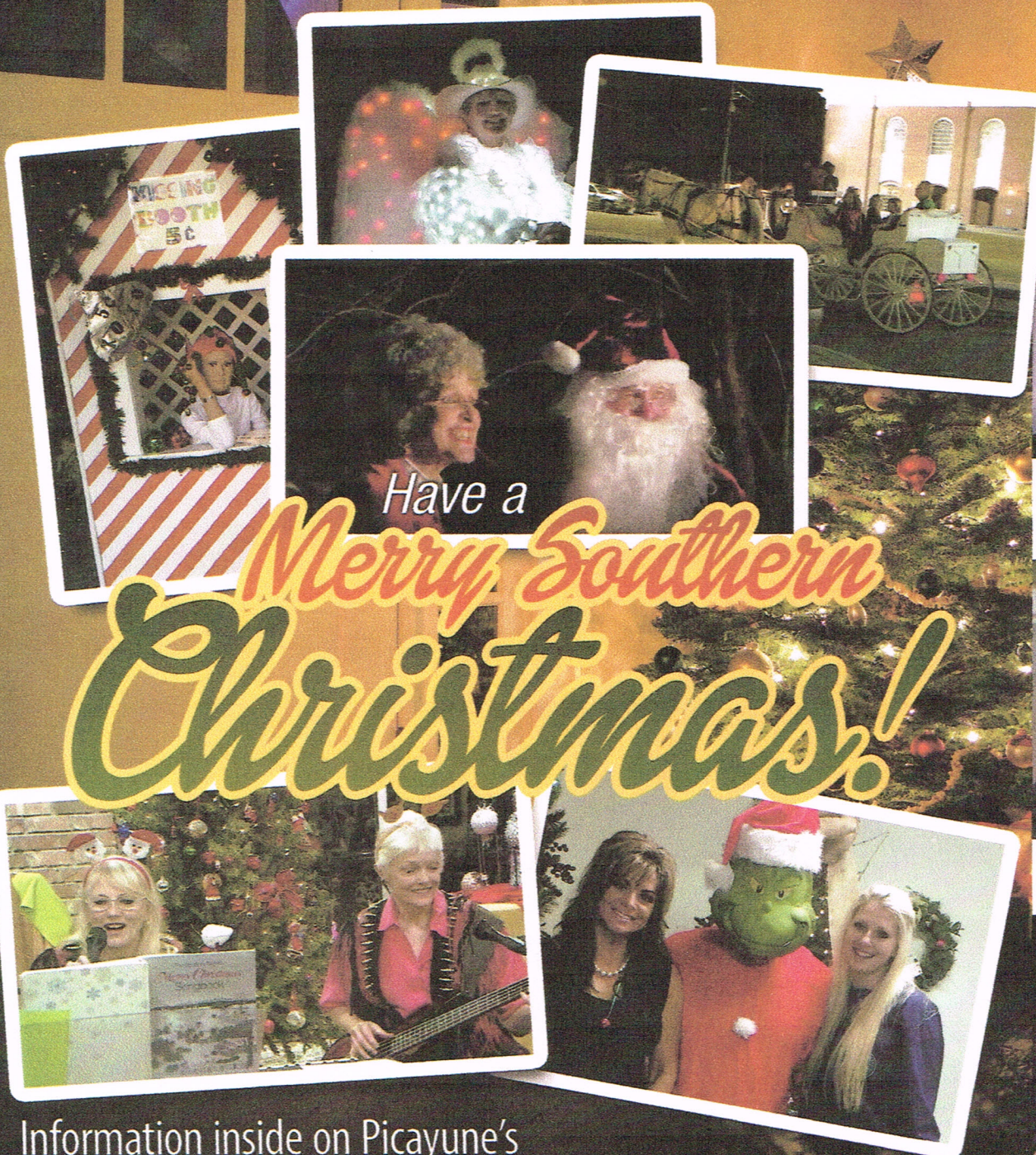


Holiday 2015

Southern • Senior

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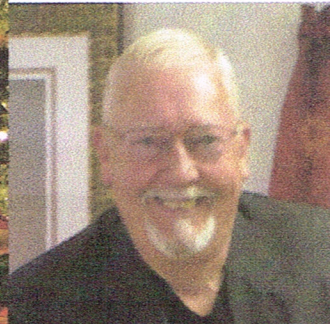


