



Issue 54, December 2024

Hello Steve R,

Put on some [Mariah Carey](#) (or maybe not), grab an [espresso martini](#), and settle in for a few minutes because once again, it's time for the...

Annual Notes From the Shop **Holiday Extravaganza!**



A couple years ago, I opened the extravaganza with some [Holiday Anti-jokes](#). Last year, we had [Dad Jokes with the Wrong Punchlines](#). Well, I hope you've had some strong eggnog, because this year, I thought I would ask GPT to combine the two concepts for...

~~ Holiday Jokes that AI Thinks Are Funny ~~

(But kinda are)

Why did the candy cane refuse to go to the party?

Because it couldn't handle the emotional baggage of peppermint politics.

Why did the bells stop ringing?

Because they joined a silent meditation retreat in Vermont.

Why are Christmas trees so bad at sewing?

Because they don't have hands... but they're excellent at interpretive dance.

What's Santa's favorite kind of cookie?

Oatmeal raisin. No, wait — he's actually allergic to joy.

Why do reindeer make great comedians?

They don't. They're reindeer. Stop pressuring them.



Enjoy the Gift of Woodworking

To celebrate the holidays, I'm offering 20% off every course registration! If you've been thinking about joining, there's no better time than right now.

[The Weekend Woodworker](#) features 6 practical projects for inside and outside your home. It's perfect for complete beginners or those looking to sharpen their skills.

[Powered Up](#) will advance your woodworking with 5 stunning, larger projects. It's suitable for ambitious beginners and seasoned woodworkers alike.

[The Weekend Workshop](#) guides woodworkers of all skill levels through transforming their space into an efficient, organized workshop. It includes 15 space-saving projects, layout tips, detailed plans, and more.

Simply click the links above **before December 15th** and the promotion

will be applied automatically!

Interested in gifting the course or have a question? Write to my team at team@theweekendwoodworker.com for assistance.

Grandpa and the Telegraph

In last year's Holiday Extravaganza, I told the story of [working at a cinema](#) when I was 17 and how that brief period of time shaped so much of who I would become. Christmas that year was also meaningful and memorable.

One of the most interesting people in my life was my grandfather. Born in 1911, he witnessed a lifetime of turbulent change and took it all in stride. As a teen, he began working as a telegraph lineman, repairing lines throughout Indiana. He picked up Morse code very quickly by ear and was soon asked to become a telegrapher for Western Union, sending and receiving telegrams from all over the country and presumably, the world.

