

We are who we are, thank goodness

It struck me the other morning, as I poured a second cup of coffee more as a means to avoid all the stuff I had to do than because I really wanted it, that it's a funny kind of Christmas this year.



EGGS IN MY POCKET

Mary Fenoglio

For one thing, didn't it get here faster than usual? Wasn't it October just last week?

I mean, I saw Charlie Brown's Christmas and loved it just as much as I did the first time. I've leafed through all the slick, glitzy catalogs we always get around the holidays, even though we've never ordered anything out of them. What could we possibly want (or afford) from Neiman Marcus? We do most of our catalog ordering from livestock catalogs.

I've perused the proliferation of holiday recipes and found most — or at least many — to be vegan, gluten-free, kind of weird combinations that only my Pushface Pack would sample. That's only because the Boston Terrorists eat anything that crosses under their noses, edible or not. Zoey, not so much.

The ads in the papers feature gifts I can't give because I don't know what they are or understand what they do, all remotely. The grandkids probably know.

It's like the tools thing. Papa and all the men in the family love tools. They never have enough tools or, more specifically, the single tool they need and have always wanted. What I know about tools I have learned from bitter experience, meaning I have often, in attempting to please one or the other tool aficionado in the family, bought the wrong darned thing, thereby causing a barely concealed disappointment for both giver and recipient. I never buy tools any more unless I am assisted by one of the other tool-happy guys.

The Day approaches with relentless speed, and as I now do a lot of online shopping since the wonderful growth of our community has choked the roads and jammed the stores with rude and harried people, I am mindful of shipping deadlines.

When I ask what, pray tell, might my loved ones be dreaming of finding under the tree, the first answer is, "Nothing." I get more out of my Pushfaces in the way of communication than I do out of any single male member of my family. I am sometimes tempted to give them exactly what they asked for, but how wicked would that be?

My Dad used to tell my Mother that he just wanted a bologna sandwich for Thanksgiving instead of all that fuss. One year, when they had nobody coming, she gave him what he asked for. They wound up at Luby's and had a fine old time — no dishes to wash.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. We are all older, thank goodness; the alternative is not pleasant to contemplate.

There are new members of the family, so that's a little different, but not a problem. Some of the old traditions have been extinguished and a couple of new ones formed (paper plates). The basics remain the same. We are a rowdy bunch. A couple of us (in the Christmas spirit, no names or specifics will be stated here) are downright difficult to get along with for more than 90 minutes and that might be stretching it. Having food involved helps.

But underneath we are us, just like we've always been, and if any of us has expressed a wish to go skiing — preferably alone — over the holidays, they have never done it in my hearing. Despite a couple of dustups, we keep coming back for more.

The Christmases of my childhood, now framed in golden splendor forever, were most likely not all that golden. But I remember the colors, the sounds, the laughter, the music, the jokes we played on each other, and I am warmed by them in the cold and alien atmosphere of a country I no longer recognize.

I remember sitting on the floor in a warm room on Christmas evening, leaning against my Grandmother's legs, her warm hand stroking my hair or resting on my shoulder as the grownups talked and we kids dozed, full of good food and happy in the bosom of our family. What an old, corny term! I wish I could do it just once more, just like that.

Ready or not (and I never am), Christmas will come. Packages will be wrapped, food will be cooked, we will be together as we always have been. It will be different, but the same. I will have the happiest time perhaps, because I have the ghosts of Christmas Past around me, imperfect but beloved.

And maybe, finally this year, I will go out to see whether cows kneel at midnight in homage to the newborn baby. Or maybe I don't really want to know. Merry Christmas.



Photos by Dmitriy Borovykh

Artist Maura Schaffer demonstrates her creation process at the Artist Talk on Sunday.

Inanimate objects tell artist's tale

By DMITRIY BOROVYKH

After seeing Maura Schaffer's artworks, you won't be able to look at your chairs and forks the same way again.

Her exhibit, now on display at Georgetown Art Center, features scenes of family dinners, with people absent. The furniture tells the whole story, portraying people's relationships, with all the blessings and hardships they entail.

Ms. Schaffer creates her works with metal wire and plain fabric, which allows her to play with perspective and composition, shaping and warping the pieces, making them come alive.

"I'm trying to have some fun, even if the darker underbelly comes out," she said.

Many of the works carry a personal meaning for Ms. Schaffer — drawing from her experiences and childhood memories — though her use of white fabric leaves space for the viewer to fill in the details.

"I wanted people to be able to bring

their own ideas and experiences in," Ms. Schaffer said. "This was a way for me to let them fill in the blanks."

Tools of the trade

Ms. Schaffer lives in Austin. She started out working as an interior designer, but eventually decided to pursue her true passion — art.

She worked in various mediums — including painting, weaving, ceramics and woodwork — before starting to create her wire-and-fabric works.

Growing up, her mother taught her to sew, and her father taught her to use tools. Ms. Schaffer likes being able to use both in her process.

To create these pieces, she starts by sketching out an idea. Then, she builds the frame out of metal wire. Depending on size and complexity, the pieces may have hundreds of weld points.

Once the skeleton is made, Ms. Schaffer paints it and wraps the fabric around it.

The exhibit will stay on display at Georgetown Art Center until January 14.



"Spilled Milk" combines painting and a relief to create a forced perspective.

Dear Santa ...

