



The time when Daddy, the electrician, hung our Christmas lights

and other stories
of holiday mishaps

Thanks to everyone who sent stories about memorable holiday moments. You can see more on our Web site. Next month we'll publish your stories of "How I Improved My Health." [Deadline was Nov. 15.] See more themes and rules for our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series on page 18.

It wasn't fog

When I was 7 years old, my father announced that he would decorate the beautiful cedar tree in our front yard for Christmas. He was an electrician, and we figured if he could wire buildings with ease he certainly could decorate a tree.

So off the family went to Lowe's, where we stocked up on boxes and boxes of colorful Christmas lights. When we got home that night it took hours to wrap the strands of lights around that tree. Finally it was complete! My father hadn't bothered to read the directions, and since he was an electrician we figured he didn't need to.

When he plugged them in, all 15 strands of lights twinkled with color. We stood there admiring the tree, and Daddy mentioned how beautiful it looked as the fog came off our pond. It was at this moment that I belted out, "Daddy! That isn't fog! The tree's on fire!"

Evidently 15 strands of lights are a few too many lights to connect together. You would think an electrician would have realized this, but I guess he got a little swept up in the holiday spirit.

I've always thought my father hung the moon. I still believe that, but now I know he can't hang Christmas lights.

Mary Wester, Durham | Wake Electric

The trip to the mountains

It was going to be the great escape: no work, no cooking or cleaning, no spending the night with relatives. We were headed to the mountains for Thanksgiving vacation.

Our first destination—Santa Land. CLOSED. No problem. There was still fun to be had.

We made it to our hotel with the indoor swimming pool, only to find out that it was not heated.

The next morning, we set out on foot to explore some sites. Dad ended up carrying Jessie because her boots didn't fit, and I carried Nicole because she was overtired.

The Ripley's Aquarium was amazing; I just hope that Nicole's temper tantrums didn't disturb the other visitors.

As we headed back to the hotel, we couldn't wait to sit in the restaurant and enjoy the Thanksgiving feast. Apparently, it was straight from a can.

We did manage to have some fun. The Black Bear Jamboree and the Polar Express were a hoot. But we missed Thanksgiving with the family and we could have done without the typical traveling-with-children woes that end with someone vomiting in the back seat on the ride home.

My advice: STAY HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

Cathy Busam, Youngsville | Wake Electric

The Belk-Tyler man

In the early 1960s, we were farmers and lived up a lane across the field from my husband's parents. We had four children and no room to hide Santa. The big barn behind their grandparents' home seemed like an ideal place. There was no reason for the children to go into the barn. We felt secure because we had large, thick bags of lespedeza seeds stacked to the ceiling and in rows. We talked with Santa and made a deal to put the larger items between the rows of seed and to just pull out a bag here and there to make sure nothing was visible if anyone did decide to peek around in the barn.

We were on a tight budget, and every year I would collect the ears of corn left across the ends and along the rows and sell them. We used this money to supplement Santa's budget. As I look back, I received as much for that corn as today's farmers receive per bushel.

This particular year one of the boys wanted his first 26-inch bike. Our oldest daughter wanted what was called a train case—now we just call it the smallest piece of luggage in a set—with a mirror in the lid, and it had to be Samsonite and red. My husband had been deer hunting (those days you really had to hunt deer). He came home just before dark and whispered that he was going to retrieve Santa and park the pickup somewhere away from the house.

When he came back he had a different look on his face. I followed him into the kitchen, and he said that someone had stolen the bike and the train case. Everything else was safe. It was almost 6 p.m., and the stores all closed at 6. Thankfully the party line was not in use, and I looked up and called Belk-Tyler's. A stock man answered, and I explained our dilemma that the only things our children really wanted were gone. He was so understanding and said the store would be closed, but we could go to the back door. He said he had a red 26-inch boy's bike and also a train case he believed was red also. He would wait for me.

