



I dedicate this book to three very special people:
To Mom and Dad for giving me a love of the
holidays, showing me the joys of opening my
heart and home to others, and providing me with
rural roots that run deep.
To my husband for his love, support, and always
being there for me. You are amazing, and I
am grateful every day for the blessing of being
married to you.



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CHRISTMAS WITH A COUNTRY GIRL

WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY POPPED UP TO DO THIS BOOK, I was beyond excited. It combines a variety of things I'm passionate about: Christmas, country life, and cooking.

A love of all three of these things was cultivated during my childhood. My growing-up years were spent on a farm in eastern Oregon where my family waged battle against sagebrush, rocks, and the random juniper tree to till the soil for crops and plant pasture grass. It wasn't until I found myself far away from home, living in a big city, that I realized how fortunate I was to have a foundation with country roots on which to build my future.

The only thing my dad ever wanted to be was a farmer. During the first dozen years of my parents' marriage, he worked for a variety of farmers and ranchers while they saved every penny they could. In the early 1960s, they purchased the farm where they would reside in a small but close-knit community for the next fifty years.

Twenty years into their marriage, with three teenagers in the house, the last thing my parents expected was to discover they were expecting. My formative years were spent running wild and free on the farm where dad raised hay, wheat, corn, and cattle. My childhood brimmed with sunshine, hay fever, and a never-ending supply of rural learning experiences.

With my two brothers and their families living nearby, an ample supply of adults kept their eye on me—even if their vigilant supervision didn't necessarily keep me out of trouble. I always had horses to ride, fences to climb, and an adventure waiting around the corner. My love for cowboys and the western way of life came naturally.

My oldest brother worked as a ranch hand on remote ranches and would come home after weeks (sometimes what seemed like months) away, brimming with hair-raising tales that spurred my interest and imagination. Sometimes, he'd bring along a fellow cowpoke in need of a home-cooked meal and a few days of rest before they headed back to the ranch. I'd sit in rapt adoration, listening to them talk about a way of life that seemed to be all but disappearing. And they brought with them the fragrances of leather and horses and sage-soaked sunshine—a scent I still love to this day.

The cowboys my brother brought home to visit were just a few of the many guests who pulled up a chair at our dinner table over the years.

My parents both come from big families who love to get together for the holidays. Since our house could accommodate large gatherings, we hosted many Christmas celebrations for extended family.

If we had snow, Dad would take down part of the fence around the pasture right behind our house so we could speed down the hill on tractor inner tubes and toboggans. My Christmas vacations were full of sledding, ice skating on the pond, snowmobiling, and attempting to build snow forts on the front lawn.

During our holiday celebrations, I learned so much about entertaining from my parents. Over the years, I've participated in and attended more big family gatherings than I can count. Not only did my parents set a good entertaining example, but that theme of making guests feel welcome carried over to the homes of my aunts and uncles and grandparents, who also took turns hosting our noisy, boisterous bunch.

My mother taught me how to feed a crowd, prepare in advance, and make food stretch when necessary. She could turn the most basic ingredients into delicious dishes with a

grandkid or two underfoot while visiting with guests. From watching my grandmothers, aunts, and mother pour their love into their cooking, I learned to do the same.

Our home was festive and welcoming to everyone who walked through the door. Guests would be plied with homemade candies and cookies and invited to warm up by the fire.

What I know about being a gracious host came from my Dad. I don't think he's ever met anyone he wouldn't invite to stay for dinner, and he's a master at making people feel welcome.

Christmas has always been such a special time for him because it's also his birthday. I have so many wonderful memories of early Christmas mornings because of Daddy's joyful enthusiasm to greet the day. He passed that love of the holiday to me along with the delight it brings when we gather with those we care about most.

And amid the flurry of wrapping paper and preparations for a house full of guests remained the true reason for the season.

