



Later in life, I owned and fished this Albemarle 32. My love for the saltwater came from a gift from my grandfather. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

Christmas vacation and the outdoors



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Growing up with my grandparents, we were fairly poor, only we did not know we were poor. You see, there was always someone who was way worse off than we were, and we referred to them as “poor.” Had I known we were poor, I would have probably been depressed, but ignorance is bliss.

My grandparents were both survivors of the Great Depression. They were very poor then, often times not having enough for a meal. The people who lived during the depression really knew what “poor” was, and I am glad I never had to experience that.

Pa was a real wise guy when it came to practical jokes, and I was usually on the receiving end of his pranks. It is no secret I suffered from a terrible childhood affliction known as school. I hated

school and everything about it. School robbed me of my freedom to run around in the outdoors and do what I want. Because I hated it so much, I was terrible at it.

My grandfather would read the notes from exasperated teachers, rattling out my poor behavior, missing homework, lack of attention, and he would threaten me. The threats around Christmas were usually based on what I was to expect from Santa for Christmas. “If you don’t shape up in school, all you are going to get from Santa this year is a rotten banana and a few pieces of coal,” was his usual threat.

Christmas morning would come, and sure enough, my stocking would have a rotten banana and a dozen rocks. My grandfather would laugh himself silly at the exasperated expression on my face. Then, he would give me a real present that contained some fishing tackle, a few toy cars, or some other thing. I would get back at him by ignoring the real present and just play with the rocks and rotten banana. He would whine to my grandmother, “When we get the money together, we got to take that boy to town and get him checked out. Something

just ain’t right.”

The best part of Christmas was the two- or three-week parole from school. For a few short weeks, I did not have to get up, put on school clothes, walk to a bus stop, wait in the rain, snow, wind or cold to take me to a place that I did not want to go. After a thousand hours, or so it seemed, I would then take the same bus home, arriving too late to do anything fun, hand over the daily note from the teacher, and get the usual threats. School really got on my nerves.

The bad part about Christmas vacation was the time of year it came. Dead of winter is not a particularly good time for an outdoor kid to have parole. In the mountains, there was always snow, piled high and deep, together with wind and cold. All the creeks were frozen over, and hunting seasons were but a distant memory. That means I sat in the house, stared out the window, and whined.

One year, my family decided to take a road trip for Christmas vacation. It had been a prosperous year and the grand folks had money to burn. They decided we would go to Florida for a couple weeks.

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Kids need outside

By CARRIE KRICKBAUM
FRIENDS OF YOUTH AND NATURE

We are so lucky to live in Colorado, where there is such a wide variety of outdoor opportunities for youth close to home in local state parks and in our vast open landscapes across the state. This past week, the Colorado Equity Grant Board awarded various Colorado nonprofits a total of \$1.3 million to help more kids and families experience the outdoors.

Here on the Western Slope, Friends of Youth and Nature was awarded a generous grant of \$67,180 towards our efforts in getting local youth into outdoor activities. This gift to our citizens is an effort to increase access to the outdoors for our youth and instill stewardship practices of our state’s outstanding natural resources in the next generation. In the long run, this investment will increase the health of Coloradans and our communities. The personal benefits gained from outdoor experiences is not a novel concept; there is a plethora of research proving that outdoor activities overall increase individual well-being.

According to Dr. Constance Scharff in Psychology Today, “Children are increasingly spending time indoors engaged with various forms of electronic devices: phones, computers, tablets, televisions, and gaming consoles. There is significant data indicating that time spent outdoors, whether in play, outdoor education or recreation, or even gardening, can have a real and positive impact on mental and physical well-being.”

Author Dr. John J. Ratey in his book, The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain, discusses how exercise influences the brain on a cellular level. He also talks about how lack of real play does hurt children because they need to use their imaginations to develop creative thinking and problem solving skills.

Many outdoor activities require kids to work together and communicate in order for everyone to have fun or to accomplish a common goal. He also describes a bacterium in the soil that increases serotonin in the brain and improves mood. Who knew that getting dirty is a good thing!

There are many activities to do outdoors, including hiking, camping, rafting, paddle boarding, rock climbing, skiing, sledding, orien-

teering, horseback riding, and raising animals, just to name a few. Some examples of activities and research-proven benefits include:

Gardening – Teaches patience, perseverance and empathy (and don’t forget that special bacterium that increases serotonin levels). According to Dr. Scharff, gardening teaches children about the food cycle and nutrition, provides important life skills, and creates opportunities for children to learn competence, resilience, and community building. There are Junior Master Gardener programs that can be integrated into school curricula or used at home or with youth groups.

Children’s gardening programs ignite a passion for good food, provide opportunities for people of all ages to work together, and develop important life skills that can lead to a lifetime of healthy choices. Food produced may be used in home or school settings, or canned for use in the off-season, and the excess can be donated to local food banks.