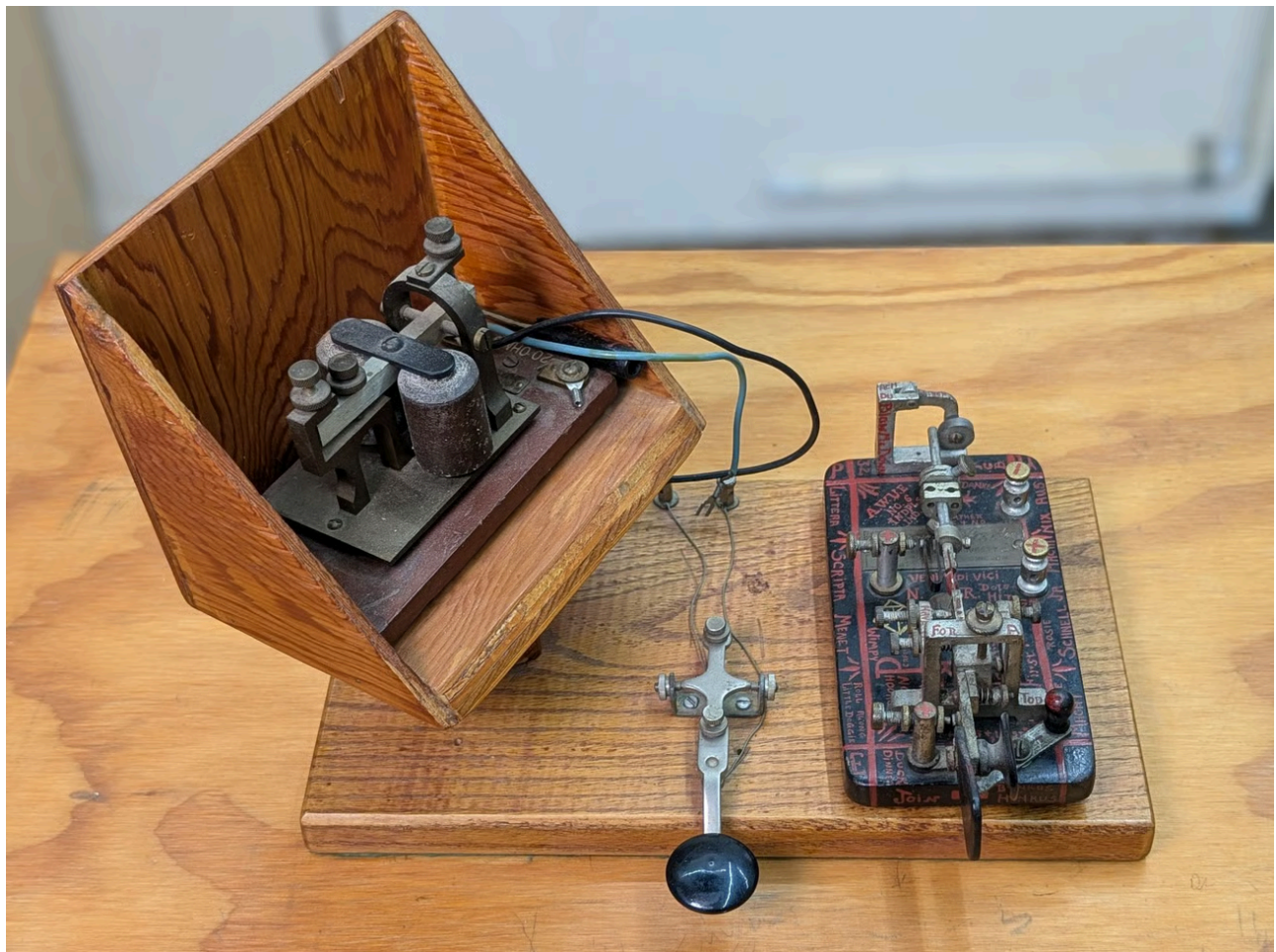


Grandpa about 20 years old

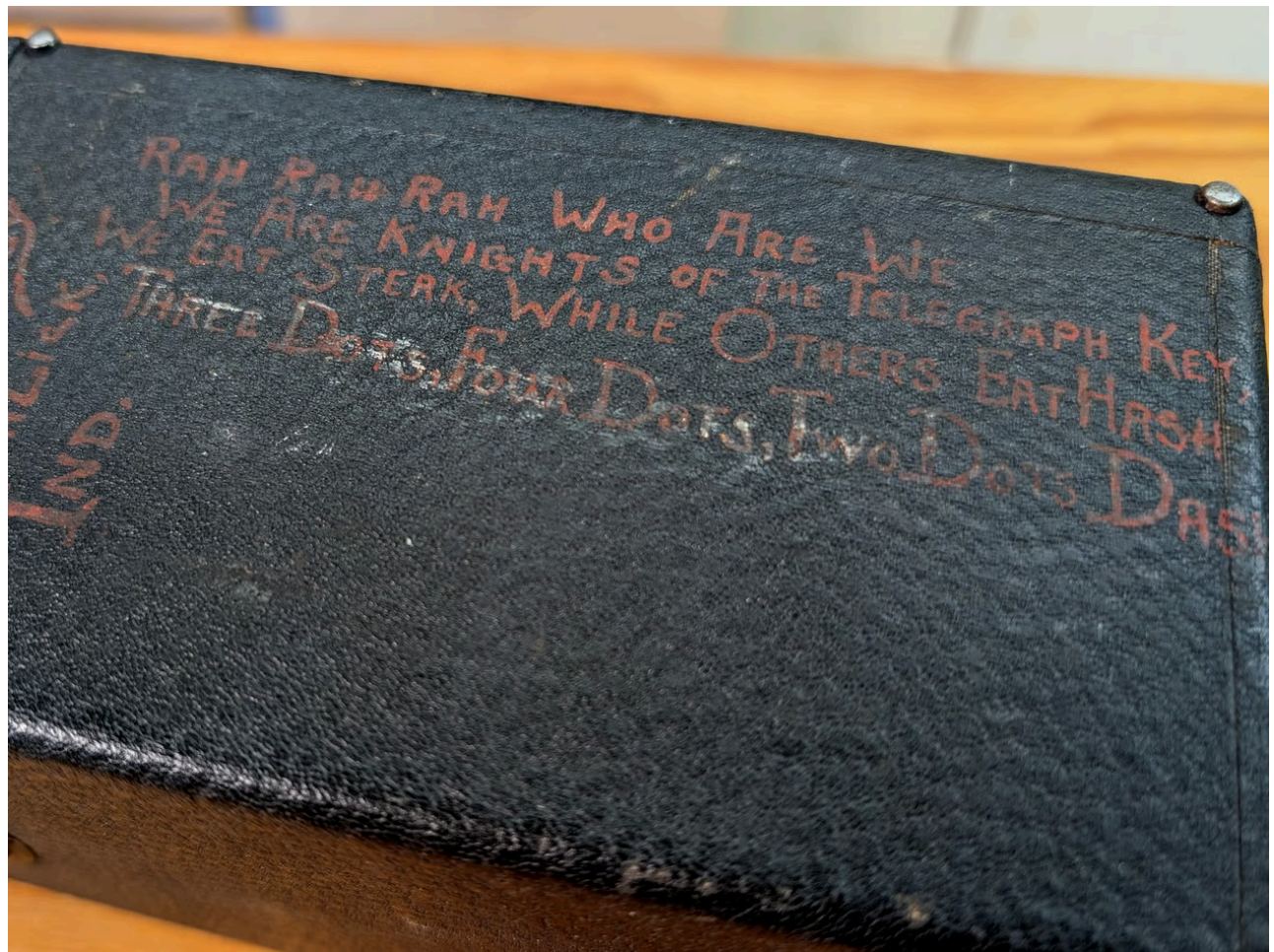
Telegraph technology was well established and still quite common by this time but would be mostly replaced by the telephone by the mid-20th century. Still, the telegraph would hold a special place in Grandpa's heart for the rest of his life. He loved to boast about how people would have to ask him to speak slower because he could send messages faster than people could hear and process them.

A typical telegraph key machine you might be familiar with had a bar that you would press down with your finger, quickly for a "dot" and slightly longer for a "dash." Each letter of the alphabet had an assigned combination of dots, dashes and spaces, and you would spell out sentences with this seemingly laborious method. I remember listening to Grandpa beep-beep-beeping; I couldn't tell a dot from a dash, let alone the brief spaces between words and even letters. Telegraphers used shortcuts to speed up the process, not unlike texting (especially akin to the early days of flip-phone texting) where we use acronyms and initialisms and sometimes omit vowels. Grandpa would have fully embraced emojis. He was an amazing communicator, online and offline.

A standard telegraph wasn't fast enough, so he used a "bug" to send messages. This machine had a key that operated side to side and would send a signal in both motions. So by making very small wrist movements, you could more than double your sending speed. You could also adjust it so a single movement would bounce the key making two signals, kind of like a drumstick bouncing on a snare. Not only that, but skilled users such as my grandfather would learn to do this with their left hand so they could transcribe the incoming message with their right hand and not have to keep setting down their pen. His bug was a work of art: He mounted it to a custom wooden station he made and adorned it all with his own personal graffiti. It's a simple but precise machine, with a lot of micro-adjustments for the user to customize.