Christmas was such a magical, wondrous, positively amazing time of year when I was a child, and is no doubt the reason I adore the holiday today. In fact, I love Christmas so much that my husband, Captain Cavedweller, and I wed just a week before Christmas twenty-five years ago.

My love for the holidays, the country way of life, and cooking from the heart is why I'm so excited to share this book with you.

In the following pages, you'll find stories with rodeo and rural families who talk about some of their favorite Christmas memories and traditions. Glean ideas to help you relax and streamline the entertaining process through the holidays. Learn a few gift-wrapping tips or gather ideas for hostess gifts. And be ready to try a collection of recipes that may become new family favorites!

I hope you enjoy this book written with love and shared with all the joy of this beautiful holiday season!

Merry Christmas from our home and hearts to yours!

—*Shanna Hatfield*





CELEBRATE THE
COWBOY WAY





DECK THE HALLS

DURING MY GROWING-UP YEARS, MY PARENTS had plenty of room for company at our home and a sledding hill with a pond for skating right outside the back door. We almost always hosted Christmas at our house for one side of the family or the other, with sometimes as many as fifty guests in attendance. It was during these festive gatherings that I learned many lessons from my parents about entertaining with grace and ease.

A gathering is more than just an opportunity to break bread together. It's an opportunity to connect lives, deepen friendships, and share in the wonder of the Christmas.

Meet a couple from Oklahoma who know all about entertaining and making folks feel right at home. Then learn tips for making entertaining at home a snap as you open your doors and deck your halls this holiday season.

TATE AND KRISTIN STRATTON

HOW DOES A BULL-RIDING, BOOT-SELLING COWBOY CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

By baking pies, of course.

Rodeo cowboy Tate Stratton proudly carries on a tradition started by his father of making pies for the holidays.

“My dad was an entertainer and loved to host parties or gatherings. Dad was the one volunteering to host events at our house,” Tate said. “We had pecan and pumpkin pie when I was a kid at a big get-together. I remember Dad sent home pies with our guests. Now, I make pumpkin and pecan pies. There’s nothing easier than a pecan pie.”

Tate loves to cook, and his wife, Kristin, enjoys baking, too. But this couple from Bristow, Oklahoma, really loves to entertain.

“The joy of the family and the blessings they bring are so much a part of the season,” Tate said.

Their friendly natures are the reason Tate and Kristin happened to meet through Tate’s rodeo traveling partner. Tate was traveling across Kansas in 2008, and his friend’s cell phone kept going off in the middle of the night. He finally picked up the phone and texted back the caller, who just happened to be Kristin. She was traveling home from West Virginia with her parents and awake on the long drive. Throughout the night, they exchanged text messages. They ended up meeting for lunch and, according to Tate, the “rest is history.”

The couple wed May 14, 2010, and made a home in Kellyville, Oklahoma, near Kristin’s parents. “I’ve only moved twice in my life. Once, next door to my parents, and then to where we live now. Tate likes to tell me I’m sheltered,” Kristin said with a laugh. “I say it is just stability. I’ve seen a lot of the country thanks to rodeo and a job I used to have. I’m not sheltered at all, actually, but home is home. There’s nothing like going home to me. It’s a safe place that’s warm and cozy.”

While Kristin has deep roots in Oklahoma, Tate was born in Oklahoma but raised in Stanley, New Mexico. His parents had eighty acres of flatland where they ran cattle and horses.

“We always had horses, show horses—Appaloosas,” Tate said.

Rodeo caught his interest from a young age.

“I loved to watch it. When I was eight, I decided I wanted to participate in an Easter rodeo by riding a calf. Dad brought home two calves and turned them loose in a round pen. I got in there with a neighbor boy and climbed on the bigger of the two. The other one was a little wiry, and the neighbor kid ate dirt riding it. But I was hooked.”

After that first rodeo, Tate went on to compete through middle school and high school. After graduating from high school, he attended Western Texas College in Snyder. It was during his



courtesy of Tate Stratton

first year of college that he won the College National Finals Rodeo and was crowned College World Champion. He graduated at the top of his class then transferred to Texas A&M University where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in animal science.

