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December 21, 2023-January 3, 2024



## A MOVING CHRISTMAS MEMORY

BY KIM VON KELLER

Whether it's a carol, a children's performance, or a slice of red velvet cake, we expect the hallmarks of Christmas to make their appearances each December.

But some holiday experiences are so unexpected, and yet so emblematic, that we are moved to tears. It's what a local resident experienced on a recent visit to St. Mary of the Angels Catholic Church on White Street.



Faither Jairo Calderon

It was an average Monday in late fall, cold

and windy and dreary. The reader, who wishes to share her story anonymously, is a member of a running team and wanted a priest to bless some charms of St. Sebastian, the patron saint of athletes. But when she arrived, the parking lot was empty, and the church doors were locked.

"As I was standing at my car, about to leave, I heard

SEE MEMORY ON PAGE 2

# Don't expect to be Mother Teresa overnight



**MARY-CATHERINE  
McCLAIN  
RINER**

Unless you are Mother Teresa, the majority of individuals have experienced feelings of irritability, disappointment, anger, and/or resentment. It could be a bully at school, being fired from work, losing an important game, or the betrayal by a friend or partner. Likewise, it could be a complete stranger who deeply hurts you (e.g., loss in car accident; trauma).

Often, individuals remain stuck in the pain, hurt, and despair. If you continue to feel distress, distrust, and/or avoidance, the chances are you need to connect with the word forgiveness. Healing has a direct link with

surrendering (not forgetting!) and choosing forgiveness—yet it has to be your choice. It is important to remember forgiveness decreases depression, anxiety, and anger as well as promotes better sleep, lower stress, stronger immunity, and lower blood pressure in general.

One thing I tell my clients is that the goal is to reduce the emotional pain, not erase the knowledge of the event. Knowledge is power and information, yet we don't need to be constantly hurting. Consider a physical injury; it hurts and swells and remains inflamed until it heals and all you see down the road is possibly a scar—yet no physical pain. If you are ready to strengthen your forgiveness muscle, it is important to remember a few things:

1) Forgiveness does NOT mean you are OK with what happened or the behavior. Forgiveness is offering grace and mercy to others.

2) Be realistic in expectations. Forgiveness will take time, and rarely does it come quickly. Begin small and build your practice of forgiveness. You will start to feel physical and emotional benefits as the brain reduces signals to the pituitary glands and decreases cortisol levels—which influences anxiety and depression.

3) Reflect on personal benefits; do you begin to feel more positively, have more hope, and have deeper relationships. Similarly, it facilitates better problem solving and decision making. You gain more empowerment as the person who hurt us no longer carries the power.

4) If you choose to do so, let's start the new year fresh with forgiveness!

*Mary-Catherine McClain Riner, Ph.D., Ed.S., M.S., is a Licensed Psychologist with Riner Counseling, LLC. Visit [www.rinercounseling.com](http://www.rinercounseling.com) or call 864-608-0446.*

## Memory

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

someone yell, 'May I help you?' Standing in front of the church rectory was a man I assumed to be the caretaker of the property.

He was wearing old, faded jeans and a black t-shirt, and his hair was a bit disheveled. When I walked over to where he was standing and introduced myself, I noticed a carving of sorts on the porch next to us. 'I'm looking for the priest to bless some St. Sebastian charms,' I said."

As it turns out, she had found him. Father Jairo Calderon, a native of Colombia, has been the administrator of St. Mary of the Angels since 2021. This year, he presides over the church during its 80th anniversary. As St. Mary's is a small church, he often finds himself with time on his hands, and he was happy to help our reader, even as he apologized for his un-priestlike appearance.

"The church is only open a few days a week," he told her, "so I need to keep busy on my off days. I'm a carpenter, and during my spare time, I carve things like this. It will be a manger scene for our Christmas service."

Our resident found herself moved to tears. Perhaps it was the warmth of his greeting. Perhaps it was the quiet of an empty parking lot. Or perhaps it was a completely unexpected experience in a season full of expectation.

"I thought," she said, "What are the chances I would meet a priest, dressed in everyday working man's clothes, who is a carpenter,



**St. Mary of the Angels Catholic Church**

who is carving what looks to be a cradle, at Christmas time? It was so surreal. As my hands were shaking, I opened the boxes of charms, and he put his hands over them and began the blessing. It was one of the most beautiful things I had ever heard. I started to weep."

