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PARIS!

Editor and Publisher
Smantha Parker

Contributing Editors
Barry Hart, Travis McLeese,
Bill Neese, John Watkins

Contributors
Karen Geary, Susan Jones,
Shannon McFarlin

Creative Design
Karen Geary

Printing
West Tennessee Printing, Paris, TN

PARIS! is published five times annually
by Parker Publishing for Paris, Tennessee
and the surrounding communities.

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Comments written in this magazine are
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All subscriptions, advertising inquiries,
remittances or reader inquiries
should be made to the editor:

PARIS!
230 B Tyson Avenue, Suite 134
Paris, TN 38242
parker@MyParisMagazine.com
731-363-8992

This magazine accepts no responsibility
for unsolicited manuscripts,
photography or artwork.
All submissions may be edited for
length, clarity and style.

A Full Heart

I always look forward to the
holidays, but never have I been this
excited! Just the thought of browsing
in downtown’s festive shops makes me
DOWNRIGHT GIDDY! Donating and
packing needed items and toys for mis-
sions with Operation Christmas Shoe
Box? YOU BET! Putting together our
PARIS! Magazine entry at the Festival
of Trees? OVER THE MOON!

There is so much to experience
during this season that it makes my
heart full, and that’s the way I feel
about this holiday issue, too.

Chamber Director Travis McLeese
has written a piece highlighting the
season’s must-see events. From open
houses and Santa to fire bowls, food
trucks, a skating rink and more, the
ambiance is pure Hallmark™.

From there we head out to Whit-
lock for a Ruchie Christmas in Back in
the Day, while Around Our Town visits
with Willie Greer and his grandson
for some Birds Creek Baptist history.
History lovers will also enjoy Reminis-
cence, which recounts the night Pearl
Routon was honored on “This is Your
Life” television show.

A Couple of Travelers takes us to
Clarksville for a lighted stroll by the
Cumberland River. But you don’t have
to drive that far for fabulous lighting,

On The Cover
Sydney Blackburn and her twins sisters, Molly
and MaKray, pose for their Christmas portrait.
They are the daughters of Adam and Nicole
Blackburn. Nicole is a delivery room nurse at
HCMC. Amy Bourne is the photographer.
A bath is not usually an exciting event, but it can be. My grandmother, Ruth, known by the grandkids as Ruchie, lived with my grandfather, Papa, in an old farmhouse. The house had been cobbled together of out at least two other buildings and the layout was, therefore, a bit unusual.

The front porch was the width of the house and had a brick railing. There were two porch swings and one entered the house through French doors except no one ever entered the house that way unless they had gone from inside to sit on the front porch. The drive went beside the house and everyone entered from the middle door of the three that opened off the full-length side porch.

Each door opened into a different room, the middle one being the sitting room although it, like the other two, had at least one bed. It was a shame no one ever used the front doors since the walk to the road was lined with boxwoods and umbrella trees and looked really nice.

Besides, the glass French doors opened into the living room and there was no bed in there. We only went in there at Christmas and other special times. There was another set of glass French doors into the dining room.

Between the three side rooms and the dining room and kitchen was a wide hall that had once obviously been a porch. The one central heat source was a large floor grate over a coal fired furnace. At the end of the hall was a bathroom with a toilet and footed bathtub. For whatever reason, the sink was in the hall.

At one time there had been a coal fired hot water heater in the basement, but it had burned out long ago and, since I can remember, was a rusted out relic. Its only purpose being to occupy space. My grandfather never deemed it necessary to replace the old water heater. After all, there was an electric cook stove and plenty of stewers.

So, when hot water was called for, Ruchie would fill a large stewer with water, bring it to a boil, and dump it in the wringer washer on the back porch or into the bathtub. She would then run cold water into the washer or tub until the temperature was just right to her seasoned touch. In my opinion, however, Ruchie was pretty insensitive to heat.

During the Christmas holidays the living room was always decorated with cedar and holly boughs and a giant tree accompanied by the wonderful odors from the kitchen that just smelled like Christmas. With five daughters and several folks they had raised, my
The grandparents’ house was full of cousins and other relatives at Christmas. It was truly a joyous time.

When young cousins would come for the first overnight visit for the Christmas holidays, we would caution them about a “Ruchie Bath.”

“Does she scrub hard,” they would ask when we warned them about bath time. “Naw, she doesn’t even make you use a washcloth or soap. She just boils you. You get real clean, real quick, and ya’ sure don’t dally in the tub.” “Now, come on. You’re lying,” they said, not entirely sure we were.

Well, bath time came, and we made sure we were all in the hall so we would see the preparations. That big hall was like bleachers for the old hands to watch first-timers take a Ruchie bath.

When Ruchie put the water on the stove, we had our guests’ attention. Their eyes would get big as Ruchie carried the stewer of boiling water to the tub. They watched in terror as she poured the steaming water in the tub, and the veterans gave them knowing nods and head shakes. Reactions varied from that point. Some would just stand and cry, some ran for their parents, and others hid. If I was the first to bathe, I would scream like I was being boiled alive. Ruchie never said much when I did. I think she knew what was going on.

Ruchie would round up the rest, pour in another charge of boiling water and turn on the cold. As they saw the cold water run in, the terror would usually subside, but not always. Of course, I was rolling on the rug with laughter.

Over the years, I have had several of those young visitors recount their memory of the Ruchie Bath, the terror still evident in their voice even as adults.
Who can forget that sweet smile? That familiar smile was evident on Pearl Routon’s face through the entire “This Is Your Life” program that aired December 19, 1956.

For those of you youngsters out there, “This Is Your Life” was a popular television program which surprised guests with their friends and family who shared their past experiences with the guest of honor. The show began as a radio program in the early 1950s and ran on NBC television from 1952-1961 with host Ralph Edwards. It was revived from 1971-1972 and ran as specials in the 1980s.

Pearl thought she was being treated by her daughter-in-law Val Routon and friend Norma Killebrew to be an audience member at a taping of “This Is Your Life” program in Los Angeles. Little did she know that she was to be the subject and her surprise lit up her face as Ralph Edwards said the familiar phrase, “Pearl Routon, this is your life!”

Most households in Paris and Henry County were glued to their TV sets to watch the program. Those who didn’t own TV sets yet, found neighbors or local businesses where they could watch it. Seeing one of their own on national TV was a BIG DEAL!

Pearl had an especially full life. She was an acclaimed artist and was responsible for the iris being named the state flower of Tennessee. She painted on canvas and on china and was a noted portrait painter. She was a musician, florist, business woman, owner of the “Dinner Bell” restaurant and cabins in Routon during World War II, as well as her flower shop and greenhouse in Paris.