He moved to Oklahoma and qualified for his first Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (WNFR) in 2009, but injuries kept him sidelined the following year.

“During a ride in Reno, I jammed my wrist. I battled with a hand injury for months, trying to figure out what was going on,” Tate said.

He ended up seeing a specialist in Dallas, Texas, and had surgery. He couldn’t compete for a while and didn’t want to reach out for help, but eventually sent an email to the Justin Cowboy Crisis Fund.

“The funds the JCCF gave us helped us get back on our feet,” Tate said. “It was a hand up, not a hand out. It just goes against our nature to ask for help, but sometimes we need it. The [Justin] Sportsmedicine Team® keeps us on the road, and the JCCF helps get us back on the road. It’s amazing to see how willing people are to get on board to support the JCCF.”

Tate came back strong in 2011 and qualified once again for the WNFR, and made his third qualification in 2012.

He continued on the rodeo road, with Kristin going along when she could.

Then, in January 2015, life changed when their daughter Merritt was born. Daughter Henley joined the family in December 2017.

“I was thinking about ‘how can I get home’ rather than ‘how can I get on the road’ after my daughter was born,” Tate said. “It’s feast or famine in rodeo, and when Merritt came into the picture, things changed.”

The stress of worrying about where the paychecks were coming from and how he could provide for his family outweighed his love of riding.

Chippewa, a division of the Justin Boots brand, was in need of a territory manager and Tate took the job. From there he’s moved up to territory manager at Justin Boots, overseeing the Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri territories.

“I don’t want to be a typical sales rep. I want to be me. I’m not there to sell something, but to help meet a need,” Tate said.

He also has been helping to meet the needs of young up-and-coming cowboys through Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association youth rodeos.

“It was a natural fit to work with kids, and I have no problem talking in front of people. The outreach worked well, and when they saw how I handled it, they started calling on me more,” Tate said. “I’m very blessed to have the career that I did, but now I can give back to the next generation.”

Both Kristin and Tate put family at the top of their list of joys for the holidays. One of their favorite things about Christmas is “the family time, getting everyone together,” Tate said. “The food is awesome. We break bread together and enjoy having our family together.”

The gift of love sprinkled into the meals served at their home is something Tate learned from his father.

“There were special dishes that were only fixed during the holidays, and I looked forward to them. Dad loved to cook. Just thinking about how much money our family spent on food during the holidays, when funds were limited, shows how much the holidays meant to him because he would spend days cooking.”

Memories of those special times with his father and how he shared his love through cooking inspire Tate and Kristin to do the same.

“I love opening my home up to anyone and everyone,” Kristin said. “I want our home to be a place for community. For anyone to feel welcomed and loved.”

And if visitors are lucky, they’ll leave with one of Tate’s pecan or pumpkin pies, baked from the heart and sent home with love.

ENTERTAINING AT HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE A PRECONCEIVED IDEA about entertaining at home. Some think it is an involved and much-to-be-avoided process. If you are one of those, let's shift the way you view entertaining.

In its most basic form, entertaining at home is opening your doors and making others feel welcome. It isn't about how well you cook or if your home appears magazine-worthy.

Entertaining at home *is* all about the way your guests feel when they head out your door.

Did you create fun or warm memories? Did you focus on enjoying the time spent together? Were you present in the moment, interacting with your guests?

A warm and gracious host is the one who views entertaining at home as an opportunity to share, to welcome guests and make them feel like they are the most important people in the world right at that moment. When guests feel truly welcomed and appreciated, the dust bunnies beneath the fridge and the fingerprints on the patio door won't matter at all.

Give yourself a measure of grace, find a new entertaining standard, and have some fun. Put your guests at ease, make them feel special, and see how much easier entertaining becomes.

