

The PACKARD PRESS

A collection of thoughts and stories to educate, entertain, and inspire.

THE PUPPET SHOW THAT SAVED CHRISTMAS

Will You Take My Holiday Challenge?

When I was 14 years old, my sweet Aunt Rachel invited me and my five youngest siblings to visit her for Christmas. It was an openhearted gesture: We'd just lost our mother (her sister) six months before, and the whole family was feeling a little lost. Our father could see us drifting, and I think he hoped that a visit to Houston would help.

I arrived expecting Christmas cookies and a pile of lights that needed untangling. Instead, my siblings and I discovered our aunt's passion project. She was hard at work on a puppet show of the Nativity story! She had a large stage — about the size of a refrigerator box — made from two-by-fours and cloth with just enough room under the window for a child to crouch and hold up their arms.

Working from Aunt Rachel's script, my siblings and I helped make the Nativity-themed sock puppets. Wise men, farm animals, angels — we had them all! Then, we piled into Aunt Rachel's car and she drove us to a local orphanage.

I'd never been to an orphanage before, and I half expected to see Miss Hannigan there! When we carried our stage into the cafeteria, I was shocked to see kids my age in the crowd. At first, I was a little embarrassed to be there with my siblings, putting on a silly puppet show for other teenagers. But I continued on for Aunt Rachel.

It only took a few minutes of awkward puppeteering before my siblings and I got into the show. We hammed up our actions, exaggerated voices for each of our characters, and brought Aunt Rachel's script to life. I had a knack for imitating farm animals, and every “moo!” and “bah!” got a laugh from the crowd. The kids watching were having just as much fun as we were; they laughed right along with us, watching every sock puppet interaction as intently as a movie on the big screen. When the puppets gave their final bow, my heart was full to bursting.

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To this day, that visit to the orphanage is one of the most powerful Christmas memories I have. For years, I've talked to my wife about my dream to put on another Christmas puppet show. Then, a few Christmases ago, she drew my name in our family's “Secret Pals” gift



exchange. (This is a little tradition that we have where we make a Christmas gift for another family member). At first, my gift looked like a pile of PVC pipe and hand-sewn curtains, but when we assembled it, I realized the truth: I finally had my own puppet stage! I immediately started to cry.

I think that memory of the puppet show is so poignant for me because it happened at a time when my family had lost the heart of our home. Yet, instead of letting us close ranks, Aunt Rachel pushed us to look outward. We reached out with our puppets and welcomed the children at the orphanage into our family, and at the same time, they welcomed us into theirs.

I felt something similar many years later when I was a sophomore in college. Once again, I was without a “home” on Christmas. My father and stepmother had become empty nesters and had recently sold our family home. My two younger sisters and I felt adrift until my older brother, Sam, invited us to celebrate Christmas with his wife's family. That Christmas Eve, we ate dinner together and watched “Lord of the Rings” at the theater in a small East Texas town. It may not sound like much, but they made us feel like family. (And consequently, the Lord of the Rings movies will forever be Christmas movies for me.)

This holiday season, I encourage you to be an Aunt Rachel or a brother Sam for someone in your life. Invite them into your family and make them feel welcome. I can promise you, as you make the world a little less lonely this Christmas, you will feel a heart full of love and acceptance returned to you.

Wishing you a blessed holiday season,

—Michael Packard

KEEP YOUR SMOKE DETECTOR CLEAN

Your Life Depends on It!

We all know a smoke detector protects us from a fire in our home. They stay on constant alert, sniffing out any sign of smoke.

But are you maintaining yours properly? Many homeowners only touch their smoke alarms when they chirp for new batteries, ignoring them every other day of the year. You should be cleaning (yes, *cleaning*, not just pressing that button!) every six months.

Cleaning your smoke detector is essential to your safety. Here's a step-by-step guide on doing it correctly.

Cleaning your smoke detector is important. Your house is filled with pollutants, even if you clean it regularly. Things like dust, pollen, pet dander, cooking vapors, and smoke linger in your house even if you can't see them. These tiny fibers and particles love to find small spaces to settle into, like your smoke alarm.

As these tiny particles build up, they cover the smoke-sniffing sensors in the detector and insulate it from the outside. This is a problem when a fire breaks out because it will take longer for the smoke to make its way to that sensor through the gunk. The more time the smoke takes to filter through the buildup, the longer your family is in danger.

There are two critical parts to cleaning your smoke detector; each is equally vital to keeping your family safe.

Vacuum the inside of the unit. Take the outer face of your smoke detector off, and use the soft brush attachment of your vacuum to gently dislodge and remove the pollutants inside the device. If you don't have a brush attachment, use any soft cleaning brush to break up that gunk before vacuuming it away.

Wipe the outside vents. In a bowl, mix a bit of water and mild detergent (we recommend Dawn dish soap or equivalent) and saturate a paper towel or microfiber cloth in the mixture. Use this to wipe the outside of your smoke detector, particularly the vent openings. These will likely become clogged with dust and dander, so focus your scrubbing efforts there to ensure air can pass through.

We want you to always be safe in the case of an emergency. Add these two steps to your cleaning routine to protect your home and family from fire.



A CAR CRASH MYTH, BUSTED

What to Do If You're Injured By Family

Imagine that your sister and two nieces are traveling home from a football game. Your sister is behind the wheel while her daughters relax in the back seat, trading jokes and talking about the game they just watched. It's a long way home down a winding road, and your sister's eyes slowly start to droop. Before she knows what's happening, her car swerves off the road and smashes headlong into a tree.

Fortunately, everyone survives the crash, but one of your nieces breaks her arm in the collision. That leads us to this common question: Does she have an insurance claim against her mother?