Following the blessing of the charms, Father Jairo talked about Anderson and St. Mary of the Angels and his parishioners. "This small church is just right for me, and I love being here," he said.

When it came time for them to part, Father Jairo asked if he could pray for the resident.

"I instantly said yes," she said. "He put his warm hands on top of my freezing hands and prayed, again. It was quite moving. It was beautiful. He told me he would continue to pray for me and asked that I do the same for him, and he invited me to come back at Christmas to see the finished Christmas scene. Although I didn't want to leave, we said good-bye. I got in my car and drove away, looking in my rearview mirror at the humble priest standing in the cold by himself. I wept. That was one of the loveliest, most impactful moments of my life. I'll never forget it, or him."

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# AnMed's Bret Justice named among 65 chief strategy officers to know in the US

*Justice the only person in SC to be named to the list*

**"The executives featured on this list advance their organizations via partnerships and acquisitions as well as innovative initiatives and technologies."**

— Becker's Hospital Review

ANDERSON — Bret Justice, the vice president of strategic planning, marketing and business development at AnMed, has been named among 65 health system chief strategy officers to know in 2023 by Becker's Hospital Review. He's the only person from South Carolina to be named.

The honor marks the second consecutive annual award for Justice by Becker's, a leading provider of industry news and analysis.

"These strategic leaders work to craft short and long-term plans that drive progress for their hospitals and health systems," the Becker's editorial team wrote in announcing their awards. "The executives featured on this list advance their organizations via partnerships and acquisitions as well as innovative initiatives and technologies. This list honors chief strategy officers for their commitment to optimizing health care."



The full list of honored officials is posted at <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/lists/65-health-system-chief-strategy-officers-to-know-2023.html>.

Justice leads growth, development, branding and positioning functions for AnMed. He joined the health system in 2021 after spending 14 years at Mount Carmel Health System in Columbus, Ohio, most recently as senior vice president of strategy and system development. He also spent time as director of planning for Shands HealthCare in Gainesville, Florida.

#### About AnMed

Founded in 1908, AnMed is an independent, not-for-profit health system serving Upstate South Carolina and northeast Georgia. It is licensed for 601 beds and anchored by AnMed Medical Center, a 508-bed acute-care hospital that has earned the prestigious Magnet designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center. The system also includes AnMed North Campus and AnMed Rehabilitation Hospital in Anderson, AnMed Cannon in Pickens and more than 60 physician



Bret Justice

practices. More than 30 specialties are represented on staff. AnMed locations are spread from Easley to Hartwell, Georgia. Named one of the nation's 153 "Great Community Hospitals" by Becker's Hospital Review, AnMed has more than 370 physicians and 3,600 employees, and it is Anderson County's largest employer. Learn more at [AnMed.org](http://AnMed.org).

For more information, contact Michael Burns at [michael.burns@anmed.org](mailto:michael.burns@anmed.org) or 864-512-3765.

## Courthouse hosts Memory Hold the Door ceremony

The Anderson County Bar Association held the second Memory Hold the Door ceremony Thursday, November 29 at the old Anderson County Courthouse in the main courtroom. The inaugural ceremony was held in 2005. Memory Hold the Door is in honor of Anderson attorneys who served the community as lawyers and civic leaders. This event is a way of paying tribute to those dedicated men and women who have since passed on and in honor of their families, friends and colleagues.

#### WILLIAM ELLISON LONG JR. (1929-2010)

William Ellison Long, Jr. was a graduate of Greenville High School, attended Furman University, served in the United States Air Force during the Korean War, and graduated from the University of South Carolina and the University of South Carolina School of law.



A long and accomplished legal career was his passion and pride, but he never let this solely define him, as he was active and accomplished in many areas. He was a reliable fundraiser for charitable and political causes. He volunteered over decades for the Anderson Sertoma Club, and was active in Anderson Little Theatre. He was a prolific student of history and literature, was a voracious reader, and could recite hundreds of poems and quotations from memory.

He was married to Mary S. (Mimi) Long

and they had five children: Sharon Martinelli, Mary Catherine Freck, Bill Long, Lisa Whitlark and Mark Long.

#### LOUISA (WESA) RICE LUND (1950-2011)

Louisa "Wesa" Lund was born and raised in Anderson among a plethora of attorneys - her grandfather, father, her uncles and cousins. It seemed inevitable that she might pursue the field of law as well.

