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RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

THANKS TO CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Christmas is a holiday steeped in tradition. Every year, we gather with our families to put up our Christmas trees, hang ornaments, enjoy a delicious feast, and of course, open presents. Everyone has their own traditions during the holiday season that help us remember who we are as people. Whether it's making a grandparent's special recipe, decorating gingerbread houses, or even watching our favorite Christmas movies, participating in family traditions helps connect us with our roots.

We may have lost a few traditions over the years, but some areas within our country stick with them, such as my wife's hometown of Morton, Illinois. This small town's girls' basketball team has won the state championship several years in a row, and the community gathers around them and supports them every step. You don't see that in many towns or cities anymore.

One of my favorite Christmas traditions is watching "A Christmas Story" because it reminds me of my childhood in Joplin, Missouri. My mom worked at Macy's in downtown Joplin, and every year, a parade would go right by Macy's front doors. It was always a highlight of my Christmas festivities watching that parade. Macy's was set up so we could press our noses to the glass and see all the Christmas decorations and even Santa. It was so much fun being part of that festive atmosphere, and "A Christmas Story" brings me right back to that time.

Movies especially help inspire my Christmas spirit, as they've been a staple of my celebrations and traditions for years. When my kids were growing up,

we would always watch "Home Alone" together before Christmas arrived. It reached a point where we could recite nearly every line as it was said on-screen. We also loved watching "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" together. It seems like every one of us can look at Cousin Eddie's antics and be reminded of a family member of our own. One of my niece's girls even looked like Cousin Eddie's daughter, Ruby Sue, and my brother would joke with her all the time about it. She didn't enjoy it much, but it got a laugh out of everyone else within earshot.

There are so many Christmas movies out there. Every one of us can connect with at least one. You might see yourself as Charlie Brown in "A Charlie Brown Christmas" or remember good times spent with your loved ones while watching "It's a Wonderful Life." These movies truly help us remember and appreciate the good times in our lives.

Christmas traditions help restore us to our roots and give us unique ways to appreciate the holidays. So much pulls us away from our traditional values that it's easy to lose track of what's really important. Even if your family is spread far and wide, participating in your family traditions will help you feel closer to each other.

I hope you all have a merry Christmas!

-Jim Monast



KEEP YOUR SMOKE DETECTOR CLEAN

YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!

We all know a smoke detector protects us from a fire in our home. They stay on constant alert, sniffing out any sign of smoke.

But are you maintaining yours properly? Many homeowners only touch their smoke alarms when they chirp for new batteries, ignoring them every other day of the year. You should be cleaning (yes, *cleaning*, not just pressing that button!) every six months.

Cleaning your smoke detector is essential to your safety. Here's a step-by-step guide on doing it correctly.

Cleaning your smoke detector is important. Your house is filled with pollutants, even if you clean it regularly. Things like dust, pollen, pet dander, cooking vapors, and smoke linger in your house even if you can't see them. These tiny fibers and particles love to

find small spaces to settle into, like your smoke alarm.

As these tiny particles build up, they cover the smoke-sniffing sensors in the detector and insulate it from the outside. This is a problem when a fire breaks out because it will take longer for the smoke to make its way to that sensor through the gunk. The more time the smoke takes to filter through the buildup, the longer your family is in danger.

There are two critical parts to cleaning your smoke detector; each is equally vital to keeping your family safe.

Vacuum the inside of the unit. Take the outer face of your smoke detector off, and use the



soft brush attachment of your vacuum to gently dislodge and remove the pollutants inside the device. If you don't have a brush attachment, use any soft cleaning brush to break up that gunk before vacuuming it away.

Wipe the outside vents. In a bowl, mix a bit of water and mild detergent (we recommend Dawn dish soap or equivalent) and saturate a paper towel or microfiber cloth in the mixture. Use this to wipe the outside of your smoke detector, particularly the vent openings. These will likely become clogged with dust and dander, so focus your scrubbing efforts there to ensure air can pass through.

We want you to always be safe in the case of an emergency. Add these two steps to your cleaning routine to protect your home and family from fire.



I solemnly swear: I am up to no good!



CLIENT PROFILE:

HEIDI PYLE GRIFFITH

Gosh, we've benefited from knowing our friend and client Heidi Pyle Griffith for nearly 20 years! A Springfield gal through and through, Heidi was born in Springfield and raised in Tremont City. She went to Northwestern High School, married an Urbana boy, and has never moved far from home base.

We got to know her when, as a young lass, she worked assembling windows and screens at Marvin's. This is hand-intensive work, pulling rails, putting in clamps, stretching screen, and meeting production quotas. She started there out of high school. After 16 years, it took its toll on her shoulders and wrists.

She hoped the pain and weakness would go away, but they didn't. Ultimately, after having been treated with rest, cortisone injections, wrist/thumb immobilization, carpal tunnel surgery, and medication, she had to find much

less physically demanding work. Fortunately for many, she began providing care services to seniors who choose to age happily at home. Now, she is a senior agent for a major hotel chain, using her people skills to serve harried travelers.

