



By Margaret Evans, Editor

I spent the holidays in north Alabama at my parents' house, a rambling cottage on the Tennessee River that's just about the best place in the world for Christmasing. It's always a charmed interlude, this week of food and festivity and family; but like all families, we've been known to have our little . . . tensions.

This year, I am happy to report that our get-together flowed more smoothly than usual. Here are some things that did *not* happen – this time around – at My Family Christmas:

- Neither of my nieces slipped and fell in a large pile of dog poop on Christmas Day, while wearing their lovely new Christmas dresses, thus sending their mother and *her* mother into a tizzy. Nope. That didn't happen this year.
- Neither of my nieces got "love nipped" in the face by any of the family dogs, marring their perfect complexions just before the big Christmas Day "reveal" to extended family and friends. Didn't happen.
- Nobody had a terribly contagious virus that sent my entire extended family – and most of their friends – spiraling into a Christmas vomiting marathon. (That was two years ago. Same year as the dog poop and the face nip.)
- Nobody stormed out of any room in tears. (Okay, nobody over the age of two.) In a house full of women – three generations – this qualifies as a bona fide Christmas miracle.

In fact, you could say we had a number of Christmas miracles this year. Here are just a few, in no particular order:

- My daughter spilled a can of Dr. Pepper all over my laptop... and it survived. So did my daughter, but just barely.
- I padded around all week in Duck Dynasty bedroom slippers – a gift to my sister from her father-in-law, purchased pre-Duckgate – and nobody was offended. People just laughed. (I wish people would laugh more and get offended less; including myself. Life is silly.)
- After much protesting, I broke down and took my daughter to see the new Justin Bieber movie . . . and thoroughly enjoyed it. (The trick was to watch it through the eyes of a 12-year-old girl – not my daughter, but the one who lives inside me. Turns out she is wholly susceptible to Bieber Fever.)
- My mom and my husband didn't argue about politics. Much. (A miracle of the first order.)
- We didn't run out of wine. (This is the Christmas miracle that repeats itself each year, to the astonishment of us all. Truly, the Lord must have a hand in this.)
- After losing Patch a few months ago, her beloved canine companion of sixteen years, my mother has given her heart to a sweet little rescue dog named Chilly. Watching Mom functioning and even festive again, post-Patch, was high on my list of miracles.
- My dad came out as an Elvis fan! Yep, my dignified, lawyerly, Handel and Bach loving father played an Elvis gospel album all through the holidays. (You don't know my dad, but this turn of events was only slightly less miraculous than the virgin birth.)

- My nieces proved, beyond a doubt, the unlikely truth I've long suspected – that young children prefer wrapping paper, cardboard boxes, and Styrofoam packing peanuts to actual toys. It took me years – and thousands of dollars – to fully grasp this revelation. Parents of tots, there's still time for you to take advantage of this wondrous phenomenon. Like childhood, it doesn't last forever.

- After being doused with some aromatic mystery potion from Bed, Bath & Beyond while still in the shopping bag, then frantically cleaned in secret by my mom, then ripped from its wrappings two days early and dragged through the house by my toddler niece Sadie, then covertly rewrapped by my preteen daughter Amelia . . . a sweater Jeff bought me for Christmas remains miraculously in tact. Like my poor, Peppered laptop, it's a survivor. Whenever I wear this special garment, I shall think warmly on how my family rallied to save it for me – well, except for Sadie – while I was completely oblivious to its existence.

- On Christmas day, my sister saw a seven-point buck standing on the side of the road and I saw a sleek red fox. Okay, not really miracles in the Alabama countryside; but pretty darn cool.

- While out for a walk one cold, clear afternoon, I looked up and saw something spectacular – a shimmering, ethereal, pink and green aura surrounding the sun. Actually, it was more like a bright swath of rainbow woven through a cotton-cloud blanket, then wrapped around the sun like some psychedelic Christmas tree skirt. Now, maybe you've seen this vision before. Heck, maybe you see it all the time. You can probably even give me a name for it, as well as a scientific explanation. But on that cold, clear afternoon, with the wintery woods to my right and the river just beyond, the smell of fireplaces in the air and a heart full of Christmas, I was of a mind to call it a miracle.

- Despite the best efforts of my loud, obnoxious inner critic, who never shuts up – “this sermon's too long . . . take that crying baby outta here . . . I hate modernized liturgy . . . what is that woman wearing? . . . I prefer the King James version . . . why aren't we singing my favorite verse?” – I still managed to hear the Holy Spirit at my old church on Christmas Eve. It happened at the end of the service, like it always does, when we sing “Silent Night” while passing candlelight through the pews – each of us lighting our neighbor's candle, one by one, 'til the whole church is glowing. During the final verse, we hold the candles up over our heads, and the church of my childhood is darkly radiant, and all those noisy, fidgety, everyday-looking people are suddenly so beautiful. And my throat tightens, and the tears come, and I can no longer sing but can only listen: *“Christ the savior is born . . . Christ the savior is born.”*