Wesa earned a B.A. in French from Clemson University and a JD from the University of South Carolina. With great pride, her father, Earle M. Rice, welcomed her into his family firm, Rice and Rice. Wesa was articulate, an excellent writer, and well-respected for her legal research and briefs.

Wesa always enjoyed theater and was an amateur thespian in several local productions. She was known for espousing French quips

and she developed an affinity for French cuisine, prompting her to enhance her culinary skills, much to the delight of many of her



friends and family members. Her creative design of her home and garden was noteworthy. Reading mysteries was a passion of hers, especially books by Agatha Christie. Family and friends would describe her as an "ailurophile" for her affinity for felines, many of which were her beloved pets.

Wesa is survived by her son, Rice Jensen (Jens) Lund and one grandson.



# PICK ME! PICK ME!

Let's start at the beginning, it's the best place to start. I first saw the light of day as I sprouted from a tiny pot in a greenhouse. I was so skinny I couldn't cast a shadow. My dad and mom were taken just down the road to the Christmas tree farm, but before they left, they named me after my grandfather, Bruce the Spruce. I live last in line on the very back row with a hundred other sprouts. The humans come in every day to give us water and food, and move us up a row, if we grow enough.



Neal Parnell

After a week I watched as sprouts my age were moved up to the four-inch row, but I didn't get chosen. Another week went by and there was talk of tossing me into the mulch pile. I wanted to be a Christmas tree like my dad, but the way it was going I'd be lucky to be a toothpick like my Uncle Cedar. I finally noticed that the new sprout next to me was basking in sunlight, I looked up and saw a clump of pine straw on the roof, blocking my vital rays. That same day my owner came in to inspect his crop and was choosing unhealthy looking saplings to discard. He spotted me and I tried to point to the roof, but I was just too weak. He picked up me and my little container with one hand and held me up for inspection. As he gazed at me, he saw what I'd seen, put me down, and ordered the roof swept clean. I grew like Aunt Sequoia after that, and was taken out to the farm. It was wonderful to be outside, able to stretch

out my limbs and soak in unfiltered sunlight all day long. I was three feet tall by the next winter and watched as my best friend Douglas Fir, he's gonna be lit for the next month. We all know what we are raised to do and it will be an honor to be chosen. Sure, there are a few old timers here that have grown past their prime and will likely still be in someone's living room as a coffee table, but anything is better than the wood chipper. My family tree goes back 600 million years and we are the tallest, thickest, largest, and oldest of all trees in the world. My great, great, great grandpa is still alive and estimated to be 4,700 years old. We are a hearty bunch, some of us only drop our seed cones after a fire has killed us, pretty amazing huh?

It's the start of December 2023, I'm seven feet tall, and ready to execute my duty. A family of six is walking near me and I'm loudly screaming, Pick Me!, Pick Me! I'm not sure if they heard me, but I heard the smallest boy say, "I like this one Daddy". The Daddy reached out to introduce himself and tugged with a firm grip. He looked at his hand, didn't see one needle and says, "Great job son, let's take it". A tear of sap ran down my face as a quick clean cut freed me from the cold ground. The ride to my new home was magnificent, as I heard them sing, "Oh Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas Tree, how lovely are thy branches". I stood by their fireplace adorned like a king, so happy that they "Picked Me".

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FROM THE SHELF

# A reading year in review

Every year I wrap things up regarding my reading in an overview of sorts and take stock of how my challenges and goals went (or super didn't in my case) but also, and maybe most importantly, what were my year highlights in reading.



Sara Leady

I went through my tracker and circled all my faves that I hadn't already reviewed for y'all, and then to narrow further I went with the ones whose covers I liked the most or I thought captured the book vibe best (sometimes that designer/artist in me just needs to fangirl).

The Last Tale of the Flower Bride by Roshani Chokshi has such an amazing cover with this tension between romance and tragedy and has an ominous feeling. It's a perfect capture of the book itself. I've read some of Chokshi before, so I was familiar with the fairytale/folklore elements of her books. There's a tension that builds throughout the narrative that's created through knowing there's a big secret, but not wanting it to ruin the really beautiful relationships that are the focus of the tale.

This is How You Lose the Time War by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Stone is cover that sold me with a simplistic, italicized type-writer font. The story builds in complexity with a literal war through time told through the narrative and time both overlapping on themselves... The story also unfolds as two rival generals taunt each other through letters also dropped across time. Oh, and it's an epic romance.

