



Christmas Day in the Village
Walter Emerson Baum
The Country Gentleman, December 1, 1938

A Blessed Christmas

Cards, gifts,
wreaths, cookies,
and a woman who
loves it all

By Ellen Michaud

It was the day before Thanksgiving, and I was already on the phone with Cheryl Werner, co-owner of Werner's Tree Farm near Middlebury, Vermont.

"OK, here's what I need this year," I began after we'd exchanged our yearly so-what-have-you-been-up-tos. Pulling out my list, I check off each item one at a time.

"Two 18-inch balsam wreaths with plaid ribbons – one wired to tie to the car's grill, the other with just a loop to hang on the back door."

"Got it."

"Three mixed-green garlands – two 22-footers to tie around the front door and porch railings; one 24-footer to frame the door of my church."

I can hear Cheryl scribbling. "Three garlands – check."

"One 24-inch swag, mixed greens, juniper berries, no ribbon, for the front door. That long plaid ribbon I have will last another year," I add, "so just leave me a place to put it. How's that sound?"

"Good," Cheryl approves. "What about a few pine cones?"

"Perfect." I check off the swag. "And I want to UPS a wreath to my stepmother – something with those pink pepperberries and velvet ribbon like you had last year. Can you do that?"

"Yep. No problem. When do you want it to go out?"

I sighed. "Today?" I asked hopefully.

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Mailboxes in Snow
Miriam Tana Hoban
The Saturday Evening Post, December 27, 1941

Sitting back in my dining-room chair, a sense of contentment begins to push past my edges as I look around the cluttered table.



Christmas Ornaments, John Atherton, *The Saturday Evening Post*, December 18, 1943

Cheryl snorts. “I’ll get Dave started on the garlands.” We finalize the details of what I need, agree to the price, agree to fast track my stepmom’s wreath, and arrange for me to head over to the farm and pick everything up the following weekend.

Sitting back in my dining-room chair, a sense of contentment begins to push past my edges as I look around the cluttered table.

Covered with cards, stamps, address books, recipes, ribbons, wire, dried flowers from last summer’s garden, fresh-clipped pine branches from the trees that surround my cottage, gift wrap, silver bells – it’s a jumble of stuff

that will help me show friends, family, and neighbors how much they are loved.

The Hanukkah cards go out first, closely followed by Christmas cards and gifts that go in the mail – Lake Champlain Chocolates to my friend Denise, a book to my friend Jane, wildly colored socks to my friend Debbie, some poetry to my friend Dolores, and three checks to three organizations that feed, shelter, and protect children.

Then I start to bake. Fragrant gingerbread people that will be tied to the Christmas tree with silky red ribbons are carefully crafted and baked, then packed into plastic containers and hidden in the back of the freezer.

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Looking out the window as snow begins to pile up around my cottage, I pick up the first card to address.

Christmas cookies drizzled with almond icing are deftly tucked into colorful little packages for my husband's next run through the community as a Meals on Wheels volunteer. A second batch is prepared for the senior citizen's community supper a week before Christmas. A third is packed for the cookies-and-cider celebration after the church Christmas candlelight service.

