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DEBBIE TRAVIS' HOUSE TO HOME



TREASURED TREES

BY DEBBIE TRAVIS

At my house, the Christmas tree changes every year. Well, not true. One stays the same, our traditional tree. It is laden with keepsake ornaments that have been handed down through the family, plus those precious handmade trinkets my kids hung with pride when they were little, and now want to burn or bury ... not a chance! In another room I dress a smaller tree, choosing any new theme that strikes me. I get inspired in various ways; it could be the latest fashion in clothes or a new decorating trend; one year it was costume jewelry — lots of baubles and bangles and glass beads that sparkled alongside white mini-lights. I get very enthused about the look of a well-dressed tree; it's joyful and beautiful and full of memories.

As lots of you know, I'm on Twitter now, and I've sent a message to all my Twitter fans asking them to show me a photo of their most imaginative and original Christmas tree. Meanwhile, I'm always on the lookout for a different look, and the sparkling tree you see here is one of my favorite finds this year. Rather than sitting in someone's front parlor, this tree is decorating a hair salon called Colourbox. The owner shared

her inspiration and how she put it all together.

The theme is Winter Garden, created with a palette of greens that build from the palest poinsettia petals to woody stalks, seed pods and crisp, deep evergreen branches. Oversized flowers and large ornaments are in keeping with the trends today. Large snow-drop ornaments and white balls are glittered to make them twinkle. Stalks of red berries nestled in the branches cheer up the cool wintry scene as they do in nature.

It's not difficult to produce a dazzling tree such as this. You'll find a good selection of silk flowers at craft stores, and the poinsettia is plentiful at this time of year. Spray-paint fake or real branches and twirly twigs, add sparkle with silver and gold glitter, and you have a winter wonderland. Here are some other themes that are hot this year.

Sweet and Romantic. This one's fitting for a couple sharing their first Christmas together. Think red, lots of hearts, silk or paper roses, lacy trim and doilies. Collect small photos of loved ones; frame by gluing onto decorative foil and hang. Tuck chocolate sweets and cookies into the branches. Make it even more personal by adding a few mementos of a holiday or special occasion.

Girl Time. Host a party for your girlfriends and celebrate by decorating a tree together. Really kitsch it up with the power of pink; trim with flossy boas and oversized feathers. Don't forget the jewelry, and hide the tree stand under a faux-fur wrap — either pink or snowy white.

Glam Fest. Splurge with a tree that dazzles with the glamorous aura of silver and gold. Before you decorate, wrap strings of the new tiny

LED lights in soft white. This is your chance to go over the top. From the brilliant gold star at the top of the tree to the silver lame skirt for the stand, load the tree with balls, birds and bells in shimmering silver and gold. Use paint or foil, and mix these two precious metals for a stunning contrast.

Whatever your theme, have fun, share with a friend and take some time off to enjoy the wonders of the season. Happy holidays.

* * *

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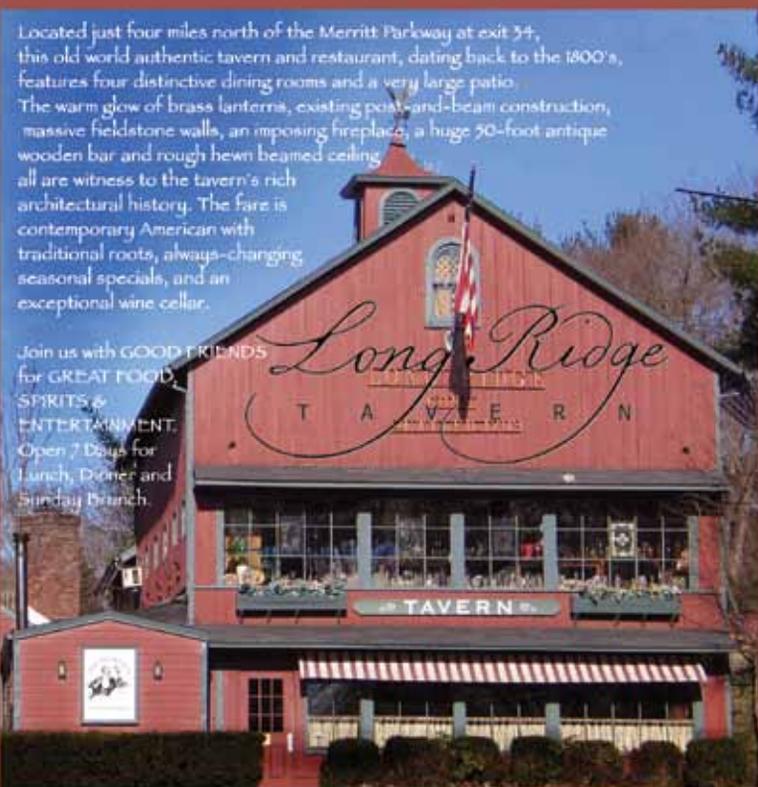
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This captivating Christmas tree evokes the brilliance of a garden in winter.

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DOGGY PRECAUTION

BY HELOISE

Dear Heloise: I, too, have always used disposable rubber gloves to handle raw meat. It is much cleaner and safer. However, I learned a huge lesson the hard way! A rubber glove that is flavored with meat will be irresistible to a dog!

Recently, my 8-year-old golden retriever became violently ill. We rushed him to the animal emergency hospital, and after an ordeal that lasted several days and cost us more than \$2,000, a glove that I had been wearing while making hamburgers had to be surgically removed from his intestines!

I had been in the kitchen the whole time I was cooking and had the garbage pail out from under the cabinet, right next to me. The dog must have just walked by and quickly grabbed the glove without me noticing. I am much more careful now when I dispose of food-prep gloves. — Kristen, Middletown, N.Y.

Oh my! Glad to know he turned out OK from what could have had a tragic ending. Readers, this is a good reminder to all of us with pets — especially dogs, who do like to eat almost anything! Think of them as furry children — dogs will be dogs!

— Heloise

CAT HINT

Dear Heloise: I have an indoor/outdoor cat. When she is in the house in the daytime, I can tell her “No!” and she will stay off the furniture. At night when I go to bed, I can’t control her. So, before I go to bed, I put foil over what I don’t want her to jump on. — Jean Taylor, Pekin, Ill.

PLACE MATS

Dear Heloise: We also are dog lovers, and we have a puli (with dreadlocks) named Bogey. I started using heavy hot pads as place mats under the water and food bowls. Works great, and I can throw them in the washer easily. Any spilled water is absorbed into the pad and doesn’t damage the wood floor. — Kathy Sampson, via e-mail

FUNNELING BIRDSEED

Dear Heloise: I kept spilling birdseed all over when trying to

fill the feeder until I came up with a solution. My canning funnel has a wide mouth and spout, and it fits exactly into the feeder — no more crying over spilled seeds. — T.R., Arlington, Va.

LITTER BOX

Dear Heloise: I have been cleaning my litter box for years by placing the pan in a tall trash bag, then placing litter on top of the trash bag, which is inside the pan. To empty it, I carefully pull the bag from under the pan up and over the pan, enclosing the soiled litter inside the bag. I close it up and throw it away. — Billie, Houston

CAT FUR VS. MOUSE

Dear Heloise: I have two adorable cats that love to chase my computer mouse across its pad. I got frustrated with all the fine fur that got stuck on both the pad and the mouse ball. I used a lint roller on the pad and compressed air in the mouse itself. Now, the ball tracks where it’s supposed to, and I have a cleaner pad. — Renee, via e-mail

SNUG BEDS

Dear Heloise: Another solution for snug pet beds: I use a cheap pillow and cover it with the zip-on pillow cover, then cover that with a flannel pillowcase. My Chihuahua, Tanner, gets chilly at night, and he loves the flannel. He crawls inside the flannel case and sleeps snugly. I wash the pillowcase and cover often, and replace the pillow as often as needed. — Marlene in Illinois

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Lee Jaksik of Pleasanton, Texas, sent this photo of four Boston terriers posing for a Christmas photo in a red wagon.

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FROMMER'S

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BY ARTHUR FROMMER

LARGEST CRUISE SHIP EVER

In articles syndicated throughout the newspaper world, in cable television shows, in "streaming video" transmitted on the Internet by enthusiastic reporters, in Web sites selling cruise discounts and from countless other media outlets, you are about to be inundated with personal stories about what it's like to sail on the largest cruise ship ever built, the 220,000-ton Oasis of the Seas, which has now gone into service.

No other cruise ship has ever been such an event or in greater need of objective reporting. But although some of those reviews will include minor episodes of foul-ups aboard, very few of the reports will be really critical. The Oasis of the Seas could experience major breakdowns in service, congestion and like horrors, and chances are that many travel journalists — the ones constantly writing about cruises, and who reach negative personal conclusions — will nevertheless downplay those views. Because if they are boldly critical, they will never be invited to enjoy a free cruise again.

In the world of journalism, the ability to go on multiple cruises each year, and report on them, normally is dependent on receiving free-of-charge cruising. Few publications or radio/television outlets are able to afford picking up the cost of their staffers' cruises, and few journalists are able to afford paying from their own pockets for such an expensive routine of constant cruises. So you'll have to wait for a bit to interview actual paying passengers about their reactions to this 6,000-passenger ship. That's because, with respect to cruises, the normal guarantees of objective journalism have diminished in strength.

