behind his ability to squeeze down the chimneys. Some things are just best left to the imagination.

Santa was willing to divulge a few personal things about himself, such as, he and Mrs. Claus often vacation during the Summer months and this year they visited the Tall Ships right here in Brockville. He also told me that each year just after Christmas Mrs. Claus insists that he shave his entire beard off. I asked if that was because Mrs. Claus likes a smooth face to kiss under the mistletoe. He laughed, "HO, ho, ho bless my buttons! How did you know that, my dear!"

Although we shared many laughs that day, we also shared some touching moments, as he reminded me that not all children are looking for the latest and greatest toys.

Tears welled up in his eyes as he told me of the many children who just want peace in their home. He also recounted a Christmas, not long ago, that one small girl asked him for a favour. Her Grandmother had recently passed away, and she wanted Santa to make sure her Grandmother was happy. The young child clearly *believed* that Santa lived somewhere magical, and that he had a way of communicating with her Grandmother.

Sometimes we all need to *believe* in something that maybe we just can't explain. Saint Nicholas was quick to add, "it's important to enjoy the simple pleasures of the season and the pure joy of Christmas Traditions." His stops at Fulford Place in Brockville and Upper Canada Village, amongst others, are about taking people back to the Victorian times with handmade gifts, family gatherings, trees decorated with ornate ornaments that were passed down through generations. A simple reminder of, "A time when believing wasn't so complicated," said Saint Nicholas. **LH**

**SAVE THE DATE:** Be sure to visit Saint Nicholas at Upper Canada Village, Morrisburg, On December 2nd-23rd.



# CULTURAL CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS:

## The Christmas Stocking

By Lisa Crandall

There is a ritual in our house on Christmas Eve – the stuffing of the socks, more formally known as the Christmas Stockings. It always begins with the orange (or in years when money is tight, a tangerine) tucked into the toe. After that the order does not matter, although there are certain other elements that are also mandatory.

The orange is the symbol of gold - money. As my mother used to say – that's your wealth for the year. It is important that you eat that orange before the end of the day if you are going to have enough money for the rest of the year.

Other symbolic elements include an apple – for health, a banana – for laughter, and a bit of chocolate – for luxury. I also insist on a new toothbrush in each stocking, but after that it can be socks, or underwear, post-it-notes, pens, jewellery, individual packets of gourmet hot chocolate, nail polish and/or lottery tickets. The possibilities are limited only by your budget, your imagination and the size of the stocking.

When I was growing up the stockings we used were very specific – my father's heavy gray woolen socks. In other households, I know that the stockings are knitted or crocheted, sewn out of red flannel, likely

decorated with reindeer or Christmas ornaments. Each one personalized with the name of its owner.

As a child waking up to find my Christmas sock on the end of my bed, or sometimes just outside my bedroom door, was a magical way of starting Christmas morning. One of my friends recalls that her parents used the stocking as a way to sleep in just a little longer. She was allowed to open her stocking and enjoy its contents as long as she did so quietly and refrained from waking up her parents. I remember gathering on my parent's bed with my brother and sisters so we all opened them together. No sleeping in for my parents!

The tradition of the Christmas Stocking reaches far back into the history of Christmas. It is mentioned in the much-loved poem 'A Visit from Saint Nicholas,' also known as 'Twas the Night Before Christmas,' which was written in 1823. It is impossible to know how much further back the tradition goes.

According to some legends, the first Christmas stockings were filled with gold coins and belonged to three sisters. The children of an impoverished widower. He was in despair, unable to provide marriage dowries for his beloved daughters. The original St. Nicholas, a wealthy nobleman

who generously shared his wealth with those in need, heard about this poor family. One night, it just happened to be Christmas Eve, he snuck into the family cottage and found the freshly washed stockings of the girls hanging by the fire to dry. He filled three stockings with gold coins and the legend of the gold in the toe of the stocking on Christmas Eve was born.

This tradition is found all around the world. Generally, the idea is that good children would receive toys and candies, but bad children would get lumps of coal. In some parts of the world, tradition has it, children leave their stockings out, but they are filled with carrots and oats and lumps of sugar as treats for the reindeer, and St. Nick repays their generosity by refilling the stockings with small toys and other gifts.

In Italy, the tradition is for the stockings to be left out the night of The Epiphany (January 6) for the good witch, Le Befana, to fill. The form of the "stocking" also varies from place to place. In Holland, the children would traditionally leave out their wooden shoes to be filled. In France, the tradition often refers to children leaving their shoes under the tree.

Regardless of the size, shape or color of it, Christmas stockings are one of my favorite holiday traditions. [LH](#)

### The Legend of Le Befana

*According to Italian legend, during their search for the Christ Child, the three Wise Men stopped at a cottage in the countryside to ask for directions. They knocked on the door and an old woman carrying a broom answered. She was unable to give them any information so they continued on their journey after asking her if she would like to join them. She declined, saying she had too much housework to do. After they left, she reconsidered and started down the road after them, but was unable to catch up. As she went, Le Befana stopped each child she encountered and gave them a small treat in hopes that one was the Christ Child. Now, each year, on the eve of the Epiphany she sets out again, stopping at each house to leave treats for good children and a lump of coal for those who were bad.*





**L-R:** The Nativity was always the most solemn part of every Christmas concert, and students dressed in bathrobes and towels magically became the Holy Family and all the attendants. Pictured here at the Greenfield School Christmas Concert of 1961 are Left to Right - Jim Dobson (standing); Back Row - Larry Horton, Margaret Findlay, Gary Burns, Marg Dobson, Donna Moorhead, Ann Burns; Front Row - Jean Webster, Liz Webster, Tom Moorhead, Kathy Horton; and Hidden on Left - Ruth Moorhead, Lorna Webster, Doris Findlay. Rehearsals were extremely important, and everyone took them seriously – even the classroom cat (photo from 1954, Pool's Resort)

# SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT at the School Christmas Concert

By Lorraine Payette



*Donna (Moorhead) Dempsey today – member of the Lansdowne Association for Revitalization, director for the Lansdowne Agricultural Society, Welcome Wagon representative, and retired Ontario school teacher. And it all started with an education in a one-room school.*

Christmas has always been a special time in school, and never more so than when everyone got their chance to be in the big Christmas Concert. Not only did this mean holidays were coming and visits from Santa, but you got a chance to wear costumes, learn lines and get up in front of all the Grown-Ups in Town to show off your acting skills.