She attended Peabody College at the age of 14 but had to quit due to lack of money to continue. But she worked for the county schools, and in time, became the principal of the former Lee School. One year, she won 35 first place ribbons at the Henry County Fair for cooking and painting, and fair officials actually told her she needed to stop exhibiting at the fair so that others could have a chance to win.

She was a giving soul who touched many lives. Born in 1882, her childhood was not easy, yet she was able to overcome obstacles. Her father died when she was only three and the family had to work hard for everything they had. Pearl died in 1965 at the age of 82 and is buried in Maplewood Cemetery in Paris.

A vase painted by Pearl was brought to the “This Is Your Life” set and it was used in the program. Everyone who appeared on the program to share their stories about Pearl brought a flower, and by the end of the program, the vase was filled with flowers, representing her good deeds.

Guests on the program included Tennessee Governor Frank Clement.
and State Welfare Commissioner Christine Reynolds of Paris. Reynolds was a long-time friend of the Routon Family and was the first woman appointed to a state cabinet in Tennessee. Governor Clement also made Pearl an Honorary Colonel on his cabinet. He said Pearl was a “great lady” and spoke of all the “little things” she did for others that made “this life better.” Reynolds praised Pearl for everything she did “to beautiful the state of Tennessee.”

Others who appeared on the program to sing Pearl’s praises were her husband, Stephen James Routon, known as “Mr. Jimmy” and a former State Senator; her son, Joe Routon, representing all the children; seven-year-old Sarah Jean McKelvey, Dr. Jesse Corum, Cecil Greer Perry, Mrs. L.J. Williams, Wallace Coleman, Calvin Freeman, Walter Williams, and Tom Joy.

The good deeds that each remembered Pearl doing ran a nice gamut. For Little Sarah Jean, Pearl fixed up a doll for her; Pearl taught Calvin Freeman how to read and write when he was 14 and helped him find a home and paid for hospital bills. She encouraged Walter Williams, who later became a magazine writer. And for Tom Joy, she provided a home for he, his wife and child in her log cabin on Flower Lane when he was a soldier at Camp Tyson.

In his presentation, Ralph Edwards noted that Pearl always had a greenhouse on Flower Lane but she was always giving the flowers away to people. Realizing she could have a business in flowers, she opened her first flower shop in 1915. Her greenhouse was destroyed by a hail storm, and in 1931, a fire destroyed a storage building for the shop. But, Edwards noted, she kept plugging on.

At the end of the program, Edwards presented her with a charm bracelet, a copy of the program and a film projector to watch it, her own TV “so she didn’t have to go to the neighbors to watch TV anymore,” art supplies, a huge sign saying “Miss Pearl’s Flowers” for her shop, and the pièce de résistance – a new 1957 Studebaker.

In July, her grandson Joe Routon posted a copy of the “This Is Your Life” program on Youtube for all to enjoy, and it has had over 2,000 views already.

Joe said the gold bracelet, with each charm representing an important event in Pearl’s life, was willed to his aunt Catherine, who then willed it to him. “It’s a family treasure, so I keep it in a lockbox at the bank. It was made by Marchal Jewelers in NYC”.

He also shared an anecdote about the brand-new Studebaker she received. It was a Silver Hawk sports car and Joe said, “To my great disappointment, she wrote to the Studebaker company graciously requesting a station wagon instead. I delivered flowers in that station wagon for years. She finally gave it to me—my first car.”

Her granddaughter Stephanie Routon, who is the Henry County Archivist, watches the program each Christmas and still has the shoes that her mother, Val, wore on the program. “Those ladies were so elegant and I just love watching that program. I get sentimental, of course, with all the good memories.”

When she was the guest on “This Is Your Life” TV show, Pearl Routon received several prizes, including a gold charm bracelet (below) and the keys to a brand new Studebaker car (left).
Willie Greer can remember vividly how he was saved. A member of the Birds Creek Baptist Church in Whitlock for 84 years, he was 14-years old when he was saved during a week-long revival at the church.

With Birds Creek Church recently celebrating its 200-year anniversary on October 4, that means Greer has been a member nearly half of the period in which the church has operated. Birds Creek is the oldest church in the Western District Association and the current pastor is Brother Kevin Gallimore.

“I started riding my bicycle to church on Sundays when I was seven,” Greer recalled. “Birds Creek was the only Baptist church that was very close to our farm. There was no way that Mother and Daddy could go with all the work on the farm. They would go for special services and then we’d get the mule and the wagon ready, but they couldn’t go very often.”

Revivals would be held at the church in the summers, Greer said, “and they’d be held every evening for a week. Even Daddy would go to those. He’d say get the mules up and let’s go.”

Greer was sitting in the back row of the church at one of the revivals “and the time came for anybody who wanted to be saved to come up. Irma Dunn came back to me and said, ‘Willie, would you like to be baptized?’ I said ‘yes’ and she said, ‘Follow me’. She carried me up to the preacher right then.”

Baptism was held the next Sunday at Jones Bend Lake. “There were 17 of us baptized together. We met at the lake at 2 pm. It was a really hot day, so I didn’t mind getting in the water at all. That was my Sunday bath,” Willie chuckled. “I remember it like it was happening now. The preacher grabbed me by the nose and laid me back in the water.”

Birds Creek was a lot smaller than it is now when Greer was a boy. “I remember we had one big auditorium and then two little rooms on each side. That was it. The little rooms were the Sunday School rooms.” One of his clearest memories was of the “Amen Corner” and he laughs thinking about it. One side of the room was the preacher and the other side was a row of benches we called the Amen Corner. That’s where several men sat and whenever the preacher said something good, they’d say ‘Amen’.

The main part of the church is still there but has been expanded over the years. “We added a kitchen and two or three more rooms, a place where we do baptisms. Then in 1996, we built an auditorium and the kids can play basketball in there.”

Caleb Grissom is the church historian and organist, and with Willie Greer being his grandfather, he gets his love of history naturally. Grissom is a collector of information and photos of the church from its inception, and if you have a question about Birds Creek, he’s the one to ask.

According to Grissom, in 1820, Henry County had just a few squatters in the northwest section. “Needing a formal gathering place for worship, Birds Creek Baptist Church was
formed. This was the beginning of the continuing 200-year life span of the congregation.

In that year, a one-room log building was worshiped in by a Primitive Baptist congregation. Grissom said, “This was called Birds Creek Church. Named by Bryan Bird because many birds came to a creek near this building, to bathe and drink water. Then it was Birds Creek Baptist Church.”