Will I ever cruise aboard Oasis of the Seas? If I do (and I have no great

desire to shove my way through 6,000 others), it will be only as a fully paying guest with no obligations — and probably under an assumed name. Because I probably would be shot on sight if recognized. Can anyone suggest how I might get on the ship under a fake name, in these days of sensitive security?

* * *

In travel, have the new "social media" — Facebook and Twitter, in particular — brought about progress, or the opposite of it? At last month's celebration in Boston of the 100th anniversary of the youth hostel movement, a participant described a scene in the lounge of a European youth hostel, filled with young travelers from around the world. Each one of them sat staring intently for long periods of time at the Facebook or Twitter information on their laptop screens. Not one of them was speaking to another.

* * *

An important recent article by travel writers Arline and Sam Bleecker claims that the cruise lines have added so many extra charges to the cost of a cruise, and placed such a heavy emphasis on attracting onboard spending, that the actual cost you incur is two to three times the price of the cruise. Cruise lines charge for both soft and hard drinks, for fuel surcharges, for eating at specialty restaurants, for mandatory tipping, but tropical all-inclusive resorts do not. Their conclusion? That tropical all-inclusive resorts are now cheaper than cruises.

* * *

Though it doesn't carry anywhere near the number of passengers as the ships of the now-defunct Windjammer Barefoot Cruises, a new, 12-passenger sailing ship operated by Island Windjammers, Inc., has begun re-

creating the laid-back Caribbean cruises operated by the much-lamented Barefoot group. The ship sails from the island of Grenada, and it charges as little as \$1,599 for a week. You can get more information from www.islandwindjammers.com or by phoning 877-772-4549.

* * *

Numerous Las Vegas tipsters are raving about the unlimited beer and wine that you now receive by purchasing a \$22.95 buffet dinner, Mondays through Thursdays, at the M Resort Spa and Casino in Henderson, Nev., on a continuation of The Strip, a short ride from the end of The Strip. What an opportunity for tipplers!

* * *

More than a year ago, I wrote about the remarkable Air Tran standby program for young people, which remains in effect and is appealing as ever. If you're between the ages of 18 and 22, you can "go standby" on any Air Tran flight for only \$69 to \$99 one way, to anywhere Air Tran flies. Presumably, the program remains in effect even during holiday periods, but you might be foolhardy to risk it at that time.

* * *

Want to legally travel to Cuba? The 900-passenger Braemar of Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, a British firm, will be leaving Bridgetown, Barbados, on March 4, 2010, and April 1, 2010, on 10-day cruises (1,429 British pounds per person) of the Caribbean that will each stop for a day in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba. Since it's illegal for a U.S. citizen to spend money in Cuba but not illegal simply to be in Cuba (without spending a cent), you easily could get off the ship, wander about in Santiago de Cuba without purchasing a souvenir, booking a hotel room or even buying a cup of coffee, and then

reboard without violating U.S. law.
Go to www.fredolsencruises.com.

* * *

Several recent visitors to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (the former Saigon) are reporting that excellent custom-made suits can be had for around \$300, including cost of the materials. Since Asiana Airlines is currently offering round-trip airfares of \$765 to Ho Chi Minh City from Los Angeles, you could now have a custom-made suit for only slightly more than \$1,000 (far less than is currently being charged by U.S. tailors), including the cost of a couple of hotel nights and meals. You could get two custom-made suits, according to my calculations, for just slightly more than \$1,300.

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Buddhist temple in Ho Chi Minh City

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NASCAR THIS WEEK

By Monte Dutton
NASCAR This Week

Men, moments and great deeds that will be remembered from NASCAR, circa 2009:

■ Jimmie Johnson became the first driver in NASCAR history to win four consecutive championships. He broke a tie with Cale Yarborough, who won



Jimmie Johnson

three straight (1976-78).

■ At age 50, Mark Martin, competing fulltime for the first time in three years, finished second in the Sprint Cup standings. Martin, who has never won a championship, was the runner-up for the fifth time in his career.

■ Ron Hornaday Jr. became the first four-time champion in the history (1995-present) of the Camping World Truck Series.

■ Kyle Busch won a total of 20 races in NASCAR's so-called three major touring series: four in Sprint Cup, nine in Nationwide and seven in Truck.

■ Brad Keselowski pulled an upset at Talladega that required him to tangle with Carl Edwards on the final straight of the final lap. Edwards' Ford left the ground, ripped through the catch fencing and tumbled over and over numerous times. Rules were changed and fencing raised and bolstered for the latter race at the track.

■ Joey Logano's New Hampshire victory made him the youngest driver ever to win at NASCAR's top level.

■ Hendrick Motorsports took the top three spots in the Cup standings, with Johnson first, Martin second and Jeff Gordon third.

■ Tony Stewart led the regular-season points standings, and both he and Ryan Newman made the Chase in Stewart's first season as a team owner.

■ Matt Kenseth won the season's first two races but struggled afterward and, like Kyle Busch, failed to make the Chase. Kenseth's victory in the Daytona 500 was a first for owner Jack Roush.

■ The leading race winner of 2008, Carl Edwards, failed to win at the Cup level in 2009.

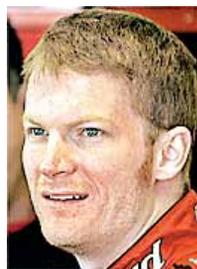
■ NASCAR's suspension of driver Jeremy Mayfield for al-

leged substance abuse spilled over into the courts and touched off an unseemly series of lurid allegations from both sides.

■ Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt, Junior Johnson, William H.G. France and William C. France were selected as the first five inductees in the NASCAR Hall of Fame, currently under construction in Charlotte, N.C., and scheduled to open in May 2010.

■ Juan Pablo Montoya, from Bogota, Colombia, qualified for the Chase and blossomed into NASCAR's first foreign-born star. The most improved driver in the Sprint Cup Series was an Australian, Marcos Ambrose.

■ The sport's most popular driver, Dale Earnhardt Jr., had the worst season of his career to date and was the only Hendrick Motorsports driver who failed to make the Chase.



Earnhardt

Jeff Burton didn't make the Chase for the Sprint Cup. That's the bad news.

The good news was that he finished second in the season's

final two races, leading a general improvement in Richard Childress Racing.

Building on that improvement is the goal during the off-season.

"I think, obviously, you've got to bring good hardware to the race track, and we did push the wrong buttons last winter and played catch-up obviously," said Burton.

Late in the season, Todd Berrier became Burton's crew chief.

"With Todd coming on board, we got together pretty quickly and had fast race cars pretty much all four weekends (at season's end, after the change), and that's certainly encouraging," Burton added. "I think we've done a nice job of putting together a really, really strong race team."

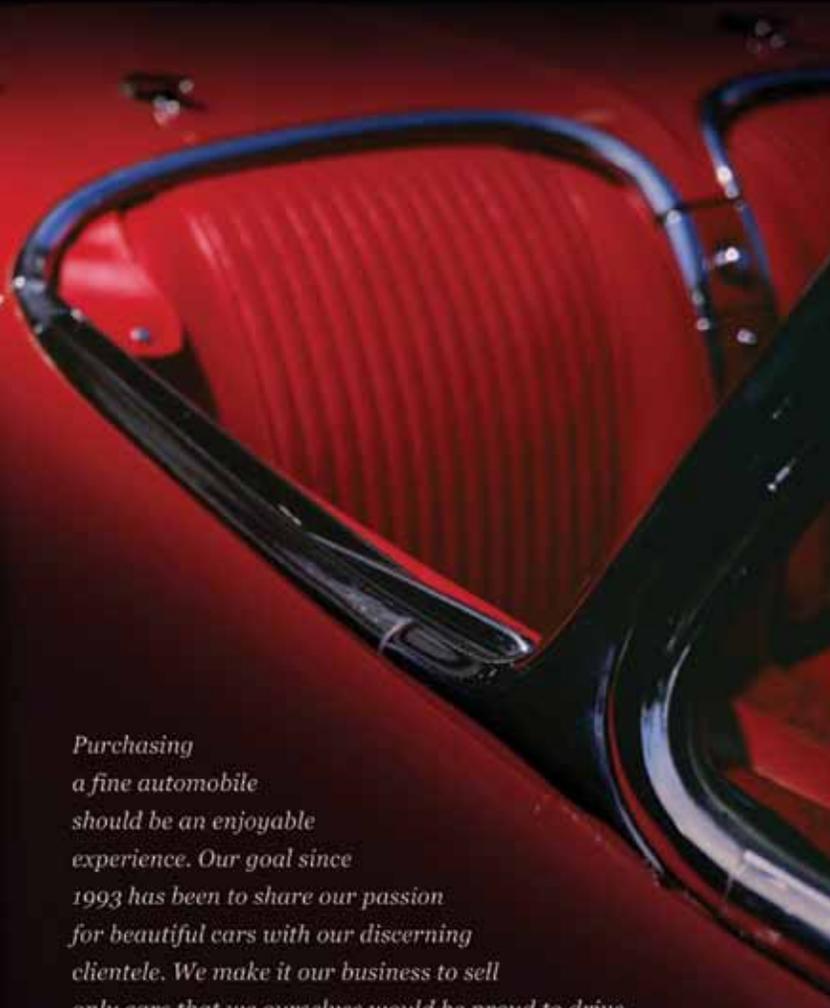
Target Jimmie — Kurt Busch is one of the drivers encouraged enough by his 2009 showing to have title aspirations in 2010.