"The music teacher and the classroom teacher planned the concert with plays,

songs and recitals," said Donna (Moorhead) Dempsey of Lansdowne. "Everyone had a part, yes, even 'the big boys'."

There were no guaranteed parts in the school plays back then, no A-list kids getting the good stuff while everyone else took what they could get. You had to "try out" with rehearsals starting in early December. Most afternoons were spent practicing and getting ready, making sure everything was exactly right. Mary, the Angels, the Wise Men – everyone had to know their lines and what to do. Even the Sheep and Cows had to get it exactly right.

But hard work prevailed, and pretty soon everyone was ready for the big night.

"At noon hour, on the day of the concert, all of the students walked to the barn at the farm next door, to retrieve the big planks that were set up to form benches for the audience," said Dempsey. "The classroom desks were rearranged to hold the planks and 'the big boys' tested them out to make sure that they were safe for folks to sit on. Bed sheets were strung on the wire to form stage curtains, and Christmas decorations were placed on the windows, walls and chalkboards. The Christmas tree was decorated and ready for Santa. Our lines were learned, songs practiced, and costumes were ready."

When the big night finally came, families started the chores early so that everyone

could get to the school in plenty of time. Most of them were farmers, and all of the kids knew they had to get their work done before the magic could begin.

"Butterflies danced in our stomachs as we waited for our turn on the stage," said Dempsey. "In case you forgot your lines, the teacher was right there to give you a cue, and no one was the wiser."

Everyone in the community attended those school concerts – little brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents, all the neighbours came out for the show.

"There was laughter for the jokes, applause for a solo and silence for the Nativity Scene," said Dempsey. "All was good. But just as the teacher was thanking everyone for coming out on such a cold night, jingling and stomping could be heard at the front door. Santa had arrived. Miraculously, he dipped into his bag, and there was a present and a huge sack of candy for every girl and boy at the concert."

How did Santa know they would all be there at that exact time? Santa always knows, and is always there for the good children and adults who take the time to believe.

This Christmas, take a few minutes and trust in the magic of the season. Attend a school Christmas concert if you can. Take time to love your neighbours and your family, and give yourself the gifts of peace and joy. **LH**



# Speaking of wine

By Russ Disotell

**T**he holidays are rapidly approaching and we are well on our journey into another traditional Canadian winter and all that entails. So, I will make some wine suggestions to help ease your holiday stress.

This is where you expect wines for the Christmas turkey, but surprise, no. The reason is that after years in the wine trade it has become obvious that celebrations such as Christmas dinner aren't about the wine, they're about conversations, the company we keep and the star of the show, that Christmas turkey, or ham or whatever your traditional meal is. So, serve a wine you're comfortable with and one that you like. I will suggest a Pinot Noir or Gamay (Beaujolais for instance) as a red or a medium-bodied Chardonnay or food-friendly Pinot Grigio for a white.

Leading up to the New Year, and then into January, there will plenty of occasions that will benefit from the addition of an inexpensive, quality wine, whether pre-Christmas work or family gatherings or post-New Year ski or skating parties. Here are a few economical suggestions.

At the top of the list is Argentina's Argento Malbec 2015 (CSPC# 591693, \$9.95) a medium-bodied, velvety soft red with plenty of heft and relatively painless on the wallet. A plum, berry and herbal nose gives way to deep, rich flavours of red cherry, red currant, berry and mocha. The balance is wonderful with silky soft tannins, nicely matching the rich fruit. The finish is lengthy with lots of flavour and just a hint of spice. Perfect on its own or matched with winter barbecue fare, stew or spicy finger foods.

Montes Twins White Blend from Chile is a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Viognier and a great companion for parties of all sorts. The nose is open and inviting with citrus and gooseberry aromas. The palate is round, creamy and complex, featuring layers of lime, pineapple, Granny Smith apple, honeydew and tangy lemon fruit. There is great length to the refreshing finish. It is absolutely lovely as an aperitif our food-friendly Chilean will match nicely with finger foods and appetizers, even those with a modicum of spice or heat.

Henry of Pelham Chardonnay 2015 (CSPC# 291211, \$14.95) from Ontario is our last

selection. A full, rich Chardonnay, it has a round, richly flavoured palate with pear, spice, melon, citrus, guava and peach flavours, knife edge balance and a lengthy, lingering finish. Perfect for sipping on its own or matched with poultry, pork and freshwater white fish.

Remember, drink responsibly and don't drink and drive. Happy Holidays and enjoy! **LH**

*Russ Disotell enjoyed a twelve-year career with the LCBO. He spent the last four years as Product Advisor in Vintages purchasing where he was a member of the buying panel and endured the arduous task of tasting products every week! Since leaving the Board he has written columns and articles on wine, helped develop wine lists and conducted wine tastings. Russ has been writing for Living Here Magazine since it's inception in 2013 and we are grateful for his insights and recommendations to our readers on finding the perfect wine to go with food, friends and family!*



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