In a land grant written in the former state capital of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on October 17, 1820, William Young received 320 acres to farm and take residence, Grissom said. This irregular tract of land included the site of Bird’s Creek Baptist Church.

“At the time, this area had no name,” according to Grissom. “It wasn’t until 1889 that the area was given the name of Chester. In 1891, a post office was established. Sometime after the post office was in operation, it was found there was another town in Tennessee by the name of Chester. Due to the confusion in mail, the Postal Service and the State of Tennessee changed the name of the village to Whitlock. Named for Tom H. Whitlock who had a large farm adjoining the town of Chester.”

In September of 1823, there was a division within the church over missions, Grissom said. “Those for missions, continued to worship at Birds Creek Missionary Baptist Church.”

Sometime before 1912, a one-room frame structure was erected. This building was partially burned in March 1913 and was repaired by April the same year. This structure is the main center of the present church building, Grissom said.

“Since its beginning, Bird’s Creek has been the beginning of pastoring for many young men. In 1949, Birds Creek called Brother Carlos Owens as pastor, the youngest one it ever had. He was a student at Union University at Jackson. In 1950, the church went full time. Brother Owens served Birds Creek as pastor for 5½ years. Owens and his wife, Myrtice, were known for their 36 years spent in Africa as foreign missionaries,” Grissom said.

Many additions and changes have happened over the years at Birds Creek. The additions of fellowship halls, and educational wings have shown the growth of the church. He noted that in 1997, the Family Life Center was built.

Grissom said, “This was a pivotal moment in the history of the Church. When we entered 2020, our church building has seen many renovations to keep the original 120-year-old structure in sound stature.”

To celebrate the church’s bicentennial, a special service was held October 4, which included music from throughout the decades beginning with 1820, a presentation of photos from over the years, a reading of the church history, recognition of the oldest and longest-serving members and a proclamation by Henry County Mayor Brent Greer. It was followed by a luncheon and a singing.

One of the things members of Birds Creek, and others who drive by, like the most is seeing what new message that member Mark Rudy puts on the church sign. The message may be poignant or it may be humorous, but it’s always heartfelt.
The Two Travelers are convinced that no other town celebrates Christmas like Paris, Tennessee, however there are a few that give it such a good go that Santa leaves extra goodies in their stockings. One city that ties an extra-festive bow on the holiday season is nearby Clarksville, Tennessee.

Only an hour’s drive from Paris, we love that Clarksville is situated on the storied Cumberland River with a hopping, historic downtown and is home to Austin Peay University. But it’s the city’s twinkling lights, merry movies, and eclectic eateries that move it near the top of the list.

The Cumberland River Walk at McGregor Park on Riverside Drive is a scenic destination for a walk anytime. The thoughtfully designed, paved path is universally accessible and offers seating, restrooms, period lighting, an overlook/stage area and attractive iron fencing. However, we like to visit in late November after the magic dust has been sprinkled and this promenade is shimmering like the Northern Lights!

More than a million bulbs glisten along the trail with cheery displays for Christmas on the Cumberland. A lighted Santa and his elves are situated next to jolly penguins sliding down icebergs. Horse-drawn carriages wait near ice skaters, and Christmas trees are surrounded by toys galore. Children, adults and even pets love strolling through the open-air tunnel created by sparkling lights. This free feast for the eyes runs from November 24 until January 1, 2021.

Although we try to visit attractions like this on weeknights to avoid the crowds, it pairs nicely with the Roxy Theater’s Friday Night Movie Series.
While the cozy, downtown theatre isn’t doing live performance yet, due to COVID-19, they note that safety measures are in place.

Their diverse selection of movie classics that will help make your Christmas complete, includes: “The Nightmare before Christmas,” “Meet Me in St. Louis,” “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation,” “The Polar Express” and our all-time fave, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Ebenezer Scrooge would appreciate the friendly, five-dollar ticket price. Go online early for reservations.

Along with these exciting, evening adventures you’ll need some sustenance, right? Two of our favorites are just steps away from the Roxy in Downtown Clarksville, which is a glittery holiday party in its own right. We’re not sure who wraps all of the trees, but each one is an illuminated masterpiece, which adds a high-end backdrop to your photos and your evening. But we digress...sustenance.

The Blackhorse Pub and Brewery was the site of one of our first dates and has remained a favorite when are in that neck of the woods. The vibe is cool, the history is authentic and everything on the menu is mouthwatering. This family-owned business has been doing things right for 30 years.

Looking for something a little more upscale? Edward’s Steakhouse is our hands-down favorite. Their steaks are spot-on, and their menu is varied and delicious. On weekends, the piano bar’s feisty performer bumps things up a notch. Add to this their excellent service and delectable entrees, and we’d take any opportunity to dine with them anytime.

En route back to Paris, drive slowly through Dover and enjoy their light show. Far smaller than either Clarksville or Paris, this town has a heart for spreading joy by lighting the path for travelers down Highway 79 for many a Christmas.

VisitClarksvilleTN.com is your online connection to Christmas on the Cumberland, the Roxy Theater’s Friday Night Movie Series, and impressive downtown and restaurant sections.

‘Til next time, may your Christmas be filled with joy, love and a bit of travel!
In 1944, a New York public school teacher, Don Gardner, penned a Christmas tune for his second-grade class, “All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth.” He had asked the children what they each wanted for Christmas, and he noticed that most all the students were missing at least one front tooth because they were answering with a lisp.

The song was introduced to America in 1948 when The Satisfiers sang it on Perry Como’s radio show. It has been recorded by Spike Jones and His City Slickers, Ray Stevens, George Strait, Danny Kaye, and several others including The Chipmunks! In an interview in 1995, Gardner remarked that he was “amazed at the way that silly little song was picked up by the whole country.”

In this article, you will soon discover what your friends and neighbors wanted as a child and how their wants have changed with time.

MR. POTATO HEAD

As a child, my first Christmas “want” that I can remember was a Mr. Potato Head. Before the plastic body was introduced in 1964, Mr. PH was just an accessory kit and the purchaser had to provide the body. I soon learned that the Irish baking potato worked much better than the red potato – too many eyes! I also remember my mom telling me not to throw Mr. Potato Head’s body away when I was through playing. She wanted to give him a more proper “funeral” in the soup that was simmering on the stove!

I’m much older now and my Christmas “want” has changed. I still like Mr. Potato Head, but what I want this year is to have more time with my family. I have six children and eleven grandchildren, and they are all growing up and spreading out across the country. I’m getting older, too, and my time is limited. Quality time with my family is more important than everything else.