"There's some stuff we learned in the Chase with this car that will help, for sure," he said. "We won in Texas and finished fourth in Homestead, and we need to translate that into week-in and week-out performances.

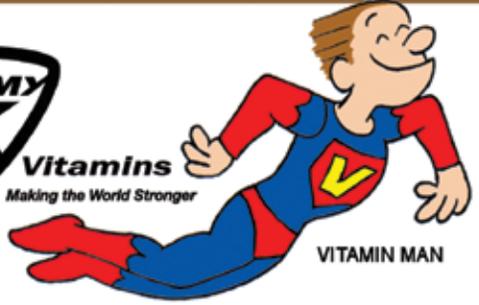
"These guys from Hendrick, they'll beat you left and right if you're not looking. We just have to keep pushing them, find new



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Happy Musings

by Sally Huss

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JILL JACKSON'S HOLLYWOOD

By Jill Jackson

HOLLYWOOD ... I really don't know how to start this tirade. It's about People magazine naming Johnny Depp as the Sexiest Man Alive. It also added George Clooney's name in there. "Ferheaven-sake!" Haven't they seen Chris Pine and several others? Johnny Depp! Good actor ... but sexy???

Long telephone chat with Joan Fontaine, who is unbelievable! Still beautiful and full of "zip." She entertained at Thanksgiving, inviting everyone in the Carmel area who didn't have family. And she still drives her group of doggies around in a van. If any of you haven't seen her films — "Rebecca," "The Constant Nymph," "Suspicion," etc. — do yourself a favor. Find them, and watch some memorable acting.

Aside to Sarah Johnson of Santa Monica, Calif.: The word "fan" used in regard to someone who is fanciful about someone or something probably arose from the word "fanatic." That's all I can tell you about that. But in regard to fans, all I can say is don't get caught up in a bunch of them — e.g. Michael Jackson's fans, fans waiting outside for a movie to open, fans chasing a celeb or any other bunch of them. I speak from experience. I've been in the middle of many, and it "ain't no fun!"

From now on until the New Year, filming news is scarce. However, the usual cast of "characters" — Lindsay, Britney and Paris — still make the nightclub, restaurant and Rodeo Drive scene. And when they're not involved in a caper, it's fun to guess the color of their hair from day to day. At the moment, Britney is blonde, Lindsay is brown, and Paris is her usual white, white blonde. Yup, I know some of you are saying, "That's news?" My answer: It's better than writing about the economy, illness, wars and demises!

Digging for something better, I find Eddie Murphy set to star in a comedy

titled "The Misadventures of Fluffy." All I know is that it's "a New York road trip" featuring talking animals.

Eddie's recent "Imagine That" and "Meet Dave" did not do so well at the box office, but he just keeps rollin' along. He also is involved in several more projects, while his married life is a most happy one. He has fathered many offspring by several marriages.



Eddie Murphy

Any of you watch the late-night talk shows? If you do, notice the way the hosts use their hands. Leno's are most always in his pants pockets; Conan's are always clasped; and Dave waves around with his huge, long fingers like giant sausages.

Any "lefties" out there? Lots of them in "the business." Robert DeNiro, W.C. Fields, Rock Hudson, Charlie Chaplin, Robert Redford, Tom Cruise, Rex Harrison, Danny Kaye, Harpo Marx and Terence Stamp. And among the femmes, Kim Novak, Betty Grable, Diane Keaton, Shirley MacLaine, Julia Roberts, Marilyn Monroe, Goldie Hawn, Joanne Woodward and Olivia De Havilland.

* * *

Harvey Keitel joins Blythe Danner, Robert DeNiro and Owen Wilson in the sequel to the hit movie "Meet the Fockers." (And I still contend someone had a sense of humor when they named this one.) The new film will be titled "Little Fockers" (which I think is even funnier) and will deal with children of the main couples. And did you know that "Meet the Fockers" was itself a sequel to "Meet the Parents"?

Nice letter from Gloria Kovelman of Brooklyn, N.Y., saying that her favorite

quote from Mae West is, "It's not the men in my life that count, it's the life in the men." Gloria adds that a friend of hers who recently passed away at age 102 also was a friend of Mae West's. She told Gloria that Mae was "a sweet, kind and virtuous lady" — so different from her portrayals on screen and stage. Her friend and Mae often exchanged clothes and went dancing. Thanks, Gloria. Keep reading.

It seems to never cease for Clint Eastwood. Books, public offices, top movies, acting, directing ... and another honor recently added. He has been named a commander in France's prestigious Legion of Honor for his "body of work, his public offices, his longevity and his ability to delight audiences worldwide." This doesn't even mention all his wives, all his affairs and all his children. AND once again, if you want to read all about him, there's a new book out titled "Clint Eastwood." (And would you believe I've never met the man?)

The Berenstain Bears head for the big screen. The plan is to combine live actors with cartoon characters, making for an interesting mix. None of the "live" actors have been announced as yet, but you can bet your best boots that many big names are clamoring to get in on the fun. This is another wait-and-see and I'll tell you when.

One of my friends went shopping in Beverly Hills to beat the Christmas rush. She reports an evening purse (a little clutch, all beaded) for \$3,000; a bracelet (just a gold band) for \$10,000; a silk scarf, \$500, and then I quit listening.

BITS 'N' PIECES: You'll get a hoot out of this. Charlie Chaplin once entered a Charlie Chapin look-alike contest and came in third. ... Natalie Portman making the talk-show rounds looking very grown-up. ... Before Katie and Nicole and Mimi, Tom Cruise had a thing going with Rebecca DeMornay. ... And finally, Lauren Bacall went on record as saying, "A woman is not complete without a man."

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CELEBRITY EXTRA

By CINDY ELAVSKY

Q: I am thrilled that Fox's "Glee" is doing so well in the ratings, as well as bringing great "older" music back into the public eye. I was wondering how Steve Perry felt about the show's rendition of Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" from the season premiere. — Randi T., via e-mail

A: Steve Perry told AOL Music's online blog, Popeater, that he definitely approved of the "Glee" kids' version of his famous 1980s power ballad. Steve said: "I would give it an A. They did a really nice, heartfelt high-school interpretation of the song."

Steve remains hands-on in choosing which projects can use his music. Before approving the song's use in the show, he saw a rough cut of the "Glee" episode that featured his song and said, "I thought it was edgy writing, and I was impressed."

Q: Like you, I am big fan of ABC's "V" and was wondering if you could give me a little background information on the actress who plays Anna. — Larry E., Deltona, Fla.

A: Morena Baccarin, 30, plays the beautiful and seductive Anna, the leader of the alien race of reptilian-like "Visitors" who have come to Earth with not-so-nice plans for its inhabitants. Morena has co-starred in other sci-fi series, including "Firefly" and "Stargate SG1," as well as guest starring in "Numb3rs," "Dirt" and "Medium." She was born in Rio de



Morena Baccarin

Janeiro, Brazil, was raised in New York City and attended the Juilliard School.

Q: I am a sucker for anything related to boy bands and was wondering what Jeff Timmons (formerly of 98 Degrees) has been up to lately. — Katrina R., via e-mail

A: Timmons, 36, is putting the finishing touches on his sophomore solo album, which is tentatively titled "Emotional High," and is offering it to his fans for free. I asked Jeff why he is giving his album away, and he explained: "I love this new music, and I want people to be able to get their hands on it."

"We sold almost 11 million records with 98 Degrees," he said, "and I don't know if all the fans out there are aware that I do music myself. They don't know what my music is going to sound like, and I can't expect them to just go out and buy it, spend 10 or 15 bucks. I thought, I'll give it away." Go to

jefftimmons.com for more details and to sign up to receive your free copy of "Emotional High."

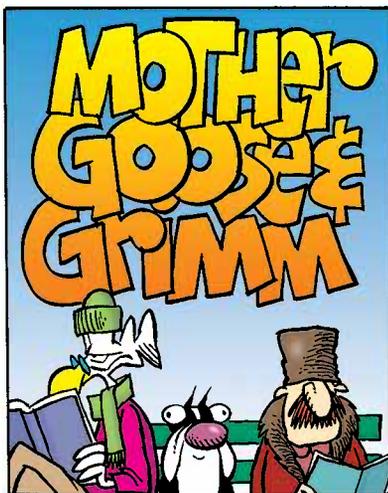
Q: I am really jonesing for some "American Idol." When will the new season premiere? — Trista F., San Antonio

A: Fox recently announced that "American Idol" will return with a two-hour episode on Tuesday, Jan. 12. The show's regular timeslots will be 8/7c on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. While I always look forward to the audition shows, I also can't wait to see how well Ellen DeGeneres meshes with fellow judges Simon Cowell, Randy Jackson and Kara DioGuardi.

