



A Lowcountry Christmas

Mary Alice Monroe

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A wounded warrior and his younger brother discover the true meaning of Christmas in this timeless story of family bonds. A poignant continuation of the Lowcountry Summer series.

As far as ten-year-old Miller McClellan is concerned, it's the worst Christmas ever. His father's shrimp boat is docked, his mother is working two jobs, and with finances strained, Miller is told they can't afford the dog he desperately wants. "Your brother's return from war is our family's gift," his parents tell him. But when Taylor returns with PTSD, family strains darken the holidays.

Then Taylor's service dog arrives—a large black Labrador/Great Dane named Thor. His brother even got the dog! When Miller goes out on Christmas Eve with his father's axe, determined to get his family the tree they can't afford, he takes the dog for company—but accidentally winds up lost in the wild forest. The splintered family must come together to rediscover their strengths, family bond, and the true meaning of Christmas.

A Lowcountry Christmas Details

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From Reader Review *A Lowcountry Christmas* for online ebook

Pamela says

If you're looking for a Christmas novel that centers around family, and is character/thematic driven with a healthy dose of realistic conflict and meaningful substance - *A Lowcountry Christmas* just might be your next delightful good read. It certainly was a wonderful reading experience for me. I thoroughly enjoyed it! Life isn't always a magical experience - Christmastime or not - but it can always be meaningful and hopeful, despite life's storms.

One of the best Christmastime novels I've read in a good while!

More in-depth review with quotes to Come

FOUR **** Faith, Hope, Love, and Family - Christmastime Joys and Sorrows - Meaningful Fiction Worth Reading and Sharing **** STARS

Don says

Once in a rare while, a holiday book appears which you know will live on in your memory forever. Mary Alice Monroe's *A LOWCOUNTRY CHRISTMAS* is such a book.

This was on my "to read" list, but it didn't hold a place of prominence. If I got around to it, fine; if I didn't, so be it. But a call from a trusted friend caused me to move it to the top and I'm awfully glad I did.

Here's the necessarily perfunctory annotation from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. It's as good as any summary I would be able to craft without giving too much away.

"It is looking like a bleak Christmas for ten-year-old Miller McClellan. His family is facing financial difficulty, so they cannot give him the dog he longs for. But then his older brother returns home from war with PTSD and a service dog named Thor."

What is not clear from that little synopsis is that this is an absolutely stunning novel. The writing is first-rate and the characters are both complex and believable. I read almost the entire book in one sitting and yet I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that it will live on in my memory for many years to come.

My only slight quibble (and it's not really a quibble as much as a question) is whether the epilogue added to or detracted from the book. I've been thinking about it all day and I'm not sure where I stand. Perhaps I would have written it differently, but kept some of the elements.

This is not a happy-go-lucky, simplistic holiday read. Yet it's powerful story confirmed for me once again why all of our stories, both happy and sad, matter and can shape a world where the Christmas spirit is alive and well if we allow them to do so.

Kathryn says

I've loved the Lowcountry Summer series by Mary Alice Monroe, and what a wonderful early Christmas surprise to be presented with a #5 in the series - A Lowcountry Christmas.

It was everything I love in a story and it was just so good to go back in Taylor's life to when he first was discharged from the Marines, after experiencing a terrible explosion that left him shattered and suffering from PTSD. He can't cope with returning to his family for Christmas, finds crowds threatening, and his family are bewildered and find it difficult to understand.

The McClellan's are finding it difficult economically, Jenny and Alistair work really hard, but the shrimping business is in decline and they just can't afford the dog that Miller has his heart set on. So when Taylor receives his lifeline - the service dog Thor, Miller is really upset. And then there is more than one grumpy Scrooge in the family. In fact poor Jenny is the only one keeping the Christmas spirit alive among her men.

This is a beautifully written story, it sucked me in right from the beginning and I loved every word and minute of it. It is a perfect Christmas story and is linked with little quotes and references to Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol.

Yes, this could be read as a stand alone, but readers of the series will I think just find that extra piece of satisfaction with it. And if you haven't reached this series yet, starting with this one would work I do believe.

Judy Collins says

A special thank you to Gallery Books and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.