I already waxed loquacious on Fourth Wing by Rebecca Yarros, but Iron Flame? Lawd. I'm a sucker for a Montserrat font, and with the stark contrast of gold and black with dragons and filigree? Book 1 was swoony, but that metallic ombre with the red on Iron Flame's cover killed me further. The books killed me too. Both books ending with nuclear cliffhangers? I still have not recovered.

Divine Rivals by Rebecca Ross popped up



when I was researching titles for the library's romance book club and the cover grabbed me. Wispy cobalt flowers (maybe dead?), old school typewriter keys in gold, and it's a romance? Sold. It's another fun romance where our lovers fall in love through letters exchanged via a magical wardrobe. Reads like a bit of an alt-history fantasy, except it's history isn't our history, just feels very familiar.

I haven't read any Barbara Kingsolver before, so I very much went blindly into Demon Copperhead. Like its inspiration David Copperfield, Demon Copperhead is a slow start and a bit on the tome side, but you're absolutely rewarded for digging in and just immersing yourself. It's set in Appalachia in modern times and dives headlong into the opioid addiction and abject poverty of the region. You follow Demon from his literal birth up until he's maybe 19, as he goes in and out of foster homes and falls into the opioid trap after a football injury. It is heartbreaking but triumphant, and the characters are incredible. I liked this cover enough to research information about it because it captures the region, tragedy, and triumphs of the novel so perfectly. It's also a cover that once you read the book and then really look at every detail captured in the black cross-hatch style artwork you find new appreciation for the scenes referenced in the cover. Pete Adlington, the cover designer, gave us a masterpiece.

The cover for The Unmaking of June Farrow by Adrienne Young in one word is whimsical. The story is about a family of women who are cursed with madness. June is

determined to be the end of the Farrow line, so the madness doesn't spread to another generation, but fate and romance don't always care what we decide. The font is romantic and a style hard to place in time, as is the lovely forest and star imagery that doesn't distinguish time and place. Sort of like the curse and the Farrow women... and anything with metallic foil always sells me.

I could obviously go on about more books, and definitely more cover designs, but thanks for coming to my brief TEDtalk on cover art slash good books.

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Carolina parakeet

## WILLIAM BARTRAM

BY RICH OTTER

In 1775, when naturalist William Bartram crossed the Savannah River into South Carolina and climbed to the “high road,” now considered part of Highway 81, his initial introduction to the South Carolina backcountry was marred by threatening thunderstorms. He hightailed to Alexander Cameron’s home, Loch-Abber Plantation, where he holed up awaiting fair weather. It was a 2,000 acre tract halfway between present Abbeville and Lowndesville.

Following the Cherokee War, European settlers had been gradually moving into the area around Ninety Six and creeping toward what would become Anderson County.

On taking leave of Cameron’s hospitality, Bartram traveled cross-country arriving at Sinica [Seneca] after “45 miles through uninhabited wilderness.” That wilderness later became Anderson County. He passed future locations of Starr, Iva and the City of Anderson. For a naturalist who normally couldn’t ignore a dandelion without marveling as to its golden glory, he didn’t offer much praise for the countryside he had observed.

Even the Cherokees didn’t think much of the “uninhabited wilderness.” They settled in the Pickens County area and used the territory as a bridge to greener pastures or as a hunting ground. Historian/naturalist/author Dennis Chastain comments that although there were no known Indian settlements in the Anderson area from that time, artifacts and archeological sites found in Anderson County clearly indicate a presence prehistorically.

Bartram commented after his journey to Sinica that while in what would be Anderson

County he “crossed several rivers and brooks, all branches of the Savannah, now called Keowe [Keowee], above its confluence with the Tugilo [Tugoloo], the West main branch. The face of the country [was] uneven, by means of ridges of hills and water courses; the hills somewhat rocky near their summits and at the banks of rivers and creeks, but very fertile, as there is a good depth of a loose dark and moist [moist] vegetative mould [mold], on a stratum of reddish brown tenacious clay, and sometimes a deep stratum of dusky brown marl.”

In 1761, Lt. Christopher French accompanied a British force intent on exterminating the Cherokees through our area. The soldiers left Ninety Six marching through future Abbeville County on their way to Fort Prince George. It appears they passed the future Starr and Iva locations and below where the City of Anderson now stands.

At one campsite Lt. French recounted wolves paying a visit. At another stop a large rattlesnake was encountered and they also spotted numerous deer. They also were greeted by a bear and beaver dams and wildlife still common in the area. Considering the rumpus made by the soldiers’ regiment, it is a wonder they saw any wildlife. It was probably curiosity that killed the deer.