Q: Help me! I really need to know what is going to happen next on "Lost." When will it return for its final season? — Olivia F., via e-mail

A: The two-hour Season Six premiere of "Lost" will air Tuesday, Feb. 2, on ABC. This season will be its last, as you mentioned, and will consist of 18 episodes. The producers and company at "Lost" are very tight-lipped when it comes to leaking plot points, but they did reveal this season's cast list: Naveen Andrews, Nestor Carbonell, Emile de Ravin, Michael Emerson, Jeff Fahey, Matthew Fox, Jorge Garcia, Josh Holloway, Daniel Dae Kim, Yunjin Kim, Ken Leung, Evangeline Lilly, Terry O'Quinn and Zuleikha Robinson. Elizabeth Mitchell, who is now starring on ABC's latest hit, "V," is not on the official cast list for "Lost," but she has been spotted flying out to Hawaii to shoot guest stints for the show.

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Chicken Soup for the Soul



A CHRISTMAS GIFT

By Victor Parachin

She was a special-duty nurse at a London hospital, and she had been assigned to care for a desperately ill German student from a nearby college. The young man had contracted pneumonia and was in critical condition. Staff physicians held out little hope for his survival. The student, aware of his perilous circumstances, pleaded with the nurse to keep him awake, saying, "If I go to sleep, I'll never wake up."

Throughout the long hours of the night, Gordon kept her patient from drifting off to sleep. With painstaking detail, she told him the biblical Christmas story — the journey to Bethlehem, the birth in a stable, the adoration of the shepherds, the visit of the Magi, the flight into Egypt. When she had exhausted the story, she sang to him every Christmas carol she could recall from memory. And whenever her patient seemed on the verge of falling asleep, she gently shook him back to consciousness.

The dawn of that Christmas morning found the student still alive and able to celebrate the day. The crisis passed, and the young man gradually improved and was released from the hospital.

Several years passed. Britain and much of the rest of the world were engulfed in World War II. Gordon, now a medical doctor, had been conscripted into the service of her country. Because she was fluent in Norwegian and a skilled skier, she was placed undercover in Nazi-occupied Norway.

One morning, German occupation troops arrested her, along with scores of Norwegian civilians. Someone had tipped off the Germans that one of the group was a British secret agent. Knowing that her true identity and mission would be discovered, Gordon prayed that death would come quickly and that she would not be subjected to torture.

Gordon was brutally shoved into a small room, where she faced her interrogator, a Nazi soldier. The man reached for his sidearm. My prayer is answered, she thought. Then their eyes met, and there was surprise at the mutual recognition. The German student and the English nurse were face to face again. Replacing his gun in its holster, the soldier pointed to the back door and said: "Go. I give you back your Christmas."

(From "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Christmas Cheer") Reprinted by permission of Victor Parachin. (c)1999 Victor Parachin.

ONCE A TEACHER, ALWAYS ...

By Kay Conner Pliszka

Mom was a teacher most of her life. When she wasn't in the classroom, she was educating her children or grandchildren: correcting our grammar; starting us on collections of butterflies, flowers or rocks; or inspiring a discussion on her most recent "Book of the Month Club" topic. Mom made learning fun.

It was sad for my three brothers and me to see her ailing in her later years. At 85, she suffered a stroke that paralyzed the entire right side of her body, and she went downhill after that.

Two days before she died, my brothers and I met at her nursing home and took her for a short ride in a wheelchair. While we waited for the staff to lift her limp body back into bed, Mom fell asleep. Not wanting to wake her, we moved to the far end of the room and spoke softly.

After several minutes, our conversation was interrupted by a muffled sound coming from across the room. We stopped talking and looked at Mom. Her eyes were closed, but she was clearly trying to communicate with us. We went to her side.

"Whrrr," she said weakly.

"Where?" I asked. "Mom, is there something you want?"

"Whrrr," she repeated a bit stronger. My brothers and I looked at each other and shook our heads sadly.

Mom opened her eyes, sighed, and with all the energy she could muster, said: "Not was. Say were!"

It suddenly occurred to us that Mom was correcting brother Jim's last sentence, "If it was up to me ..."

Jim leaned down and kissed her cheek. "Thanks, Mom," he whispered.

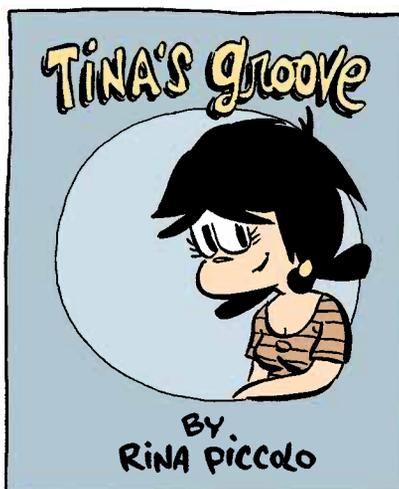
We smiled at each other and once again shook our heads — this time in awe of a remarkable teacher.

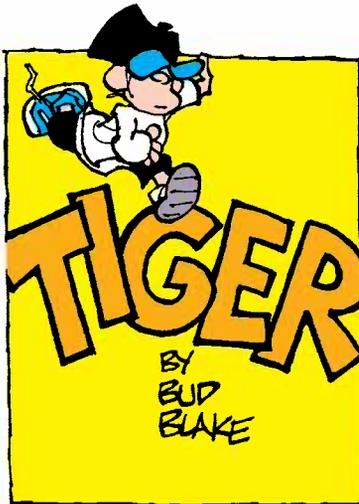
(From "Chicken Soup for the Teacher's Soul")

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KOVELS ANTIQUES

By Ralph and Terry Kovel

HOLIDAY ITEMS

Christmas is a time to buy gifts, but also a time for manufacturers to sell special holiday items. In 1949 John and Robert Howard and Grant Holt finished college and started Holt-Howard, a New York City business that sold Christmas items. Their first success was a revolving brass candelabrum called "Angel Abra." The heat from burning candles makes a round metal propeller rotate to spin cutouts of angels. The idea dates back to the Middle Ages in Europe and similar candle carousels are still being made. At first Holt-Howard focused on Christmas items — candle holders, punch sets, dishes, planters, candy dishes and other ceramics featuring angels, pixies and Santa. The company moved to Connecticut in 1955 and started making kitchen-related items like condiment dishes, cheese jars and salt and pepper sets. Holt-Howard is credited with making the coffee mug a common household item; in the 1950s it made many different styles of mugs instead of traditional cups and saucers. The company's ceramics were all made in the U.S.A. until the late 1950s, when manufacturing was transferred abroad and Holt-Howard became an importer. Collectors like the playful look of Holt-Howard designs and also the fact that each piece is marked with the company's name and the date of manufacture.

Q: My father was once on board the USS Williamsburg presidential yacht. I still have the souvenir he received

that day, a Ballantine Burton Ale bottle with a "Christmas Greeting" paper label that says "Brewed especially for Harry S. Truman on May 12, 1934. Bottled December 1949." Would this be worth anything?

A: If the bottle is still full, it's worth more than if it's empty. Ballantine Burton Ale was a very special ale brewed and aged at one of Ballantine's plants in Newark, N.J. It was never sold. Bottles were given as Christmas gifts to Ballantine distributors and VIPs, including President Truman. The USS Williamsburg had been used as a naval gunboat during World War II, but served as the presidential yacht from 1945 to 1954 so it was used by both President Truman and President Dwight Eisenhower. Full Ballantine Burton Ale bottles with the Truman label sell for more than \$100. An empty bottle sells for less.



Holt-Howard made this punch cup in the 1960s as part of a set that included a bowl, ladle and eight mugs. The complete set sells for about \$150-\$200, but this mug alone costs only \$7. (photo credit: Cloe Eiber)

Q: Can you tell me anything about the plastic Santa bank my father left me? It's a bust of Santa wearing a black top hat. The coin slot is in the top of the hat, and the bottom of the bank is marked "Knox Hats, New York."

A: Knox Hats dates back to 1838, when Charles Knox (c.1818-1895), an Irish immigrant, opened a tiny hat shop on Fulton Street in New York City. The business grew during the second half of the 19th century, and Knox opened a bigger store on Fifth Avenue and a factory in Brooklyn. The company was sold in 1913, but the brand name lived on until the 1950s. Because your bank is plastic, it probably wasn't made until after World War II. That's when plastics become widely used. It's likely the bank was an advertising premium or a Christmas gift given to loyal customers.

Tip: Plastic bubble wrap can ruin the glaze on old ceramics. If the wrap touches a piece for a long time in a hot storage area, it may discolor the glaze or adhere to the surface in an almost permanent glob.

Terry Kovel answers as many questions as possible through the column. By sending a letter with a question, you give full permission for use in the column or any other Kovel forum. Names, addresses or e-mail addresses will not be published. Write to Kovels, King Features Syndicate, 300 W. 57th St., New York, NY 10019..

