

# significant living

celebrating life & faith for today's christian

Actress  
**Nancy Stafford**

tells her favorite  
holiday tradition

**Ron DiCianni**  
sharing Scripture through art



\$3.99 U.S.  
November/December 2010

a gingerbread house  
glowing with cheer

ideas for simplifying  
holiday celebrations

holiday letters your  
family will cherish

financial tips for  
the new year

by NANCY STAFFORD

TAKING A

# Bough



*ACTRESS NANCY STAFFORD is used to the spotlight, but one of the brightest moments in her Christmas season is the joy she feels as she decorates the branches of her tree with cherished handmade ornaments—each lovingly created by her mom.*

My ornaments are my favorite tradition. Each Christmas, as I “dress” our tree, I’m flooded with sweet memories. Every ornament holds significance. Every ornament is infused with love. Every ornament was made by my mother. Each one is unique, sparkling, and elegant . . . like my mom.

Encrusted with glimmering jewels and pearls and beads, the tree is luminous with the soft glow of faceted gems, gold braid, satin and velvet. Not even Fabergé eggs in a museum could compare to my mom’s lovingly crafted ornaments.

The tradition of making handmade ornaments began the year I was born, and year-by-year, the collection grew. The journey of my life can be traced through mom’s ornaments like a road-map.

The year I was eight was the year I got my first pair of little blue eyeglasses. To commemorate this event, mom made a blue ornament with an intricate design of iridescent stones. Another year, a shiny silver beaded ornament, swagged and crisscrossed with a spiderweb of orthodontia-inspired wire and braid, marked the year I got braces.

By 1976, I had emerged from adolescence and was crowned Miss Florida. Mom remembered this special time

ACTRESS NANCY STAFFORD TREASURES  
HER MOTHER’S HANDCRAFTED ORNA-  
MENTS FOR THEIR MESSAGE OF LOVE  
AND LESSONS ABOUT *faith.*

“WHATEVER YOU ARE GOING  
THROUGH RIGHT NOW, YOU MUST  
*trust* THAT GOD IS WITH YOU.”

by creating a purple satin ball topped with the triumphant gold crown of the “King of Kings”—a reminder that there is more to life than my tiara.

When I began my television-acting career with a part on the NBC soap opera *The Doctors*, mom’s annual ornament was a rainbow-colored fan of jewels and peacock feathers in homage to the “peacock network.”

In 1983, when I joined the cast of the Emmy-winning hospital drama *St Elsewhere*, mom fashioned an oblong gold ornament that looked suspiciously like the Emmy statuette.

And, when I became *Matlock*’s law partner in 1986, mom created a silvery blue ball that looked strikingly similar to my co-star Andy Griffith’s gray seer-sucker suit!

Later, when I became an author, a beautiful ball encircled with mirrors reflected the theme of my first title, *Beauty by the Book: Seeing Yourself as God Sees You*—my reminder to readers to look in the true mirror of God’s Word for beauty and worth and to see themselves as He does. And, when *The Wonder of His Love: A Journey into the Heart of God* was published, mom made

a heart-shaped ball, echoing my invitation to readers to journey deeper into the heart of God’s infinite love.

In addition to marking professional milestones in my life, mom’s ornaments also celebrated personal ones. Throughout the years, mom’s ornaments have chronicled events in my life both big and small, joyous and heartbreaking—just like life itself.

An oval rose-colored satin ball covered in seed pearls and lace snipped from my wedding gown celebrated the year I was married.

The year my daddy died, mom covered an ornament with a swatch of his favorite plaid work shirt. It still smells like Old Spice, and every year when I unwrap it, I hold that ornament close to my face, breathe in his memory, the loving fragrance of his life, and thank God for allowing me to be his daughter.

Mom’s angel ornament was especially significant: I never had the blessing of children of my own. After two devastating and heart-crushing miscarriages, mom made an angel ornament that gave me a glimpse beyond the realm of earth, the assurance and comforting reminder that I have two babies in the

*(Opposite) The beautiful ornaments that grace Nancy’s tree are special reminders of her mom’s love for her, but they also remind her of God’s love for her. She says, “God knows our fears and delights, every pain, joy, and dream. He knows us completely and accepts us unconditionally.”*



arms of Jesus—and I will one day hold them in heaven.

The year that followed the miscarriages was equally painful, with two failed adoption attempts. At the time, I was co-starring in a TV movie called *A Child Too Many*, about an infertile couple who hire a surrogate to have their baby, and then lose the child in a custody battle. The movie theme mirrored my pain. But mom’s ornament helped soothe my wounded heart. She covered a ball with canvas tent fabric and circled it with tiny hand-hewn wooden tent pegs. I recognized it immediately—Isaiah 54: “Sing O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy . . . more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband . . . Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide . . . for you will spread out to the right and to the left.”

This ornament reminds me that I do have the blessing of many children in my life—spiritual children, women I’m privileged to minister to around the country through my speaking and books, a slew of incredible godchildren, a beautiful stepdaughter, and a 9-year-old grandson. God *has* enlarged the place of my tent!

Though I’ve been blessed to experience success as an actress, speaker, and writer, I have also faced crushing circumstances and painful disappointments: financial crisis, unemployment, health challenges, and a huge forest fire, followed by mud slides the following winter, that left the ranch retreat center my husband and I had built scorched and decimated.

But in the midst of those difficult circumstances, mom made what is perhaps the most beautiful ornament of all: a ball covered in rough, gritty sandpaper and scattered with beautiful pearls. It serves as a reminder to me that the beauty of a pearl is produced through pain. As a grain of sand invades its shell, the oyster releases a healing fluid until finally the irritant is covered—creating a pearl. Without the irritant, it’s just an oyster. No pain—no pearl. No trial and testing—no treasure.



“LIKE THESE ORNAMENTS, GOD  
MADE EACH ONE OF US UTTERLY  
*unique*, HIS WORKS OF ART.”

So the deeper meaning I see in mom’s sandpaper and pearl ornament is that whatever you’re going through right now, you must trust that God is with you through all your difficult circumstances. He is grinding you, polishing you, and preparing you to be his luminous pearl and sparkling jewel.

Mom is 90 now, in a nursing home, and nearly blind—macular degeneration has stolen her vision. A few years ago, she gave me the last ornament she was able to make. It’s my favorite—white and gold with a bottom tassel made of the pendant from mom’s favorite gold necklace. I played with it every night as a child as she rocked me in her lap at bedtime, softly singing her favorite hymn, “I Come to the Garden Alone.” I wrote about this in my book *The Wonder of His Love*, in a chapter called “Comforting Love.”

Mom’s ornaments are beautiful. Truly works of art. But more, they are expressions of her creativity and her love—invaluable treasures that remind me of our life together and how well she knows me.

But more than that, I believe, the ornaments are also a “picture,” intended to provide a glimpse of how intimately God knows us. He knows our entire lives, from beginning to end, since before we were ever born, before the earth was ever created. Like these ornaments, He made each one of us utterly unique, His exclusive works of art.

This Christmas, my wish is that you might rest in the knowledge that every unique detail and “facet” of your life is known by a loving Father, who pours out His life and love for you. As that reality floods your heart, may you shine with a rich and luminous glow—just like mom’s ornaments!

For more information about actress, author, and speaker Nancy Stafford visit [www.nancystafford.com](http://www.nancystafford.com).



*(Above) Nancy’s tree shines brightly and its glow is reflected in a nearby mirror. (Opposite) Whether hanging on the tree or gracing a mantel, these ornaments become a lasting legacy of love between mother and daughter.*