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Truck Driver Received an Emotional Secret Santa Surprise

When truck driver Carl opened his trailer door to a news crew in 2022, he did not appear to be in the mood for company. The 72-year-old East Idaho resident initially seemed standoffish and skeptical of the unexpected correspondent and his camera, asking several questions about why they were visiting him. But when reporter Nate Eaton handed Carl an early Christmas gift from "an anonymous person," he warily relented and invited the crew inside.

When he opened the gift box, Carl found a stack of gift cards inside. He appeared surprised and puzzled, so Eaton explained that four gift cards were worth \$500 each for gas for his truck. Another \$2,000 was included on four additional cards from a local supermarket so he could purchase groceries. In shock, Carl responded, "Holy crap!"

He began to tear up at the unexpected generosity and shook the reporter's hand

in gratitude when Eaton announced he had one more surprise left. He then handed Carl a cashier's check worth \$10,000 to spend however he wanted. "Thank you so much," Carl replied emotionally before trailing off, "You don't know ..."

It's unclear how "East Idaho News" and their Secret Santa chose Carl as the subject of this generosity, but the selection was no accident. Carl had lost a leg above the knee 37 years prior but still worked four days a week at age 72, sometimes clocking 14-hour days.

He'd also suffered more recent setbacks; his wife died from a brain aneurysm in 2010. Meanwhile, he had three COVID-19 infections in less than three years. Despite worsening health and pain caused by his amputated lower leg, Carl continued to begin work at 2 a.m. while also making time to attend his grandchildren's sports games.



Carl explained the gift meant he could finally retire.

He repeatedly requested the identity of his Secret Santa, but "East Idaho News" refused to say. So, Carl instead thanked his anonymous gift-giver through the camera. His hard exterior melted away, leaving only gratitude and awe behind. In his last words in the broadcast, Carl promised to "pay it forward" by finding a way to help someone else.



Passing Down More Than Just Ornaments

The Importance of Planning for Sentimental Items

I love decorating for Christmas! The twinkling lights, the festive ornaments, and the scent of fresh pine evoke cherished memories and create a magical atmosphere. It allows me to spread holiday cheer and share the spirit of togetherness with loved ones. However, what truly makes the holiday season special for me is the Christmas ornaments on our tree — each one holds precious memories, love, and tradition.

Christmas ornaments, in their various forms, have played an integral role in my family's holiday celebrations. My mom started this tradition by buying each family member one Hallmark ornament each year. But my favorites were the set of dancing Santas that my dad and I found at a "blue light special" at Kmart one year. I delighted in their whimsical charm. Over the years, those dancing Santas became worn and weathered, and we eventually had to let them go.

A few years back, I found myself reminiscing about the dancing Santas and decided to search for them on eBay. To my delight, I discovered I could purchase not just replacements for myself, but also for my brother and my kids. Now, as those dancing Santas twirl on our tree each year, we all remember my dad and the cherished moments we shared.

Over the years, our Christmas tree has become a showcase of our family's journey through time, each ornament a testament to our changing tastes and interests. Although my kids have outgrown some of these ornaments, their sentimental value is what is so special. The ornaments serve as a heartwarming connection to the past and a symbol of the love and warmth of the holiday season.

I bring home an ornament from every vacation. It offers a unique way to commemorate my adventure without cluttering my home with souvenirs. It's a delightful annual ritual to unwrap these ornaments, take a trip down memory lane, and reflect on the experiences that have enriched my life. One of the standouts of my collection, a set of hand-painted wooden ornaments, hails from a memorable trip to Puerto Rico with my best friend. They perfectly encapsulated the vibrant spirit of the island and have since become treasured keepsakes for me.

The holidays are a time for creating and cherishing memories, sharing love, and celebrating the traditions that warm our hearts. Amid all the festive preparations, let us remember that other aspects of our lives deserve careful consideration, such as our estate planning. While Christmas ornaments are cherished keepsakes, other items of personal property also hold sentimental value. You must clearly outline your wishes regarding the distribution of these items in your estate plan.