I don't remember what the replacements cost, but we will always remember the kindness of a man (whose name is now forgotten) and his smiling face as the gentleman who saved Christmas. He went out of his way to turn a family's despair into a joyous Christmas morning. We never knew who took the gifts, but we will always remember the kindness of the one who replaced them. Merry Christmas.

Doris Godfrey, Hertford | Albemarle EMC

No invitation needed

One Christmas several years ago, we were living in a small trailer. There were five of us girls and Mom and Dad and Grandma were there, too. We were up on Christmas morning trying to get a nice breakfast going when the power went off due to a sliced wire in our backyard. Now what?

Well, our good friends' place was down the road from us. They weren't at home, but we knew they wouldn't mind if we used their house. So we took our half-cooked breakfast to their house, finished cooking it, and had a jolly time in spite of ourselves.

Holly Carver, Rutherfordton | Rutherford EMC

Monty and the Christmas tree

Our son Monty's fifth Christmas was a magical time for him. Eyes bright with excitement, he participated in each holiday activity with energy and enthusiasm. But the thing that fascinated him the most was decorating the Christmas tree.

A few days before Christmas that year I was busy in the kitchen when I heard a loud crash. Running to the living room, to my horror, I saw our beautiful tree on the floor, ornaments broken, lights jumbled and water everywhere. I also saw one very chagrined little boy. After cleaning up the mess, I patiently explained to Monty that he could look at the tree as much as he wanted, but he was not to touch it anymore. Back I went to my baking, sure that the problem had been solved.

Much too soon I heard another crash. Returning to the living room, I saw the same scene as before: little boy, big mess. Once again, I fixed the tree, which was beginning to look a bit ragged, and cleaned up the mess. With narrowed eyes and a steely voice, I informed Monty in no uncertain terms that he was to leave the tree completely alone and find something else to play with.

All was calm, and peace was on earth—or at least in our household—and my heart was filled with the joy of the season. I had almost finished my baking when once again I heard that now familiar crash. When I got to the living room this time, there was the tree on the floor, but no boy. Finally I noticed two little feet sticking out from under a branch. Fuming, I jerked the tree up and glared down at my son, who looked up at me, smiled, and said, "I didn't hurt myself."

Once again I cleaned up the debris and set our tree upright. It looked awful, but stayed in place from then on, and we had a joyful, happy and memorable Christmas.

Peggy Fuller, Scaly Mountain | Haywood EMC

The angels in Murphy

When my husband and I purchased a secluded doublewide home near Murphy around the holidays we decided to spend our first night in our new home on Christmas Eve. What a night this was!

About midnight, we noticed the house starting to cool off. We had run out of propane at one of the coldest periods of the season and the most inconvenient time of year. We had no phone, nor did we know anyone in the area. Being desperate, we finally bundled our cat up and drove to the nearest neighbor's home and asked to use their phone. Lucky for us, they were still awake and trusted us.

After getting no response from the gas company, our neighbor said she knew someone who might be able to help us find a supplemental gas tank. She called this "angel," and he came out in the cold and very late hour (or very early, depending how you look at it) and hooked up a small propane tank. He said it would get us through a couple of days.

We have been forever grateful to these caring people for helping us on our first night in our new home. Not only did we learn to always check the propane tank in winter, but also that there really is a Santa Claus or two living in Murphy, N.C.

Robert and Cheryl Thomas, Murphy | Blue Ridge Mountain EMC

The frozen presents

When you are 4 years old, Christmas is one of the best times of the year. One Christmas my son wanted a soccer net, a play workbench, a wagon and almost anything else you could think of. At my house, Santa usually gets my son what he wants, and that year was no different.

We had stored the presents at my parents' house so he would not find them. After having dinner with my parents, my husband loaded the truck with the presents to take home. But my son would not go to sleep. So we just put the presents on the front porch so it would be easier to get them inside as my son slept.

