

# Jim Casada Outdoors

## December 2014 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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### December Delights

Honesty compels me to acknowledge that, from the perspective of eager anticipation, I no longer get greatly excited as Christmas approaches. Indeed, I don't really want or expect much in the way of presents, partly because shopping for me is an exercise in futility and also thanks to the fact that when I want something (and can afford it) I simply get it. On the other hand, there are myriad aspects of the Yuletide season which bring me enduring delight. Many rest in the vaults of fond memories while most others involve family togetherness, thinking about the deeper meaning of the holiday (remember the word comes from "holy day"), and of course the festive foods and traditions associated with them.

With that by way of background, this month's newsletter goes back in time for a bunch of decades and resurrects some of my favorite Christmas memories. They touch on a wide variety of subjects, but all are near and dear to me. Hopefully they will serve as a reminder of some of your own precious recollections, and who knows, maybe we will share some in common.

- Christmas Eve at Grandpa Joe's and Grandma Minnie's. A goodly part of the Casada clan would gather there, with gifts for all the kids, lots of laughter and telling of tales by the grown-ups, and at some point My Aunt Emma would recite James Whitcomb Riley's "Little Orphant Annie." For a youngster that poem was a bit scary, but she'd balance things out by following

#### This Month's Holiday Specials

Books always make a great holiday gift, and this year I'm making a bunch of special offers connected not only with my own books but those on my various out-of-print lists.

**OFFER #1**—First of all, buy \$100 or more in books and you can take a 10% discount. Buy \$200 or more and up that to 15% and the shipping is free.

*Please contact me for this offer:*  
Tel.: 803-329-4354  
E-mail: [jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com](mailto:jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com)

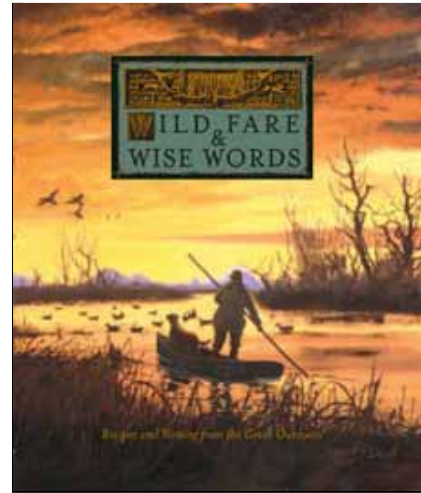
**OFFER #2**—If you have a sportsman/reader in the family or as a good friend, why not give them a gift certificate? I'll send them a letter with the gift certificate and details. Available in amounts of \$50 or more.

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**OFFER #3**—Our cookbook, *Wild Fare and Wise Words*, contains scores of recipes for fish, game, wild foods, and more. Get a copy (retail value \$20) for \$15 and the shipping is free.

it up with "The Night Before Christmas," complete with some sound effects.

- Grandpa Joe never had a bank account, never drove a car (much less owned one), and always had so little in the way of funds he invariably described the few bills he did have as "cash money." Yet he cared so much about his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren that he always tried to get them something in the way of a Christmas gift. My favorite aspect of his giving involved nothing more than him digging deep into the pockets of his overalls and coming up with a stick of peppermint candy. Better still, if I could get him alone during Christmas season, was the enduring joy of a rocking chair session of tale telling. It didn't take much to get him going on things like the demise of the American chestnut; the time he killed a "painter" (cougar) when he was a young man; or a heavy, soft snow which left rabbits so helpless he caught a tow sack full of them.
- The year I got my first gun. It was a little 20 gauge Savage Model 220A choked tight as a miser's purse. The gun worked mighty well for squirrels but was a distinct disadvantage when it came to rabbits, quail, or grouse. I still have it, with all the blue long since worn away and the stock scarred and scratched from countless encounters with sawbriars and blackberry canes. Strictly for nostalgic reasons, I took it on my first turkey hunt ever and it performed quite nicely.
- Memories of my first book (I still have it), Zane Grey's *Spirit of the Border*. Mom knew I loved to read and from that initial book forward she periodically gave me one she thought would be special (and they always were).
- The joys of family outings in search of the perfect pine for our Christmas tree. In truth, Daddy had always already located the pine he wanted, since he kept a keen eye out for a nicely shaped one during our weekend rabbit hunts which started at Thanksgiving, but he still made a big deal out of all of us being involved. There was never so much as a thought of a store-bought tree, and the Virginia pine which annually ended up in our living room was always a thing of beauty. Often while we were out cutting the tree we would also gather other greenery—she holly (only female hollies have berries), hemlock boughs, and galax—for Mom to use in decorating.
- Mom's wonderfully creative touch in decorating. She made gum drop trees using honey locust limbs and tipping every thorn with a colorful, sugar-coated gum drop; fashioned wreathes out of grape vines or nuts with a bit of help from glue; made long stringers of popcorn for garlands to put on the tree; and much more.



