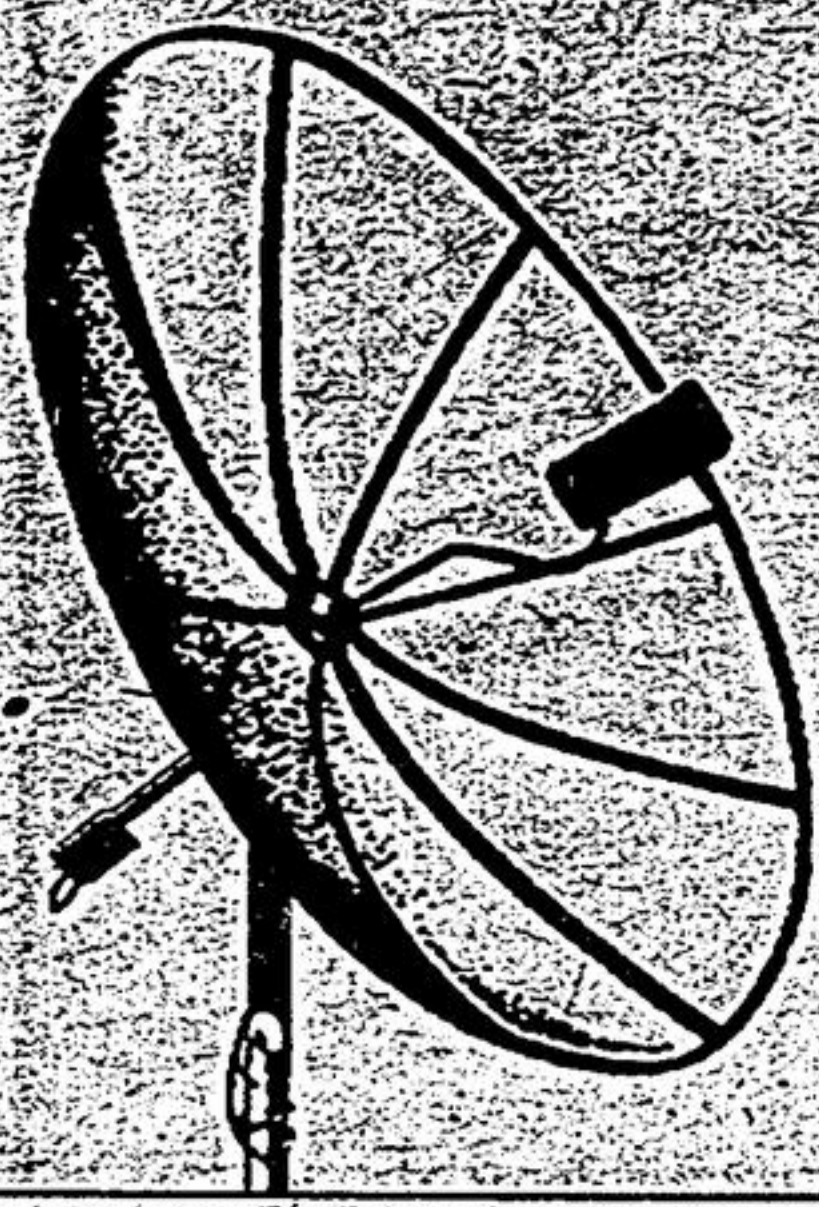


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Outdoors

A tale for the nature-lover

ART BRIGGS-JUDE
Correspondent

Not too long ago, amidst all the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping, I stopped in at the village barbershop.

While waiting to get my ears lowered, as is the seasonal custom, several of the locals got to talking about Christmas presents.

"What does one buy for the sportsman who has everything?" a tallish fellow with sandy hair asked.

There was a long pause until a younger lad in a sheepskin vest piped up: "Nobody has everything."

"Well, you know what I mean," the sandy-haired one explained. "This brother-in-law of mine is a real outdoor nut - hunter, fisherman, camper, the whole bit. Not only that, he has everything in the way of the latest equipment."

The conversation see-sawed back and forth while each of us offered our own suggestions.

"It's all my sister's fault," Sandy stat-

ed bluntly. "She figures because we fish and hunt a lot together, I can come up with something different for him. I tell you, it gets harder every year."

An older man, wearing thick glasses and clad in a heavy wool sweater, leaned forward and spoke in a deliberate way.

"How about getting him a moose horn?" he said.

All eyes suddenly turned as if on cue and even the barber stopped cutting for a moment.

"A moose horn?" the sandy-haired one blurted out. "Naw, I don't think so." Most of us nodded in agreement, figuring we had that one well shot down.

Then the older fellow spoke again: "Listen, a birch-bark moose horn is the ideal gift for any outdoor person and I'll tell you why."

The man rose to his feet and, using his hands, began to demonstrate how the birch horn could be plugged with a kerchief and made to hold water like a pail for bailing, or turned upside down to form a rain hat.

"It's also a good makeshift basket for wild apples or mushrooms in the fall. Or, pull out the cloth and you've got a funnel," he said.

The old fellow was really wound up by this time and nobody in the room dared to slow him down.

"Why, I remember one we had around our house," he said thoughtfully. "It was used for everything from calling cows to calling us kids. They carry the sound real well, you know."

"My Uncle Bert once made a game for us kids, tossing walnuts into that inverted horn," he said, his face wrinkling with the memory.

I don't know how many more uses the old fellow had for a moose horn, because as I was leaving the shop, he was still extolling its virtues.

"And there's more thought in a gift that's handcrafted, you know," the old man's voice rose again above the sound of the electric clippers.

Taking one farewell glance, I noticed the barber cringe again as I stepped onto the street and quickly closed the door.

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