2016 Best Southern Holiday Book

Southern master storyteller *Mary Alice Monroe* returns following *A LowCountry Wedding* with **A LOWCOUNTRY CHRISTMAS** featuring Taylor McClellan, a character from previous books. A wounded warrior revisits the past, a broken man, and his journey to the present and future.

A heartwarming holiday tale of family and the true meaning of Christmas-scattered with some humor and quotes from Charles Dickens and *A Christmas Carol*. Past, Present, Future.

"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach!"- Scrooge, *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens.

A life-changing story of love and hope featuring a beloved family from the Lowcountry. Memories from the past. Overcoming obstacles to look deeper than the glitter of the season to discover the true meaning of Christmas. *A time for families together to share stories, gifts, laughter, and love.*

Whether you're meeting the Muir family for the first time, or finding them all over again. A Lowcountry Christmas will stay in your heart throughout the holiday season- bringing together a family in the aftermath of a loss, and in the midst of an unfolding story of hope, with the help of one very special dog.

If you have read Mary Alice Monroe, you are aware, even though her Coastal South Carolina stories may be fiction; their impact, is real. She writes richly textured books and stories that delve into the complexities of interpersonal relationships and the parallels between the land and life. Her life-changing work and environmental fiction are an inspiration to readers, worldwide.

Readers met Taylor in the Lowcountry Trilogy, a wounded warrior, suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). With a little help from his service dog, providing support and increased means of coping with such symptoms as hypervigilance, fear, nightmares, flight-or-fight response, and impaired memory.

Set in 2015, it is Christmas Eve, Taylor is returning home to Sullivan’s Island, South Carolina. As a Marine, he has seen his share of battles. He recalls his previous feelings at the approaching Christmas holidays. In the first five years since he had returned from Afghanistan, he barely acknowledged the holidays. There are two reasons presently, for joy in his heart – his wife and daughter. Harper and Marietta. Only three months old.

“The treasured memories captured moments from times long gone—envelope us in that matchless spirit of Christmas one season after the other, year after year, until we ourselves fade and become part of the memories.”

Thor is Taylor’s service dog, attuned to his every mood. Even when he is resting, he is monitoring his breathing and his body language. He senses his anxiety, the PTSD, and knows all the danger signals and how to deflect before his slips into the abyss. Thor is not a dog to be ignored. *Part-great Dane and part-Labrador, he’s a whopping 120 pounds of devotion.*

As always, Mary Alice Monroe links a connection with animals, as in all her books, with extraordinary powers. An inspiration for the book, a bond, a story of one serviceman’s return from war with PTSD, and his inspiring journey back to his home and himself through the help of his steadfast service dog.

Looking back, it was a Christmas tree that changed everything. One pivotal Christmas five years earlier.

Washington, DC 2010. Taylor was going home for Christmas, the son of a shrimper. A graduate of Citadel in Charleston, the first man to graduate from college in his family. The bombs had shattered his bones and burned his body and soul. He brain was not right. The scars in his mind were the wounds that cut the deepest. He did not want to leave the hospital. It is where he felt safe. *Surrounded by other servicemen.*

Where do you go but home when there is no place else to go? He felt as if he were heading for a fall. *Home for Christmas.*

In the small fishing town of McClellanville, outside of Charleston—2010. Ten-year-old Miller McDaniel McClellan is not excited about Christmas. His dad is captain of a shrimp boat and times are tough.

The son of a long line of fisherman. His dad is a hard worker, smart and good with his hands. His mom cleans houses. They have little money. He only wants a dog – one particular puppy. Is there hope? He had singled out a golden puppy. His name was Sandy Claws. He likes to dig. They cost \$300 each. He only has seventy-five dollars saved. He loves this puppy. Since his dad put the boat to dock, money was tight. Of course, his dad thinks a dog cost too much to upkeep. No dog for Christmas.

Instead, his mom is excited about his older brother coming home for Christmas. This was his Christmas present? No Xbox, no Playstation, and worst of all, no Sandy. *Bah, humbug!*

We hear from Jenny, Taylor, and Miller. Jenny, the mom who wants to create a home, rich with traditions, values, and morals that would instill confidence in her children. A happy time meant for laughter, sentimental gifts, and love. After all, Taylor was coming home. They had so much to be thankful for. She wanted to make both her son's dreams come true. Miller's heart was broken.

