

Family Room

MEET THE PEOPLE IN OUR PAGES



LEE Ronnie and Brenda, who have been married for 40 years, spend every Christmas Eve caroling with their two daughters and three grandchildren.

What would you do if **Brenda Lee** (*The Giving Spirit*, page 32) came to your door and sang a Christmas carol? "My neighbors think nothing of it," says Brenda. "To them I'm just Mrs. Shacklett, singin' a few Christmas tunes." Every Christmas Eve, Brenda and Ronnie gather their family and go door to door singing carols. "We sing all the old standards—'Silent Night,' 'Away in a Manger,' 'Joy to the World,'" says

Brenda. "We take the kids caroling because it's fun for them, but also to show them what Christmas is really about—celebrating the birth of Christ, being with family and bringing joy to others."

Mama Doe's death inspired **George McDonald** (*Mama Doe*, page 18) to start the Doe Fund, a nonprofit group that provides job skills training and social support services to the homeless. The fund's

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MCDONALD George and his crew

Ready, Willing & Able program has set up housing, work and drug rehabilitation outreach for hundreds of men and women. Its enrollees clean streets and renovate houses. On August 14, the lights may have been out in New York City, but so were the Ready, Willing & Able employees. "The guys felt like they were essential workers," says George. "They were right there, sweeping the streets and bagging trash." The men's hard work didn't go unnoticed. "The streets in my neighborhood were a mess, and your guys cleaned up everything," one appreciative New Yorker told George. "At that moment I felt like a proud father," George says. "The guys surpassed my goal of becoming self-sufficient. They learned to give back to the community." [com](#)

I never thought writing a book would lead to marriage," says Nicole Johnson Baker (*Speaking Out*, page 46), "but in a strange way it did." After Nicole's first book, *Mr. Food's Quick & Easy Diabetic Cooking*, led to an ap-

pearance on a local television station, Scott Baker, one of Nicole's grad school professors and a local anchorman, caught the show and called her up. "I hadn't seen Scott in years. But we started talking every day." The two tied the knot this past August. Before she walked down the aisle, Nicole insisted on one thing: Scott had to wear an insulin pump. "I wanted him to understand who I was," says Nicole. "I hooked him up to a pump, without any insulin, and I showed him how to use it." Now that they're husband and wife, Scott is even more interested in Nicole's health and career—if she's a little sluggish he'll ask her if she's checked her blood sugar, and he samples all the meals in her cookbooks (which are coauthored with "Mr. Food," Art Ginsburg). "Scott and I eat the same food," says Nicole. "Diabetics don't have to eat bland food. That's the main point I wanted to get across in my new cookbook *Mr. Food Every Day's a Holiday Diabetic Cookbook*. If we monitor our blood sugar, we can eat everything from filet mignon to chocolate cheesecake!" [com](#)



BAKER The Bakers' wedding day

Mary Faith Russell (*Interlaced*, page 58) still has the tablecloth Madame Delplace wove for her that Christmas more than 30 years ago. Recently Mary Faith and her husband, Bill, moved into a new apartment, and she's found the perfect spot to display the lace tablecloth. "I'm going to frame it and hang it in the foyer," says Mary Faith.



RUSSELL *Holy Night*

"Looking at it reminds me of my time in Europe and my visits with Madame Delplace." Every January the Russell family celebrates Three Kings Day—a

tradition they learned in France. On the night before Epiphany, many people in France eat a cake with a small toy baked into it. The one who receives the slice with the toy is the king or queen for the day. "Our children loved doing it while we were in France," says Mary Faith. "Now it's a tradition that we're passing on to our grandchildren." And on Three Kings

Day, Mary Faith says a prayer for Madame Delplace. "I don't know where she is today, but I pray that the Lord keeps her and her children safe."

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IN OUR DECEMBER ISSUE

Speaking Out



Read excerpts from Nicole Johnson Baker's autobiography, *Living With Diabetes*. "Educating people about diabetes is one of my biggest goals in life," says Nicole.

The Giving Spirit

Listen to samples of Brenda Lee's classics "I'm Sorry" and "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree." And read about Brenda's life, from her first big hit to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Comfort From Beyond

Order the first volume from our



new *Comfort From Beyond* book series, which contains moving stories from everyday people who've lost loved ones.

PLUS Mama Doe

Help formerly homeless and disadvantaged men and women achieve lives of independence and self-sufficiency through George McDonald's nonprofit organization, the Doe Fund.