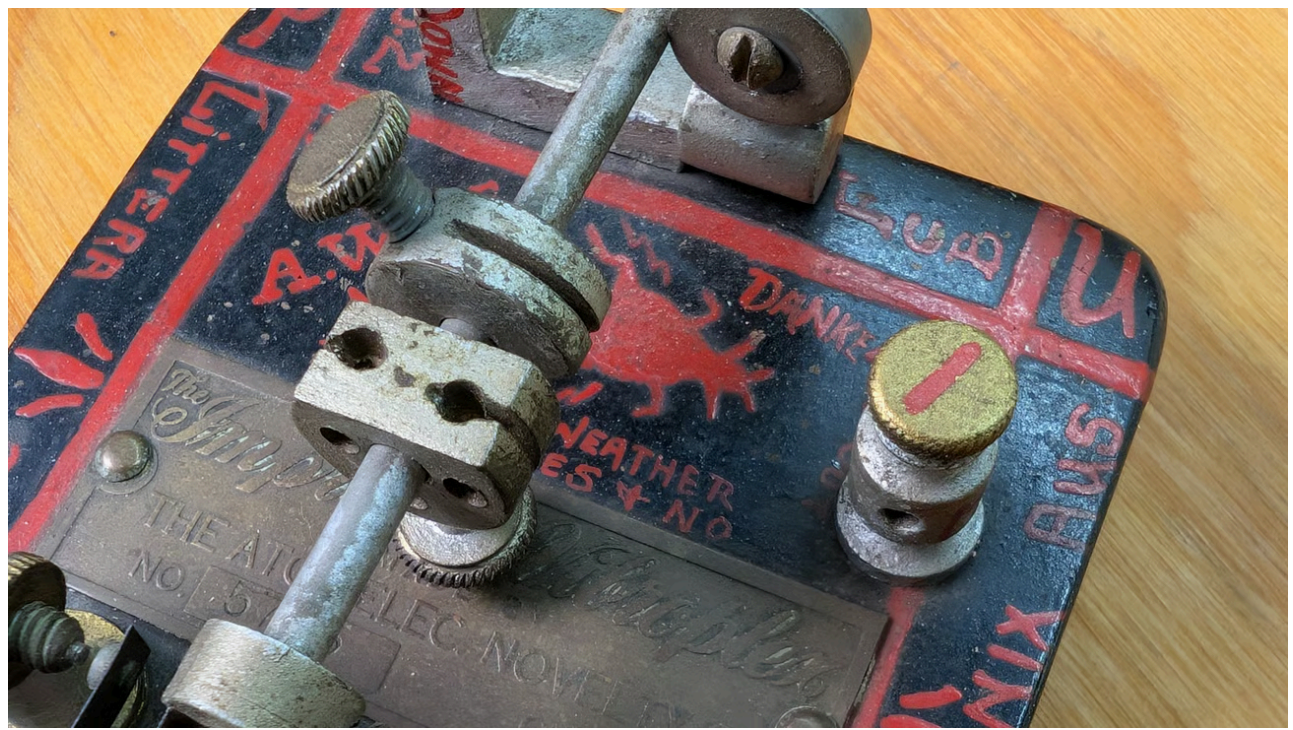
This is a sounding box. The elevated part would reflect the clicking sounds. The wires attached to a battery. Mounted to the board is a standard key which makes a click every time you press it. The machine on the right is the "bug," which was operated with a finger and thumb, side to side.



“Rah rah rah. Who are we. We are knights of the telegraph key. We eat steak while others eat hash. Three dots, four dots, two dots, dash.” (s-h-i-t)



Some of his messages are lost to time.



I think he would appreciate that I paint my tools.

Two of my favorite stories about Grandpa's telegraphy career were told by my grandmother, both giving insight into his character. First, her tale about the time they went on a double date with Grandpa's telegrapher buddy and his girlfriend. It seems the two coders would secretly chat with each other (presumably about their girls) by tapping on the table, a practice Grandma always remained a little salty about.

The second story she told was about how he was not allowed to enlist in the military during WWII because he was needed stateside as

some sort of classified telegrapher. He worked 365 days a year for three years, often having to sleep in the telegraph office since there was such a shortage of people. One of his duties was to receive incoming messages about young servicemen who had lost their lives fighting overseas, and he held the responsibility of communicating this information to the families, in person if feasible. At night, he would wake up in cold sweat and walk the empty streets for hours. Sometimes Grandma would go fetch him and walk him back home.

He never talked to me about either of those stories, confining his love for the telegraph to the craft, the technology, and the people he met and chatted with. It was a dying technology that became mostly obsolete and abandoned him after the war, leaving him working in chemical engineering for the rest of his working years.