Add to Cart

**OFFER #4**—One of the more interesting and unusual of the out-of-print books on turkey hunting is Frank P. Harben's classic, *Hunting Wild Turkeys in the Everglades*. Thanks to having obtained a fine stock of this relatively hard-to-find book, I can offer it at \$20 postpaid.

Add to Cart

**Don't forget to take a gander at my [Web site](#), and you'll find hundreds of new and used books in a wide variety of fields.**

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- The gifts Daddy brought home from work. There was almost always a five-pound white fruit cake and a ham, both of which the whole family enjoyed.
- Riding around town on Christmas Eve prior to going to my grandparents. We would look at all the lights and displays, and if we were especially lucky, the car radio would play a favorite Christmas carol or two. Mom was partial to Bing Crosby's rendition of "White Christmas," and on at least two occasions we actually had snow on December 25.
- Discovering on Christmas Eve, when I was six years old, that I had chicken pox. It wasn't my most pleasant holiday ever, but it was certainly a memorable one.
- Getting up on Christmas morning from the time I got my first gun right on until I had gone off to college (and maybe even after that) knowing that there would be at least a couple of gifts for me that focused on hunting. I always got a whole box of shotgun shells. That would be the only time I would have that many, because usually I bought them four or five at a time (they cost eight cents apiece or you got a baker's dozen for a dollar). There would usually be an item of Duxbak hunting attire, maybe a new pair of long johns or hunting socks, or perhaps a knife.
- At some point Daddy always share his woeful tale of having so desperately wanted a knife for Christmas when he was a lad, only to be bitterly disappointed when all he got was a piece of hard candy shaped like a knife. He sure made up for that sad moment with his sons and grandsons, blessing us with multiple gifts of knives over the years.
- Experiencing Mom's innocent, child-like enjoyment of everything associated with the season. She had a tough childhood, no matter how you look at it, but rather than be bitter she simply enjoyed Christmas in every way possible. Right up until her death she took as much pleasure, and showed as much delight, in opening a present as any starry-eyed child.
- Christmas pageants and gatherings at the church, where there would be a bag of "goodies" for each child and a great deal of good will on the part of the entire congregation.
- Shooting out mistletoe for Mom to use in decorations. I didn't own a .22 but a good friend did and three or four of us would chip in to buy a box of 100 shells (they cost the whopping sum of \$.99 a box) and then enjoy keen competition to clip a big clump of mistletoe loose from high up in an oak tree.
- Holiday rabbit hunts. I would go hunting every day of the Christmas break, although Daddy restricted me in use of the beagles since I would have worn them out given the opportunity. I'd hunt with them one day and then go out the next day on my own while they rested. It seems I never needed any rest, although at night I slept the wonderful sleep of those who come home from a day afield deliciously tired.

Those and other memories sustain and uplift me each holiday season, and looking back I realize just how blessed a childhood I had. It didn't involve a lot of lavish presents—like virtually everyone in the little mountain community where I grew up we made do with what we had and it wasn't a great deal in material terms—but there was tremendous joy and a wonderful sense of family togetherness.

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### **Christmas Food Memories—Delectable Desserts**

Not surprisingly, given my love for food, many of my holiday memories revolve around dishes associated with the season. Some were foodstuffs we never enjoyed at any other time of the year, but other

dishes were standard fare which just happened to be included in the Christmas menu. Along with the non-culinary memories already noted, these are some of the ones which stand out. All except the biscuits focus on desserts, perhaps because I've always had a mighty sweet tooth. Even the biscuits could qualify in a sense, because it was a toss-up as to whether I enjoyed them more with red-eye gravy, sawmill gravy, butter and molasses, or butter and honey.



Persimmon pudding fresh from the oven.

### MOM'S APPLESAUCE CAKE

1 cup butter  
 2 cups sugar  
 4 cups flour  
 1/3 cup cocoa  
 4 teaspoons baking soda  
 2 teaspoons cinnamon  
 2 teaspoons allspice  
 2 cups raisins  
 3 cups applesauce  
 2 cups black walnut meats  
 2 teaspoons vanilla  
 Pinch of salt

Cream butter and sugar. Add applesauce and remaining ingredients a small amount at a time, stirring as you go. Bake in a cake pan at 350 degrees until top is browned and a toothpick comes away clean.

