

POSSIBILITIES

unleash your imagination

WINTER 2022

'TIS THE SEASON TO OVERFLOW

Christmas is a season of overflowing hearts. And, overflowing stockings - especially mine.

The idea of hanging a stocking by the fire at Christmas goes a long way back. The legend says that Saint Nicholas was a rich man in the 4th century who wanted to help a poor villager who was raising three daughters. He secretly dropped a bag of gold down the poor man's chimney and some of the gold found its way into a stocking that was hung up to dry. And the legend of Santa and the Christmas stocking was born!

In 1822, Clement Moore cemented the stocking as seasonal lore in his poem 'Twas the Night Before Christmas, with the line "The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that Saint Nicholas soon would be there."

Well, we didn't have a fireplace when I was growing up, so we laid them on the couch. With care of course.

When I was quite young, I made my own stocking with help from Mom. It is made of some material that I have never seen used again, anywhere. It's a very firm spongy type of material that is more akin to cardboard than it is to cloth or wool. It was however, easy to paint on. We cut out two identical pieces in the shape of a boot and sewed them together, then painted a stenciled Santa Clause on the front, and put my name - BILLY - across the top. I loved it.

There was one problem - almost nothing would fit into it. The stiffness of the material, and the fact that the two pieces were sewn tightly together made the inside space very small. So small in fact that getting even a small orange into the toe was a battle. And if Santa

did manage to do that, I had a Dickens of a time getting it out.

I didn't care. It was big enough to hold a candy bar, a small toy car, and a toothbrush. Anything bigger, or in addition to those things

cushion on the left end of the couch next to the piano. Like a flag stuck on a discovered territory my stocking said "Anything on this cushion belongs to Billy. All others stay away." Santa, and my siblings, understood this.

Despite having a fireplace in the house for many years, when our daughters were growing up, we still didn't hang the stockings there. We started a new tradition by leaving them outside their doors in the hall, or sometimes even at the edge of their beds. No-one seemed concerned that Santa was wandering through the house in his boots. When the girls awoke to find their stockings close at hand, it was the signal that Christmas was to begin. And they knew the routine. Drag the stockings into Mom and Dad's room where we would explore them together. This activity would take up at least the first half hour of Christmas morning. Their stockings were huge - especially compared to mine - and so lots of stuff would come out of each of their stockings like a kind of clown car for Christmas gifts. Only when the stockings were emptied would we all go downstairs together to see what Santa had left under the tree.

I recently noticed an entire wall of Christmas stockings for sale at a local shop and it made me laugh. Do they think they can sell this many? Don't you just buy one stocking for life? And why are they

so enormous?

Yes, I'm still using the same tiny stocking. Each year I look at it and think "It's smaller than I remember." But I know that most of the stuff that Santa would like to put into my stocking will just end up beside it instead. Some might think that my stocking is the worst - but I know



that Santa deemed stocking stuffers, was left beside it.

More than anything, the stocking served a very important purpose. Our couch had three cushions and there were two chairs. There were five of us. Each of us used our stockings to mark one location. Mine was usually the

Continued pg 2



Our team making holiday wreaths at Country Cut Flowers. www.countrycutflowers.ca

I always look forward to gathering with friends and family and making memories during the holiday season. I love to reminisce about all my favourite past holiday moments. A few that come to mind right away are the Christmas that my sister and I had the chicken pox. All our pictures were plagued with pink spots! I also remember the year that our oven wasn't working properly. We had to eat dinner backwards! We started with the pie and ended with turkey and stuffing. Most of my fondest holiday memories seem to start with a catastrophe that quickly becomes a cherished lasting memory.

Well, I have a feeling that the 2022 holidays will be a year my family remembers forever. This year our Christmas is going to revolve around puppies!

We found out at the beginning of November that our beloved dog Emma was expecting. We were all thrilled by the news! The veterinarian confirmed with us that Emma looked healthy, and her litter would be about six pups. She made a point of saying that there could be more. Doggie ultrasounds are a bit less reliable than our human ones! I didn't think much of this since a normal litter for a dog her size

is six to eight puppies. We spent the weeks left in her pregnancy preparing our home for Emma's babies. When the puppies started arrived (ahead of schedule) at 1:30am on a Tuesday I was ready. Hours later when puppy number 9



arrived I felt a bit less ready.

In the end she had 11 puppies! I was in shock and totally overwhelmed by the prospect of caring for all these dogs. It was then that it hit me we will now have eleven puppies over Christmas. For some reason six just felt so much more manageable!

As anticipated, these eleven puppies have already changed our 2022 holiday plans. On top of having 11 new puppies, 2 dogs, 2 cats,

and 2 kids, everything must happen at our house this year! The puppies can't be left alone for a long period of time and let's be honest everyone wants to come for puppy cuddles. We will now be hosting Christmas dinner, boxing day dinner, and an extended family dinner on the 28th of December. The Santa Claus parade that our family takes part in every year was missing one special elf this year, me, because someone had to babysit our little munchkins. As well, I have decided to leave more than half of our Christmas decorations in their respective boxes. I fear that if they were to be put out that they may not survive until next Christmas (those puppy teeth are sharp).

The holidays are just beginning, and these little guys have already made this year stand out from any before it. I can't wait to see what else 2022 will bring. I know that no matter what happens there will be lots of love, puppy cuddles, puppy kisses, and I'm sure an accident here and there. The joyful chaos will surely make some of our best stories and memories yet. This will be the Christmas we had puppies!

Happy Holidays from my family to yours, and may you make some wonderful memories of your own this year!