When you are planning to welcome more than a few guests, these secrets to entertaining will give you the foundation you need to entertain with ease and look like a pro.







MADE FROM THE HEART

ALTHOUGH I CAN'T KNIT TO SAVE MY LIFE, my efforts at crocheting typically result in a mile-long string, and my quilting attempts appear like a drunken chicken has grabbed the needle and headed to town, I do enjoy making gifts for others.

There's just something about creating a special present for a loved one that fills my heart with anticipation and joy. Will they like it? Will it be something they treasure? Will they know how much they mean to me through that particular gift?

One thing I've discovered is that when I create something unique for someone, or even have something personalized for someone, it's that extra effort that makes the gift precious to the recipient.

Because I'm well aware of my crafty limitations, I'm glad there are people in this world—like one amazing couple from eastern Oregon—who can make nearly anything!

If you can wield a glue gun (or a bottle of craft glue), there are easy-to-make wreaths, ornaments, and gift ideas you can create. And even if you are all thumbs when it comes to crafts, having a gift personalized has never been so simple.

Just remember to share gifts from the heart this holiday season and you won't go wrong.



DEREK AND JESSICA MILLER

ONCE IN A WHILE, AN UNANTICIPATED GIFT comes our way and changes the world around us. For one eastern Oregon couple, the unexpected happened May 5, 2013, when they met at Hot Lake Springs, a resort and foundry near La Grande, Oregon. Derek Miller was already employed there, but a young woman named Jessica arrived that day to interview for a job in the bronze foundry.

Jessica nailed the job interview and soon began working there, although it wasn't until December of that year when she and Derek went out on their first date.

"The biggest thing that drew me to him was our shared interests and ability to work together as a team," Jessica said. "Not to mention that he was handsome and had an amazing smile!"

Derek said he felt a connection to her in a variety of ways. "We both have a love of horses and the western/ranching lifestyle, the outdoors, photography, animals, and art. We had similar goals, and it was easy to see that we made a great team."

They wed in August 2016 and "have yet to spend a single night apart," Jessica said.

Both Jessica and Derek have roots in the country that derive from their youth. While Jessica said her family moved often when she was growing up in Oregon's Willamette Valley, her grandmother owned a small acreage near Molalla where she has fond memories of visiting.

"That is where I grew my roots for the love of the farming and ranching way of life," Jessica said.

For Derek, his country roots grew from his family's homestead in eastern Oregon, near Elgin. His grandfather passed away when he was sixteen, and his family moved to the timber and cattle ranch to help his grandmother.

"We lived thirteen miles from town, and it really cemented my love for country and ranch living."

Derek and Jessica moved to Baker City, Oregon, in March 2014, and bought the place where they currently reside.

Between the two of them, there isn't much they can't make or create. They own several small businesses together, including Ranch Studio Artworks. Jessica started RSA after graduating from college.

"When I met Derek, he challenged my abilities and brought even more to the table as well as encouraged me to start an online presence."

Derek said before he got involved with RSA, Jessica “did really cool western art and decor. When I came on board, the products evolved with a mixture of both of our styles and influences. We still do some of the same things, but have added many new items and do a lot of custom work.”

Jessica said one of the first things she discovered when she began showcasing her original artwork was her lack of marketing skills. She started creating practical and affordable functional items, like horseshoe hooks, that the average person could afford and appreciate.

“Together, we have realized there is no project that we cannot do, so now we offer anything from custom cowhide furniture and custom leather products such as belts, cuffs, holsters, and chinks to picture frames, horseshoe letters, cake toppers, clocks, lamps—you name it!”

Derek added that their offerings encompass home decor, art, leather goods, and photography.

One of the areas where Jessica’s talents particularly shine is painting and sculpting.

“Painting has always been a passion of mine; however, it can be time consuming, and the older I get, the less I am finding myself able to sit still for too long. Building with my hands has always been very rewarding, and with sculpting I am able to see the results I want much faster.”