Just as we lovingly preserve and pass down our treasured ornaments, we can also plan for the legacy we leave behind. By updating and maintaining your estate plan, you can alleviate potential confusion and disagreements among your loved ones. The more you can prevent headaches for your loved ones in the future, the better.

Many estate plans enable you to write a memo, separate from the will or the trust, where you can designate the recipients of your special items of personal property. As you take time to enjoy the holidays with your loved ones, this would be a great time to review (or complete) your tangible personal property memo!

So, as we embark on another year of holiday decorating and ornament hanging, let us also take a moment to reflect on the treasures we hold dear, both the tangible and the intangible. From twinkling lights to cherished ornaments, from the joy of tradition to the warmth of family bonds, the holiday season offers a multitude of reasons to celebrate and cherish the memories we create together. Happy holidays and Merry Christmas!

- Angela Klenk



Scan the QR code on this page for a blank "tangible personal property memo" that you can use to update your gifts of personal property. Let us know if you have any questions — we are happy to help!

MONEY WORRIES KEEPING YOU UP AT NIGHT?

EXPLORE EXPERT FINANCIAL ADVICE
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

No matter the economy, time of year, or stage of someone’s life, money is on people’s minds. According to a July 2023 report from LendingTree, “56% of Americans say they’re worried about their future financial situations, with 35% losing sleep over money.” The study further breaks down the percentage of this financial fear per generation. It found that over 50% of every age group, from Gen Z to baby boomers, were worried about their finances. Gen Xers (ages 43–58) had the highest majority at 61%.

So, can we do anything about our financial situations, or will this fear haunt us forever? Of course, many resources advise cutting back expenses and saving more, but with the average American holding \$21,800 in personal debt, doing so is easier said than done. Luckily, financial experts who understand these issues have written books containing far more effective, realistic, and actionable advice than “spend less, save more.”

This holiday season, you may find yourself with more downtime than usual — a long plane ride ahead of you to visit family or time off your job. Whatever the reason, the extra time is the perfect opportunity to read the advice from these financial experts and take control of your financial present and future. We also understand that the financial issues a 20-year-old faces are far different than those a 65-year-old might face. So, to help you find the most effective book for your situation, we’re giving you the best books to read this holiday season, categorized by life stage.

Young Adults (20s and 30s): ‘The Total Money Makeover’ by Dave Ramsey

When young adults are first entering the workforce and beginning to build their careers, every penny counts. Wide-sweeping advice about investing in real estate or the top stocks to buy may not always be realistic, especially with student loans, rent, or a first mortgage on someone’s plate.



“The Total Money Makeover” by Dave Ramsey, a New York Times bestseller, is all about practical advice centered around the beginning of someone’s financial journey. He teaches readers how to successfully dig themselves out of debt, how to create a budget that doesn’t leave them starving, tips for creating an emergency fund, and more.

Middle-Aged Adults (40s and Early 50s): ‘Your Money or Your Life’ by Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez

By this point in most people’s lives, they’ve established a career and have regularly occurring costs they’ve learned to manage. But isn’t there more to life than that?

This book is for those who want to break out of that monotony and finally achieve financial freedom. However, the most significant benefit of this book is that it helps people who have already been stuck on the financial hamster wheel step off and look at what they want in life, set goals for those dreams, and use their finances to achieve them.

Pre-Retirees (Late 50s, Early 60s): ‘The Four Pillars of Investing’ by William J. Bernstein

Individuals in this age range can see retirement on the horizon. They’ve built their career over several decades and likely have a retirement account waiting for them. However, the fear becomes the thought of running out of money once the steady stream of work income is gone. In that case, setting up a diversified portfolio is a good idea.