We walked with her on this journey all these years. And throughout, she's been a fun, happy, and silly woman who doesn't give up.

She and her husband William have a son, Luke, and a beautiful granddaughter, Alyssa, who are the light of her life. She also has Bentley the wonder dog who enjoys watching Bengals games with the family and riding along on road trips.

She recently closed her claim, and we helped. Fortunately, our friendship lives on. Springfield is a happier town with the joy our dear friend Heidi spreads. We are blessed to know her!

Why Munchkin Moved to Environmentally Friendly Packaging

IT ALL STARTED WITH A STRAY CAT



We've had so much debate over the last few decades about product packaging and its effect on our environment and the wildlife living alongside us. We've all seen pictures of marine life living with garbage or stuck in a plastic ring meant to hold soda bottles. Even with all the information and picture proof, many corporations have not changed their packaging methods. Munchkin, a company that designs, develops, and manufactures toddler and infant products, changed its packaging after hearing how it put one cat's life in danger.

Laura Baker, the founder of Itty Bitty City Kitties, a rescue center in Ellington, MO, received a call from an individual who saw a kitten walking around with a plastic ring around its body. Baker found the kitten and saw the plastic ring was digging into its body. She took the kitten to the vet, and it underwent surgery. The vet office determined the plastic ring had come from the packaging of Munchkin's Any Angel Cup product.

Baker wanted Munchkin to know about the situation, so she wrote them a letter and sent a picture of the cat, not necessarily expecting a response. But Munchkin responded and even sent money to pay for the cat's surgery. They also donated to Baker's charity. They didn't stop there, though. Diana Barnes, Munchkin's chief brand officer and creative director, said, "We clearly had to do better on the packaging material."

Over the next year, Munchkin developed new packaging made from 60%-70% recycled, fully compostable material. They designed it to be easy to tear if another cat got into the same situation. This redesign was not just for the Any Angel Cup but for 478 Munchkin cup products. By doing so, Munchkin will reduce its annual plastic use by 643,630 pounds.

You may wonder what happened to the stray cat caught in the Munchkin plastic ring. Baker adopted him, and he was given the name Munchkin to represent everything he went through and the incredible change he unintentionally started.

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ANSWER



MUNCHIES WITH MOLLY

NO-BAKE PEANUT BUTTER SNOWBALLS

Inspired by TheFoodieAffair.com

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1/2 cup creamy peanut butter
- 3 tbs softened butter
- 1 lb white chocolate candy coating

DIRECTIONS

1. Line a cookie sheet with parchment or wax paper.
2. In a medium bowl, combine powdered sugar, peanut butter, and softened butter. Mix until evenly combined.
3. Shape the mixture into 1-inch balls and place them on the lined cookie sheet. Chill in the refrigerator for 30 minutes or until firm.
4. In a microwave-safe bowl, melt white chocolate candy coating in increments of 30 seconds, stirring occasionally until smooth.
5. In the same bowl, use skewers to dip peanut butter balls into the chocolate before placing them on a lined cookie sheet so they can harden.
6. Chill until ready and then serve!

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LOCKS OF LOVE

SON MAKES A WIG FOR HIS MOTHER

Melanie Shaha is currently fighting her third brain cancer battle. For 15 years, she's been suffering from a benign tumor on her pituitary gland. Although she doesn't mind being sick, going to her appointments, focusing on her treatment, and talking to loved ones about her cancer, she doesn't like looking sick.

If you didn't know Shaha, you wouldn't realize she was battling cancer. But this suddenly changed once she lost all of her hair. She had two surgeries, in 2003 and 2006, in hopes of removing the tumor on her pituitary gland, but they weren't successful. Then, when she began radiation therapy in 2017, the treatment caused her hair to fall out.

"Not having hair [makes] you stick out like a sore thumb, and well-meaning people can say things that break your heart," Shaha told TODAY. She didn't like all the attention and the looks people gave her in public. So, her 27-year-old son Matt had an idea. At first, Matt joked

about cutting all of his hair off to make his mother a wig. But the joke soon became a plan, and Matt followed through in 2018.

After graduating from college, Matt began growing his hair out. In no time, he had long and luscious hair. His mother tried to dissuade him from cutting it, but Matt wanted to help her feel confident and comfortable in her skin. So, he chopped it off and sent his locks to Compassionate Creations, a hair company in Newport Beach, California, that created a wig for his mother.

Now, Shaha has a piece of her son to take everywhere with her beautiful new tresses. "The color is spectacular, and we had it cut and styled with a hairdresser. Matt said it looked great on me. It sure fills your emotional cup," Shaha says.

If you — or someone you know — would like to donate your hair to cancer patients, you can donate to Locks of Love, Wigs For Kids, Chai Lifeline, and Children With Hair Loss. Research donation centers in your area if you would like to give back locally.