The couple has worked on fascinating projects of all sizes, although Jessica says some large projects have been challenging.

“One in particular was a life-sized impression/relief of a bugling elk out of barbed wire. When starting a project like this, it is very intimidating, taking something so thin and destructive and turning it into something amazing. Then there is always the challenge of how to display it.”

They agree the elk project was one of the most “challenging and exciting projects that we built together,” Jessica said.

The holiday season is their busiest time of year, although they’ve steadily built their year-round online sales through outlets like Etsy.



courtesy of Jessica Miller



courtesy of Jessica Miller

“Holidays can get pretty busy with online orders, especially with creating our own custom gifts for our friends and family,” Jessica said. “Luckily, in the wintertime, it’s cold outside and snow usually covers the ground, so it creates a perfect environment to bring out the creativity and time to spend inside working on projects.”

The holiday season is a special time for the Millers.

For Derek, it’s all about family. He said Christmas is a time for “the ones we get to see, the ones we don’t, and the ones that are no longer with us.”

“When I think of Christmas I automatically think of the colors, smells, family, and the time to think of others,” Jessica said. “Snow was a bonus if we ever got it growing up. Now that we live in Baker, the snow is just the icing to the cake! Having four true seasons really helps with getting into the holiday spirit.”

They agree an ideal Christmas celebration would include unlimited time with family.

“The perfect Christmas to me would be our families all in one place for a week at least with lots of snow,” Jessica said.



HEARTFELT GIFTS

DO YOU HIT PANIC MODE WHEN IT COMES to finding the perfect gift for your friends and family? Is your go-to gift of choice gift cards? While I'm all for getting and giving gift cards, sometimes it's nice to give a more personal gift, one that shows you put some thought, care, and effort into it.

Explore ideas for making simple wreaths, unique decor, or one-of-a-kind ornaments.

Even if you don't have a single crafty or creative bone in your body, there are oodles of ways you can still give a personalized gift, from a cutting board to a watch made from Grandma's old silverware.

Give a gift made from the heart, even if it wasn't your hands that created it.

WELCOME HOME WREATH

There is nothing quite like opening the door and stepping into a home that is redolent with the delightful aromas of Christmas. I love it when holiday scents fill our home. It warms my heart and evokes a bit of nostalgia for treasured celebrations of the past.

This simple wreath (which can also be made as a garland) is a wonderful gift to give someone, and they'll long be grateful for the lovely fragrance it brings to their home. Don't forget to make one for you, too!

SUPPLIES:

5 oranges or apples
Parchment paper
Cookie sheet
Tapestry needle with large eye
44-inch length jute string
300 dried bay leaves
Cinnamon sticks

STEP 1: Slice apples or oranges into thin slices, about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick.

STEP 2: Place parchment on a large cookie sheet, then arrange fruit slices on parchment. Place in a 200°F oven for about 2 hours. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

STEP 3: Thread needle with jute and knot one end. Gently push needle through a bay leaf and slide to the end of the string. Keep adding leaves until you have about 2 inches of space filled.

STEP 4: Add a cinnamon stick (you may need to use a nail to poke a hole through the stick).

STEP 5: Add three fruit slices.

STEP 6: Repeat bay leaves, cinnamon stick, and fruit slices pattern.

STEP 7: When you reach about 36 inches on the string, tie a knot. If you want a garland, leave both ends free. For a wreath, tie knotted ends together and add a ribbon for hanging.



OTHER IDEAS FOR WREATHS

ROPE WREATH

A rope wreath is one of the simplest wreaths (and gifts) you can make. Just take an old rope no one is using (because if you take a favorite rope right out of the hands of a working cowboy, be prepared for a battle), wire it together with a piece of florist wire, then add a bow and some festive accents like jingle bells and greenery.

If you want, you could add a bandana, burlap, or non-holiday-patterned bow with a fun little cut-metal ornament or two so the wreath could be used year-round.



