

OPINION

Visions of sugarplums dance only in my head

We all have that fantasy of what Christmas is supposed to be like in our heads. There's a Norman Rockwell painting of a lovely little snow-covered village with town folk who care deeply for each other. They are gathered in the town square, singing Christmas carols around a bonfire, sipping cups of hot cocoa, and wishing each other Merry Christmas, peace, joy, health, wealth, and all things bright and wonderful in the coming year.

As the holiday approaches, we reinforce our vision of the perfect Christmas by watching hours of Hallmark movies and striving mightily to create the version that lives in our dream world. We try to stick to traditions put in place generations ago, which may or may not be feasible in our present-day lives. Just like a jigsaw puzzle that has been passed down from one generation to the next and moved from one house to another during moves, there are lost pieces, a jumble of pieces, and Christmases that no longer fit the way we think they should.

There never was a truer quote than that which I repeat

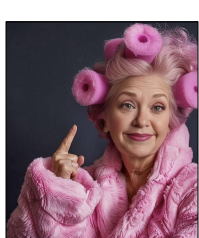
frequently: "Life is what happens when you're busy making plans." At no time is this truer than the prequel to the Christmas holiday season.

Life doesn't wait for Christmas to end before it steals those we love in the middle of the night. Life doesn't care that the loss of a loved one or a critical illness will leave an empty chair at your carefully arranged holiday dinner table ... as well as a massive hole in your heart.

Likewise, the acts of others can impact your life. Divorces, family arguments and estrangements, moves to far-away places, and financial stress can impact your mood and how you perceive the Christmas holiday.

Sometimes it's Mother Nature who unleashes forces that damage your property, regardless of the time of year.

These and other unplanned and unexpected events may affect your ability to deal



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appropriately and effectively with family and friends during the holiday. These factors can cause mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and even substance abuse.

But thankfully, the human spirit is innately resilient. When life gives us lemons, we instinctively start making lemonade. Oh sure, we have to wallow a bit and cycle through all the stages of anger, sadness, and hopelessness.

Somehow, we manage to find a dream that we never planned or even wanted and it puts us on an even better path than we originally envisioned.

Whereas you used to make lists of things you wanted for Christmas, you find happiness in giving and watching others' joy at receiving your gifts. Finding just that perfect gift for someone else fulfills you.

Instead of letting memories engulf you and drag you down into the mire of sadness, you share the stories of Christmases past with younger generations, and they, in turn, will share them for generations to come.

The saving grace in aging is that humans are wired to LIVE. That's why ambulances race with lights and sirens blaring,

and EMTs and paramedics provide lifesaving techniques until they reach the help of doctors and surgeons who make personal sacrifices on holidays to ensure that you have more time with your own loved ones.

Neonatal units give newborns a chance to experience long and happy Christmases for many more years.

Agencies such as police, firefighters, air traffic controllers, food and drug safety, suicide prevention, and health centers and gyms are all in place to protect our lives and to ensure that we LIVE them to the best of our ability.

So, while it is unlikely that Christmas will ever meet your expectations 100 percent, you have it within your power to make it the best it can be.

At first, you may need to set reasonable goals. If you have just recently lost a loved one, don't expect to feel up to parties and big family get-togethers. But don't isolate yourself completely, sit home, and dwell on what might have been. Commit to one-on-one time with a friend or family member.

Maybe just spend Christmas

morning watching a beloved grandchild's wonder and magic as they open gifts and see their joy when they realize Santa and the reindeer ate all the cookies and carrots they left for them.

No one will expect you to have shopped this year, and most will be very understanding if you are overwhelmed and need to cut the visit short.

There are so many platitudes about Christmas ("It is better to give than to receive." "Tis the season to be jolly," "Time with family and friends is the best gift"), but I will not bore you with all those seasonal quotes, because they may not be true for you this year. I have lived through many of life's ups and downs and learned many accidental lessons.

I won't tell you that Christmas is a stocking full of sugary goodness.

What I do want to leave you with this holiday season is HOPE and RESILIENCE, and the promise that no matter what life has thrown your way, you will get through it, and it may just be far better than any Christmas you had in mind.

Merry Christmas to all!

Davy Crockett's Christmas of 1822 fraught with peril

Davy Crockett had a successful fall hunt following the corn harvest of 1822.

"I found bear very plenty and all sorts of game and will varminths, except buffalo. I supplied my family very well with wild meat at which time my gun powder gave out.

He had no powder for hunting or for the celebratory firing of the Christmas and New Year's guns, a practice that was common in that era but has been largely replaced by fireworks today.

His brother-in-law had recently settled about six miles away, bringing Davy a keg of gunpowder. Although there was a general flooding, Davy decided he couldn't wait longer in going for the powder. He tied together some extra dry clothes and moccasins and set out.

"The snow was about four inches deep when I started but when I got to the water, the flooding made it look like an ocean," Davy wrote. "I got in and waded 'til I came to the channel, where I crossed on a high log."



Davy Crockett

WIKIPEDIA

Crockett began wading again until coming to the deepest part of the river. Ordinarily he would cross at that point on a log but it was submerged about three feet under the floodwater and couldn't be seen.