I talked to others in my circle, and here’s what they had to say.

SUSAN DOLL & SOFTBALL GLOVE

Martha Campbell, retired registered nurse, said the first Christmas “want” she remembered was a walking doll. She still has “Susan,” and the doll is dressed in her original green dress and bloomers. Her shoes are long gone but her hair is still pretty. Martha’s wish for 2020 would be for all her family to be together. She said, “The older we become, the less items become important. I am blessed.”

Jennifer Mikeska, Administrator of Henry County 411 on Facebook, said the first Christmas “want” that she can recall was a softball glove so that she could play catch with her brother.

As a child growing up in the Atkins-Porter neighborhood, she often “gathered with the other kids to play ball on the lawn of the school and having your own glove meant something back then. “For those of you who are new to the area, the playing field was where the A-P parking lot is now.”

This year, Jennifer wants a comfortable holster for the weapon she is licensed to carry.
CB RADIO & SEARS WISHBOOK

Retired Paris Fire Department Captain Barry Farmer’s first “want” was a CB radio so he could communicate with others that were out and about. He had been bitten by the “bug” while using his neighbor’s mobile radio.

Santa came through and delivered. His next want, you might guess, was for a proper antenna to replace the home-made version that he and his dad constructed.

In 2020, his want is much simpler. “Just have the kids home safe and sound for a few days,” said Barry.

Jack Spencer, Security Assistant and HAPNA’s Neighborhood Watch Chairman, spent hours poring over the Sears’s Wishbook trying to decide what he really wanted for Christmas as a child.

It is rumored that his first “want” was a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Whatever he decided on was passed along to his father in case Santa had not received his letter!

In 2020, Jack says, “I just want to see an end to this plague that has disrupted our lives like no other time we have lived through.” He added, “I just want to see my family and my neighbors healthy, happy, and at peace once again.”

EASY BAKE & A WISH FOR SNOW

Renae Peale, owner of a private home daycare, remembers that her first “want” was the Holly Hobbie Easy Bake Oven. It seems that Santa was generous and brought two – one for Renae and one for her sister, Anita. Can’t you just imagine the bake-offs going on in that house?

Renae said what she wants for 2020 and 2021 is some sort of “normalcy.” She wants the local schools to offer in-person learning for all students and our elderly in the nursing homes to not be forgotten. “Lastly,” she said, “for people to be filled with more faith than fear. These are all issues near and dear to my heart.”

Mike Wilson, Circuit Court Clerk, said that when he was a kid his “want” was for “snow to keep me out of school, presents from Santa, and the many home-made cookies and treats the holiday would bring.”

The most exciting present he remembers receiving was the Ronco Pocket Fisherman Rod and Reel. (I should have asked Mike if he ever caught any fish with it!)

For 2020, Mike said, “I want to watch the excitement those things bring to the faces of our grandchildren, and the older I get the more I enjoy family interactions, the storytelling of times past, and time spent with my wife away from the hustle and bustle of work.”

WHEN I WAS A CHILD...

1 Corinthians 13:11 says: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

It does seem that most everyone had a favorite childhood memory. And while it’s fine to hold on to those, it appears that as I and everyone matured, our “wants” became more family centered, faith based, and hope driven. Here’s hoping our “wants” for 2021 are fulfilled.
As I write this in early October, the yards in my neighborhood are glistening with a silvery white sheen. But if ol’ Jack Frost thinks he’s ahead of the game, he should check out the Downtown Paris Association’s Christmas Committee.

For months, these folks have worked on Downtown Unwrapped, researching how these treasured traditions could be modified for COVID-19. Remember, this time last year the words “social distancing” and “masks” were not even in our daily vocabulary.

Happily, the decision was made to push forward with the full list of the traditional Christmas events, although a couple have been swapped for more COVID-friendly ones.

On orders from Santa, the health of the community is being monitored on a daily basis with significant precautions in place to encourage social distancing and create the safest environment possible.

So, pull up your calendar and prepare to log the dates of your old favorites, plus a few surprises!

CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE
NOVEMBER 6-8
This magical weekend ushers in the sights and sounds of the holiday season by welcoming friends and visitors to exquisitely lighted, historic Downtown Paris. Shops will be brimming with decorating and gift ideas, including home décor, apparel, jewelry, gourmet food, Paris items and more.

Linger a while and enjoy our traditional restaurants and food trucks. Cozy up to a firepit and sing along with holiday tunes via downtown’s new sound system that fills the streets with cheer. You bring the shopping list and we’ll bring the hand sanitizer, plus information on social distancing and recommended masking info for increased safety.

FESTIVAL OF TREES
NOVEMBER 24 - DECEMBER 16
Festival of Trees is a tradition that features a room filled with joyfully decorated trees from businesses, neighborhoods and families. To allow for more trees and space for social distancing, digital entries will be allowed. See them all at the Old 5 and 10 Event Center on the square. Don’t forget to vote for your favorite!

NORTH POLE FAMILY FUN DAY
NOVEMBER 27
The day after Thanksgiving means one thing to kids, Santa Claus is coming to town! Enjoy the thrill of huge firetruck delivering the big man-in-red to his home on the courthouse lawn. Although we will not have a petting zoo or crafts this year, children love riding the popular trackless train and visiting with Mama Claus and her North Pole pals.

VISIT WITH SANTA
NOVEMBER 27 & WEEKENDS THROUGH DECEMBER 18
Because we all want to keep Santa safe, he’s using a creative alternative to having children sit on his lap. A Dutch door has been made for Santa’s House,
allowing him to open the top, stand at the door, and visit with the kiddos. Bring your cell phone; multiple photo opportunities will still be available.

**ADVENT CANDLES AND CAROLS**

**DECEMBER 2**

Advent is Latin for “coming.” Join us on the courthouse lawn as our community gathers to celebrate the coming of Jesus through word, song and light. COVID precautions will be taken to encourage social distancing.

**DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL**

**DECEMBER 12**

Who wants to go ice skating? This year we will be trying something new. In addition to visiting with Santa, guests can experience a synthetic ice skating rink and 30’ “Snowzilla Jr. Slide.”

The 30’x 40’ rink will be available from 10 am – 9 pm. It holds 20 skaters at a time, so online reservations are recommended for the 20 minute segments.

**NEW THIS YEAR:**

**PASSPORT TO CHRISTMAS**

**NOVEMBER 6 – DECEMBER 12**

Everyone loves shopping locally. Those dollars help fund our police and fire departments, parks and more. But this year there’s another reason to shop at home.

