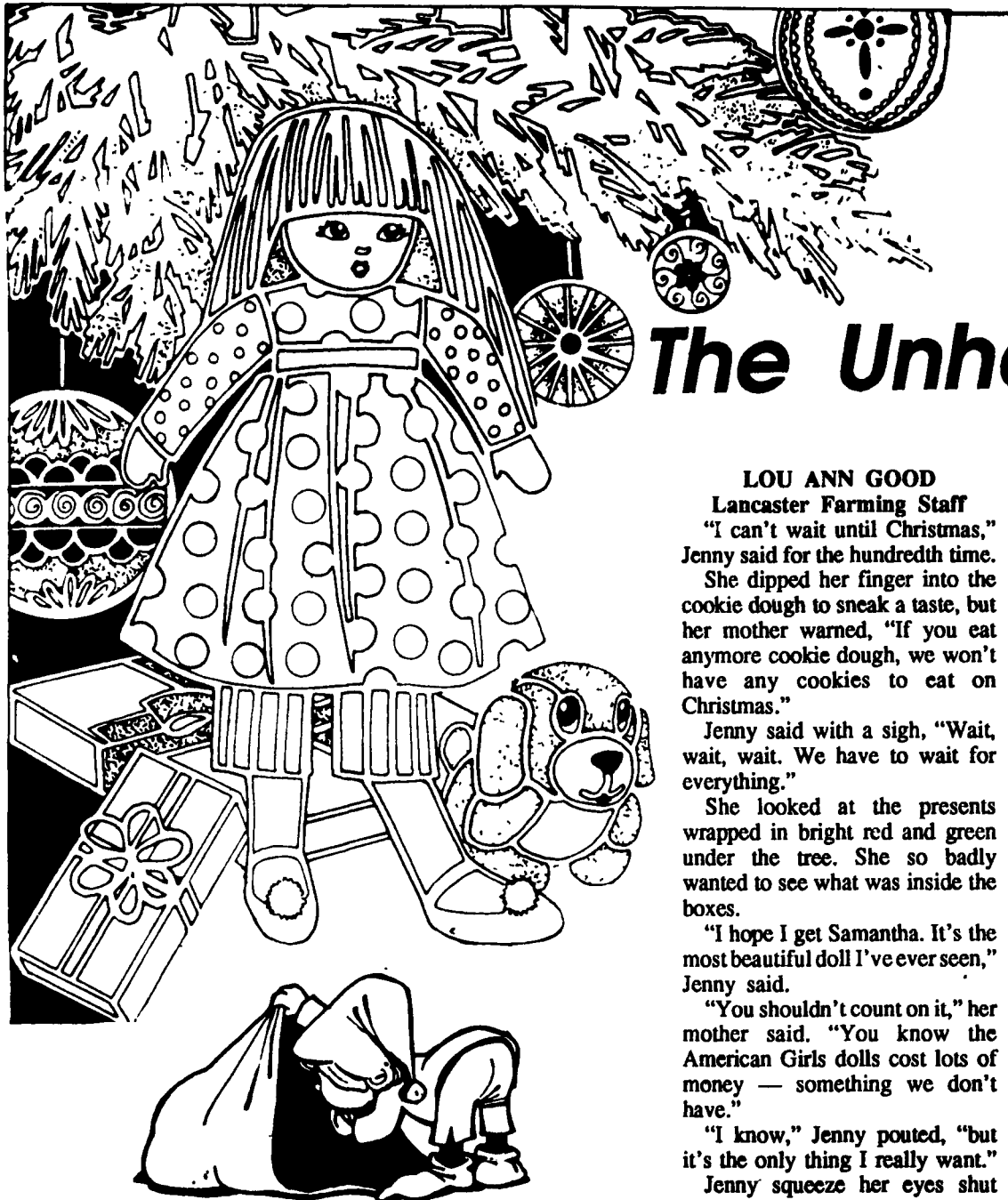


# Kids Korner



## The Unhappy Christmas

A True Story

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

"I can't wait until Christmas," Jenny said for the hundredth time.

She dipped her finger into the cookie dough to sneak a taste, but her mother warned, "If you eat anymore cookie dough, we won't have any cookies to eat on Christmas."

Jenny said with a sigh, "Wait, wait, wait. We have to wait for everything."

She looked at the presents wrapped in bright red and green under the tree. She so badly wanted to see what was inside the boxes.

"I hope I get Samantha. It's the most beautiful doll I've ever seen," Jenny said.

"You shouldn't count on it," her mother said. "You know the American Girls dolls cost lots of money — something we don't have."

"I know," Jenny pouted, "but it's the only thing I really want." Jenny squeeze her eyes shut until she could envision beautiful Samantha with her long lush hair and sparkling eyes.

Jenny could almost feel Samantha in her arms. If she didn't get Samantha, she didn't know how she could ever be happy on Christmas Day.

All evening, Jenny thought about Samantha even though her older brother Derek called her a baby as she paged through the doll catalog.