SHEET MUSIC WREATH

My awesome friend Becky made this gorgeous sheet music wreath for me from pages taken out of an old hymnal. You can use any type of sheet music, and books of music found at estate or yard sales are perfect for this project. To make the wreath, all you need is approximately fifty sheets of music. Fold each one into a cone and glue it. Cut a circle of cardboard (think pizza pan circumference for a wreath this size), then glue the cones to the cardboard, starting with the bottom layer and working your way around the circle, then repeating with the top layer. In the center add whatever decoration you like best. Glue a piece of jute or string on the back for a hanger and you're ready to give a beautiful gift!







RECIPES





APPETIZERS AND BEVERAGES

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON IS THE PERFECT TIME to connect with family and friends. From small, intimate gatherings of less than a dozen to a holiday bash for a hundred, easy-to-make, delicious recipes are an important part of a successful party.

When guests walk in your door, they are filled with eager anticipation, and they're most likely hungry, too!

Offer an assortment of appetizers and beverages that let them know they are welcome and about to be well fed in the warmth and comfort of your home.

Appetizers don't have to be complicated. Even simple recipes, crafted with good, fresh ingredients, can make a huge impact with your guests.

If young ones are attending the party, think about offering beverages that will make them smile.

Get your party started, and off on the right foot, with appetizers and beverages that set the tone for the fun to come.



BACON-WRAPPED POTATOES

There are so many deliciously delightful things you can wrap bacon around, like scallops, shrimp, even water chestnuts.

But living in a house with someone who considers water chestnuts strange and exotic food, I had to find something a little more everyday to encase with bacon.

Baby potatoes are the perfect answer! And they really are so good. Captain Cavedweller described this appetizer best: “It’s the perfect combo of smoky, crispy bacon outside and soft, tender spuds inside.”

Makes 2 dozen appetizers

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 teaspoon all-purpose seasoning

Salt and pepper

24 baby potatoes

12 slices bacon

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Mix oil, seasoning (I like to use Mrs. Dash), and salt and pepper in a bowl. Set aside. Wash the potatoes and pat dry. You can use any variety of baby or fingerling potatoes.

Dip potatoes in oil and seasoning mixture, then place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake for 10 minutes.

Cut bacon strips in half crosswise. Remove potatoes from oven and, using a fork, place potatoes on strips of bacon and roll up. Secure bacon ends with a toothpick and place back on baking sheet.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until bacon is crispy and potatoes are soft.

Serve with ranch dressing or your favorite dip.



BEST BACON DIP

I happened upon this recipe several years ago when I needed an appetizer for a small gathering of friends. After setting the dip on the table with a plate of crackers, I turned around to get something from the refrigerator. By the time I got back to the table, the bowl had nearly been scraped clean!

Needless to say, the dip has gained a popular following among our circle of friends over the years. I've never taken it to a party or potluck and had any leftovers, which is why I always make a little extra to leave at home.

Makes approximately 16 servings

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1 cup chopped tomatoes
- 1 cup crumbled cooked bacon

In a large mixing bowl, combine all ingredients. You can use your favorite cheese, but my go-to is Colby-Jack for this recipe.

It should be noted that if you use salad dressing instead of good old mayo, your dip will taste weird and the mayo police will take you out and have you horsewhipped.

Just kidding . . . mostly. Use mayonnaise. Pretty please.

The dip can be made a day ahead of time and actually tastes even better when the flavors have time to blend together. Keep refrigerated until ready to serve.

There are a variety of ways you can serve the dip. The first is in a pretty bowl with crackers or crostini bread on the side. Our cracker of choice is Ritz. They taste so good with the dip.

The second option for serving the dip is to core cherry, cocktail, or (my favorite) campari tomatoes, then spoon the dip into the tomatoes and serve. You could also serve it in lettuce cups.

No matter how you present it, this dip is sure to be the hit of any appetizer buffet.