Have a

*Merry Southern
Christmas!*



BETI SPANGEL
Everything in MS
is trying to kill you



PASTOR CHARLIE HAYNES
Jacob's Well Ministries



LYNNE ADAMS BARZÉ
What Christmas is to Me

Information inside on Picayune's
Christmas on the Rails page 19

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By Beti Spangel

Oh honey, *everything* in Mississippi is trying to kill you.

One of the many residents at the new homestead in Mississippi.



I sat on the crinkly paper covering the examination table in the doctor's office, unconsciously scratching my arm. I'd just been informed I had an exuberant case of scabies.

For the uninitiated and uninfected, scabies is a condition caused by mites getting under your skin. In the beginning it feels like a bad case of bug bites, but spreads and itches. And itches.

I've lived in Mississippi since mid-May, having moved from Schroon Lake, New York, a very small town in the mountains of the Adirondacks. My husband and I lived in an old farmhouse on 30 acres, surrounded mostly by woods, and homesteaded on a small scale. By choice, my husband was transferred within his company to Bogalusa, Louisiana, and we bought a house in Poplarville.

When I tell people this, they look at me with mix of sympathy and confusion. But we wanted this transfer. We were married in New Orleans a couple of months after Hurricane Katrina. My husband had lived in the South as a younger man and introduced me to New

Orleans, which I immediately fell in love with. We now had kids living there, and after 10 years of going back and forth, decided to make a permanent move. The past three New York winters were unnecessarily harsh, as in the air in January hurt your face. I no longer wanted to live in a place where the air hurt my face.

Yes, the South is different, in mostly good ways. Newly arrived in May, when I would comment to people that the warm weather felt good, they would say, "Oh, you just wait."

The high 90's are no longer a novelty, and I dare say I've acclimated. Our new house has central air, and I'm surprised anyone settled territory south of the Mason Dixon line before it was invented.

While there were mites in New York, they were unfriendly enough to mind their own business. Like many things Southern, these mites were friendly and wanted to welcome me to the area.

I think our neighbor's donkeys were the culprits. Missing the horses we had in New York, I dug out a brush and went over to groom them. They loved being scratched, and now I know why. I served as a bridge to fresh munching grounds for invisible parasites.

I've already had run-ins here with chiggers, hornets, and spiders the size of my hand. I saw a snake the circumference of a radiator hose in my backyard. And fire ants? Somebody around here should figure out how to make them a commodity.

My doctor gleefully pointed to a poster on the wall showing local vegetation just waiting to make me itch and blister. "The plants in Mississippi will kill you. The insects in Mississippi will kill you. The animals in Mississippi will kill you. The weather in Mississippi will kill you," she said.

I left her office with a prescription for permethrin cream that I had to cover myself with head to toe. While relief was immediate, I don't recommend this particular Southern experience.

Even with all these natural disasters waiting to befall me, I wouldn't go back to colder climes. 95 degrees with 100% humidity may be a tough sell, but -25 degrees and ice is no barrel of laughs. I can't slip and fall in humidity.

The bigger reason to stay is how at home we've been made to feel, by neighbors, coworkers and local townspeople, all of whom do not make me itch. I look at my husband, smile, and say, "I can't believe we live in Mississippi!"

Beti Spangel is a freelance writer newly transplanted from upstate New York to Poplarville, Mississippi. Her work has appeared in *Tractor Supply's Out Here*, *Mane Stream*, *New York Forest Owners*, *North Country Living*, and other magazines. She was also a reporter for her local daily newspaper, *The Post Star*. With her husband, Larry Phillips, she is trying to figure out what agricultural endeavor to embark upon on their 11 acres in southern Mississippi. See more of her work at betispangel.com.

