

Author's BAZAAR

ONLINE

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Editor's Note

BY DEAN REA



You are being treated to some holiday fare this month in *Author's Bazaar*, an online hobby journal that features poetry, essays, articles, short stories and photographs.

We are entertained by Deseree Probasco, who shares a secret recipe, by Sheryl Nelms, who writes about tumbleweeds in December and by Chuck Russell, who writes about his elderly ping-pong playmates.

David Griffin described a trip to an orphanage on Christmas night and what it taught him about his father.

Kathleen DesHotel returns again with a short story that will put a smile on your face and will warm your heart during this festive season.

If you wish to send an e-mail to any of the author's in this issue, just click on the by-line.

All of us may recall events that make this holiday season memorable. In my case, a gift I received as a boy always rises to the top of the list when Santa dances into my thoughts.

The sale of milk was the only cash crop my farm family enjoyed during the late 1930s when the nation was shaking off the Great Depression. I knew that Santa would be hard-pressed to leave a gift for me. Nevertheless, I enjoyed helping my parents and brother decorate the tree with a few ornaments and strings of popcorn.

Santa's gift that year remains one that I will never forget. It was lumpy and wrapped in an old newspaper. As I unwrapped the gift, I discovered that my father had taken time from his busy farm schedule to repair and to repaint my favorite toys.





SECRET RECIPE

By Deseree Probasco

My grandmother taught me to make Christmas candy,
as she was taught by her grandmother.
She talked over the worn kettle,
One cup of sugar, plus,
one cup dark corn syrup, overflowing.

She measured everything in her paper-thin hand,
warm vanilla, a pinch of salt.
I poured in the chopped pecans,
three cups, plus a handful,
for good measure.

The sugar and syrup frothed in time,
called up by her voice when she said, now boil
for seven minutes.
She handed me the old wooden spoon,
the same used by her grandmother.

Scrape and stir, scrape and stir, she chanted.
I talked over the worn kettle,
scrape and stir, scrape and stir, in time.
I let her taste the glistening caramel.
My grandmother smiled. Well done.

Playing On

By Chuck Russell

We are old and we are gray,
And we are broken in so many different ways.
But our spirits are still strong,
And so we will continue to play on,
If only in the words of a poem
Or in a song.



The author took this photo of the men he plays ping pong with.

Perfection

BY DAVID GRIFFIN

I was taken to the orphanage on Christmas night. We had started off for supper at Aunt Sue's over snow-covered roads. Dad drove us through the dark, the tires crunching on frozen snow as the old Ford slowly pushed beams of yellow light down an empty gray road. I was already missing the Christmas toys I'd left at home but was hungry for the cold turkey sandwiches my aunt served each year.

My 10-year-old big brother was in the front seat, and I was in the back, the normal arrangement to keep us separated when we got tired and grouchy toward the end of a long day. I asked Dad at least three times what was under the old blanket covering the large box beside me, but he didn't answer, except to tell me to leave it alone.

Halfway to Aunt Sue's house, Dad abruptly turned the car left up a long steep driveway, surprising my brother and me. In a few moments we came to a tall brick building, blackened with age. Above us lights shone from dozens of windows, all against a black sky holding a billion stars. Be-

fore I could ask, “Where are we?” my father hopped out of the car, reached in back, grabbed the cardboard carton and, laughing, threw the blanket over my head.

I pulled it off just in time to see a box full of gaily-wrapped Christmas presents carried up the steps of St. Joseph’s Orphanage. I admit being disappointed that I

wasn’t getting one more present on that festive day. Selfishly, I felt the same way each year when we made the delivery. I suppose I should have been happy on those Christmas nights to not be dropped off with the gifts.