The only times Grandpa ever said no to me were when I asked him on several occasions to teach me Morse code and how to use his telegraph. He said it was a waste of time to teach a dead skill. In fact, those were the only times I remember him becoming visibly tearful, so I stopped pressing the issue. He had a lot of emotions tied to that machine.

I was often told I inherited many traits from my grandfather — his artistic skills, his humor and personality, his love for writing — but today I mostly appreciate his communication skills. He enjoyed talking to people and found the good in everyone. It didn't matter where we were; he would strike up a witty conversation with anyone. He was infinitely fascinated by people and loved asking them about what they were doing. No matter where we went, supermarket, ball park, auto mechanic...he always wandered off to chat with strangers with genuine curiosity. I remember one Christmas Eve my grandma sent us to the supermarket to pick up a roast (she loved making roasts) and we returned over an hour later because Grandpa had a lengthy discussion with the butcher. Also, we may or may not have told my grandma about our side trip to the ice cream parlor where he had to get the inside scoop (lol) on ice cream from the expert behind the counter.

I loved woodworking in Grandpa's garage workshop, building small projects, but mostly just puttering around with him. He was extremely well organized (not a trait I fully inherited) and loved to show off his collection of over a hundred pliers which were neatly arranged on a custom wooden rack. Not woodworking tools, but he had all kinds of them from back when he was a linesman and a telegrapher. I would ask him about the purpose for each one and he would tell me vivid stories surrounding them, usually an anecdote related to someone he knew or had worked with. He seemed to recall every person he ever met.



I have a BMW drawer filled with my grandpa's pliers.

The most interesting thing about his pliers (and all his tools for that matter) was that he engraved them all with his initials in American Morse code. Five dots for P. One dot, space, two dots for R. He used a hacksaw and represented dots with vertical lines. Thus, ||||| | ||.



Grandpa's personalized tools with his Morse coded initials

I got two gifts from my grandfather on Christmas when I was 17. The first was a brand new toolbox filled with an assortment of hand tools, and, of course, a few of his pliers. It was the first toolbox I ever owned and I still have it. I used it professionally when I did maintenance work for the cinema chain; I felt like a big shot walking into a concession stand with that big metal beast, even though most of the tools I used were in my tool belt. *“Stand back, I’m an untrained professional here to repair your popcorn popper!”*



The big brown beast I got for Christmas and used for many years.

The second gift he gave me: his bug. He told me he wanted me to have it and take care of it because no one else was interested in it. It was the most personal gift he could have given me. I knew how much he loved it and loved demonstrating it to me when I visited Grandma and him. I remember sensing the emotions he felt as I opened the gift, almost as if he finally found a fitting conclusion to his legacy as a telegrapher. To my grandma and my dad, and the rest of my family, this machine was simply a tool of his trade. They didn't get it. He needed to communicate something very personal about himself that he wouldn't have with anyone else who wasn't genuinely curious and interested. For some people, even those skilled with language and communication, love can be a difficult thing to express with words.

He died just a few years later and I never got to hear him use the telegraph again. Twenty years later, after my grandma died, my dad found Grandpa's toolbox and gave it to me. It smelled like work and grease and brought back a flood of memories seeing it. It contained tools he used for working around the house, but also artifacts of his

telegraph days. I removed a few tools from the box, but it never felt right to disturb the rest.



I'm sure his toolbox is 100 years old by now. I have no idea why he painted "J" and "J" in two places on the lid.

Every once in a while I will take out the bug from storage and recall those moments with him. It's a reminder of a man who showed me the power of curiosity and human connection. He was a master at communication who I'm pretty sure would be on YouTube if he were alive today, telling stories about telegraphy and the people he met.

This holiday season, take time to think about the legacy you will leave behind. Do you want to be remembered as the person who bickered with strangers on Twitter or a person who expressed compassion toward strangers in the real world? Do you want to be thought of as a person who was bitter and cynical of fellow humans, or a person who was able to find the beauty and wonder of the world, even in dark times? It's never too late to change your perspective. Telegraph your love and intentions to your friends and family now.