Our Passport to Christmas highlights participating businesses while adding a little bit of holiday fun. Simply spend money in those businesses to collect stickers in your passport. Redeem those stickers for a chance to win $1,000 holiday cash!

**LIGHT UP PARIS!**

**NOVEMBER 27 – DECEMBER 31**

Our online platform will allow Parisians and surrounding towns in Henry County to enter their commercial or residential Christmas lights for everyone to see. Simply click three buttons, snap a photo and the information will be entered into a GPS database. From there, those wishing to find local Christmas lights can use the page to plan an evening filled with merriment. Don’t forget to vote for your favorite.

More details will be available as the season progresses. Follow the Downtown Paris Association online or on social media for up to date information.
Happy Holidays
FROM
TWIN RIVERS ORTHO
HEATHER A. MELTON, MD
SAME AND NEXT-DAY APPOINTMENTS
East Wood Clinic | 1323 E. Wood Street | Paris, TN 38242

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MyParisMagazine.com
Driving down Lone Oak Road, across the street from Rhea Elementary School, the area is much like any other neighborhood – until Christmas!

On the 1700 block is a home not decorated with wreaths and twinkling lights like the others for the holiday. At the residence of Stephen Haynes, the exterior is a dazzling scene of retro designs, vintage lawn decor, and sparkling garland, and all is properly lit by well-placed lighting.

Haynes knows a bit about creating a scene. He is the designer/technical director for Bethel’s Academic Theatre program and he also teaches a variety of theatre courses, as well as a speech course. When asked how he got into designing for his home, he replied, “I've always been sentimental about certain things and holiday decorations are one of those things.”

Haynes’ whimsical home displays are brightly painted with exacting detail. Many resemble artwork from the 1950s to the mid-1960s with illustrations that might have appeared in print advertising, packaging, greeting cards, and wrapping paper.

“I guess it started with collecting things I remember from my childhood coupled with my love of mid-century design,” he said. And that fondness shows in his work.

“I try to add something new and change things up a bit from year to year,” Haynes said of his decorations. “One of my inspirations for the outdoor decor is the large municipal decorations that cities and towns always used year after year. I looked forward to seeing the familiar ones.”

Primarily, Haynes decorates his home for Christmas and Halloween, but this year he added some Easter...
Haynes would be the first to admit he is a big fan of Christmas, and he finds the season both aspiring and exciting year-round.

During your drive to see the holiday decorations with your children, put Stephen Haynes’ address on your list of “must-see” homes. His artwork will put the “Ho-Ho-Ho” in your vehicle and in your heart.

decor. In the off-seasons, he stores the plywood pieces in his garage and basement.

Not only does Haynes decorate his home on the outside, he also festoons the interior with vintage Christmas collectibles. “I am particularly fond of Santas from the late 40s to the early 70s,” he said. “Actually, they are what inspired the outside decorations.”

He finds most of his Christmas items at estate sales, flea markets, thrift stores, and eBay. “I guess it is a hobby. It’s fun to finally find a piece you’ve always wanted or to see something you never knew existed.”

Haynes painted this piece based on the graphics for a fake fireplace.
Season’s Greetings
During this holiday season, we wish you all the best.

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331 Jim Adams Drive, Suite C • Paris, TN 38242
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"Twas the night before Christmas, and I was fully awake,
No toys under the tree; no cookies were baked.
The packages coming by mail were terribly late,
And Amazon things, back ordered to April 8th.

The kids were all asleep and under their covers
Video games still playing, unseen by their mother.
I worried and fretted. What was I to do?
What a weird type of Christmas, I stewed!

Then suddenly, out on the lawn, there came a great crash.
I jump to see what the security camera had captured.
In my fearful state, I shook from my head to my toes,
While the street light lit brightly the newly fallen snow.

Then what to my astonished eyes do I see?
A sleigh with tiny reindeer? Where was the police!
Nobody was seeing this, not even my dog.
He was sleeping soundly, just like a log.

It was Santa Claus, all right, yet different somehow,
A candy-striped mask covered his big bearded jowl.
He wore a fur-trimmed hazmat suit of red;
A jolly “Merry Christmas” was all he said.

He was quick with his chore, much had to be done,
Shiny packages he affixed to a silent, speedy drone.
He guided the 'copter with the greatest of skill,
Gifts arrived down the chimney. Oh, what a thrill!

Out in the snow, to Santa Claus I ran,
But he warned me, “Six feet you must stand.”
He tossed me a face mask and started to explain,
“This Christmas with COVID, it’s simply insane!”

“I must protect Mrs. Claus and the elves these days,
Plus myself, from this deadly disease, I say.
I’ve done it before, through illnesses and wars,
And Christmas will come again, just like before.”

“But this Christmas is not all about gifts and toys,
It’s about those things we should never avoid.
Christmas is about family, friends, and those we love.
It not about what’s here but from Heaven above.”

“Hold fast to those things that really matter in life.
And wear your mask! Let it cause you no strife.
Keep your hand clean because that is a must.
Oh, me! Look at the time! I really got to rush.”

With a smile and wink, Santa was gone into the night,
On his sleigh full of toys and his drone so bright.
I tiptoed back inside, not to wake anybody asleep,
And back to bed to ponder Santa’s yearly feat.

It is hard to believe, but my strange tale is true.
Santa’s words will stay with me, that’s for sure.
My Christmas will be filled with more love and care,
And around my community, a face mask I’ll wear.

Merry Christmas!
Paris native and gospel legend, Dr. Bobby Jones, stopped to reflect for a moment after the unveiling of the Tennessee Music Pathways state marker placed downtown in his honor.

At the official ribbon-cutting the city of Paris Dog Park, from left, Sam Tharpe, Police Chief Chuck Elizondo, Assistant Chief Ricky Watson, Chamber President Michele Atkins and Randy Boyd, whose foundation provided the grant for equipping the dog park. Boyd is the University of Tennessee President.

Even adults got into the act at the official opening of the Eiffel Tower Splash Park. Susan Jones, Missy Hamilton and John Etheridge couldn't wait to get splashed.

Meagan Hart of Paris BPU shows off the pumpkin for the “Leroy The Lineman” scarecrow at this year’s Scarecrows On The Square.

Brook Ray shows a little customer how to do some crafts at this year’s Arts ‘Round The Square.

Recently, the hard-working folks at the W. G. Rhea Library participated in “Purple In Paris” for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.
Jane Cozart Reed and Darrin Thompson, representatives of State Farm Insurance donating to First United Methodist Church’s Food Pantry. Receiving the check are Rev. Joy Weathersbee and Jennifer Cronin.