The water was about 10 feet deep under the submerged log making it 13 feet altogether.

"I felt my way along with my feet on the log although about waist deep in the water," Davy related. "It was a mighty ticklish

business but I finally got over. I had very little feeling in my feet and legs by this time for I was in the water so much."

Crockett continued only a short distance before coming upon another slough. He felt fortunate however since there was a floating log leading across. Holding his gun and dry clothes, which were tied in a bundle at the end of a stick, he started the precarious task.

"I mounted the log and started walking across," he told. "When I got about the middle of the deep water, somehow the log spun over and I went in to my head. I barely managed to hold my gun and grip above my head.

"I waded out of this deep water until I came to a highland where I stopped to pull off my wet clothes and put on the others. I was so cold my flesh had no feeling. I thought I would run to warm myself a little but I was so cold I couldn't step more than half the length of my foot."

Davy began functioning better after awhile and continued the five miles to his destination.

His brother-in-law was amazed to see him upon his arrival. Weather conditions were even worse the following morning and Davy decided to extend his visit.

"I went out hunting and killed him two deer," Davy said. "The weather still got worse and colder instead of better. I knew the water would be frozen over but not hard enough to bear me so I agreed to stay. The next morning was bitter cold but I was determined to get home to my family or die trying. I took my powder keg and hunting tools and started out."

When Crockett reached the water it was a solid sheet of ice for "as far as I could see." He started walking across the ice but it broke through with him after only a short distance.

"I took out my tomahawk and broke my way along for a considerable distance. At last, I got to where the ice would bear me so I mounted it and went ahead. It soon broke in again and I had to wade on till I came to my floating log. It was frozen in by

the ice so I knew it couldn't give me another fall as it had before."

Davy crossed it without difficulty but still had to negotiate the submerged log that was his last obstacle. The swiftness of the current kept the water from freezing so he had to wade across a log with swift water meanwhile up to his waist. He waded first with the powder and then returned for his gun.

"By this time I was nearly frozen to death," he wrote later in life. "When I managed to get home I wasn't quite dead, but mighty nigh it. But I had my powder and that was what I went for."

As you make trips of a similar distance during this Christmas season consider Davy Crockett and his venture of 1822.

Jadon Gibson is a widely read Appalachian writer from Harrogate, Tn. His stories are both historic and nostalgic in nature. Thanks to Lincoln Memorial University, Alice Lloyd College and the Museum of Appalachia for their assistance.

Best free (or inexpensive) tech tools for small businesses

Running a small business often means wearing every hat — owner, bookkeeper, marketer, scheduler — sometimes all before lunch. With tight margins and limited time, many local businesses put off new technology, assuming it's expensive or complicated. The good news: plenty of simple, affordable tools are designed to help without breaking the bank.

Free or low-cost tech tools can save hours each week, reduce costly mistakes, and help small businesses look more professional. Used wisely, they level the playing field — letting a one-person shop compete with much larger operations without adding overhead.

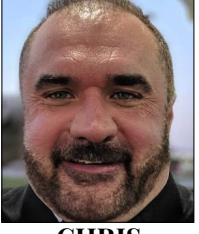
income and expenses, and getting paid on time.

Popular options include Wave, Zoho Invoice, PayPal Invoices, Square Invoices, and basic Google Sheets templates. These tools can create invoices, track payments, and keep records — often at no cost.

Best for: Sole proprietors, trades, farms, and service businesses that need simple, clean records.

MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA

What this solves: Staying visible without spending hours online.



CHRIS HALL

Tools like Canva make flyers and social posts easy. Meta Business Suite helps manage Facebook and Instagram in one place. Buffer and Mailchimp offer free tiers for scheduling posts and sending email updates. A Google Business Profile is essential for local search visibility.

Best for: Retail shops, restaurants, home-based businesses, and anyone relying on local customers.

INVENTORY OR SIMPLE OPERATIONS TRACKING

What this solves: Knowing what you have, what's selling, and what needs restocking — or tracking jobs and supplies for non-retail businesses.

Retailers may use Square for Retail or low-cost Shopify plans. Others prefer Sortly, Airtable, or

Google Sheets to track products, tools, or weekly tasks.

Best for: Boutiques, farm stands, makers, and service businesses managing parts or supplies.

SCHEDULING & APPOINTMENTS

What this solves: Reducing back-and-forth calls and no-shows.

Options like Google Calendar appointment schedules, Calendly, Square Appointments, and Setmore let customers book available times online — often with free plans.

Best for: Hair stylists, trades, consultants, fitness instructors, and anyone who works by appointment.

EXAMPLE

Imagine a small-town handyman. He sends invoices

through Square, tracks weekly jobs in Google Sheets, uses Calendly to let customers book estimates, and posts before-and-after photos on Facebook using Canva. None of it costs much — but together, it saves hours and looks professional.

Keep passwords strong and turn on two-factor authentication when available. Back up important data, even if the tool is cloud-based. And resist the urge to use too many apps — one tool that works is better than five you never open.

You don't need to overhaul your business overnight. Pick one category—bookkeeping, marketing, inventory, or scheduling — and try a tool this week. Small steps add up, and the right tech can give you back what every small business owner needs more of: time.