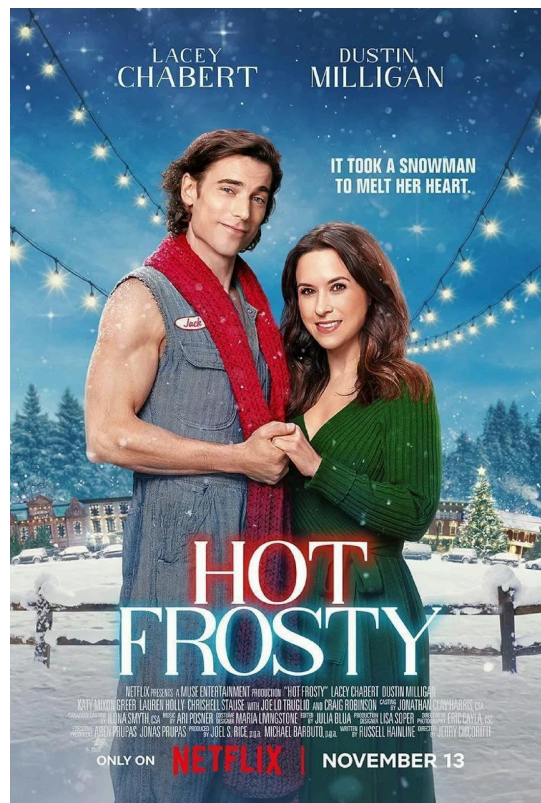
— Steve



The Christmas Movie Section

One of my favorite ice-breaker questions to ask strangers this time of year is, “What’s your favorite Christmas movie?” It’s a question almost everyone has an answer for, and I love how passionate many people are about some very specific movie that, for whatever reason, they turn to year after year. The must-see movies I ritually watch every year are last year’s newsletter mentions, [Die Hard](#), [Elf](#), and [Anna and the Apocalypse](#). [Christmas](#), [Bloody Christmas](#) is my newest tradition because I have a soft spot for evil ax-wielding robotic Santa flicks.

If Christmas mayhem movies aren’t your thing, I’d like to recommend one of the most inexplicable movies I’ve seen in a while, [Hot Frosty](#). You’ve probably seen it trending on Netflix.



For a person who has adored schlock cinema his whole life, *Hot Frosty* has the potential of becoming a cult classic, like *The Room*, or *Plan Nine From Outer Space*. It’s unintentionally awkward and the story makes no sense. It's full of cringe, embarrassing innuendos and older women lusting over an emaciated snowman-turned-into-human hunk

with the mind of a child who knows how to order products online and is an expert at home repair. Sure, we've seen it all before, but have we seen it in the style of a slightly spicy Hallmark movie? I think not.* This movie is utterly bizarre. It's the perfect movie to have playing in the background of any holiday gathering where heavy drinking is involved.

*Shout-out to Joe Bob Briggs, *The Last Drive-In (IYKYK)*

One of the other movies I watch every year is [It's A Wonderful Life](#). In fact, I have probably seen this classic more times than any film, even *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. It never fails to fill my heart with joy. It's a good reminder that every action we take in our lives, no matter how small, has a compounding effect on the lives of others. Plus it's fun to quote. *"I must've gotten a hold of some bad liquor or something!"*



Also, it's a good example of my **Jimmy Stewart Principle**, a concept I created many years ago. It states, *"Strive to be pleasant, not the best."* I never viewed Jimmy Stewart as a *great* actor, but every single film he appeared in is enjoyable to watch.

Finally, I have to mention one of my favorite movies of the year; one that probably fewer than 1% of you will want to see, [Terrifier 3](#). This is my jam. Set during Christmas, this movie features Art the Clown back wreaking havoc in the most mind-blowing experience of depravity you will ever see. Director Damien Leone has outdone himself in this third entry into the *Terrifier* franchise, creating practical special effects that are sure to leave you feeling like you've had a little too much peppermint and Irish whiskey eggnog. (Is that a thing?) It's a wild ride, lol. If you're interested, [please read my review on Shade Studios](#).



Modifying the Modified BMW

Earlier this year I made a standing workstation, which is a modified version of my Basic Mobile Workbench design. Since then, I've needed it for a new studio space where I'm working on [some art](#). Since the new space is smaller than the space in my workshop, I decided to shrink it down. [Watch the video here!](#)

One of the benefits of the BMW is that it's easy to modify, so by cutting down a few pieces, I was able to fit this workstation perfectly into its new home. (If you haven't already built a BMW, [download my free plans!](#))



[Shop WWMM Holiday Sale!](#)

All plans are 40% off!