Chastain paints an appealing picture in retrospect of what could be found when venturing through those sparsely occupied lands prior to the American Revolution. It was a diverse habitat including some creatures forever lost due to the encroachment of civilization.

In addition to the wolves and bear encountered by Lt. French, Chastain reports there would have been Eastern woodland bison, Eastern cougars, turkey and such lost exotics



Venus fly trap

as passenger pigeons and Carolina Parakeets. He said observers remembered passenger pigeons so numerous they would “darken the skies.”

The historian further references Bartram describing open Savannahs with immense fields of wild strawberries that would dye horses’ feet red. He said there were extensive

cane breaks on both sides of the Savannah River and that the hardwood forests “would have been dominated by the now extinct American Chestnut.” He recalled one reference to “Venus Fly Traps growing in the boggy areas of the site of Andersonville,” a future tourist attraction until inundated by Lake Hartwell.



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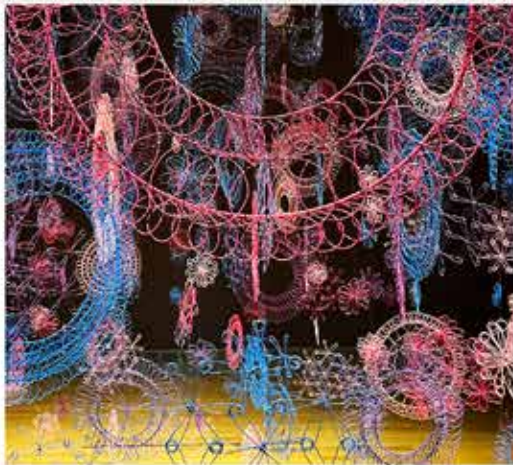
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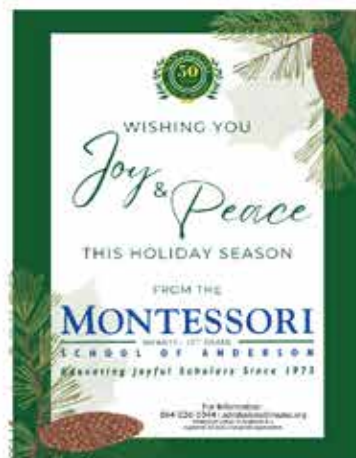
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## Strutting into 2024 in style

Can you believe 2024 is almost here? 2023 was a wild and crazy rollercoaster ride for me. Let's hope this year goes a little more swimmingly, and if it doesn't, at least our wardrobe will be cute. I always end up doing something on New Year's Eve and it's always been so magical to me ever since I was a little girl. I love to get all dressed up in sequins, watch the fireworks and sip on some bubbles.



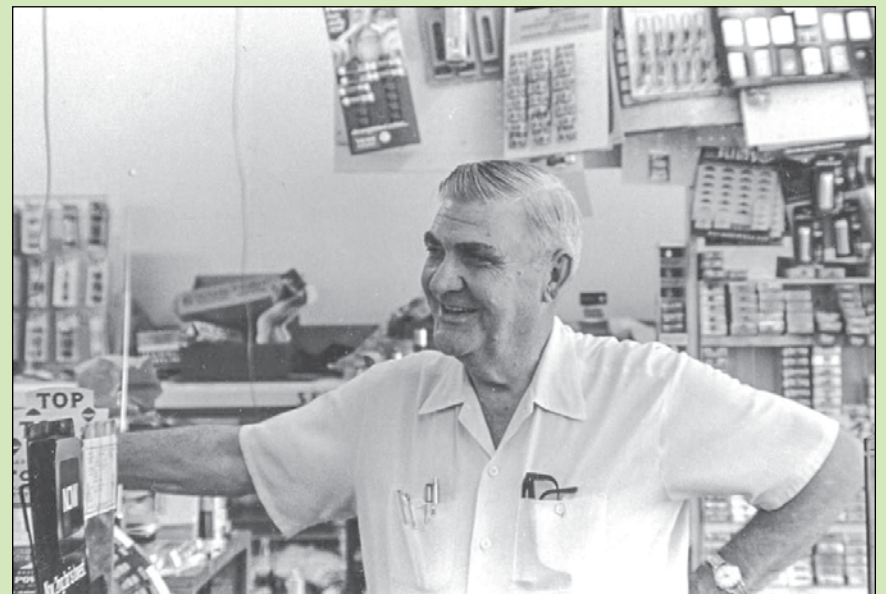
Kristine March

I'm really into this certain clothing store called Altar'd State. It's similar to Anthropologie or Free People, but it gives back. A percentage of their net proceeds go to local charities across the country. Why doesn't every clothing company do that? Anyways, that really makes me like their store and their clothes so much more. The price point is so good too. I bought their Holland Corduroy jacket that looks straight out of "Almost Famous," the movie. It