Horsing around after the last freshman game and a big win is, left to right, #63 Carter Hedges, #15 Braiden Newell, Cheerleader Angelina Overcast, and #11 Mason Shankel.

Willie, daughter of Preston and Audrey Bradley, found a chicken to hold at her Granddad Emory’s farm.

Haven Dunlap and her friend, Daley Wade, enjoy one last jet ski ride on Kentucky Lake before cool weather arrives.

Little Leah Wherry enjoys playing in the corn at Holt Farms’ pumpkin patch. She is the daughter of Kayla Wherry.

Grove Patriot Cheerleaders recently had a fundraiser where Addy Kate Parker was a top seller, thanks to Joe Rice and the fine folks at Serra Chevrolet of Jackson.

Haven Dunlap and her friend, Daley Wade, enjoy one last jet ski ride on Kentucky Lake before cool weather arrives.

Little Leah Wherry enjoys playing in the corn at Holt Farms’ pumpkin patch. She is the daughter of Kayla Wherry.

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Merry Christmas!

from everyone at Moody Realty

Moody Realty would like to express its appreciation to all who helped make 2020 successful.

We are truly blessed to have made so many good friends over the past 64 years and thank you for the opportunity to have served you.

We wish you and your family a warm and safe Holiday Season and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

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ACROSS
2. Bill Neese’s grandmother
5. They make great BBQ and cater, too.
6. He decorates his home for the holidays.
9. Brand of automobile in 1956
10. Mike Wilson wished for this at Christmas.
13. First tree wanted to be made into a beautiful _________.
15. Pastor in ________ Joy Weathersbee
16. Cafe where Santa likes to eat
19. What is a 200-year anniversary?
20. Willie Greer vividly remembers this at his church.

DOWN
1. Enemy of Weed-Be-Gone
3. Bible ________ and Archeologists
4. COVID Christmas ________
7. Find Sam & Hannah’s food videos here
8. Chamber of Commerce’s Downtown ________
9. Type of steak for tacos
11. New feature during Downtown Christmas Festival
12. Need this for chance to win $1,000
14. Find Clarksville’s Christmas lights here.
17. Barry Hart needed this vegetable for his Christmas toy.
18. She was on TV show “This Is Your Life.”

Puzzle Solve on Page 38
What do you do when you're a minister and your church has been basically shutdown due to a pandemic? What do you do when you are a Sunday school teacher with no students to teach? For Reverend Joy Weathersbee and retired school-teacher Cindy Lowe, you improvise!

“I missed my kids,” said Lowe. “I needed to find some way to connect with them.” She came up with the idea of a virtual get-together of her Wednesday night children’s group to share Bible lessons with them. The result was “Bedtime Bible Stories with Miss Cindy” on Facebook Live.

Lowe also reached out to Weathersbee with another idea she heard about from a cousin in Michigan. “Her town’s Methodist and Lutheran churches got together to do Pastor in Pajamas stories on Facebook Live for their children, but they also simulcast the audio over the local radio station so all the children could hear the stories,” she said.

It didn’t take much urging for Weathersbee to suit up in her PJ’s on Sunday nights for her own bedtime story readings. “The stories are either faith based or Bible stories for children,” said Weathersbee.

She has a list of children’s books prepared and has even ordered an illustrated Bible storybook that was first printed in the 1940s to share with her young viewers. “They had such great pictures,” she said about the children’s books from that era. Lowe has also ordered an additional aid for her Bible studies, a Betty Luken flannelgraph.

Both women have dealt with unfamiliar territory when reaching their audiences. Each has a special set-up in their homes for their story times, but they aren’t limiting themselves to a computer in a closed room. Recently, Lowe took some vacation time in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and took the Bible lesson on the road with her.

“My lesson was from Genesis about the creation story, and right before time to start on Facebook, a shaft of light came down from the sky and rested on the mountain. It was like God was saying ‘Let there be light.’ It was so surreal,” she recalled.

Pastor Joy did a reading from her grandson Henry’s home. “I had to sneak off to the other end of the house...
so not to wake him.” They plan to try other locations in the future.

When asked if it felt odd to read stories aloud with no children around, both gave a resounding, “Yes!”

“I find myself slowing down when I talk,” said Weathersbee. “I feel a bit like Mr. Rogers.”

“Bedtime Bible Stories” and “Pastor in Pajamas” is not limited to just the children of Paris First United Methodist Church. It is open to any child and/or parent who request entry to Bible Explorers and Archeologist, a blog Lowe began on Facebook. The average age level is preschool to grade school but is open to any child wishing to hear the stories and lessons. Lowe’s class is on Wednesday nights at 7:30 and Weathersbee’s stories are on Sunday nights at 7:30.

“We thought that was a good time. Kids would be finished with sports and other activities and beginning to slow down for the night,” said Lowe.

Both women have planned their stories and lessons through the holidays and stay tuned for special readings the week of Christmas.

If you know a child who would enjoy the bedtime readings, go to www.facebook.com/Bible-Explorers-and-Archeologists and follow the instructions. Sweet dreams!

Cindy Lowe reads a Bible story on Facebook Live to her Wednesday night kids’ group.

Previous page: Rev. Joy Weathersbee is decked out in her PJ’s while she reads a bedtime story.
Skirt Steak Tacos

Lights, Camera, FOOD!

By Karen Geary

Skirt Steak Tacos with Roasted Salsa Verde. Shrimp and Grits. Adobo Chicken Nachos. Grilled Turkey. Homemade Pizza. Are you hungry yet? Good! Because Sam and Hannah Hutson of Cottage Grove are ready to teach you how to prepare these dishes via their YouTube Channel for Grange Food Co.

“We love living a rural lifestyle with a small farm full of animals and fresh food,” said Sam. “When we started Grange Digital Marketing, a professional video services, we always had the goal of starting a food brand.”

“Grange” is synonymous with a farm or farmhouse in Europe and other culture, and when Hannah discovered the word, they both knew this would be the basis for their company. Sam is a third generation farmer and has learned from example. His father, Mike, farms down the road from him, and his grandfather, Dan Paschall, is a well-known area farmer. “We grow our own,” said Sam.

Raised in another part of the county, life was different for Hannah. “I grew up in the City of Paris and my family didn’t have a garden. But after I got married and moved out here, I really got into digging the earth and watching the plants grow. It was a lot easier that I thought to grow my own nutritious food.”

With the COVID-19 quarantine, the couple also saw a need to offer the videos as a way to educate the public on healthy cooking. “A person doesn’t need to have a big garden to feed their family. A fair amount of food can be grown on a patio or deck in pots and small containers,” said Sam.

