

# Jim Casada Outdoors

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## December 2012 Newsletter

Jim Casada  
1250 Yorkdale Drive  
Rock Hill, SC 29730-7638  
803-329-4354

Web site: [www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com](http://www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com)  
E-mail: [jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com](mailto:jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com)

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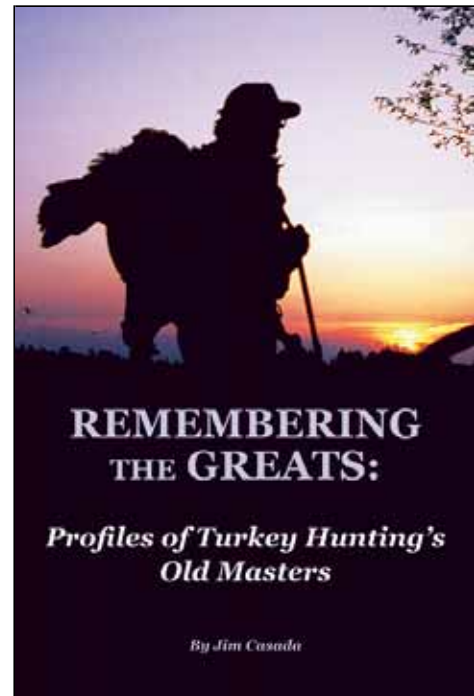
### Things I Remember About Past Decembers

One of my favorite outdoor writers is Havilah Babcock, who might well be termed the poet laureate of the bobwhite quail. The old professor had a real way with words, and America has produced few, if any outdoor writers with a finer knack for turning a phrase. Recently, while crafting a piece on Babcock for a new magazine, *Covey Rise* (I heartily recommend it to anyone enchanted by whirring wings and fly feathers, wide ranging dogs and staunch points), I had cause to look at some of his memorable quotations. One of them rang a real bell with me. "Boyhood," Babcock wrote, improves with age, and the more remote it is the nicer boyhood seems to become." Another wonderful writer and arguably our country's finest sporting scribe, Robert Ruark, stated at the outset of his timeless treasure, *The Old Man and the Boy*, "Anybody who reads this book is bound to realize that I had a real fine time as a kid."

As an ordinary sporting scribe who loves the literature of sport, maybe I can, on this one subject, momentarily link hands with these giants. Certainly I've reached the point in age where boyhood is pretty remote, there's no doubt that as a youngster pleasure was my middle name, and I have a great fondness for looking back on those halcyon days of youth. At no time does that ring more true than during the Yuletide season, so this month's newsletter is devoted to warm and winsome things I remember about Decembers past. If you have been blessed, truly blessed, in your life, you will share some of these memories. If not, it's never too late to start making them; better still, make them with a youngster. Here is a sampling of my memories:

### Special Offers and Gift Recommendations for December

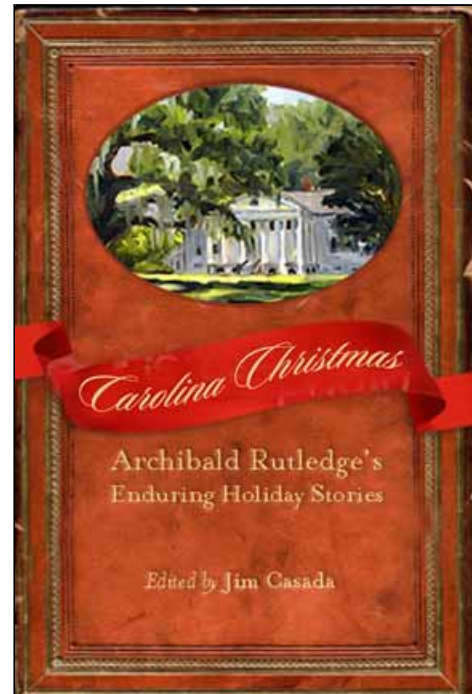
Want to get your turkey hunting buddy something special or give yourself a reading treat for those grey grim days coming in January and February. Consider my new book *Remembering the Greats: Profiles of Turkey Hunting's Old Masters* (\$39.95+\$5 shipping and handling). I'll gladly sign and inscribe.