would be the perfect New Year's Eve jacket. Pair that with their All That Glitters Sequin Skirt and a pair of Luckelf sparkle tights from Amazon that are only ten dollars a pair, and you will be dazzling. For shoes, I would do a cute pair of block heels for comfort. I can't do stilettos like I used to in my early twenties. Ouch.

I love the Jessica Simpson Lasharen Platform Pump in gold metallic. They're so glitzy and posh. Go all out and add glitter on your eyes and décolleté. I love a glitter that you can easily apply. The Stilla deluxe glitter and glow liquid eyeshadow is everything and then some. I've been wearing it for a few years now and it is just so beautiful on the eyes. They have gorgeous colors. I wear the shade, Kitten Karma. It's almost like a dust effect so it's not sticky or annoying to wear. Even if it isn't New Year's Eve, it's the perfect eyeshadow.

What are you doing New Year's Eve? Don't forget to party like it's 1999 and remember to make the sidewalk your runway and be kind y'all! Happy Almost 2024!



## Remembering days gone by

Local resident Devlin Thompson submitted this photo of his grandfather, John T. Thompson Sr. (1912-1983) behind the counter at his convenience store, the K.P. Mart in Anderson, circa 1975.

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THE GARDEN SHOP

# HEUCHERA BY ANOTHER NAME



**SUSAN TEMPLE**  
master gardener

At our Fountain Inn Garden Club's Christmas luncheon, a friend asked what I'm doing in my garden these days. For the first time, I had to think about it for a few seconds. I've been on a break from normal gardening activities lately. The summer heat, then drought, and my back needing a break, it's been mostly piddling around with stuff in my garden shop. Plus, our dog is still in training. He will never learn to stay with me or be a gardening companion if he's in the fence all the time. But it is hard to do much productive gardening when eyes must be kept on him at all times. Yogi is growing into a good dog. He's been with us seven months now. Still a teenager, he's rambunctious, full of energy, and has gone on unchaperoned field trips a few times when given that extra nano second opportunity. But Yogi appears to be slowly learning there is no greener grass on the other side of the swamp and if he stays with — and minds — his mama, life is going to be pretty durn dandy.

There are about a dozen plants, at least, in the garden shop area waiting for me to figure out where



Solar Eclipse Heucherella hybrid

they are going to go. Many more that have been rooted won't be ready to go in the ground until probably next year. There are always plants in the garden shop waiting for their home. They give me something to piddle over when it's too hot (or for whatever other reason) that working hard in the yard is just not the thing to do. But it still gets me outside

and hands in the dirt.

Over the last couple of years, I've become quite fond of heucherellas but have only used them in pots. They can be a bit temperamental, and even though are a perennial, they can be short lived. Guess that's why I've never put forth the effort to plant them in the ground. A chartreuse one, I think guacamole, has

been a pot for several years and has done great, with minimal water too. The pot is in the shade until about 3:00 and then it gets sun until about 6:00 (in daylight savings time). An almost black one only lasted about a year in a pot on the breezeway. Other annuals are put in this pot each year and it seemed like a good idea to add an evergreen perennial

to the mix. Oh well. A holly fern was put in that pot back in the fall so maybe it will last for years to come.

Coralbells, the common name for heuchera, are best known for shade gardens but there are varieties that will tolerate more sun. With so many sun options, I'll take shade coralbells. With foliage colors from rust, to chartreuse, to black, to stripes, to multi-colored leaves, there should be a color for most any garden. And since shade garden colors can seem limited at times, these are a great way to add color. Blooms range from white to dark pink and are dainty little spikes above the foliage. Butterflies and hummingbirds like the flowers too. Having never grown them where deer can get to them, I don't know if they like them or not. However, they have not eaten the ones in garden shop awaiting their new home. Deer don't usually bother too much in this area thankfully. Maybe it's too close quarters for them to meander through all the stuff.