Many people believe the answer is "no" because the two women are in the same family. But that's not how insurance works! In reality, the daughter can and should make a claim against her mom to ensure the insurance company pays for the injuries.

This is true for any car wreck involving relatives and friends. If a passenger is injured in a car crash where the driver was at fault (like the one we just described), they should always file an insurance claim and seek compensation. It doesn't matter if the driver is a stranger, a friend, or a roommate. It's the same for a mother, cousin, husband, or wife. Regardless of the relationship between the driver and the passenger, the insurance company is on the hook for injuries to any passengers.

If you've been injured in a wreck by a family member (or if you know someone who has been), we strongly recommend seeking the advice of an attorney. Don't fall for this old car wreck myth! You can call our firm at 210-756-5399 or pass along our number to a friend or family member who needs help. We'll dig into their case and start the process of securing their compensation.

—Michael Packard

MEET YOUR NEW FAVORITE HOBBY

D&D Is a Game for All Ages — Yours Included!

December 20th is International Games Day, and I am a fan of all types of games: board games, video games, card games, party games, and so even though I'm a little embarrassed to admit it; I'll put it in writing: I love playing Dungeons & Dragons (D&D).

You might recognize D&D as the game Mike and his friends play in the Netflix show "Stranger Things." The show has contributed to a recent D&D craze, and my family has joined in the fun. We didn't discover the game until just before the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020.

It was early March, and I was one of many parents hustling to the game store. The shelves were completely barren except for one small box: the Dungeons & Dragons Starter Set. It was on sale for \$15, so I picked it up, scanned the back of the box, and thought, "Why not? I'll try it."

I brought the game home and taught my older kids how to play. We quickly fell into a COVID routine: Every evening after they finished their homeschool lessons, we broke out the D&D box and played the game together. We had a fantastic time, no one was more surprised than me!

D&D is a tabletop roleplaying game. It's essentially a storytelling game that includes random chance. Everyone creates a character, and then those characters navigate a story that all of the players make up together. If you want to make a particular move, sometimes you need to roll the dice to discover whether you succeed or fail. From there, the dungeon master (DM) weaves the result into the rest



of the story. The game is part chess, part bedtime story, and part whose-line-is-it-anyway.

I love everything about D&D: the complex rules, the creativity needed to make up stories on the fly, and the fact that my kids continually surprise me with their innovations. I usually play with my 10- and 12-year-old boys, but my teenage daughters sometimes join us. My wife has even played a few sessions! I've also found fellow adult "nerds" to game with, too.

If you're skeptical of D&D, I highly recommend giving it a try. If I love it, you might too. I also recommend the board game Splendor and the card games from **GrandpaBecksGames.com**. Invest in a few, and you won't be bored this holiday season. Happy gaming!

—Michael Packard

TAKE A BREAK



Celebration	Gingerbread	Midnight
Decoration	Hearth	Mittens
Family	Holiday	Present
Gathering	Icicle	Roots



NO-BAKE PEANUT BUTTER SNOWBALLS

Inspired by TheFoodieAffair.com

Ingredients

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 3 tbsp softened butter
- 1/2 cup creamy peanut butter
- 1 lb white chocolate candy coating

Directions

1. Line a cookie sheet with parchment or wax paper.
2. In a medium bowl, combine powdered sugar, peanut butter, and softened butter. Mix until evenly combined.
3. Shape the mixture into 1-inch balls and place them on the lined cookie sheet. Chill in the refrigerator for 30 minutes or until firm.
4. In a microwave-safe bowl, melt white chocolate candy coating in increments of 30 seconds, stirring occasionally until smooth.
5. In the same bowl, use skewers to dip peanut butter balls into the chocolate before placing them on a lined cookie sheet so they can harden.
6. Chill until ready and then serve!

The Packard Family Is Here to Help Your Family

Personal Injury
Social Security Disability
Car Accidents
Special Needs Planning

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A Myth About Family Car Crashes
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No-Bake Peanut Butter Snowballs
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LOCKS OF LOVE *Son Makes a Wig for His Mother*

Melanie Shaha is currently fighting her third brain cancer battle. For 15 years, she's been suffering from a benign tumor on her pituitary gland. Although she doesn't mind being sick, going to her appointments, focusing on her treatment, and talking to loved ones about her cancer, she doesn't like looking sick.

If you didn't know Shaha, you wouldn't realize she was battling cancer. But this suddenly changed once she lost all of her hair. She had two surgeries, in 2003 and 2006, in hopes of removing the tumor on her pituitary gland, but they weren't successful. Then, when she began radiation therapy in 2017, the treatment caused her hair to fall out.

"Not having hair [makes] you stick out like a sore thumb, and well-meaning people can say things that break your heart," Shaha told TODAY. She didn't like all the attention and the looks people gave her in public. So, her 27-year-old son Matt had an idea. At first, Matt

joked about cutting all of his hair off to make his mother a wig. But the joke soon became a plan, and Matt followed through in 2018.

After graduating from college, Matt began growing his hair out. In no time, he had long and luscious hair. His mother tried to dissuade him from cutting it, but Matt wanted to help her feel confident and comfortable in her skin. So, he chopped it off and sent his locks to Compassionate Creations, a hair company in Newport Beach, California, that created a wig for his mother.

Now, Shaha has a piece of her son to take everywhere with her beautiful new tresses. "The color is spectacular, and we had it cut and styled with a hairdresser.

Matt said it looked great on me. It sure fills your emotional cup," Shaha says.

If you — or someone you know — would like to donate your hair to cancer patients, you can donate to Locks of Love, Wigs For Kids, Chai Lifeline, and Children With Hair Loss. Research donation centers in your area if you would like to give back locally.