The next morning, Derek came into Jenny's bedroom and whispered, "Quick. Get out of bed. I'll show you what you are getting for Christmas."

Jenny sat up immediately. "How do you know what I'm getting," she demanded.

"Come on," Derek ordered. "Mom and Dad are in the barn. I know where they hid the presents."

"They're under the tree," Jenny protested.

Derek glared at Jenny. "Don't be silly. Those presents aren't the big ones they got for us. They hid the other presents because they wanted to surprise us."

Jenny followed her brother to her parents' bedroom. Derek already had the closet door opened and pulled out some boxes hidden underneath a stack of blankets.

There was Samantha, smiling at her beneath the cellophane covered box.

Jenny caught her breath in amazement and reached out to touch the lovely doll. Then her hand slowly dropped to her side. "I can't get her out of the box until Christmas."

"Don't be silly," her brother sneered. "I know how to open the boxes and close them up again so that no one will ever know they were opened."

"But... but... it wouldn't be right," Jenny said.

"Don't worry. Mom and dad will be in the barn for hours. They'll never know," Derek said as he pried open a box that held the motorized car he wanted.

Jenny shook her head. "But Mom always said, 'No peeking before Christmas.'"

But Derek was already inserting batteries into his car. Jenny watched in amazement as the car scooted across the room. Then she looked back at the packaged doll.

She was so beautiful — more lovely than she had ever dreamed from looking at the catalog.

Jenny hesitated.

"Open the box. You can do it," Derek said without looking up from operating his car.

Jenny looked at the doll but she couldn't help feeling a bit guilty. She knew her parents would never approve of what Derek and she were doing.

"I'm going to wait until Christmas," she said.

"Don't you say anything, Tattletale," her brother warned. "You looked so you'll get into trouble too."

Jenny walked back to her bedroom. "At least I know that I'm getting Samantha for Christmas," she whispered to herself.

The warm fuzzy comfort she expected from knowing didn't come over her.

By the time Mom and Dad returned from the barn, Derek had safely packed the boxes away. Just like Derek had promised, Mom and Dad never suspected.

There were only a few days left before Christmas. Jenny helped her mother clean the house and set the table. She looked forward to Grandma coming. She thought about Samantha, but she never said a word about her to anyone.

On Christmas morning, Jenny and Derek hurried down to unwrap their presents. Under the Christmas tree, Jenny saw the oblong present that held Samantha.

"You may open this present first," her mother said as she handed the box to Jenny.

Slowly Jenny removed the wrapping. She wanted to act surprised, but it was hard to act surprised when she had already seen the beautiful doll.

"I can't believe it," her mother said. "I thought she'd tear open the box."

"Oh, thank you. Just what I wanted," Jenny said as she took Samantha out of the box.

"I thought she'd act a lot more excited than that," Mother said to Grandma.

Jenny couldn't help but notice the sadness in her mother's voice. "I am really excited," Jenny insisted. She was happy to get Samantha but why did she feel so sad at the same time? she wondered.

She was so busy thinking about her mother's disappointment that she hadn't notice Derek unwrap his present until her father said, "I can't believe this. The car is broken."

Mother said, "But I know that the car was fine when we bought it."

"Yes," Daddy said, "I had checked it out. I know that it worked."

Jenny looked at Derek.

"Well, we'll have to take it back to the store and exchange it because it doesn't work," Derek said.

Jenny remembered that the car had worked when Derek had first opened the box. She wondered what had happened.

"Derek," Daddy's voice was stern. "You played with this car before, didn't you?"

"How could I?" Derek asked innocently.

Daddy looked at Jenny. She burst into tears.

Slowly the whole sordid story came out.

"Well," Daddy said. "There's nothing to do to change it now. But I feel so disappointed that you would disobey and search for the toys. It isn't any fun to give gifts that you already played with."

Jenny hung her head. It was a sad Christmas. It could have been such a happy one.

"I will never peek at my presents again," she promised. And she never did.



## Smart Stuff

WITH TWIG WALKINGSTICK

Can I burn wrapping paper in the fireplace?

Can you? Yes Should you? Well, no

Colorful, shiny wrapping papers used during the holidays don't burn with your normal yellow flame, but with intense colors like blue and green

Those flames come from chemical dyes and heavy metals — like iron and magnesium — used to give paper their pretty looks. The chemically treated colors release fumes into your closed house when burned. Breathing in those fumes isn't good for your body. (Sure, you need iron and magnesium as part of your daily diet, but they aren't good for you to breathe.)

Burning wrapping paper in fireplaces also sends ash up the chimney and contributes to "particulate pollution." That's what scientists call the dirty stuff in the sky that moisture builds up around. The ash from burning paper is similar to the dust that covers the earth when a volcano erupts. Tiny, tiny particles then cloud the sky.

So enjoy your holidays, but keep the wrapping paper out of the fireplace!

Scientifically yours,

Twig

