

## Boats for Christmas

My wife of many years claims I am the hardest person on earth to buy presents for. She says every time there is something I want, I just purchase it, making it near impossible for anyone to get me a gift. She also takes issue with the cost of some of the items that head my list.

Her claim is pure nonsense. While I admit that occasionally I request something that may have to clear the finance committee, I take vigorous exception of the need for filing an application for a grant request to fund my few necessary items. After all, I give so much and ask so little.

After spending 45 years under this management, I have learned a few things, and this year I was ready when she asked the question, “What do you want for Christmas?”

I told her that I have decided I would like a boat this year. We have the place in Florida where we will be spending some fishing time and I think a nice flats boat would be perfect for chasing the tarpon and snook around.

It is very difficult to have a serious conversation with your spouse when she is rolling around on the floor with tears of mirth running down her face. I gathered up my shattered dignity and retreated to the room we laughingly refer to as my office.

Boats have been a part of my life since my eighth summer when my grandfather cut me loose on the chain of lakes – we



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

lived on with a 12-foot wooden boat.

This boat weighed slightly less than a full-sized Buick and probably was more difficult to row. Nonetheless, I cut my teeth with that boat, showing determination as I rowed it around all day in pursuit of fish.

The next Christmas there was a one lung Johnson outboard under the tree. My grandfather said he did not think it was right for an eight-year-old to have such big arms from rowing all the time and bought me the little kicker. That rig carried me around for years and I learned about my lifelong love affair with boats.

Boats have been a big part of my life ever since. When we moved to the Florida Keys, I discovered the two greatest saltwater fishing adventures in the world: offshore sportfishing, and inshore flats and backcountry. Of course, this discovery required more than one type of boat.

For the offshore side, we started with a Boston Whaler Outrage, but quickly decided it was too small to effectively fish for big game in the deep waters. We upgraded to a 32-foot Albemarle with



This boat, the Tag ‘em, was one that we ran offshore fishing charters on in the Keys. I am only asking for a much smaller boat this time around. (Photo by Mark Rackay)

twin inboards for power and discovered the wonders of offshore.

Next addition was a 45-foot sportfishing boat, complete with a tuna tower. We put this boat in charter service in Islamorada. This boat, called the Tag ‘em, was the only boat that actually paid for itself as all the others were holes in the water in which you just threw money.

From there we got into flats fishing and the backcountry, thereby requiring a flats boat. The shallow waters are where the tarpon, bonefish, snook, redfish and others all live.

It is a much calmer method of angling compared to offshore, as the wave heights are much smaller. My wife

very much enjoyed this type of fishing and that is the only fishing this old body of mine can stand anymore.

Flats boats are the saltwater version of the bass boats you see on the lakes out here.

The difference is that flats boats can run much shallower and take much rougher water, being built different. Flats boats are much sturdier because of the harsh saltwater environment they live in. They also go very fast so you can cover many miles of water in a short time.

The bay areas of Florida, to include all of Everglades National Park and the surrounding waters, encompass many miles of flats, basins, bays, rivers and passes, but they are

miles apart. On a typical day of fishing in the back, we might put 75 miles on a boat, so speed is a necessity.

Speed on the water kicked in my adrenaline rush brain cells, and I got into offshore racing and go-fast big boats. We did have sponsors to help with the costs, so my wife’s claims of my herniating the family finances are without merit.

Alas, I got too old to run 150mph in boats and had to give up the sport. The human spinal cord can only take so much pounding before it sends mayday messages to the brain, telling you to take up golf.

I love my hunting and everything outdoors, but something has been missing. The fishing

is what needs to come back in my life. A nice flats boat will run nicely on some of the lakes and reservoirs here at home, and also work very nicely for when I take a few jaunts to the Everglades each year.

I am not seeking anything too fancy, a mere 18-footer with a 150 Mercury Pro XS on the back will do nicely. Throw a double set of Power poles on the back and a saltwater trolling motor on the bow, and I am good to go. Of course, I will need a solid aluminum trailer to haul it back and forth.

Perhaps with some convincing, my wife will come around to the idea of a boat becoming a part of our family again.

She may hate to admit it, but she had many good times fishing, snorkeling and diving off our boats, and hopefully will again one day take to the waters with me. I am just a little bit concerned about how she is going to wrap the boat, let alone sneak it under the tree Christmas morning.

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## Christmas traditions from gardens and nature

T’was the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, unless you have small kids who still believe in Santa.

So I figure if you’re reading this you’re having a quiet Christmas Eve or have a little spare time in your schedule. If so, why not sit back and read what I discovered about why we have some of the Christmas traditions that we have today. I thought some of them were pretty interesting.

In past articles I’ve told you about the traditions of the Christmas tree, lights on the tree, mistletoe, wreaths, Poinsettias and even the Christmas pickle. So this year I’ve decided to tell you about the more unusual traditions that have to do with items



### Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corvine McIntosh

from gardens or nature.

When I took some dried orange and apple slices out of my dehydrator to decorate the tree and some packages with, I started thinking, why are apples and oranges used so much at Christmas?

I know when my kids were little I always put an apple and an orange in their Christmas stocking because they were cheap and took up a lot space in the sock! But I figured

there had to be more to the tradition than that.

What I discovered was that oranges were actually traditional 19th-century stocking presents. Go figure.

It’s said that in the original St. Nicholas stocking folktale that Santa often left oranges instead of a bag of gold coins. And I thought I was being thrifty!

I guess the kids in those days thought that was great because the fruit was considered exotic and a rare treat. Just to be perfectly clear in case Santa gets word of this, I’d still prefer the bag of gold! I also read that orange and apple giving really took off during the Great Depression when candies, nuts and fresh fruit were considered to be a special treat.

When you think of Christmas fruits I wonder if some of you instantly think of fruitcake. Like them or not, the fact is, fruitcakes have been around since ancient Rome (No, not the same one you just received last week). The Roman version was made from barley, pomegranate seed, nuts, raisins, and mixed with honeyed wine.

They called this satura. It was their version of a high energy bar so the Roman soldiers liked to have them on hand. I read that satura lasted forever without going bad. Yum! Knights carried a less flavorful cake called stolen, which is the German version of fruitcake, made from flour, oil, yeast and water.

I just received a Christmas present from one of my daughters and it was wrapped in the cutest paper. It had little avocados wearing Santa hats printed on the paper. I thought, “that’s so cute and interesting” so I started looking into avocados at Christmas. Much to my surprise, avocado ornaments are everywhere.

They even have avocado design clothes. Who would have known? Legend has it that the first avocado was eaten by a Mayan Princess in Mexico around 300 B.C.

It is also known as an “alligator pear”. Once you think of it, that describes the texture and appearance pretty well. That’s really all I could learn about what’s happening. I guess as long

as we all keep buying avocado themed items, the fad will continue. Who knows if they’ll really become a part of our holiday tradition.

I just have to tell you the history of the Yule Log in case you haven’t heard it. The custom of burning the Yule Log began before medieval times. Like a lot of our traditions, it was rooted in pagan rituals. It was a Nordic tradition and the name “Yule” was the name of the Winter Solstice festivals traditionally held in Scandinavia, Germany, and other parts of Northern Europe.

Originally, the Yule “Log” was an entire tree that was ceremoniously selected and brought into the house.

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