I need the Amazing Spiderman suit

Carver Elementary
Mrs. Henderson, 2nd Grade

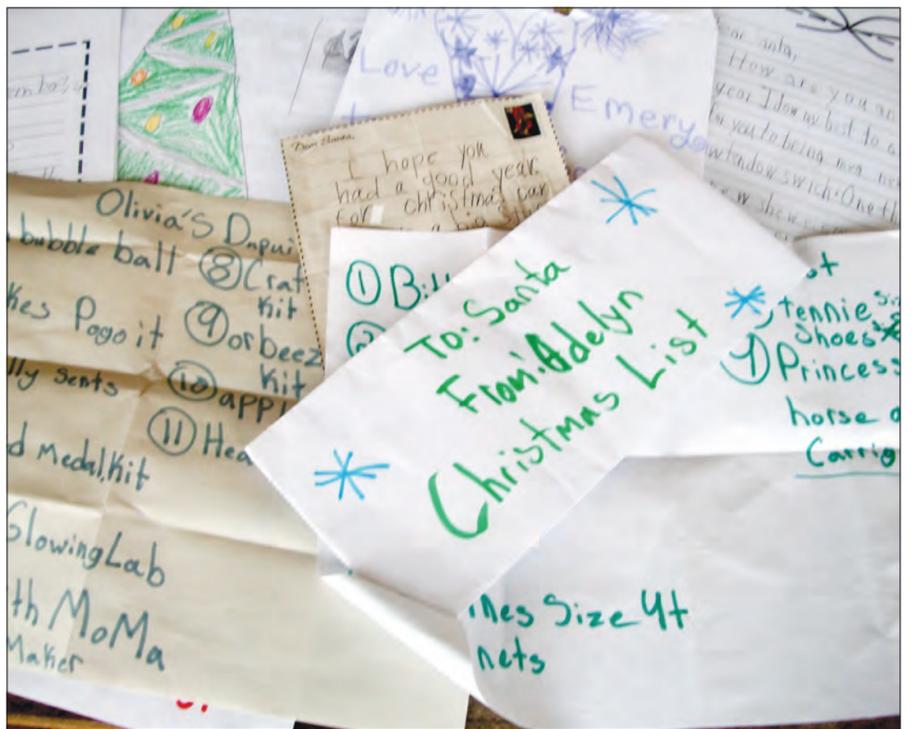
Dear Santa,
your my favorite holiday person. I love so much. I need the florida Internashink speed way and some more cars3 toy. I need the Amazing Spiderman suit the first own pleas. Cars3 legos. Some more Cars3 things to go with the track. A ninja turtle bike. The Amazing Spiderman toy. A sticky basketball hoop with a ball. Now train set. Marble track with marbles. NBA lego set. Spiderman legos. Kinetic sand.
Love, Chayce R.

Dear Santa, for crismas I want a nice family diner with my frinds and family with yeme food and as a geft I ont a toy wich is a? Well I well tell you later you are very spisiel you bring more than a blevery man or women you bring kids joy and lafter you are speshil to evre one and now I well tell you wate I wont I want a yame numes cake set and a cat
Love, Chloe S. PSS sore if it is to much to asc for

Dear Santa, I would like 3 blank journals and 2 hot weels traks and 5 kits and a bag and color's pleas. Dont forget romot cuntrel hellocopter. PS Are you real _____
your friend Francisco H.

Dear Santa, I want a bichover-board airbrush stying, Barbie house, cookeing set, corling set
Love Mya R.

Dear Santa, I want a hagobol and a ril baby poltol dog and a tablet and a baby cat and a deSCEN-DaNTS EVIE doll monser hosedoll and hose and hubod a pet hamser and a scoter and a bick.
Love, Hailie G



Dear Santa, what I want for crismis is a texe cool toy and a robot puppy and a badre house that gos with my Braidres on and shopkins.
your friend Jocelyn S.

Dear Santa, My name is Payton D. and May i have a X box One. and Can i have a PS4. and Can i have a Xboxone s.and can i have Jffey Toy.
By Payton D.

Dear Santa, i Love you. aND caN you ples BRING Guf RLU. Cus i Love him. it's Like hes a PRT of the famLy. hes totly a K*****. I wont a eLF oN theshelF. aND

SnuggLs the PuPPy. and a FiN FuN MRMad taLe. Pleaeeeeeeees can i have a FiN FuN mRmad taLe. Can I oLsow Have a jesus DoLL. Becus i Love jesus so Much. i pRay sumtims and I go to chRch aNd caN I Have RoLLRskats my foot size is a 3 Thank you PS i Love jesus aNd god and you.
Frum HaLey K.

Dear Santa, for crismis I want two huvrBords one gold and one blue PS I love you
Danny C.

Dear Santa, I wot a four welr and a Jron and a ipfon8t and a 2 Jrif car 1,000 Dolrs and I wot a

Dog I wot a scudder I wot a pop-sucker: and a xbox 360
By Osvaldo V.

Dear Santa,
fro crismis I what 35 litte is Pet Shop and a American Girl Doll and clothing for my American Girl Doll PLZ I love Santa
love Marlee B.

Dear Santa, I as wat a fenl mo-atonr fol mi a xox pel and a oarnmand to and amonlrrrrrkor-pikrusadu sad to a wor hape and ro _ and dor agre :- pik2was and hdef uo wut satu!
Christian B.