

Not a Creature

I don't understand why there aren't more dogs in holiday lore. If there were shepherds, surely there were sheep dogs. We've got a one-horse sleigh, a partridge in a pear tree, and reindeer galore but not a single dog—not even when people spring from their beds to see what's the matter. If strangers were prancing on your roof, you'd expect barking, yet not a single woof in all 14 stanzas. And so it goes throughout the seasonal canon. Chinese tradition has the Year of the Dog, but otherwise pooches get short shrift.

I say let's give the dog its due. Let's put some wag in those winter tales.

In my family we still talk about the December night in 1962 when cousin Benjie arrived with his new Dalmatian puppy. No sooner was that dog in the door than our two Great Danes gave chase. The three of them hightailed it through the house, across the dining room and down the hall, scattering rugs as they took the corner into the family room, where the Christmas tree stood in all its splendor. There each dog paused just long enough to lift a leg on the gifts arrayed beneath the trembling boughs. Then they dashed off again, 'round and 'round 'til someone finally corralled them in the kitchen. For the grownups who rewrapped every damp gift, this was a night to forget, yet it lives on across the generations.

Then there's the one about "The Card," with my brother and me smiling 'til it hurt, each of us clutching one dog by the withers while our poor father tried to get just one decent shot.

I admit, these memories of mine are small stuff, and irreverent, but they're a start. We can't be the only family with dog stories, not now when every canine from here to Canaan has moved indoors. Humans even keep wolves and foxes for pets nowadays. Gentle or fierce, these creatures are part of our lives and traditions.



Share your dog story
or picture here.

Some people say they don't like dogs, but to me that's akin to not liking innocence, not liking merriment. For most dogs, every new day is a gift, another chance to gladden hearts, bring comfort, and nuzzle all the good little boys and girls who sneak turkey to them under the table.

Make a year-end gift to
your local animal shelter.
Here's one of the best:
San Francisco SPCA

If there's a dog in your life, why not pause right now—stop shopping, baking and wrapping for a moment—and give your poodle or pug a hug. (One more thing: this year, why not forego the clip-on antlers. Your best friend will appreciate the gesture.)

Dog or no dog, as we celebrate this season and unleash a new year, may companionship come your way. May you sing with the sirens. May you dance in the snow. May you give and receive the best present of all: the wondrous gift of unconditional love.