New ones that will go in the ground soon are Heucherella 'Solar Eclipse'. Not to complicate matters but there are heucherellas also. These are a hybrid between heuchera and tiarella. One would have to be a botanist to tell the difference most likely. However, tiarellas are quite different from heucherellas. And that is a subject for another Garden Shop.

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**The GARDEN HOUSE**



## Bay3 Artisan Gallery partner: Wesa Neely, watercolor painter

"As an artist, I look to our wondrous world for inspiration. Colors, shapes, and light fascinate me," explains Bay3 Artisan Gallery partner, Louisa "Wesa" Neely. "I primarily use watercolor as my means of artistic expression; however, I have been experimenting with acrylics to broaden my skills and do textural pieces. Landscapes, pets, and florals have been my focus, but recently I have included portraits. I have completed many commissions of homes, pets, weddings, and a collection of South Carolina college paintings."

Neely began her painting with private lessons and high school classes before studying art at Wesleyan College. She transferred to Clemson and completed a degree in education. She continued to enhance her skills by taking classes with local artists and workshops. She received her inspiration from teachers Pam R. Brown, Herman Keith, Al Stein, J.J. Jiang and Mary Whyte. Neely is a signature member of the South Carolina Watermedia Society, the Anderson Artists Guild, and is a partner in Bay3 Artisan Gallery. Bay3 Artisan Gallery is a co-operative gallery of local artists located just off the Atrium Gallery at the Anderson Arts Center at 110 Federal Street in Anderson. The gallery is open Wednesday – Friday from 10 to 4 and Saturday from 10 to 1.

# DELIVERY MAN

Christmastime. The Little League team was riding in the bed of my father's truck. There were about ten Christmas trees back there.

It was late. The local decorations were already up downtown. There was a team of reindeer strung across Main Street. Rudolph was missing his antlers. Santa looked anemic.



Sean Dietrich

Tonight, we were delivering Christmas trees.

It was our yearly tradition. Each year, my father gave trees to needy families. He got the trees from the church; he got the names from anonymous submissions. The free labor came from the Little League team.

We arrived at the first trailer home. It was a ratty place. No Christmas lights. Dilapidated car out front, up on blocks. My father double checked the address.

Several of us boys leapt out and hauled the Christmas tree to the porch. The lady who answered was Miss Karen. Her husband left her with two kids. She worked three or four jobs.

"I didn't order no Christmas tree," Miss Karen said, cigarette in the corner of her mouth.

"No, ma'am," said my father, checking his clipboard. "You won this tree, fair and square."

"Won it?"

"It was a raffle."

"I didn't play a raffle."

"Well," my father said, pushing past her. "Someone must have submitted your name."

"I don't want this tree," she said.

"And I don't want to lose my job," he said. "If I don't give you this tree, they'll fire me."

She crossed her arms. "You're a volunteer."

But it was too late. My father had already burst into the lady's house and was selecting the perfect corner. We placed it beside her television set. You should have seen the looks on her children's faces.

The next place we stopped at was a shotgun house. There was a sofa on the front porch. We walked up to the front door with a tree in our arms. An old man appeared behind the screen door.

"What's this?" the old man said.

"A balsam fir," said Daddy. "What's it look like?"

"I didn't ask for a tree."

My old man checked his clipboard. "It says here your daughter bought it for you."

"I don't have a daughter," he said.

We set the tree up in the corner. And in a few minutes, we were all riding across town again.

Next, we arrived at a house that looked like it was going to fall over. The clapboards were gray. The roof had a blue tarp. My father threw the truck into Park. He had a visible reaction when he saw this house.

We brought the tree to the porch. There was a young woman standing at the door. She was pregnant. The inside of the house was squalid. There were kids running around everywhere.

My father placed the tree in her den. The young woman started crying. She threw her arms around my father. My father just hugged her and wished her a merry Christmas. And



he looked like he was about to lose it.

When we all got back to the truck, my dad started crying. When I asked why he was crying, he took a long time to gather himself and finally answer.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "All that matters is that those kids know someone cares."

Years later, I was an adult, my father was many years dead, and I was driving past that very same house with my uncle riding shotgun. I remembered the house vividly. So I pointed it out to my uncle, and told him the story of the Christmas tree delivery long ago.

My uncle said, "Yes, I can see why your dad would have been upset about that house." Then he wiped his own eyes. "That's the house where your dad grew up."