- Gathering mistletoe for Christmas decoration by shooting springs of it out of the tops of oak trees with a .22 rifle.
- Collecting galax and running cedar for Mom to use as decorating material on the mantle and elsewhere.
- Gathering little items from nature—hemlock and white pine cones, milkweed pods, sycamore and sweet gum balls, hickory nuts, acorns, and the like. Mom would spray them with gold or silver paint and craft them into wreathes.
- The grand family expedition to get our Christmas tree. This was no visit to a vacant lot or tree farm but rather a serious undertaking that had been some weeks in the making. Dad would keep a keen eye out for a shapely Virginia pine while we were out rabbit or squirrel hunting, maybe contemplating and ultimately rejecting a dozen or more before making the final selection. The whole family participated in the actual cutting, usually on a Sunday afternoon, and if there was some little imperfection Dad would add a limb, use thin wire to straighten a wayward branch, or otherwise set things right.
- Popping popcorn we had raised and using a needle to run through the popped kernels to create garlands for the Christmas tree.
- Making popcorn balls which were held together by molasses.
- Bringing Mom several small limbs off of honey locust trees. She would cover every thorn with colorful gumballs (sometimes using only red and green, on other occasions opting for every available color) and place the fetching decoration at strategic points around the house.
- Sitting together of an evening as a family picking out black walnut kernels from nuts we had gathered earlier in the fall and which Dad had cracked down in the basement using a vise.
- The smells of Christmas baking. Among the things Mom made were a number of desserts featuring black walnuts—cookies, a black walnut pound cake, and black walnut banana bread (see recipes for all three black walnut dishes below). She also produced pumpkin pies, a scrumptious applesauce cake, and more.
- Christmas presents which always included hunting equipment—a box of shotgun shells (the only time I ever had a full box; other times I bought them individually at eight cents apiece or a baker's dozen for a dollar), new long johns, maybe a pair of Duxbak pants, or the most

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If you want a thematic item in keeping with the season, I'm offering *Carolina Christmas: Archibald Rutledge's Enduring Holiday Stories* at \$25 postpaid. The book and shipping are normally \$34.95, so you are getting a \$10 discount. Incidentally, the book includes not only dozen of Christmas-related hunting and outdoor stories but a concluding chapter of seasonal recipes.

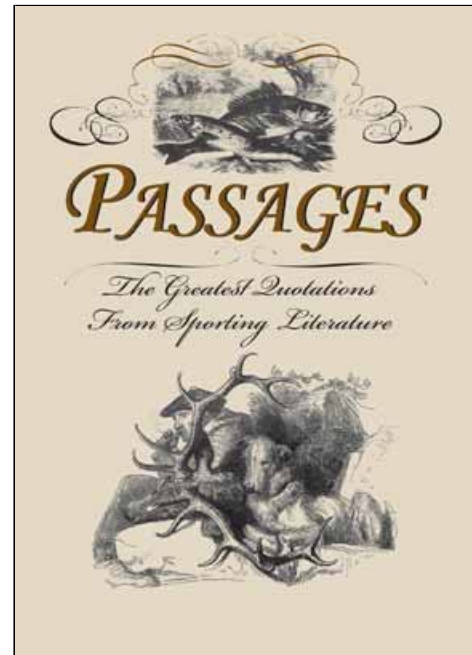


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Finally, if you want some simple reading to do in a spare moment or two, at bedside, or for inspiration, consider *Passages*, a collection of quotations from 30 years of issues of *Sporting Classics* magazines and the greatest sporting writers of all time. I co-edited the book and wrote the Introduction to it. Just \$20 and I'll pay the postage, or I have a few of the limited edition, slipcased, numbered version at \$50 postpaid.

memorable gift of all, a new shotgun. I still have the gun, a little 20 gauge Savage Model 220A. It's choked tight as a miser's purse but accounted for many a squirrel and rabbit, not to mention the fact that I killed my first turkey with it for the simple sake of nostalgia. There was invariably a book or two as well.