Her older son was home safe in her arms. God had answered prayers. But something was different about him. Withdrawal. He had not really completely come home.

Taylor knew he was not the same man. He had a hard time touching people, hugging – damaged goods. He had to find the strength and courage to find his way back through the black mist. Thor gave him hope.

Miller is upset his brother has a dog (service dog), and he doesn't. *Taylor is the big war hero.*

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed. "I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company and do it with a thankful heart." --Scrooge, A Christmas Carol.

With some special Christmas quotes from Charles Dickens, we visit the past, present, and future—to keep Christmas alive in our hearts all year long.

Jenny was in the middle. All she wanted was a normal happy home, not Team Scrooge. Christmas was only a week away. Miller disappears with his brother's service dog, Thor. Everyone is worried. It is Christmas Eve and he has taken his dad's ax and the wagon. He sets out to get a Christmas tree, since they cannot afford to buy one, and gets lost in the forest.

They are frantic, and it is getting cold. They are receiving snow, the first time since 1989, after Hurricane Hugo. A heartfelt reunion.

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!"—Scrooge, A Christmas Carol.

Flash forward, to the Epilogue, Christmas 2015, Sea Breeze, Sullivan's Island, SC, where memories come together. We catch up with the historic Harper house, where they married and had their first child. Miller now fifteen, where the family gathers around the tree, the unspoken symbol of that important Christmas when they had dug deep and fought for one another—for their survival.

For their family, their happiness, while discovering the true meaning of Christmas. They each had the chance to redeem themselves, no matter how much of a Scrooge they may have been- they are not alone.

Fans will love catching up with Mamaw, Girard, and the rest of the Muir family—Blake and Carson, Dora and Devlin, Nate, Atticus and Vivian and some special holiday recipes from the queen of Southern cooking, Nathalie Dupree, bestselling author with more than three hundred TV appearances for the Food Network, PBS, and the Learning Channel. Also included in *Mastering the Art of Southern Cooking*.

If you are looking for a special Christmas story to warm your heart and soul, surrounding by the beauty of the Lowcountry; Mary Alice Monroe, with her own signature style, delivers a Hallmark Christmas filled with humor, joy, and love, rediscovering the true bonds of family and the special meaning of Christmas.

Especially, during this time with the aftermath and destruction of the most recent Hurricane Matthew, and the shrimpers in the area.

? Kimberly says

While this is the fifth novel, the story focuses on the McClellan family sharing events of one particular Christmas. It isn't necessary to read the previous books. Although admittedly I would now like to learn more about others within this South Carolina coastal community.

Monroe shares the tale from several narratives. We begin with Taylor celebrating the holidays and reflecting on events that occurred five Christmases ago. We then get perspectives from ten-year-old Miller McClellan as he shares with us his wish for Christmas and the struggles his family is facing now that his father can no longer work his shrimping boat. We are also treated to chapters from Mary Alice Monroe, their mother as she tries to bring Christmas joy to their lives. The story that unfolds pulls the reader in as you become caught up in this families lives.

I slipped into this story, identifying with Mary, feeling Miller's frustrations when everything seems impossible for a ten-year-old boy. Taylor, an injured Marine tugged at my heartstrings as he struggled with his PTSD, guilt for the loss of his men and the overwhelming darkness he felt. Thor, his service dog, was an important and touching part of the story. Monroe touched on the importance of these dogs, folks reactions and the incredible bond formed between man and beast.

Each chapter begins with a line from Charles Dicken's classic "A Christmas Story" and sprinkled throughout the story it is mentioned. Its message is shared, and its impact on the main characters was a brilliant tribute to the story.

If you're looking for a Christmas story that will touch your soul and remind you to count your blessings then, A Lowcountry Christmas is the perfect tale to read this holiday season.

Copy provided by publisher. This review was originally posted at Caffeinated Book Reviewer

Sue says

A Lowcountry Christmas is book 5 in the Lowcountry Summer series but instead of being a continuation of the story, it's a prequel and can be read as a stand-alone without any confusion.