Walking and talking – Builds conversation skills and helps with the flow of creative thinking. Just taking a long walk outdoors with a friend has many benefits. State and national parks offer a wide variety of outdoor activities for youth and families. These are not necessarily just hikes or camping, but interactive wildlife activities, archaeological explorations, storytelling times, and much more. The park service often coordinates activities and provides special programming for youth groups. Every Kid in a Park is a National Park Service Program to encourage youth visita-

tion to national parks. Every Fourth grader gets a yearlong free family pass to any national park. Visit their website to find out more, and encourage your kids to become junior rangers (www.nps.gov/kids/every-kid-outdoors.htm). Public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have mostly free access with a variety of trails for mountain biking, hiking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing.

Bird Watching – Watching any wildlife has its benefits! Observation can help build attention skills while also practicing mindfulness and coping strategies. It also stirs a sense of curiosity in young people. Many birding organizations provide activities and/or mentors to teach children about bird watching. Check into your local Audubon chapter, Colorado Field Ornithologist groups, or the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. National and state parks also offer nature programs that are scheduled or can be requested by contacting them. Audubon Adventure for Kids highlights curriculum and related DIY activities that can be done at home or in a yard or park (www.audubon.org/get-outside/activities/audubon-for-kids). Scavenger hunts are a great way to get kids excited about exploring nature and improve their observation and attention skills. Looking for a bird nest, a cactus flower, a cool rock, or an animal track can be very exciting. Search the internet for nature/outdoor scavenger hunts; you will be surprised with how many come up.

See KIDS page A11



Metaphorse Riding Instruction. Working with horses can help children, teens, and adults make significant improvements in their emotional well-being specifically building confidence and self-esteem, and managing anger, anxiety and PTSD symptoms. (Courtesy photo/Carrie Krickbaum)

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Martha the Christmas Story

How not to kill your holiday cactus



Gardening from A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

My mom passed away several years ago but she left us a great Christmas story with her little Christmas cactus that was affectionately named Martha. This is the true story of Martha.

If memory serves me right, I was away at college when my mom acquired Martha. That’s a clue how old Martha really is, but we won’t talk about that. Anyway, my mom had quite a green thumb and she would manage to bring the old girl into bloom for the holidays year after year. Over time she started referring to the plant as Martha. I don’t think the name really had any significance. It was just a name she came up with. After all, she called her car Old Nellie.

I think Martha was probably just a plant that she picked up at the grocery store to use for a small holiday table decoration. But over time the little plant grew and grew and became a pretty large houseplant. Over the years my mom had to move a few times and Martha made every move right alongside of her.

When my mom passed away and left Martha orphaned, my oldest daughter adopted her, and my other daughter and I took a cuttings off of her. If you’ve never tried taking a cutting (propagating) from a Christmas cactus it’s super easy. The leaves of the cactus have a series of little joints and some of them will form a Y shape. Just cut the segment that

you want at the foot part of the Y-shaped stem. It’s best to have two or three jointed segments on your cutting. It just makes sense to take your cutting from healthy foliage.

You can insert the cutting into a small flower pot that contains good quality potting soil or it can be placed into a small container of water. Either way should work. If you choose to use the potting soil method, gently poke the cutting into the soil about half way up the first lower segment and water it. If you choose to start the new plant in water, let the cutting sit, out of direct sun, for a day. This will callous the cut part and keep it from rotting. Then place it into the container of water so the plant is only inserted about half way up the lower half of the stem. In about a month the little cutting will start producing roots.

This is where I have to get back to my story and tell you about starting my little cutting. I always take my Christmas cactus outside for a summer vacation in the shade on my deck. When I brought it back indoors in late summer a little piece of stem broke off. Being the kind hearted soul that I am, I eventually picked it up and brought it into the house and put it in a little tin cup that was sitting on the counter at the time and added some water. I later put it on the kitchen window sill and tried to check the water level if the thought to do so ever occurred to me. Most of the time the water was really low, and a couple of times it completely ran out of water. I thought I’d transplant it before Thanksgiving but I got busy and that never happened. My next goal was to put it in a pot with soil before Christmas, but so far that just hasn’t happened.

Now that I think about it, this is the great-great granddaughter of Martha and I feel horrible about how I’ve been treating her.



Martha Jr. the Christmas Cactus. (Linda Corwine McIntosh/Special to the MDP)

I can’t believe the poor little thing is blooming right now, just in time for Christmas! That’s so exciting! In spite of all of the plant abuse that I’ve put her through all of her life, she’s blooming right there in the tin cup that I put her in the fall. Do you suppose she’s grateful that I saved her little life?