This is a quite dry cake and Mom solved that by adding the occasional dollop of wine or else covering it with apple slices, replacing them every few days. She always made several of the cakes and did them well in advance in order to allow plenty of time for them to get moist. She stored them in an unheated bedroom and it took all of my will, with the overriding threat of dire punishment looming in the background, to stay away from them until Mom deemed it was time to slice one.

I typed the above recipe straight from a card she pecked out on her old manual typewriter, and I've got to admit seeing those unevenly dark letters, the occasional raised one where a key wasn't depressed just right, and her handwritten additions left me a bit moist-eyed. But then, such memories are a part of the holiday experience.

### GRANDMA'S APPLE PIES

There's no recipe as such here. Grandma just made pie dough (she used plenty of lard she had procured from the family butchering of hogs in it), shaped it into thin circles of about a six- or seven-inch diameter, and made the pies one at a time in a cast iron skillet. She would put the dough in, let it brown for a short time, then add the filler made from dried apples, spiced with a bit a cinnamon and sweetened with brown sugar. She would cover

only half the dough, flip it over the apples, crimp with a fork, and perhaps turn to be sure she got it properly browned. Once she got going she could produce pie after pie in rapid-fire order.

### GRANDMA'S BISCUITS AND BISCUIT BREAD

In this particular case I'll have to confess that I have no idea of how Grandma worked her culinary magic with biscuits. I just know they were always perfect—light, fluffy, shaped by hand, and big enough to hold a fried egg from Grandpa Joe's chickens without white sticking out over the edges. Often, if she was in a hurry, we wouldn't make individual biscuits. She'd just get the dough ready and put it in a loaf pan for baking. She called this biscuit bread. The taste was the same, and when it came to biscuits and gravy, it was just the ticket.

While I don't remember Grandma's biscuit recipe, and Momma always left this aspect of food preparation to her, my good friend Tipper Pressley shared and demonstrated her approach to making biscuits at a recent gathering of outdoor writers in a fashion which takes me straight back to boyhood. It's a "can't fail" approach which is the essence of simplicity.

2 cups self-rising flour  
1 cup (or slightly more) heavy cream

Mix well and knead once or twice. Cut out biscuits from the resulting dough and place on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes or until a light golden brown on top.

About all that then remains is to slather with butter and your favorite sweet biscuit adornment or else cut the cathead open and apply plenty of gravy. Let out your belt two notches and get busy with your trencherman duties!

### MOM'S PUMPKIN CHIFFON PIE

Both Mom and my Aunt Emma made pumpkin chiffon pies, and I've got both of their recipes. They vary slightly but Mom's is the simpler of the two.

Prepare a bake pie shell (can be made of Graham crackers or gingersnaps, though Mom's was a plain crust).

1 tablespoon gelatin (soak in ¼ cup of cold water)

Separate the whites and yolks of three eggs. Set the whites aside and lightly beat the three egg yolks.

Add:

2 half cups of sugar—separate into ½ cups  
1 ¼ cup pumpkin  
½ cup milk  
¼ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon cinnamon  
½ teaspoon nutmeg

Cook and stir all these ingredients (except one ½ cup of sugar, which should be set aside) over hot water until they are thick. Stir in the soaked gelatin until it is dissolved. Cool and then whip until stiff.

When the pumpkin mixture just begins to set, stir in the second ½ cup of sugar and fold in the egg whites. Mix and then fill the pie shell. Chill the pie in the refrigerator for several hours before serving. Top individual servings with whipped cream.

Note: If you want more of a pumpkin taste and a bit less sweetness, reduce the amount of sugar to a total of 2/3 of a cup.



## PERSIMMON PUDDING

1 cups persimmon pulp  
 2 cups packed brown sugar  
 ¼ cup butter, melted  
 1 teaspoon vanilla  
 1 ½ cups self-rising flour  
 ½ cup light cream  
 2 eggs, beaten  
 ½ teaspoon cinnamon  
 ½ cup raisins

Combine all ingredients and beat just until well blended. Pour into a greased 9- 13-inch pan and bake at 350 degrees for 30-35 minutes or until golden and beginning to pull away from the sides of the pan. Remove from oven and cool, then cover and seal tightly with aluminum foil or plastic wrap. Cut into squares to serve. Top servings with whipping cream if desired.

I made a persimmon pudding over Thanksgiving and my, was it fine. Every bit as rich and scrumptious as I remembered, and ever so much easier thanks to the fact that my Asian persimmons have reached bearing age. A single fruit, and they are seedless, weighs a half pound. That translated to needing just two persimmons for a cup of pulp, a far cry from scores of them, with the work of removing the seeds, for wild ones.



Basket of Asian persimmons from my trees.

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