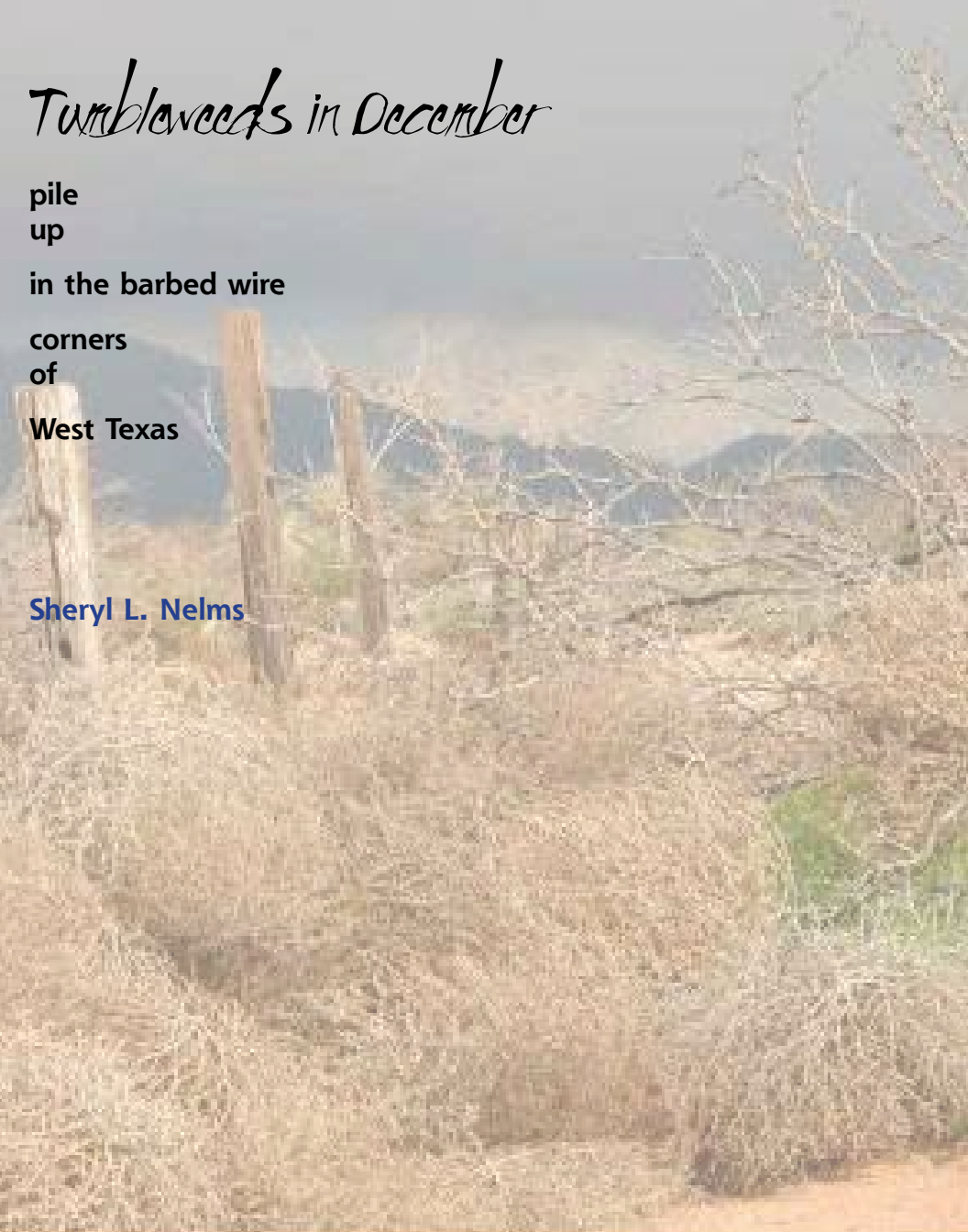
As I grew older I sometimes wished my heart was

as big as Dad’s, but I seldom compared myself to him. We were two different people, and besides, I would have lost. He set a good example for his sons, but he wasn’t perfect, and that allowed me to not expect perfection of myself. I sometimes walked in his footsteps and other times a good distance to the side. But I hope to have set an example a few times in my life. Those who live with me have seen my warts. So did my Dad, but he laughed and threw a blanket of love over them.

Tumbleweeds in December

pile
up
in the barbed wire
corners
of
West Texas

Sheryl L. Nelms



Gertrude Waits

By Kathleen DesHotel

It was so cold that Gertrude found it necessary to wear three pairs of socks and pink fuzzy slippers. Whenever she felt stressed, she would snuggle up under a fluffy quilt in her comfy burgundy chair.

Her husband had, what he called, periodic business trips. Usually they were short jaunts off to neighboring counties to buy supplies, but the winter trip was especially exhausting to her and her hubby. As the snow piled up outside their cozy home and nearly covered the view through windows, she put another log on the fireplace to keep her hands from freezing. She thought to herself, “It’s a good thing that I am a little overweight; a skinny person would not survive these temperatures.”

Star, her furry cat curled up on the crocheted rug by Gertrude’s slippers. The warmth of the yellow fur was a welcome benefit of cat ownership on this below-zero snowy and windy night. Their cocker spaniel was smarter than she and the cat were; Belle had already gone upstairs and burrowed under the quilts and blankets on the king-size

bed. Belle was getting older and didn't enjoy the freezing temperatures. Gertrude reminisced about Belle's puppy days when she would romp through the snow and carve a path to the workshop in their back yard.

That workshop was her husband's pride and joy. Youngsters in their little town had been there to watch him carve and create with pieces of wood. When spring arrived, every little visitor went home with a birdhouse wearing an original paint job. The birds were most appreciative. As soon as the houses were hung in the trees along the lane, the birds began laying eggs and searching for seeds and worms to feed their hungry hatchlings.

Everyone in town lived for springtime. The snow melted, and nature brought green sprouts to every tree, lawn, and plant. But tonight, thoughts of spring and birdhouses neither kept Gertrude warm, nor assuaged her concern for her prodigal husband. While she realized that his job was important and that many people depended upon him to do it well, this didn't stop her from wishing he could stay at home during the cold months.