The pair make a good team in their videos. “I have always been very passionate about cooking,” said Sam. “I have a smoked turkey that is to die for.” In two videos, Hannah instructs how to make mouth-watering strawberry pie and peach cobbler, using fresh fruit from Future Vision Farmers on Whitlock Road. “Even when we’re not doing the videos, I sometimes just like to go in the kitchen and make a batch of cookies,” said Hannah.

The Hutson’s goal is to produce a cooking video at least once a week.
“We have had so much positive interest in the local community since we started, but we hope to expand our audience soon,” said Sam. “We want to keep our brand at the center of the videos by focusing on cooking with fresh ingredients grown locally, supporting local farmers, showing people how to cook what they eat, and ultimately letting our community tell us what they want to see us cook.”

They have also highlighted local agriculture businesses in some food videos. “We shot a recipe alongside North American Caviar that featured three recipes using Asian Carp. We wanted to show how simple it is to cook a great meal with the fish. Asian Carp is a serious problem for our local lake and we discussed the issues the fish bring, how it affects tourism, and what steps they are taking to help with the problem.”

In a recent episode, Sam and Hannah headed to the Murray Farmers’ Market and challenged themselves to prepare a three-course meal without knowing what fresh food they would find there.

“We are in no way culinary experts,” Sam said. “We like to make recipes that the average person can prepare.” Hannah agreed, “We have watched cooking videos and come up with our recipes. Cooking doesn’t have to be hard and should be enjoyable.”

That is obvious watching Sam and Hannah in action on their videos. They interject their down-to-earth personalities and humor into each episode and are unashamed when something doesn’t go right. In one episode, a Go-Pro camera just about overturns a pot of hot cheese sauce. In another, the couple is seen chowing down on a whole cobbler. “That’s the best part! We get to eat what we fixed,” said Sam.

Sam and Hannah want YOU to help decide what content to create next! Follow them on Facebook and Instagram, message them what food you wish for them to prepare, and subscribe to “Grange Food Co.” on YouTube. Your food suggestion just might be their next video.
This is my favorite time of year. It’s my favorite for many reasons. I love the spirit of the approaching holidays, cool weather, family get-togethers and perhaps most of all I enjoy the food. This year may be a little different with fewer gatherings, but we can still enjoy all the fixings!

Sam and Hannah Hutson are letting us borrow their turkey marinade recipe (see article on page 28), and I’m including a few of our family favorite sides, as well.

No matter if it’s Thanksgiving, Christmas, or just a Tuesday night, spend time with the ones you love and cook up a little homemade goodness.

**EASY BROCCOLI RICE CASSEROLE**

- 16 oz. frozen, chopped broccoli or broccoli florets
- 1 cup uncooked long grain rice
- 2 cups hot water
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. butter
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 (10.75 oz) can condensed cheddar cheese soup
- ⅔ cup milk
- 16 oz. Velveeta, cubed
- 2 cups coarsely crushed Ritz crackers (leave several bigger pieces)
- 4 Tbsp. butter, melted

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Preheat oven to 350° F. Cook frozen broccoli according to package directions. Drain and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, over medium heat, melt the 1 Tbsp. of butter in a large pot. (I use an 8 qt. stock pot.) Add onion and saute until translucent and tender. Stir in soup, milk, and Velveeta cheese. Cook, stirring frequently, until cheese is melted.
3. Stir in broccoli and cooked rice. Spoon into a 9x13 baker pan that has been sprayed with cooking spray. In 2 qt. bowl, combine coarsely crushed Ritz crackers with 4 Tbsp. of melted butter. Sprinkle over rice mixture.
4. Bake uncovered 30 minutes or until top is golden brown and casserole is bubbly.
**TURKEY RECIPE**

This recipe is very versatile and can be adapted to most poultry. This particular recipe is for a whole turkey, but it can be used for a turkey breast or chicken!

**POULTRY BRINE:**

- 2 oranges, halved
- 1 lemon, halved
- 6 bay leaves
- 1 bunch thyme
- 1 bunch rosemary
- 3 Tbsp honey
- 1 head garlic
- ½ cup black peppercorns
- 1 cup Kosher salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 gallon water

**FOR THE TURKEY:**

- 1 whole turkey, rinsed and thawed
- 5 sprigs thyme
- 5 sprigs rosemary
- 1 head garlic
- 4 lemons, halved

1. Pour the water into a large pot over medium heat. Add all ingredients and stir until the sugar and salt have dissolved. Remove from heat and let it cool completely.

2. Remove giblets from inside of the turkey and rinse completely. Place turkey in a large container, such as a 2.5-gallon resealable plastic bag. Pour the brine over the turkey and let it sit in the refrigerator overnight, at least 12 hours.

3. Remove turkey and pat dry. Sprinkle poultry rub over the entire turkey. Stuff turkey with the remaining thyme, rosemary, garlic, and lemons. Bring the turkey legs together and tie with butchers twine.

4. Set smoker to 325 degrees with hickory, pecan, cherry, or applewood. Smoke the turkey for 12 minutes per pound, or until the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees. Let rest for 20 minutes before slicing.

**NANNY’S MASHED POTATOES**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 3 pounds Idaho potatoes
- ½ tsp. salt for water
- ½ stick butter
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ tsp. pepper

1. Bring a large pot of water, ½ tsp. salt, chopped potatoes to a boil.

2. Simmer 20-30 minutes or until fork tender.

3. Drain water. Add butter, milk, salt and pepper; MASH the potatoes with a potato masher. You’ll be glad you did!
Well, if it weren’t for my calendar on the wall, I would hardly believe that the holiday season is upon us already. I had to double check to make sure there wasn’t a misprint because it seems like we went straight from March to November with no summer months. What a year!

While this has been one for the record books with so many trying times and concerns, there is always something to look back on and be thankful for. In what has become somewhat of a tradition, I thought I would take a few paragraphs and send out my yearly “Thank You” notes to those things that have brought a little light to an otherwise dreary and overcast year.

THANK YOU, MULCH…
You do so much for the garden and ask so little in return. You allow us to take something that would otherwise be a waste product (whether it’s bark from a pine tree or maybe ground up and composted wooden pallets) and turn it into a weed-controlling, moisture retaining, and soil conditioning machine. Heck, you can even repel pests to a certain degree. And while you’re beautiful on your own, we gardeners can paint you up or dye you to the color we want.

THANK YOU, LEAVES…
It’s amazing enough that you can take a little water and carbon dioxide and magically produce enough food for yourselves. But then you have the goodness to give what’s left over (oxygen) to us humans so that we can respire. I just hope that you continue your philanthropy and think of us as good and worthy recipients.