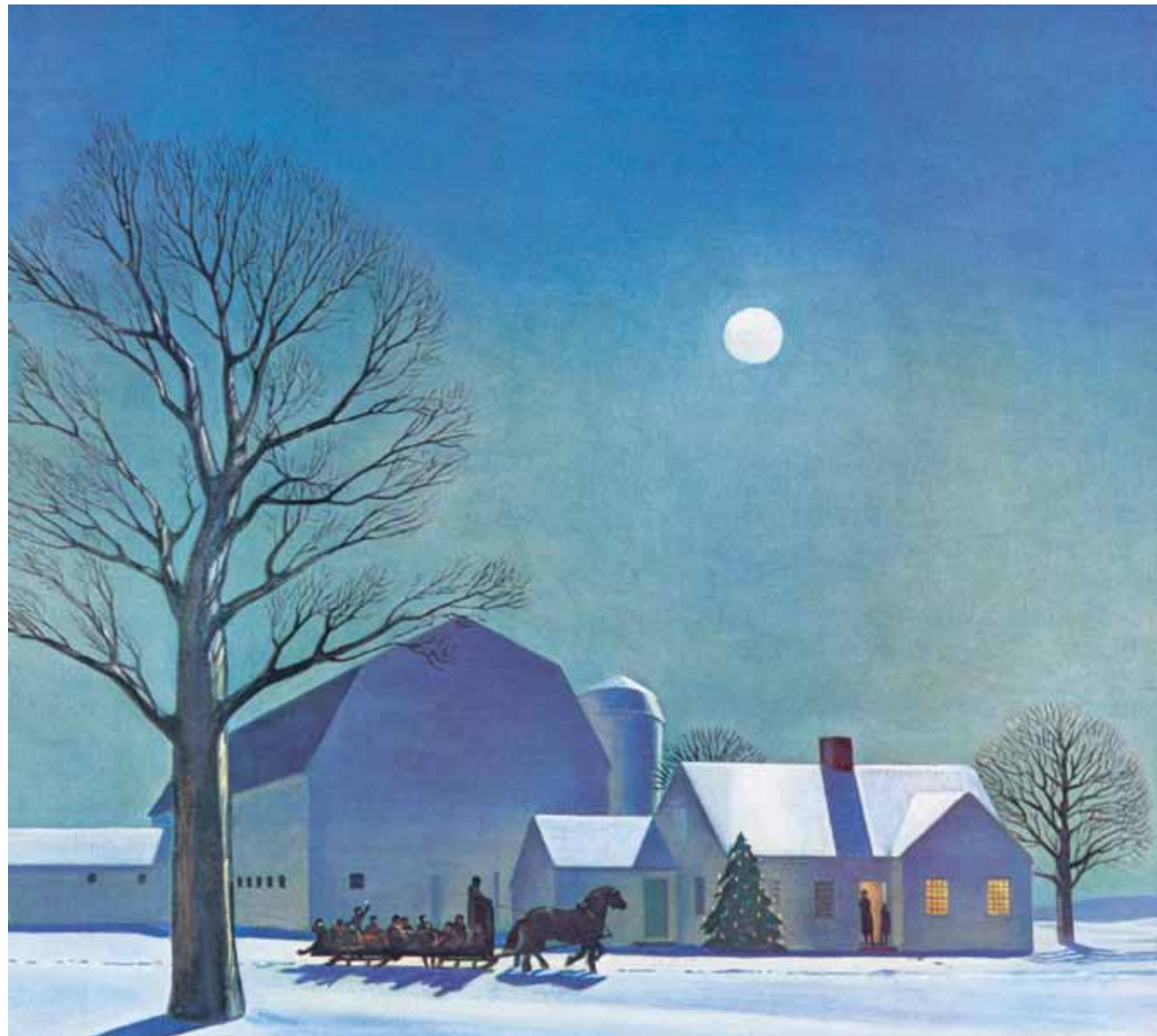
Then a dark, rich Vermont chocolate is whipped with fresh crème from the farm down the road into chocolate mousse and tucked away in the freezer behind the summer's green beans until Christmas night. It's quickly followed by a buttery-rich pecan pie for New Year's Day

that goes into the freezer incognito – usually disguised in layered tinfoil as a quiche, which no one in my family would touch with a 10-foot pole.

Looking out the window as snow begins to pile up around my cottage, I pick up the first card to address – and realize that from Thanksgiving to New Year's my whole life will be focused on doing a zillion small things for family, friends, neighbors, and people I don't even know.

Somehow, I just can't stop smiling.

Ellen Michaud is the award-winning author of Blessed: Living a Grateful Life and blogs at theblessedblog.com.



Moonlit Sleighride, Rockwell Kent, *The Saturday Evening Post*, December 1, 1943

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Starry Starry Night, Douglas Crockwell
The Country Gentleman, December 1, 1950