- The inexpressible delight of having a full two weeks off from school. That meant hunting almost every day, although Daddy wouldn't let me take the rabbit dogs out on a daily basis. Undeterred, I simply went squirrel hunting on alternate days.
- Riding around town on Christmas Eve night to look at the lights.
- Listening to Bing Crosby sing "White Christmas" I truly dreaming of and hoping for snow-covered ground on December 25.
- Joining our elderly and widowed next door neighbor, Mr. Black, to watch the Lawrence Welk Christmas show and enjoy cookies and punch. This was special in part because we didn't have a television.



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- The Christmas Eve gathering at the home of my paternal grandparents. There would be an impressive array of aunts, uncles, and cousins. All the children got a bunch of gifts. There are two gifts I recall with great fondness. One was a stamp album my Aunt Emma gave me when I was aged eight or nine. It set me striding down a lifelong path as a philatelist (one of those \$10 words which means stamp collector). The second was the sheer joy with which Grandpa Joe greeted a gift of dry twist Apple Jack chewing tobacco. Never mind that he might have gotten a fine new wool shirt or even a suit of Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, it was the tobacco which caught his fancy.
- Discovering I had chicken pox on Christmas Eve.
- Church pageants and carol singing, with bags of candy, nuts, and fruits for the children afterwards.
- Dad telling the story of his keen disappointment as a young boy when he desperately hoped for a pocket knife—and got one, only it was hard candy rather than the real McCoy.
- The childlike delight Mom had in receiving presents. Her own childhood was a rough one, being raised by relatives and never having a lot in the way of material goods. She made up for it in the finest of fashions by lavishing great love on her children and, right up through her last Christmas, being greatly excited at each and every gift.
- Gag gifts for Dad. These included such things, over the years, as a Sammy Davis, Jr. tape (he absolutely detested the man and his music) and a pair of underwear adorned with Mickey Mouse.

- The Christmas Day feast at the home of my grandparents. It was a meal rivaled only by the spread at Thanksgiving.
- Grandpa Joe “sassering” a cup of Russian tea and smacking his lips as he drank liquid hot enough to scorch most lips.
- The concluding words of every blessing I ever heard Grandpa deliver as we were preparing to eat: “You’uns see what’s before you. Eat hearty.”
- Sneaking into the high school gym to play pick-up basketball. I now suspect that the coach intentionally left a door or window open.
- Listening to Grandpa Joe, as he sat close to a good fire, relive his own boyhood days. He was a grand teller of tales and his experience encompassed things such as killing a “painter” (mountain lion), squirrel hunting in the days when the mighty American chestnut still dominated forests in the Smokies, catching rabbits in two feet of snow so soft you could identify their whereabouts by breathing holes and the cottontails were unable to run.
- Enjoying dressing made with chestnuts and cornbread and topped with giblet gravy.
- Feasting while afield after Christmas on scrumptious leftovers such as fruit cake and orange slice cake.
- Sledding on homemade sleds with wood runners.
- “Skating” on frozen ponds or melted snow which had refrozen using leather-bottomed shoes as a substitute for skates.
- Listening to tales of old mountain Christmas traditions such as Yule logs, the 12 days of Christmas, celebrating Old Christmas (January 6), and drinking syllabub.
- Eating chocolate-covered cherries (I assume they are still made but I haven’t seen, much less eaten, one in years).
- Getting kumquats mixed in with fruit baskets containing oranges and grapefruit. Like chocolate-covered cherries, I haven’t seen a kumquat for a long time.
- Mom saving orange rinds to use in making marmalade, as zest in cranberry relish, or for other culinary uses. She didn’t waste much.
- Enjoying crackling cornbread.
- Eating Grandma’s picked peaches and Aunt Emma’s ambrosia.
- The keen sense of anticipation in the lead-up to Christmas morning and the opening of presents in our immediate family.
- Most of all, being with folks I loved in a warm family environment. I now realize we didn’t have a lot and quite possible would have been, by citified standards, considered poor. Most everyone else was in the same circumstances (or worse), and it wasn’t until I went off to college that realization dawned that our family wasn’t exactly blessed with an over-abundance of world goods. In truth though, we were anything but poor. We had loving and devoted parents, enough to eat, clothes on our back, a world of natural beauty surrounding us, a comfortable home, and a staunch “make do with what you’ve got” attitude. I fear that attitude, not just in my beloved Smokies but all across the nation, is in abject decline.