Now I’m faced with a bit of a dilemma. Transplanting a blooming plant causes stress on the plant. But I’m sure blooming in a container of water isn’t

good for it either. Oh the agony of decisions!

I guess the bottom line is I’m going to treat her with the dignity and respect that she deserves. I’ve made up my mind to give her the Christmas present of a pot to grow in. I’m going to dig through my collection of pots, find one that’s just right for her, clean it up, put fresh potting soil in it, and plant her.

I’m a little short of room when it comes to another houseplant right now but I’m going to make it

a priority to find her a nice location, away from intense direct sunlight and drafts. And I promise I won’t put her back on the cold window sill where she somehow managed to survive for so long.

I don’t know about you but I like the way this Christmas story is turning out. I’m thinking you might even want to start a tradition of handing down a treasured plant. I hear there are people who have had their Christmas cactus for twenty years or more. I’m

going to see if I might be able to break that record.

I hope you’ll have a Christmas and New Year that’s as happy as the one little Martha Jr. is going to have. I think instead of visions of sugarplums I’m going to fall asleep dreaming of a name for the little girl. I hope all your Christmas stories have happy endings!

Linda Corwine McIntosh is a CSU Advanced Master Gardener, ISA-certified arborist and commercial pesticide applicator.

KIDS

FROM PAGE A10

Horses – Studies have shown that working with horses helps children, teens, and adults make significant improvements in the areas of confidence, anger management, empathy, impulse control, self-esteem, PTSD, anxiety, and overall emotional well-being. Did you know that horses can be an emotional mirror to ourselves? Research has also shown that horses recognize and react to human emotions from our body language and facial expressions. Since they are herd and prey animals, they have a strong emotional sense, reflect and respond to the behavior of other horses in the herd. Even playing with your family pet or walking your beloved dog has huge benefits. Speaking of the influence animals have on youth, Meet Wilder! This is a very engaging video you can watch with your kids featuring Wilder. It will inspire them to go outdoors and play (www.generationwild.com/). Are you looking for something that will help your child build social



Students practice using binoculars to find birds and learn bird identification techniques during a field trip to Ridgway State Park. (Courtesy photo/Carrie Krickbaum)

interaction skills, confidence, problem solving skills, independence, creativity, and emotional well-being? Take them outside! No matter what activity they do outdoors, just getting them outside on a regular basis has so many benefits to them, their families, and our communities.

Carrie Krickbaum is an education specialist

and a board member of the Friends of Youth and Nature — a non-profit that promotes opportunities for youth and families to get outside, experience outdoor activities, and explore nature. Follow our outdoor news blog and receive monthly tips on connecting your children to nature. Learn more, visit: www.friendsofyouthandnature.org

VACATION

FROM PAGE A10

The year was 1967, and we piled into the Plymouth and drove to Florida. After three long days of sitting in a back seat, we arrived at a place in the Florida Keys called Marathon. The weather was warm, sunny, and the ocean was everywhere I looked. We stayed in the most affordable motel on the island, but no matter, as we did not spend any daylight hours in our room anyway.

My Christmas present that year, came in the form of fishing trips. The first trip was on a head boat, sometimes called a party boat. The boat took us a dozen miles out where we anchored over a reef and bottom fished. The seas never bothered me, but lots of people were hanging over the side “chumming.” I caught a half dozen fish, all exotic looking to the kid who had never caught anything but brook trout up until that point.

The next trip was on another head boat that went out to the reef and fished all night. The seas were not as rough as the first

trip, and it was awesome to see the lights from the shore and the stars of the southern sky above. Again, I caught snapper, grouper, and a handful of other reef dwellers.

For the big present, we chartered a big offshore boat to take just the three of us out trolling for the big stuff. This boat had a captain and a first mate who worked the cockpit. I sat in a fighting chair as we trolled in reasonable seas of 3 feet or so.

A couple hours into the trip, the big trolling rod doubled up, and I was into the biggest fish of my life so far. After 15 minutes of cranking and pulling, I landed a 50-pound kingfish. I was hooked for life. I loved fishing before that, but I had no idea what saltwater fishing was all about, until then.

The gift my grandfather gave me that year was probably the greatest gift I ever received in my life. He did not just give me that trip, he gave me an opportunity to discover an entire new world, the world of saltwater fishing.

If you fast forward to 1982, you will find me in the Keys. My grandfather took me to school in 1967,

and this school I fell in love with. I learned all about saltwater fishing, both inshore and offshore, and spent 3 decades doing it. I have him to thank for it.

I always thought the reason for the rotten banana and rocks in my stocking were because my grandfather was cheap, not wanting to fork out the dough for a real Christmas present. It did not matter to me, because even then, I saw it as an equitable relationship. He got to save a few bucks and I got to do lousy in school. I was wrong. I had just not yet found the right school, but he did.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org