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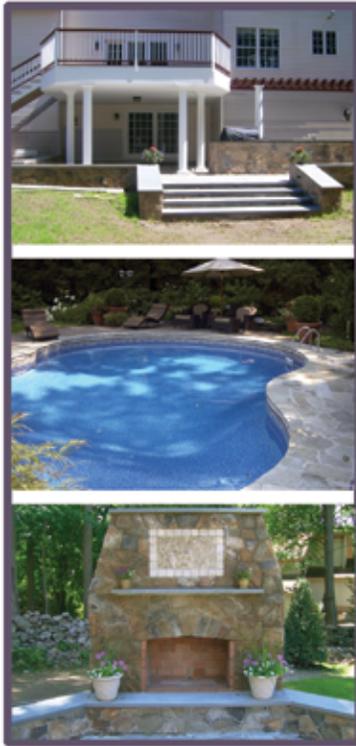
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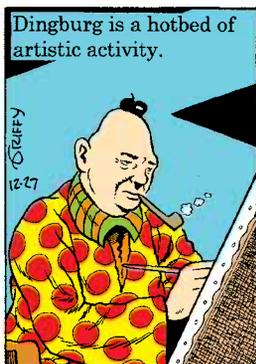
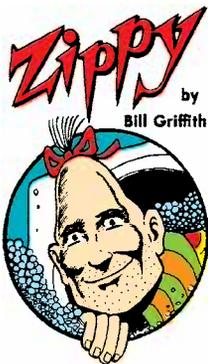
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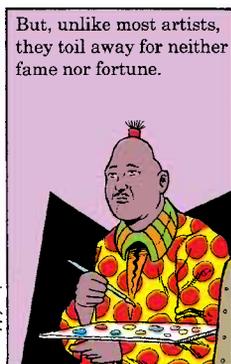
"The C. Demmy!"

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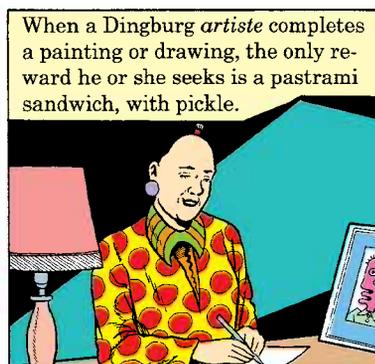


Dingburg is a hotbed of artistic activity.

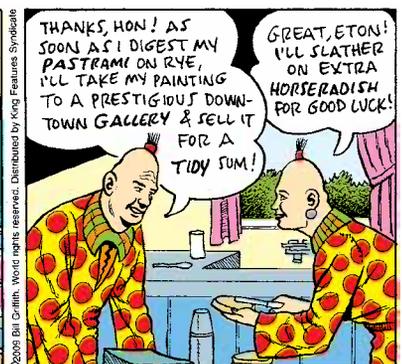
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But, unlike most artists, they toil away for neither fame nor fortune.



When a Dingburg *artiste* completes a painting or drawing, the only reward he or she seeks is a pastrami sandwich, with pickle.



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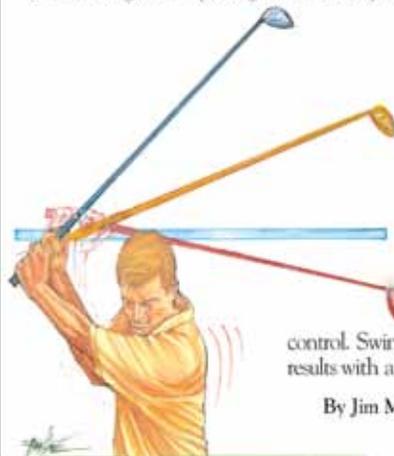
Full Swing?

When is a backswing full? The generally accepted answer is when the clubshaft is parallel to the ground. The truth is, there is no "correct" backswing length. It varies with each person's strength and flexibility.

Many golfers who try to achieve this parallel position shouldn't. For example, a slender, flexible golfer may swing the shaft easily to parallel to the ground or well past. Then

you can have a stockier, thick-set player who can't turn his torso as far. Note: A person's build doesn't determine flexibility. John Daly is stocky, and he brings his clubhead back to his left knee, but that's him.

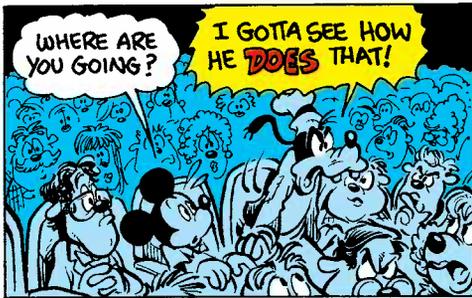
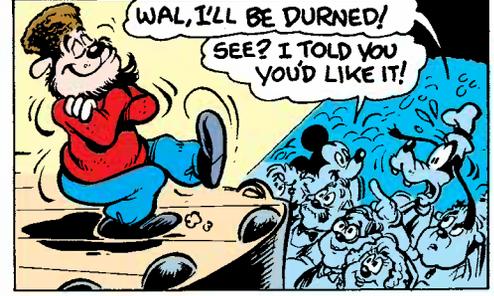
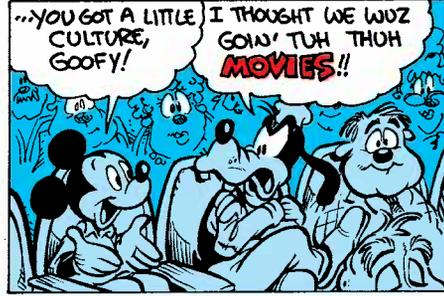
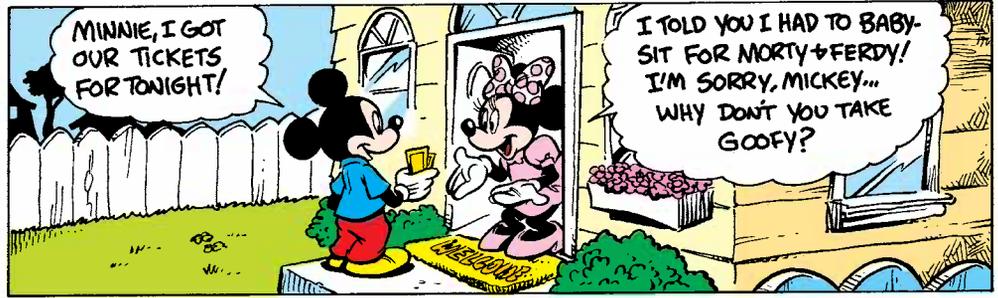
A position in which the clubshaft is halfway between perpendicular and parallel to the ground is fine. Studies have shown that a longer backswing does not always mean more distance. Reaching for a backswing that you're not capable of will cause you to lose control. Swing within yourself - you will have better results with a compact, smooth, balanced swing.



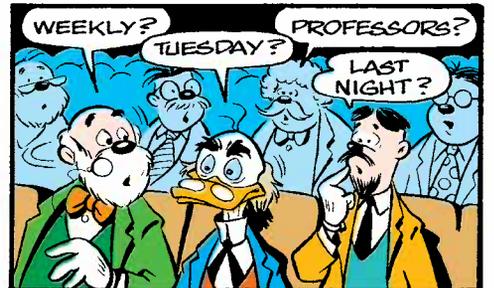
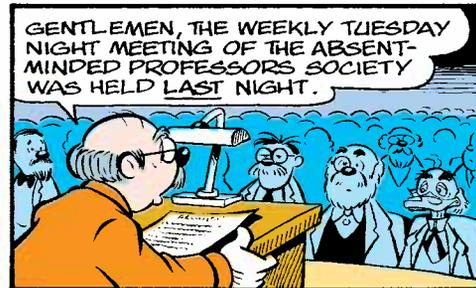
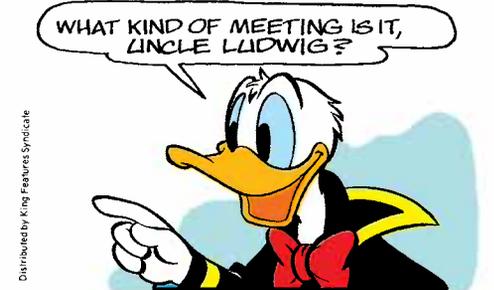
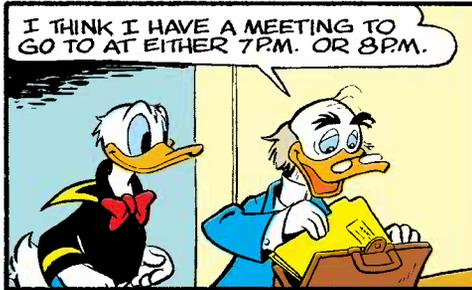
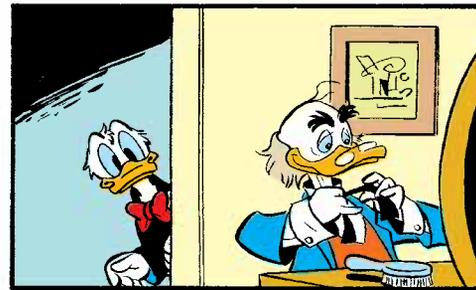
By Jim McLean, Owner, Jim McLean Golf School