**There are other memories, many of them. Some are powerful and poignant, and some bring a catch to my throat or a tear to my eye. Others evoke a smile or a chuckle, but all remind me mine was a blessed boyhood. Here’s hoping you have similarly fond recollections and all best wishes for Christmas. May it be**

filled with joy for you and yours, and keep in mind the true reason for the season.

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## Recent Reading

Last month I added a new feature to the newsletter, a listing of books I was reading or had read in recent weeks. [Let me know](#) what you think as I ponder whether it is worth the time to share this material. Basically, it's your call as readers. Here's what I've been reading of late with a few notes on the nature of the book or author. Those with an asterisk (\*) are ones I would recommend for leisure or armchair pleasure.

1. J. Cecil Alter, *Jim Bridger*. Bridger was one of the early mountain men and a truly interesting individual.
2. \*Charles Askins, *Unrepentant Sinner*. This is the autobiography of the younger Charles Askins, a career military man and noted hunting and guns writer. He's bombastic at times and probably a bit prone to gilding the lily. The book, published by Jim Rikhoﬀ's Amwell Press, desperately needed an editor and proofreader, but it is interesting stuff.
3. Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling*. Along with Robert Service, Kipling ranks as one of my two favorite poets, with Sidney Lanier not being far behind (obviously I like poems that rhyme).
4. Able Chapman, *Retrospect: Reminiscences and Impressions of a Hunter-Naturalist*. Chapman was a peripatetic Brit who hunted across Europe and Africa and wrote a number of books.
5. \*Skipper Duncan, *Characters and Critters*. Skipper is an outfitter in Texas with whom I've hunted turkeys on multiple occasions. He's a gifted storyteller, and if this book doesn't tickle your fancy and have you laughing I suggest you forthwith make an appointment with a psychiatrist. You have problems or else were born without a funny bone.
6. Frank Gruber, *Zane Grey, A Biography*. Most folks think of Grey in connection with his bestselling Westerns, but he also wrote a batch of fishing books and lived to fish. One of his early stories fishing, "The Lord of Lackawaxen Creek," is superb.
7. William Manchester and Paul Reid, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill—Defender of the Realm, 1940-65*. This is the third and concluding volume of the definitive life of Churchill.
8. Sharlotte Neely, *Snowbird Cherokees: People of Persistence*. The Snowbird Cherokees live in Graham County, NC, in an area I fish a lot. This is a scholarly work of interest to me but not recommended for general reading.
9. \*Robert Ruark, *The Old Man and the Boy*. I usually try to read what I consider the greatest book on the outdoors ever written in this country at least once a year, usually in November or December. Some of Ruark's finest stuff comes from these months, and one of his finest stories is "November Was Always the Best." In this case I also had an ulterior motive since I was working on a little piece for a dandy new magazine, *Covey Rise*.
10. \*Barbara Taylor Woodall, *It's Not My Mountain Anymore*. This is a moving chronicle of growing up close to the land in the Southern Appalachians. At points the book is glad, at others sad, but for anyone who loves the mountains it's a sometimes earthy, always moving and meaningful testament to a hardy people and their way of life. I'll offer just two little examples. The first is a riddle. What has "four stiff standers, four down hangers, two lookers, two crookers, and one switchabout?" The answer is a milk cow. The author writes about a spell of bitterly cold weather with deep snow; a situation which produces a comment to the effect it was so cold you couldn't even get to the outhouse. The solution? "Piss down

the gun barrel and shoot it out the window.”