We, too, fell asleep, and as we did, freezing rain and sleet began to fall. This froze all his toys to the porch. We had to get the hair dryer and the kerosene heater to get the toys unfrozen. I hope my son knows just how much Santa loves him.

Shelley Goff, Gray's Creek / South River EMC

Next year's Christmas gifts

Three Christmases ago my son and his wife were hosting their first family Christmas dinner. There were 17 in attendance. I had asked my husband's sister if she would bring 14 salad plates from her Christmas china to use for dessert. (The three children ate from the everyday plates.) My sister-in-law brought the plates, and we set the desserts on a separate table in the den.

After the dessert, the plates were cleared away, washed and placed on the antique table in the den for my sister-in-law to pack up. She picked up the first plate and the table leg suddenly collapsed! Seven of the 14 plates broke. I was appalled. I felt so responsible since I was the one who had asked her to bring them.

My sister-in-law was completely nonplussed. She said she rarely used the plates, and besides, everyone would know what they would get for Christmas gifts the next year.

The following Christmas all the ladies and the one little girl got beautiful bracelets and necklaces made from the broken plates! Everyone who comments on our beautiful jewelry is entertained by the story behind it.

Martha Blount, Rocky Mount

The stove and the sink

It was Christmas Eve 1980, and we had ordered our daughter Robyn a stove and sink set. She wanted it so badly. That night when Robyn and her brother David were sleeping, we took the monstrosity out of the box, which contained painted, corrugated cardboard, a plastic sink, knobs and a hundred screws—with assembly directions in Spanish.

My husband and I worked on that set until 3 a.m. when he finally gave up and went to bed. I folded, screwed, cursed and prayed until I got what I could together. Then I gave up and went to bed.

A couple of hours later I awoke to excited shrieks and laughter from the living room. When I walked in I started laughing, too. The major appliance we had solemnly purchased was wrong-side-out on one side. The knobs were in the floor, and the new pots and pans that Robyn was putting on it were sliding off as fast as she put them on since it was leaning like the tower of Pisa.

Teresa Erby, Rockingham / Pee Dee EMC

Holiday road kill

To understand this story, you first need to know that my grandfather is a gadget freak and my dad loves to buy things that are on sale. When the two of them went together to a huge tool show while we were visiting my grandparents for Thanksgiving, we knew there was bound to be trouble. Everything seemed fine when they returned with nothing more than a car-top luggage carrier that they had bought for a very low price.

On the morning of my family's return home, my dad packed in the new luggage carrier most of our suitcases and a lot of the Christmas presents my mom had bought the day before. After we got a few hours down the road, my mom noticed that one of the carrier straps was no longer connected and was flapping in the wind. Everything else seemed secure so we didn't stop. Several miles later, a couple of cars honked as they passed us on the Interstate. Fearing that his recent investment was not living up to its "rip-stop" guarantee, my dad pulled the car over to investigate. Much to the dismay of my siblings and myself, my dad informed us that all but a lonely few of our gifts were most likely scattered all along the Interstate.

Being the money-saving family that we are, my parents were determined to at least look for our lost presents. As we kids covered our eyes, my parents drove back and walked along the highway until they found every single one of them. On Christmas Day, as we opened those gifts, we remembered the day of the holiday road kill. 🚗

Hannah Love, Matthews / Butler High School

Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures about these themes. If yours is chosen for publication, we'll send you \$50. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

February 2006 We Made History

Who in your family made a mark in North Carolina history? Send a photo, if you have one.

Deadline: Dec. 15

March 2006 Why I'm a Gardener

The real reason you tend a garden.

Deadline: Jan. 15

April 2006 A Perfect Site for a Picnic

Send us your pictures and stories about the best picnic place in North Carolina.

Deadline: Feb. 15

May 2006 "The Ugliest Lamp I Ever Saw"

Send us the pictures.

Deadline: March 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. One entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published. We retain reprint rights.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can't pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don't agree to this.)
9. Send to: Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616
Or by e-mail: finer@carolinacountry.com
Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com