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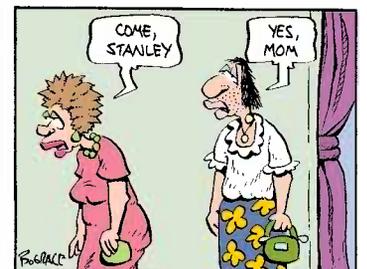
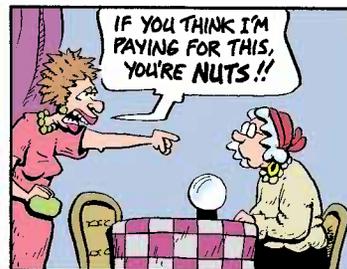
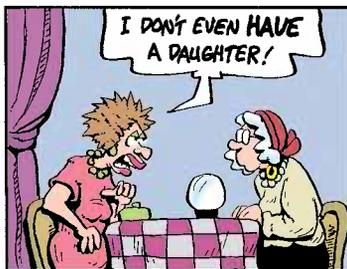
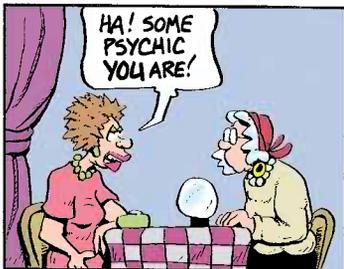
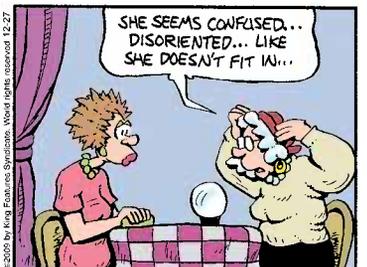
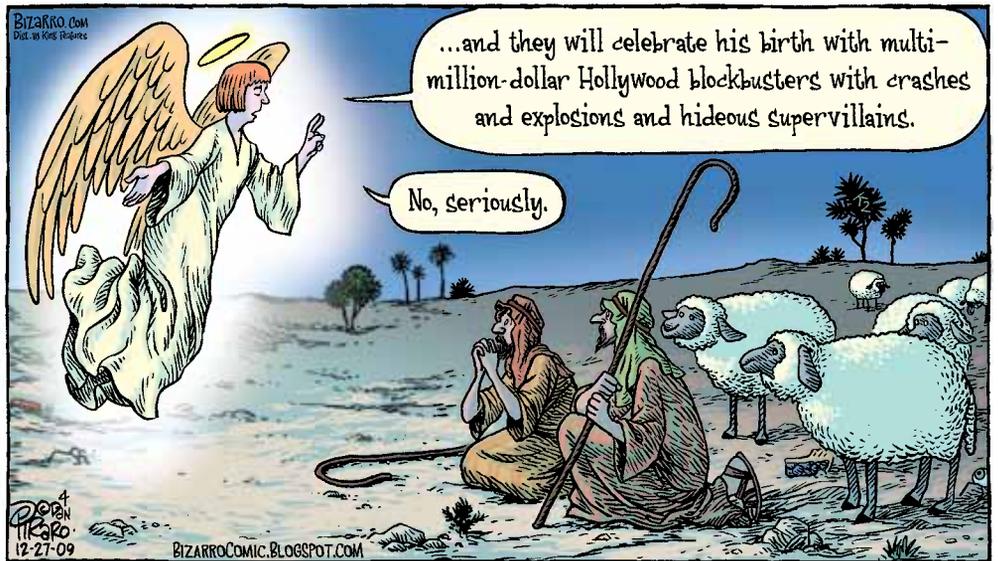
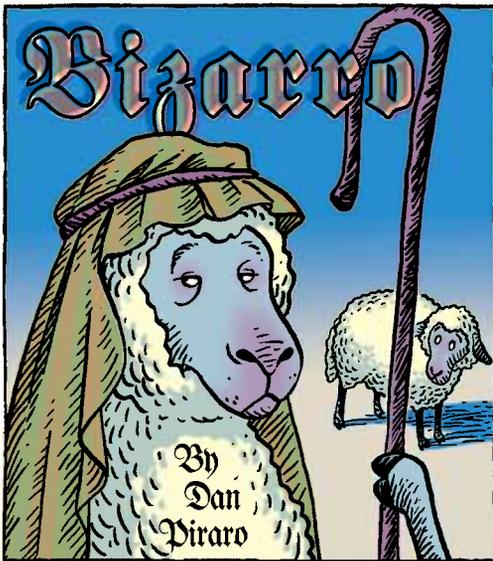
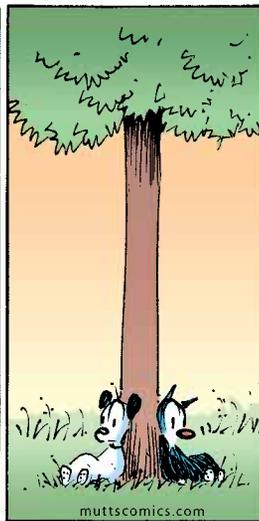
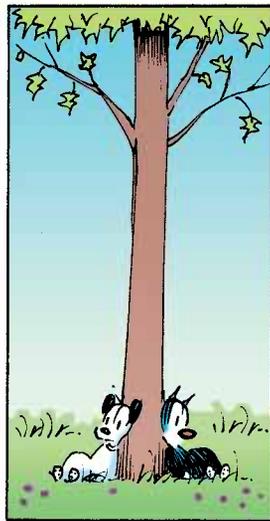
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BY AL AND KELLY CARRELL

A PERFECT TREE

It's hard to believe another year is almost over. There's only one big project left for most of us — and that's the holidays! Every Christmas our family puts up a big Christmas tree — or two or three. We love the fresh-cut trees that tree farmers provide every year, and we like to support them. But how do you pick a "good" tree?

The first thing to consider is how long it has been cut. The fresher it is, the longer it will last. Look for a tree that still has green, supple branches. If you bend a small branch gently, it shouldn't snap off. If it does, that tree is too dry, and you should keep looking.

Another sign of a fresh tree is to use your thumb-

nail to scratch off a little bark from the main trunk. If the tree's tissue under the bark is still green, it's a good sign that the tree will last through the season.

If you pick up a tree and bring it down sharply to the ground and it rains needles, keep looking. This tree is too dry and will continue to lose needles.

As soon as you get your tree, cut off the end of the trunk — about an inch will do. This opens up fresh tissue that will soak up the water you supply and keep the tree from drying out too fast. Put it in water immediately, and keep the water supply fresh every day. It will drink a lot of water the first few days but will slow down after that.

Use a tree preservative with the water to keep the tree fresher even longer. You can buy these at your tree dealer, or make your own from our recipe. It's on our Web site at www.thesuperhandyman.com.

It's a great idea to place your tree and stand on top of a large trash bag. This protects your floor from slobbered tree water, and when it's time to take the tree down, you can just place it in or on this bag and drag it outside without making too much of a mess.

Keep your tree away from heat registers so it won't dry it out too quickly. And never leave the lights on when you are not around.

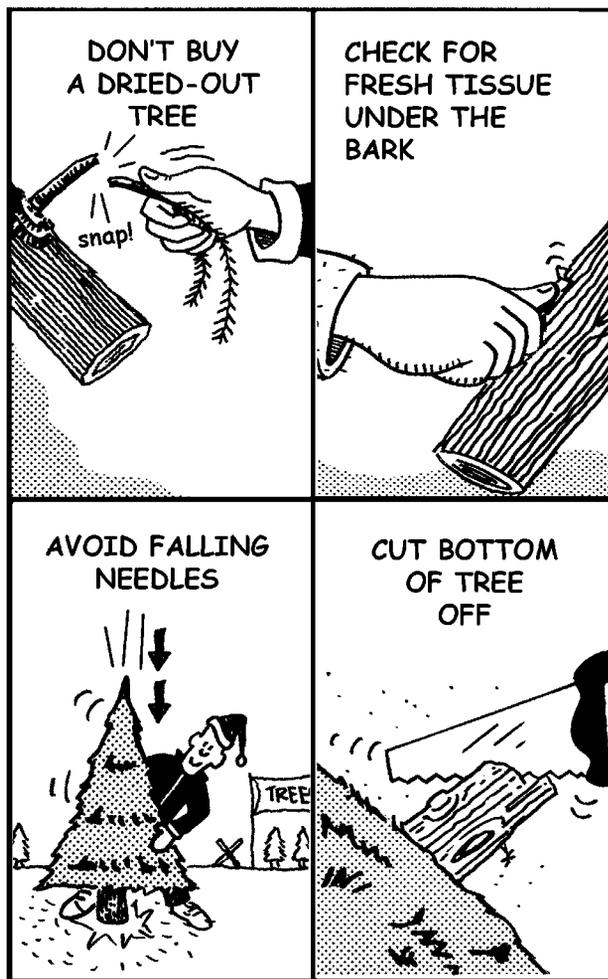
The Super Handyman and Super HandyMom want to wish you and yours a super holiday!

Q: We don't get much sun on the north side of the house, and I have some mold growing on the roof. How can I get it off without ruining the composition shingles? — W.A.

A: Try spraying it with laundry bleach to kill the mold first. Then hose it off with some pressure.

Q: I have a traveling washing machine — that is, it wobbles and moves away from the wall in our basement. I'm afraid it will break the water line eventually. What can I use to anchor it down? — T.W.

A: You don't need an anchor, but you do need a level. Just use a 3- or 4-foot level, placed in all directions, to level the machine. The front feet will adjust by turning to lift the front up or down to get it just right. Unless you have some internal problems, this should resolve the issue and keep your washer from flying the coop!



Got a question or a handy tip? Send it to The Super Handyman in care of this publication, or visit our Web site at www.thesuperhandyman.com. Those of general interest will be used in future columns.