Want to make some Christmas gifts? Or if you just want to grab a couple of woodworking plans to have on hand for when spring eventually arrives, now is a great time! Please take advantage of my Holiday Special at ShopWWMM. Now through the end of the month, **all premium plans are 40% off!** This is my biggest sale yet.

Just head over to ShopWWMM.com and use promo code **HOLIDAY2024** at checkout!

Don't forget there are a bunch of other plans available that you can pay whatever you want for! Or just download them for free.

What are your goals for 2025?



In the next issue, I'll be looking ahead at the new year and looking back at the goals and intentions I set for 2024. I'd like to hear if you have any goals or resolutions, woodworking or otherwise, for 2025. Let me know: I want to include some of them in the January's issue. Are you excited? Apprehensive? Or would you rather just insulate yourself from the outside world and cut lumber? (Understandable) **Just reply to this email and tell me what's on your mind.**

Reader Mail

My father-in-law passed away 5 years ago. He and my son (who is now 34) were big buddies, both with a love of the outdoors. About a year ago a large pine tree in my in-laws front yard died. Fearful of it falling on the

house, my 90-year-old mother-in-law had it cut down. We arrived at her house as they were cleaning up, and I grabbed a chunk of the trunk and tossed it into my truck. A month or two later, I sliced off a piece with my chainsaw and stuck it in the garage for a few months to dry. I decided to make a small table out of it to give to my son. I flattened it with a router and flattening jig I made. I filled a major split in it with clear epoxy and finally coated it with six coats of spar urethane. A set of metal legs from Amazon, and I was finally finished. My son will love it because it's from "Pop's" house. I counted 84 rings in it, which means it was growing when my father-in-law built their house (in the 1950s).



—Perry H.

What a great little table, one filled with generations of memories.

— Steve

My 2-car detached garage serves triple duty as a wood shop, power equipment storage, and full-time home office. Really proves that any space can go farther than you think if you stay organized(ish). Your content inspired a lot of this and kickstarted my DIY spirit in general, so thank you :)



—Hudson B.

Thanks, Hudson! Amazing use of space. Really like that Shop Vac cart too! — Steve

Your mention of the old woodworking books reminded me of some books I have. After my Dad passed in 1997, I brought home a bunch of his old books. Among them was a set of a *Popular Mechanics* "Encyclopedia," rife with plans for different woodworking projects. I haven't made anything from them yet (all the projects are a bit dated – ha) but I may pick one just so I have another project for those cold months ahead. It was also funny that you mentioned the old books because I got in bed last night and grabbed one of Dad's old magazines. It was the December 1977 issue of *Popular Mechanics* (I love looking at the car ads "The Brand New Ford Pinto for only..."). There's a set of plans in there for building a wooden toy car. My youngest child is 34 so he won't enjoy it (and NONE of my kids have figured out how to make their own yet – their own kids, not their own wooden cars, that is) but I'll give it to someone if I make it.

—Perry H.

Those old woodworking books and magazines are a trip to flip through. There's some genuinely interesting projects that can be adapted and updated, and a bunch of "What were they thinking?" kinds of projects! Plus orange shag carpeting. —Steve



Thoughts on this month's newsletter? Got a story to tell? Just want to say hi? Drop me a line by simply replying to this email.

Member Projects

"Some new charcuterie boards I made. Which one is your favorite?"

—Ash W.



"Spread project 1 out over a few days, but had such a great time launching this woodworking hobby with the side table!" —Gavrie K.



"A friend asked if I could make Rummikub holders to her specifications. Lots of math and a brand new planer jig later... This is just the prototype. She's ordering 12 more for Christmas gifts!!!" —Amy H.



Have you made something you want over a quarter million people to see in next month's newsletter? Just hit reply and send me a pic!



Thank you!

Thank you for joining me and for reading this issue of Notes from the Shop! I enjoy this journey with you and love to see everything that you make, so keep sharing.

Wishing you a Happy Holiday, and I'll see you in 2025!

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