Oh, and that thing you do in the Fall! Wow! I’ve often wondered where you get your inspiration for those dayglow, fluorescent oranges, yellow, and reds?

I also need to acknowledge the fact, that thanks to you, the cost to cool my house is probably cut in half. Now, if I could just find some way to fix that terrible shedding problem you have….

THANK YOU, PARKS AND BOTANICAL GARDENS…
To me, you’re kind of like an episode of “Game of Thrones.” Sometimes you bring me up, sometimes you bring me down, but you’re always entertaining.

You bring me up by showing me the possibilities of gardening if you just put forth the time and effort. You bring me down by showing me how miserably I sometimes fail at my own home gardening effort. But thank you for supplying an outdoor venue that allows me a little escape, even during this trying time of pandemic.

THANK YOU, IRRIGATION…
If it wasn’t for you, my plants would be dried and shriveled up like some kind of botanical sarcophagus. With the flip of a switch you can water just what is needed without wasting a drop on those areas that don’t. With a drip system, you can even place the water right at the root zone where it’s most needed. And who doesn’t have fond memories of running through a sprinkler on a hot summer day!

THANK YOU, FERTILIZER…
When my grass isn’t as green and healthy as Augusta National, you’ve got a formulation for that. When my flowers aren’t flowering like those tags at the nursery showed me they would, you’ve got a formulation for that.

When the leaves on my shrubs are as yellow as a school bus or when my
Maypops aren’t popping and my lilacs are lacking, you’ve got a formulation for that.

Whether you come in granules that I can spread around or in a powder that I can just mix with water, you never let me down. And a big shout-out to those companies that manufacture you, saving me a trip to the farm and having to follow Bessy around until she decides to manufacture an all-natural alternative.

THANK YOU, FLOWER POTS AND HANGING BASKETS...

Who needs a lot of space when I can brighten my day just by placing you around my patio or deck? I can even move you around if I get tired of where you are. You can’t do that with an oak tree, now can you?

THANK YOU, CRABGRAASS...

I know, that’s kind of weird, but we all need humbling now and then. You are one of the most resilient and opportunistic plants out there and an equal opportunity offender. It doesn’t matter whether it’s right in the middle of the lawn or smack dab in a flower bed full of zinnias, my hat is off to you for being so tough an opponent.

By the way, I also appreciate the feeling you give me when I break out the Weed-B-Gone and watch you wither away like a bad memory.

And finally...

THANK YOU, BUTTERFLIES AND HUMMINGBIRDS

Our gardens just wouldn’t come to life without you. There’s just something magical about the way you hover and float above a beautiful flower that makes it even more so. Not to mention the pollinating you perform with seemingly no effort. My thanks to you will be to plant more attractors next year in hopes that you will bring all of your friends.

So, in closing, I know it’s been a rough year, but look back on it with thankfulness for all of the good things that have happened and look forward to a happy and prosperous new year!

John Watkins is the grounds director at Discovery Park of America and resides in Henry County.
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What can I say? The year 2020 has been hard for a lot of folks. We have witnessed things that we once thought were not possible in America.

The holidays are fast approaching and can be the hardest times for so many people. With all that has happened so far this year, you may even be wondering at this very moment if God has forgotten you. To be honest, there have been times when I have questioned His presence. Let me be quick to remind us all, God is faithful no matter what we may see, hear, or feel in our hearts. That should give us all hope.

In the days right before Jesus and John the Baptist were born, it had been 400 years since God had spoken through prophets. Do you think some folks started wondering if God had forgotten them?

Christmas is a reminder that God is truly faithful. He does NOT forget His children! This truth is found in the most well-known, most quoted verse of the Bible: John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

With all that in mind, I want to share an American folk tale adapted from the out-of-print book The Tale of Three Trees, retold by Angela Elwell Hunt, Lion Publishing 1989.

Once upon a mountain top, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to be when they grew up.

The first little tree looked up at the stars and said, “I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I'll be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world!”

The second little tree looked out at the small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. “I want to be traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I'll be the strongest ship in the world!”

The third little tree looked down into the valley below where busy men and women worked in a busy town. “I don't want to leave the mountain top at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me, they'll raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world!”

Years passed. The rain came, the sun shone, and the little trees grew tall. One day three woodcutters climbed the mountain.

The first woodcutter looked at the first tree and said, “This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me.” With a swoop of his shining axe, the first tree fell. “Now I shall be made into a beautiful chest. I shall hold wonderful treasure!” the first tree said.

The second woodcutter looked at the second tree and said, “This tree is strong. It is perfect for me.” With a swoop of his shining axe, the second tree fell. “Now I shall sail mighty waters!” thought the second tree. “I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!”
The third tree felt her heart sink when the last woodcutter looked her way. She stood straight and tall and pointed bravely to heaven. But the woodcutter never even looked up. “Any kind of tree will do for me,” he muttered. With a swoop of his shining axe, the third tree fell.

The first tree rejoiced when the woodcutter brought her to a carpenter’s shop. But the carpenter fashioned the tree into a feedbox for animals. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold, nor with treasure. She was coated with sawdust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals.

The second tree smiled when the woodcutter took her to a shipyard, but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead, the once strong tree was hammered and sawed into a simple fishing boat. She was too small and too weak to sail on an ocean, or even a river. Instead, she was taken to a little lake.

The third tree was confused when the woodcutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. “What happened?” the once tall tree wondered. “All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point toward God.”

Many, many days and nights passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman placed her newborn baby in the feedbox.

“I wish I could make a cradle for him,” her husband whispered. The mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and sturdy wood. “This manger is beautiful,” she said. And suddenly the first tree knew she was holding the Greatest Treasure in the World.

One evening a tired traveler and his friends crowded into the old fishing boat. The traveler fell asleep as the second tree quietly sailed out into the lake. Soon a thundering and thrashing storm arose. The little tree shuddered. She knew she did not have the strength to carry so many passengers safely through with the wind and rain.

The tired man awakened. He stood up, stretched out his hand, and said, “Peace.” The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun. And suddenly the second tree knew she was carrying the King of Heaven and Earth.

One Friday morning, the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten woodpile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man’s hands to her. She felt ugly and harsh and cruel.

But on Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God’s love had changed everything. It had made the third tree strong. And every time people thought about the third tree, they would think of God. That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.

The next time you feel down because you didn’t get what you wanted, sit tight and be happy because God is thinking of something better to give you.

Barry Hart is a published author and retired minister. He can be contacted at hartbm@charter.net.
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