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Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

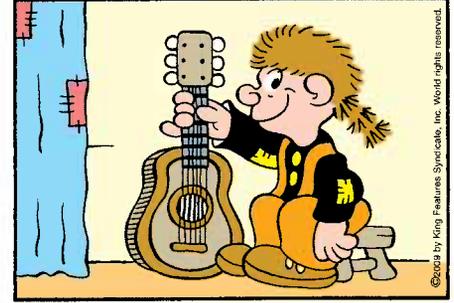
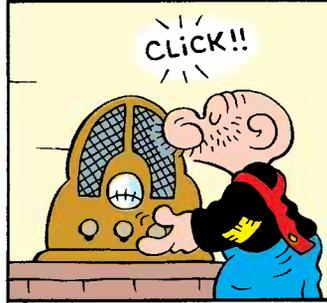
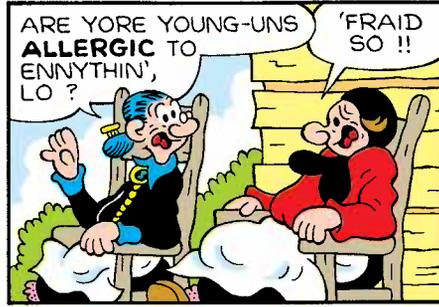
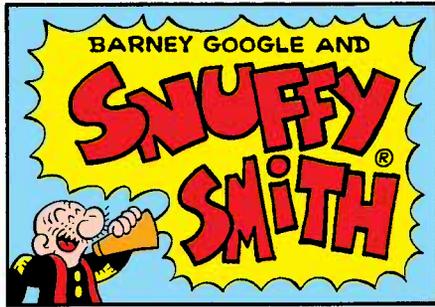
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1923 Yellow Cab

By Tad Burness

Pity the poor driver of this 1920s taxi. His compartment was only partially enclosed — no roll-up windows in the doors to keep out the wind, rain and cold. But passengers in the back compartment rode in comfort, with windows that could be rolled up when necessary, with heaters in some cabs.

All Yellow Cabs before 1926, as well as many other brands of taxis in the '20s, had these partially open driver's compartments. In 1926, Yellow had mercy on its drivers and finally built a fully-enclosed cab, after General Motors had taken over the operation during 1925. After that, improvements and restyling were more frequent. For 1930, GM renamed the Yellow the General Motors cab. But because of Depression setbacks, GM suspended its cab production for 1935 only. This was Chrysler Corporation's big opportunity to get into the act, by introducing De Soto taxis in the latter months of '35, and when the '36 De Sotos appeared, its cab production increased rapidly, with another big wave of De Soto taxis in 1941, 1942 and 1946-1948. Thousands of the De Soto cabs were bought by the various Yellow cab franchised operators from coast to coast, and De Soto dominated the field until it restyled for 1949 (a few months late, in February). The 1949 De Sotos didn't seem as big and roomy as before, so other makes entered the field. Checker Cab, popular since the 1920s, increased its share and was the most popular New York City cab until Checker bowed out in 1982.

Yellow Cabs and their counterparts of the early '20s are very rare now, but they sometimes appear in old movies from the 1920s and early '30s. One of Laurel and Hardy's talking comedy shorts from 1933, "Me and My Pal," has a Yellow Cab like this one featured prominently. Oliver Hardy is late for his wedding because he's trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle while several kibitzers interfere — including a tall, aggressive cabbie who'd been waiting around to take Hardy to the wedding, more than an hour late already. A brawl finally erupts, and the pieces of the puzzle end up scattered all over the room. In spite of all that, there are several scenes in and around the ancient taxi.

Tad Burness welcomes mail from readers. His address is "Auto Album," P.O. Box 247, Pacific Grove, CA 93950. Please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you would like a reply. If you would like to be contacted by telephone, please include your phone number, with area code, in your reply.

AUTO ALBUM BY TAD BURNESS
09-49 (CLIP AND SAVE)

THIS RARE TAXI STYLE WAS COMMON IN THE 1920s.
MODEL "O-3"

1923 YELLOW CAB

WITH 4-CYL. L-HEAD ENGINE 3 3/4 x 5" BORE + STR.
22.5 NAAC H.P.

OPEN-SIDED DRIVER'S COMPARTMENT
STYLING OF 1921-1925 MODELS SIMILAR.

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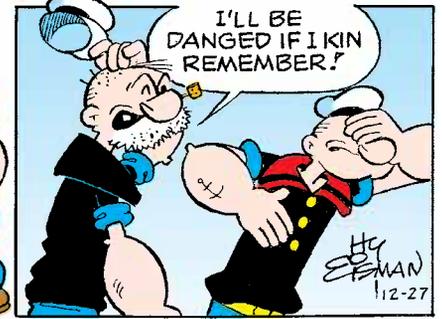
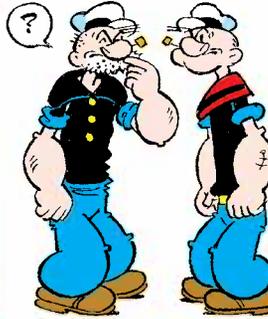
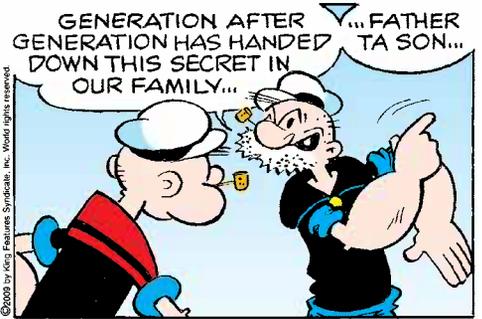
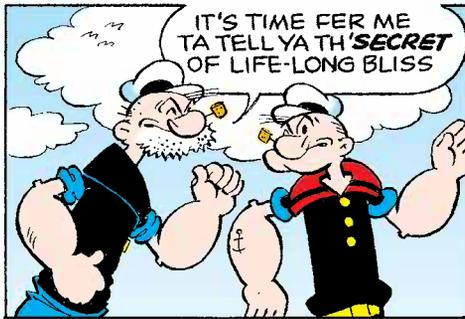
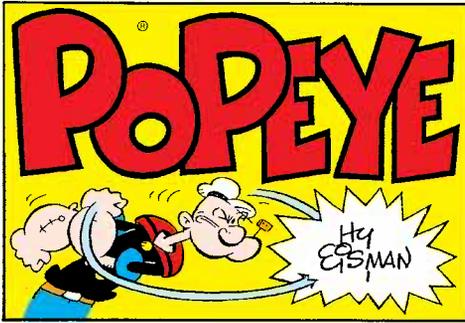
109" W.B.

SINCE 1915 FROM YELLOW CAB MFG. CO., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS (GM PURCHASED CO. IN 1925, AND MOVED YELLOW CAB PRODUCTION TO PONTIAC, MICH., FOR 1929 MODEL YEAR. (GENERAL MOTORS CAB, 1930 TO 1938) (NO 1935 MODEL.)

MAGNETO IGNITION

2-WHEEL MECHANICAL BRAKES (THRU 1928)

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SOLUTIONS

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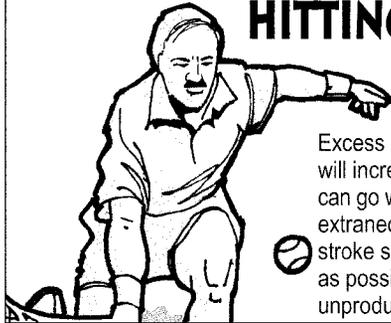
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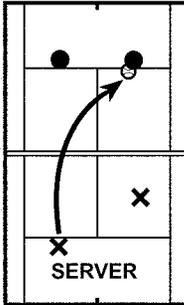
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STAN SMITH'S TENNIS CLASS

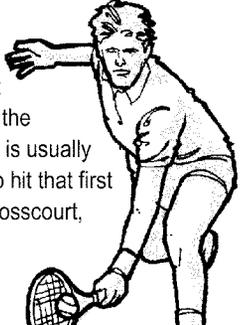


HITTING SMOOTH STROKES

Excess motions in your shots will increase the ways they can go wrong. Try to eliminate extraneous motions. Your stroke should be as smooth as possible, without any wild, unproductive movements.



As the server moves in, he will hit his first volley around the service line. It is usually best for him to hit that first volley back crosscourt, at the feet of the oncoming returner.



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Make sure that you follow through completely, without any excessive bend in your body or snapping of your wrist or arm.

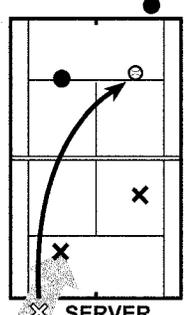


CLASSIC VOLLEY

On your volley, keep your swing compact and think in terms of just holding your racket in the path of the ball. Step as you hit, using a short, compact punch of the racket that moves your racket head toward the target.



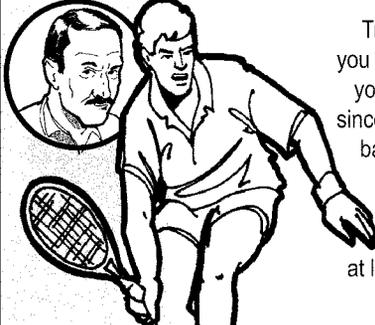
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DOUBLES: SERVE & VOLLEY

In doubles, it's important that, following a good serve, the server should move toward the net, preparing to hit a volley. The team that controls the net in doubles usually wins.