William J. Bernstein, dubbed “a hero to frustrated investors everywhere,” is an American financial theorist and neurologist. In “The Four Pillars of Investing,” he uses what he knows about people, our brains, and investing to create a practical and easy-to-read guide for anyone looking to start their investing journey and create that perfect portfolio.

Retirees (65 and older): ‘How to Retire Happy, Wild, and Free’ by Ernie J. Zelinski

At this point, work is in life’s rearview mirror, but that doesn’t mean money is, too. But retirement isn’t just about someone watching a bank account to see how much they have. Retirees want to do the things they love, like the trips they’ve been waiting to take or the hobbies they’ve been meaning to start.

Ernie J. Zelinski, an international bestselling author and life coach, agrees. In his book, “How to Retire Happy, Wild, and Free,” he offers advice on making the most out of retirement, including managing finances while pursuing hobbies and passions.



SKILLET CHICKEN POT PIE

Inspired by TheModernProper.com



Ingredients

- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup sliced celery
- 2 cups sliced carrots
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 1/2 tsp celery seed
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 cup milk
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 2 cups peas
- 4 cups cooked chicken
- 1 package frozen puff pastry, thawed
- 1 egg

Directions

- Heat oven to 425 F.
- In 12-inch cast-iron skillet over medium heat, melt butter, then add onion, celery, and carrots. Sauté for 5 minutes.
- Add flour, salt, pepper, celery seed, and garlic powder to pan and stir. Sauté for 2 minutes. Slowly incorporate milk.
- Add stock and bring to a simmer, whisking until mixture thickens. Add peas and chicken.
- Roll out pastry sheet into 16-inch square on floured surface. Cut into 3-inch squares and place overlapping onto chicken mixture.
- In a small bowl, whisk egg with 1 tbsp water. Brush egg over pastry and place in oven for 25 minutes or until golden and bubbling.

TAKE A BREAK



Chimney
Christmas
Gifts
Igloo
Mistletoe
Ornament
Parka
Reindeer
Sleigh
Snowman
Wreath
Yuletide

The Guard Squirrel Who Went Nuts on a Burglar

Anyone robbing a house must know they’re getting into a dangerous situation. But the teenager who burgled Adam Pearl’s Meridian, Idaho, home had no idea what consequences were in store. Many homeowners have a guard dog, but Pearl got his home security from Joey, his pet squirrel.

One day in 2017, Pearl came home and saw that something seemed amiss. Joey was excited, and the doors he’d left closed were now open. After finding scratches on the lock of his gun safe, Pearl knew there’d been a robbery and called the police.

Officer Ashley Turner couldn’t help but notice Joey’s presence in the house but didn’t believe he was connected with the case — at first. A few hours later, Turner returned to Pearl’s house with his missing belongings and a story to tell. She’d partially identified the perpetrator by the suspicious scratches on his hands.

During questioning, Turner said the burglar confessed to the home invasion and explained why he’d left sooner than intended: Joey attacked while he was attempting to break into the gun safe. Unsurprisingly, the rodent’s violence was frightening. “He wasn’t expecting to have, you know, a squirrel come flying out of nowhere at him,” Officer Turner said. The thief reported that leaving was the only way to stop Joey’s aggression.

After learning of his bravery, Pearl rewarded Joey with his favorite candy, Whoppers. But he then had a difficult choice ahead. When Joey was still a tiny baby, Pearl and his wife had taken in the abandoned squirrel. They had intended to release Joey back into the wild when spring came, but they were no longer sure.



Ultimately, they let Joey decide. After he started playing with other squirrels through the home’s sliding glass door, the Pearls installed a cat door so he could come and go as he pleased. Joey spent several weeks outdoors with other squirrels by day and returned to the Pearls by night. Eventually, he requested one final scratch behind the ears before disappearing into an apple tree and leaving the Pearls’ house behind forever.

Though Joey returned to the great outdoors to live with his kind, his legend is a warning to humans. When you break into someone’s home, you never know what you might find.