Funny what you remember at Christmas.

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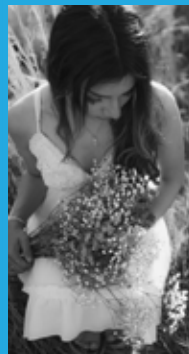
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# The real reason

Christmas - we're well into the season. Parades, pageants, school and church programs, walk-through and drive-through exhibits, toy collections and motorcycle runs--all are out in full force. Retailers are enticing shoppers in through their doors, and on-line merchandisers are enticing shoppers in through their computers. Mail services are overwhelmed. Homes are decorated and lights abound. People are baking and cooking and wrapping presents. Some call this the happiest time of the year; others are just glad to get through it in one piece. Some years the Christmas season is delightful; other years it's ... not.

As of now, our family's holiday this year should be one of the happier ones, with a new son-in-law joining the family in October, as well as the addition in May of our son and

daughter-in-law's precious now seven-month-old baby. She loves the lights, she'll play with the boxes, and we'll have to keep her from eating the wrapping paper, but watching her experience the wonder of Christmas for the first time will be delightful for us all.



Ann K. Bailes

But for some, this season is hard. I'm thinking of several families who have lost loved ones recently, and know that the pain of recent loss is acute. I'm thinking of many who have lost loved ones in years past, and even though the experiences are not recent, the holidays still bring pain. I'm thinking of people who have experienced other



kinds of loss - there are many - and those who are struggling financially. I'm thinking of people facing illness. I'm thinking of people who are lonely this year for whatever reason.

So I would urge you, dear fellow traveler through this world--whether this is a happy Christmas season for you or one that is filled with difficulty--Get to a quiet place with a cup of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or whatever you like best. Turn on the tree lights in an otherwise darkened room. And then, mentally strip away the glitz, the glitter, and the activity. Contemplate the root reason for why we go through this every year - the same root reason that often gets covered up with all the activity.

Because Christmas is really about the complete opposite of all the lights, color, busyness and action. It's about the rude birth of a tiny baby in a quiet and dark cattle shed over two thousand years ago. The fact that we even remember that event so many years later is yet another evidence of why this birth was so important to all of mankind.

So I urge you to consider the claims made by this baby as He grew up and changed the world. And as you do so, may you see that the peace of the real reason for Christmas can calm your heart and give you joy that supersedes pain. Merry Christmas to all!

## NIBBLE & SIP

# Take back the quiet

Let's face it: The Christmas season is loud. It's a joyous loud, but volume is volume. Between Hallmark movies, Mariah Carey, and the consistent crinkle of wrapping paper,



Kim von Keller

there's seldom a peaceful moment. Add to that a family wedding and out-of-town company, and it's a wonder that my windows haven't cracked out of their casings. The most silent night I've had was when, during a storm, the power went out and

everyone froze in place.

It's time to take back the quiet.

Below, you'll find an easy Nibble and Sip, meant for sitting by a fire or curled up with a book; I'd suggest Ferrol Sams' "Christmas Gift!" or Barbara Robinson's "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever." **Calm and Bright** is the name I'm giving to this easy, three-ingredient cocktail. Technically, it has a different name, but I like this one better. **Easy Crab Dip** feels like an indulgence, but you can put it together in less than 10 minutes.

Regardless of the nibble and sip you choose, be sure to find some quiet time this season. Giving yourself a break from joyful

noise will contribute to a merrier Christmas and a happy, happy New Year.

### Calm and Bright

2 oz. apple brandy (I like Laird's)  
1 oz. sweet vermouth (I like Carpano Antica)  
2 dashes Angostura bitters  
Orange slice, sliced into quarters

Add apple brandy, sweet vermouth, and bitters to a cocktail shaker. Add ice, shake briefly until chilled, and strain into a martini glass. Garnish with the orange slice and serve. Serves one.

### Easy Crab Dip

8 oz. crabmeat  
3 T. mayonnaise  
1 T. Dijon mustard  
1 T. lemon juice  
1 T. chopped parsley  
¼ t. Worcestershire sauce  
½ t. Hot sauce (I like Tabasco)  
Salt and pepper, to taste  
Crackers (I like Captain's Wafers)

Pick through the crabmeat to remove any shells. Combine Crabmeat, mayonnaise, mustard, lemon juice, parsley, and hot sauce in a small bowl and stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Chill until ready to serve with crackers. Serves 4.



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