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Try to move forward as you hit. This will help keep your racket face closed, since if you lean back, the ball will tend to fly long. Volleys will be easier shots for you if you keep the ball at least 2 feet away from your body at contact.

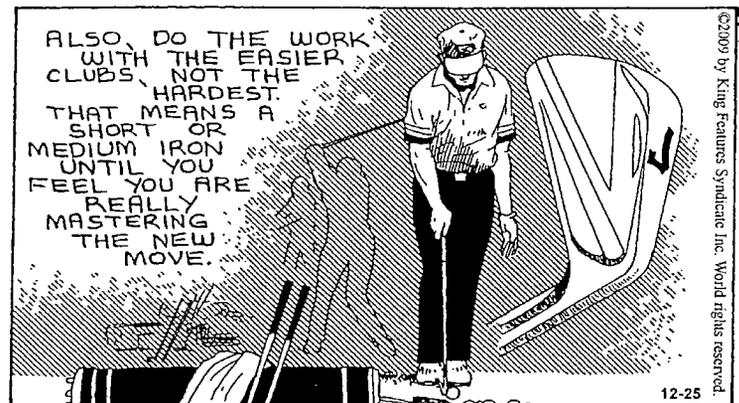
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IN WORKING ON YOUR GAME, NEVER TRY TO MAKE A LOT OF CHANGES AT ONE TIME. GO STEP BY STEP, IN A LOGICAL SEQUENCE. SOME PATIENCE IS ALWAYS REQUIRED TO MAKE A CHANGE REALLY STICK.

JM



ALSO, DO THE WORK WITH THE EASIER CLUBS, NOT THE HARDEST. THAT MEANS A SHORT OR MEDIUM IRON UNTIL YOU FEEL YOU ARE REALLY MASTERING THE NEW MOVE.

12-25
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We hope you enjoy all the features and entertainment in our fun magazine. Drop us a line if you have any suggestions, comments, or just to say "hello" neal@thebestoftimes.us

PREMIER Crossword

By Frank A. Longo

**NEW YEAR'S
TUNE
TRANSPOSING
ACROSS**

- 1 Ship poles
6 Russian composer Prokofiev
12 IV dosage amts.
15 Slugger Ty
19 PC letters
20 Experiments
21 Skiing site
22 Butterlike spread
23 Name for an animated beach bird voiced by actor Aiello?
25 Come into view again
27 — 500
28 Golf's Ernie
29 Thin woman's revolver?
31 Toothpaste box inits.
32 Sister of Sasha Obama
34 Less distant
35 TV's McBeal participated in naked karaoke?
39 Injunction
44 "Yang Yang" singer Yoko
45 Word after film or opera
46 Information
50 River of Italy
51 Mexico-U.S. border city
55 Poet Ginsberg plus his male buds?
58 Robbin' Robin
59 Philosopher — -tzu
62 Giant fan
63 Just might
64 Hideous boy in a novel by writer Rice?
69 Rack up
71 Cause
72 Have an ascending slant
75 Be a rude houseguest
78 Tornado, e.g.
80 Prod with one's nose?
82 Canon camera
84 Lipton pouch
87 Laugh sound
88 Film — (dark movie genre)
89 Happy sisters at an Ivy League school?
93 Actor, singer or dancer
96 Eye lustfully
97 Claim on property
98 Town
101 Have life
102 "— alive!"
104 Kampala resident shouts?
109 Comparable (with)
113 Grubby guys
114 Mo. in spring
116 Actor Griffith carries singer Horne?
122 "— believer!"

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128						129					130								131		
132										134											135

- 123 Lorain's lake
124 Once
125 New Year's tune transposed nine times in this puzzle
128 "Malice" star Baldwin
129 Min. part
130 Labored
131 Like many windows
132 "And there you have it!"
133 Ordinal ending
134 Skips over
135 Five dozen

DOWN

- 1 News outlets
2 Plummer of "Pygmalion"
3 Heclless shoe
4 Wee
5 Tricky
6 Designer McCartney
7 Effacing
8 Big truck
9 Old France
10 Couture magazine
11 Cuba, e.g.
12 Waitress on "Cheers"
13 See-through
14 Black card
15 Ticket givers
16 Cassini of fashion
17 Male lover
18 Given life
24 Add herbs to
26 Prefix for "fire"
30 Essential
32 Chatty bird
33 In the past
36 Most ear-piercing
37 Teachers' org.
38 Internet address
40 Dustcloth
41 Beat-keepers' big moments
42 "May It Be" singer
43 Pinkish-red
47 "Feliz — Novo!" ("Happy New Year!" in Lisbon)
48 Actress Reid
49 Lack of vigor
51 "— she blows!"
52 Actress Skye
53 Polio vaccine developer
54 Math. class
56 Put on cargo
57 Small drinks
60 Roker and Gore
61 Cartoon woman Olive
65 Black, as a chimney
66 Fictitious
67 "Crude" vowel sound
68 "The Simpsons" clerk
70 Dog breed
73 "Blech!"
74 Stew veggie
76 Surgical cut

- 77 "Jane —"
79 Timbuktu's country
81 Shooters' org.
82 Personality components
83 Olympic gymnast Korbut
85 Picnic pest
86 Part of APR
90 GPA spoiler
91 Hoops org.
92 Daily riser
94 Big name in shades
95 "— chic!"
99 Blvds., e.g.
100 Jesus' home
103 Lone
105 Fatty stuff
106 Land rovers
107 Voice box
108 Piano type
110 ICU worker
111 Shoelace tip
112 Pump (up)
115 Like cattails
116 "... to buy — pig"
117 "Show Boat" heroine
118 Scott in an 1857 case
119 Urban rec center
120 — and void
121 Jai —
123 Morales of "My Family"
126 Netflix rental
127 Fam. docs



PRIME TIME WITH KIDS BY DONNA ERICKSON

Aromatic Apple-Cinnamon-Dough Gifts and Ideas

Do you want to make some dough with the kids this weekend? Put away the eggs, the flour and the butter, because this aromatic dough requires only two ingredients in very odd proportion — equal parts applesauce and cinnamon. Sound delicious?

You definitely won't want to eat this concoction, but you can enjoy its delicious scent as cut-outs for tree ornaments, gift tags and even jewelry for holiday gifts. Welcome to Apple Cinnamon Dough!

Here's what you'll need for a small batch of dough to start:

1/2 cup ground cinnamon (I bought in bulk for less than a dollar)

1/2 cup commercial applesauce (homemade is too runny)

Here's the fun:

Mix together equal parts cinnamon and commercially made applesauce. If it gets a bit sticky, add more cinnamon. If it's too stiff, try more applesauce.

Scoop onto a piece of waxed paper, place another sheet on top and roll it out until it's almost 1/2 inch thick. Stop and decide what "charms" for jewelry or ornament shapes you would like to create — stars, hearts, pine trees, alphabet letters, etc. Use cookie cutters you have, or make your own templates by cutting out pieces of cardboard from a cereal box in the desired shapes. Place on top of the dough and trim away the dough around the pattern.

Use a drinking straw to poke a hole in shapes for threading later onto ribbon or string. Use a toothpick and carve details, such as scales on a fish or a smile on a crescent moon.

When complete, place them on a cooling rack and allow them to air-dry for about 24 hours or more until they are nice and hard. Or, an adult may set them on a baking sheet and place in a 200 F oven for about two hours or until hard.

Time to decorate! Using acrylic craft paints in squeeze bottles, create patterns of any kind on your shapes. Dry.

Fashion a pin or brooch by gluing a clasp on the back, or make a necklace by stringing together a few alphabet-letter shapes or smaller charms. Tie a string through the hole for ornaments. For gift decorations, make shapes of objects that are a clue to what is inside the package. For example, if you are giving Uncle Jim a windbreaker for sailing, make a sailboat shape. Tie it to the ribbon on the gift, and it will be like giving two presents in one.

Donna Erickson's new award-winning television series "Donna's Day" is airing on public television nationwide. Visit www.donnasday.com to find out when it airs on your local PBS station and to sign up for Donna's e-newsletter.

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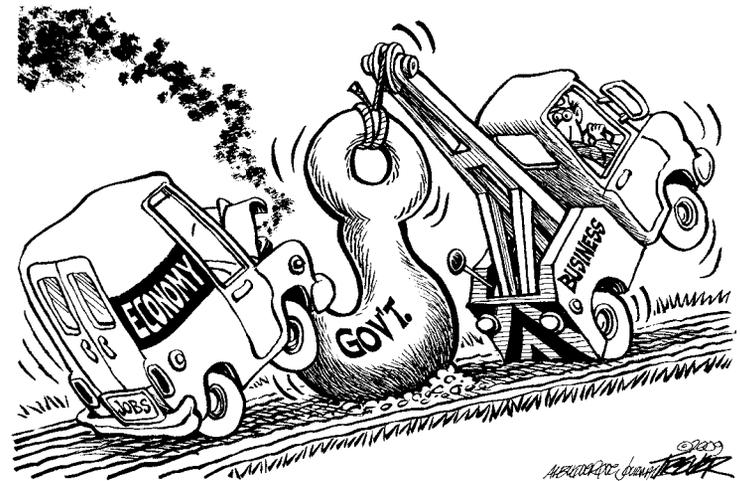
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