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## RECIPES

### BLACK WALNUT AND BANANA BREAD

½ cup vegetable oil  
 1 cup sugar  
 2 eggs  
 2 cups very ripe bananas, mashed with a fork  
 2 cups flour  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 1 teaspoon baking powder  
 ½ cup finely chopped black walnuts

Mix vegetable oil, sugar, eggs and bananas well. Add flour, salt, baking soda and walnuts and mix until thoroughly blended. Place in greased loaf pan and bake at 350 degrees for an hour or in four small loaf pans for 40 minutes.

### BLACK WALNUT POUND CAKE

This recipe came from the late Beulah Suddreth, as good a soul and fine a cook as ever called Swain County home. I was blessed to have known her well, as will be the case with many readers.

1 cup butter (no substitute)  
 ½ cup shortening  
 3 cups sugar  
 5 eggs  
 3 cups sifted flour  
 1 teaspoon baking powder  
 1 ½ cups finely chopped black walnuts  
 1 teaspoon vanilla  
 1 cup half-and-half milk

**OPTIONAL:** For a more moist cake, use 8 ounces of sour cream

Cream butter and shortening thoroughly. Gradually add sugar; cream until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each. In a separate bowl sift flour and baking powder and add chopped black walnuts. In a measuring cup, add vanilla to half-and-half. Add flour and walnut mixture alternately with half-and-half to creamed mixture, and if you opt to use sour cream, alternate it as well. Blend and mix well (beating well is the secret to a fine pound cake). Pour into a prepared 10-inch tube pan. Bake at 325 degrees for an hour and 15 minutes or until done. Cool for 10 minutes and remove from pan.

You can, if desired, prepare a frosting for this cake (1 stick melted butter, 1 16-ounce box powdered sugar, half-and-half, and ½ cup finely chopped black walnuts. Blend butter and sugar and add enough half-and-half to reach desired consistency. Fold in walnuts and frost cooled cake.

### CINNAMON OATMEAL COOKIES WITH BLACK WALNUTS

½ cup sugar

¾ cup packed brown sugar  
 1 ¼ cup margarine  
 1 egg  
 1 teaspoon vanilla  
 3 cups oats, quick cooking or regular  
 1 ½ cups flour  
 1 ¼ teaspoon cinnamon  
 1 teaspoon baking soda  
 ½ teaspoon salt  
 ½ cup raisins  
 2 cups black walnut meats

Cream sugars and margarine; add egg and vanilla. Place dry ingredients in separate bowl and mix well. Add raisins and walnuts to dry ingredients. Combine creamed mixture and dry ingredients well. Drop by tablespoons onto cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for 8-10 minutes or until golden brown. Yields three dozen cookies.

## BLACK WALNUT BARS

### CRUST

½ cup butter  
 ½ cup packed brown sugar  
 1 cup flour

### FILLING

1 cup brown sugar  
 2 eggs, beaten  
 ¼ teaspoon salt  
 1 teaspoon vanilla  
 2 teaspoons flour  
 ½ teaspoon baking powder  
 1 ½ cups shredded coconut  
 1 cup chopped black walnuts

Cream butter and brown sugar. Slowly add flour and mix until crumbly. Pat into a 7 x 11-inch baking dish. Bake for 8-10 minutes at 350 degrees until golden.

Combine brown sugar, eggs, salt and vanilla. In separate bowl, add flour and baking powder to coconut and walnuts. Blend into egg mixture and pour over baked crust. Return to oven and bake for an additional 15-20 minutes or until done. Cut into bars and place on wire racks to cool.

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