As a seamstress, she created a new coat for him every year to wear for his business trip. He always liked them and would boast to all their friends, "My honey bun made this beautiful coat for me. She not only warms my body,

she also warms my heart. She's a very talented woman. She sings, sews and cooks." Then he would pat his tummy to show just how good a cook his wife was.

Although Gert lived her life as the woman behind the man, she managed to get some accolades for

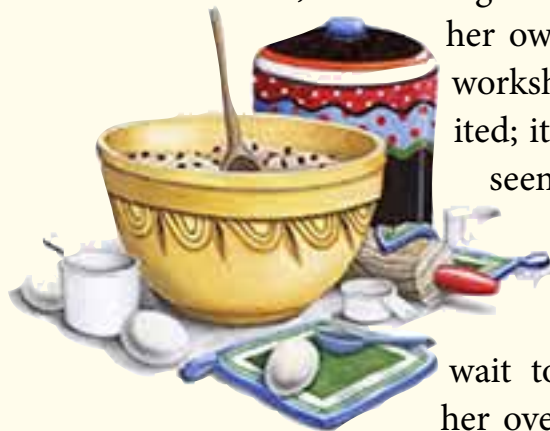
her own talents. It wasn't just his workshop that the little people visited; it was also her kitchen. They seemed to smell their way to the

house on her baking days and would pull up a chair to her kitchen counter and

wait to see what emerged from her oven. The aroma of her cakes could make a person drool. The mail-

man, Mr. Bowe, would always say, "I have the best job in town because I deliver mail to Gertrude's house every day, and sometimes I stand outside and inhale deeply as I try to figure out from the aroma just what it is she's baking. She makes the most superb oatmeal cookies, and her brownies make me feel like I could dance! Maybe that's due to her habit of singing while she works."

Gertrude was always so flattered by his compliments that she kept cookies or brownies on hand for him. As



soon as she would hear his footsteps on her wooden front porch and then the metal flap on her mailbox shut, she'd come to the door with a little container of delicacies for him to enjoy along his mail route.

Today, the snow was falling so hard that there was no delivery. This was disappointing because Gert, as her husband called her, looked forward to all the Christmas cards from friends, relatives and neighbors. She hung ribbons in the windows and clipped each card along the red and green ribbons so that everyone could see their beauty. At least she had decorated her tree with twinkling lights and handmade ornaments. Staring at the glistening tree, she had to fight approaching slumber because she didn't want to miss her husband's return to their home.

Rather than have some of her oatmeal and chocolate chip cookies to greet him, she had a multiple vitamin, an 81-mg enteric aspirin and his Omega-3 capsule for him to take. She felt personally responsible for his health. The pills and a glass of water awaited him on the end table next to his easy chair. He always complained about having to swallow them, but underneath it all he knew her insistence to be an act of love. She would say, "Honey, you have to take care of yourself. Where would I be without you?" And, he would down the pills one after another.

To pass the time until his return home, she tried knitting. She was making him a black-and-gold argyle sweater. The stitches were complicated, but knowing that Drew Brees of the Saints was his favorite football player kept her carefully counting the stitches. He would take time away from work to watch the team play. He would complain that there are so many football games on so many nights (Sunday, Monday and now Thursday) that he couldn't possibly take that much time from his workshop. "Whichever night Drew plays, I'll definitely take the time to watch. He makes lots of money, and he donates some of it to worthy causes. I like that."

As her needles clacked and the coo-coo clock ticked, she would flash a glance toward the snowy, limited view in the window by the front door. Hearing the twelve coo coos made Gert think of all the midnights that she marched out to his workshop and told him that he had worked long enough and that he must shower, don his flannel jammies and go to bed. He would grumble, but he would kiss her on her forehead before heading to the shower.

They had an agreement: She should ignore his grumblings, and he should pay attention to all the love and care she offered him. He let her know how much he loved her in subtle ways. For instance, he was an early riser, who made

a pot of coffee for them to share when she awoke. That was their together time when they talked about their concerns and their plans. She replayed those conversations until two coo coos in the morning. The drowsiness was setting in so she made a pot of coffee without her husband's help. This might warm her up and provide caffeine so she could keep her eyes open.

The coffee warmed her up, but the caffeine let her down. Her drowsy eyes won the sleep battle. At least the worry stopped about his safety out in a snowstorm. She dreamed about him instead. It was a fantastical dream. He was in a huge red sleigh filled with toys, and nine flying reindeer were pulling it across the skyline. The one in front had a red glowing nose. Even in her dream, she thought the sight was unbelievable. Sleigh bells were jingling loud and then louder.

Gert jerked upright in the easy chair as the door flew open. There in the midst of a snowfall stood her husband.

"I must have been dreaming," she said, "but now I can stop worrying about you out in that storm."

"It was quite a blizzard," he said, "but you don't have to worry about me, Gert. You know I'm magical."

"Well, you might be magical," she said, "but now you have to take your vitamin, aspirin and Omega-3."