'TIS THE SEASON (CONTINUED)



that my little stocking is perhaps the best in the world at overflowing. Even the smallest of gifts makes it overflow. And overflowing is a big part of what this season is about. My stocking, made carefully with little hands 60 years ago, reminds me each year that pouring love, kindness, and joy into the world from an overflowing heart reveals the

magic of the season and offers a glimpse of what the world could be like if only our hearts could remain so full.

May your life overflow with the most important things this season and all through 2023.

Bill Bell
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MELTING MOMENTS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup butter
- ½ cup icing sugar
- 1½ cups of flour
- ½ cup corn starch
- 1 large milk chocolate bar with anything you want in it (we use one with almonds!) broken into chunks

DIRECTIONS

Start by microwaving the butter for 15 seconds to soften it. Mix the butter well with the electric mixer and then add the icing sugar while continuing to mix.

Next, combine the flour and the corn starch with a fork. Add mixture to the butter and sugar and continue to mix using the fork.

Roll the dough into balls and press them down with a spoon and add your chunk of chocolate to the centre. (Check out the pic).

Bake at 300°F for 20 - 25 min. Do not overcook! And then sprinkle with icing sugar when your are finished.



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LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

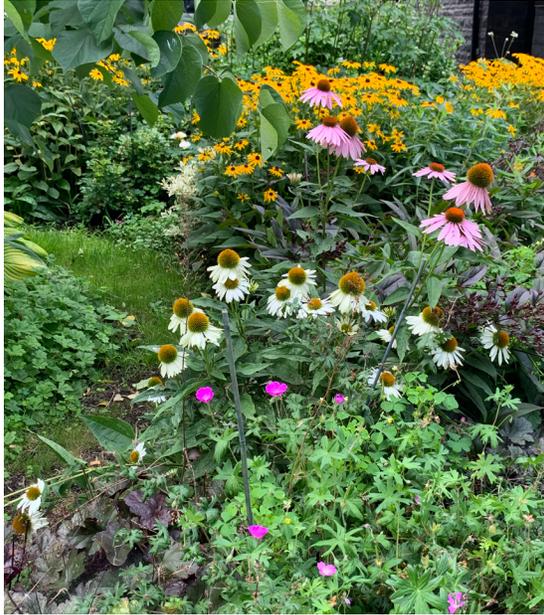
The garden has been put to bed for the winter. The leaves have been raked and bagged, except those covering the flower beds, which provide shelter for overwintering bees and other beneficial insects. I've cut back the perennials, but those with seedheads have been left upright for finches and sparrows to munch on through the inhospitable months ahead. Already plans are rattling around in my brain to expand the bed in the front yard come springtime: more perennials, less grass = more insects, more birds. Will these ideas bear fruit? It's too soon to know for sure, but it's important for me to plan, to imagine what next year might look like.

Year-end is the time to step back, reflect and take stock of the events and experiences that have transpired and file them away. Some will be cherished and fondly recalled years from now; others, best forgotten (but ultimately never quite forgotten). It's the culmination of a life lived, 365 days at a time, and there are bound to be some clunkers among the golden moments.

Over the span of my lifetime, years have been distilled down into significant events that have become signposts, chronological markers that have signalled a change in purpose and direction. Sports activities and injuries, leaving home, leaving school (too soon), career, marriage, first home, first child, second child, more injuries and rehabilitation, marriage breakdown (emotional injuries), more rehabilitation, finding love again, second marriage, children leaving home, more injuries and rehabilitation.

It's a bit disconcerting to note that a recurring theme in my memories of events over the distant and recent past involves breakdown and repair. I've seemed to have inherited a body that has allowed me to enjoy much of what has been offered, only to betray me time and again. Building up, breaking down, rebuilding. It may be the natural ebb and flow of a life lived, but it can become exhausting, nevertheless.

This past year, at age 62, health issues have again dominated my days. Back in January, it felt like my body was held together with dollar-store paper clips and scotch tape. Fortunately, with time, drugs and lots of therapy, I'm beginning to re-imagine a life that makes room for happier, healthier moments, hopefully just around the corner. I suppose that's what a new year is



for: to cast off our worn shoes and break out that new pair, waiting in the box on the floor of the closet. Optimism abounds, and the smell of brand-new sneakers is strangely invigorating.

For over thirty years, gardening has given me great joy, purpose and continuity. I revel in the resilience of nature, the life cycle of growth, decay and rebirth. There's a reassurance in its constancy. Over the next few months, I will look out the window at the barren landscape and wonder what the springtime will bring. Each year it's different: some birds that have reliably frequented the feeders for years will not return, while others will appear for the first time; some perennials will flourish while others will wither. The bees will abound, but the butterflies will only make rare appearances. But in one form or another, life will return, and the garden will surprise and delight me once again.

I hope I will decide to expand the flower bed in the spring. It can be part of my rehabilitation, physical and mental. Something to look forward to.

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GREAT MINDS, GREAT Thoughts

The smells of Christmas are the smells of childhood.

The Christmas Box
Richard Paul Evans

True contentment is not having everything, but in being satisfied with everything you have.

Oscar Wilde

For a couple of hours out of the whole year, we are the people that we always hoped we would be!

Scrooged

I took nine. Yeah. I did slightly overcommit to the whole dog thing. It turns out I'm probably more comfortable with six.

Megan (Melissa McCarthy)
Bridesmaids

I'm eating junk and watching rubbish! You better come out and stop me!

Kevin McCallister
Home Alone

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