I love Mary Alice Monroe's books and I really enjoyed this series so I was thrilled that there would be another book in the series. This is Taylor's story about his life before he married Harper. When Taylor returned from Afghanistan, he had PTSD and couldn't cope with life. His younger brother was afraid of him and his moods and inaction were making life difficult for the family. After he received a service dog from Pets for Vets (a real group who helps vets), his life and his attitude toward life began to slowly change.

As always, Mary Alice writes lovingly about the SC Lowcountry. When you read her books, you can smell the ocean and feel the ocean breeze. She is also an avid conservationist and this is reflected in her books. Her love of animals shines through in her descriptions of Thor, Taylor's service dog.

I loved this book. I highly recommend it and think that it will put the readers into the Christmas spirit and make them believe in the miracles of love and family.

Thanks to the author for a copy of this book for a fair and honest review.

Obsidian says

Please note that I gave this book 3.5 stars, but rounded it to 4 stars on Goodreads.

I read this for the Twelve Tasks of the Festive Season.

Please do not read unless you have read all of the books in the series.

I have been reading the Lowcountry Summer books for years. There were some ups and downs. Ultimately I thought the stories involving the Muir family were good. This newest book focuses on Taylor McClellan, Harper's husband. I think the idea behind the book was good (takes a very good look at PTSD and service dogs) but the tension in the book was not really present because we already know that Taylor is alive and well with Harper, and we know that his family is okay too since they were mentioned in previous books. I did like how Monroe tied this story into "A Christmas Carol" though and I really got a kick out of that.

So I was never really interested in Taylor while reading the series. If anything, I wish this book could have followed up with the newest Muir Atticus. That would have been a nice swan song to the family. Instead this book has Taylor being happy in his life with his new wife and daughter. The book then flashes back five years to when Taylor arrived back home suffering from PTSD. The story switches between Taylor, his younger brother Miller, and then their mother Jenny.

The beginning of the book told from Taylor's POV really did not fit the book version of Taylor I had in my head up to that moment. He was way more eloquent than I thought Taylor had ever shown. The flashbacks to when Taylor goes home, interacts with his family, etc. read more like the Taylor that Harper had met and married.

The character of Miller felt off throughout the entire book. He is 10 at the beginning of this story and he does not have a "voice" like any 10 year old I have met. At certain times he sounded babyish and at other way too adult for the age he was supposed to be. He was either clueless about his family's finances or he was not clueless. But having him reacting badly to not getting a dog was not exactly making me want to get up and cheer this character. He does end up becoming more improved as the book went on, but I think that was because one Monroe has him interacting with his mother and brother more and more he felt more realistic to me.

The character of Jenny was actually written very well. Frankly I liked her POV's more than anyone else's. Maybe it would have been smart to just have Jenny's POV. I did not always get her (her having to constantly deal with her husband acting like an ass is a recurring theme) but you know she loves her sons.

I really wish if Monroe was going to do this, she had included Taylor's father's POV as well. It seemed odd we didn't get his POV and I think if you are going to go all in about the McClellan's it would have worked much better if he got added in. The guy read like a jerk throughout the whole book until the end. I really wanted to be able to get a sense of his feelings and how he was dealing with losing his way of life, not being

able to provide for his family like he wanted to, and having to acknowledge that there was something wrong with his oldest son.

The writing was fine in this book. Just a bit flowery here and there for 10 year old Miller and older version Taylor. Also it was just weird to me the book starts off with Taylor remembering 5 years ago and the book just breaks it up to show Miller and Jenny's POV's as well as his. The book does set up the different POV's so even while reading you know who is "speaking" before each chapter.

The flow was slow to start off with. Things really don't start clicking more until Taylor gets home and his family starts to realize that something is wrong with him. I thought the whole "incident" put into the story was a bit much though. It read way too Hallmark for me and I was surprised Monroe included it. It didn't really fit the larger story she was telling.

The setting of the lowcountry is a familiar one and I do enjoy it. But this one besides location did not have the same set-up (obviously) or feel of the previous books.

The ending was okay but way too much information was spewed in the last 5 pages that left me with more questions than answers. Also I am wondering why the family scene was missing some people we know are important to Harper (her grandmother on her mother's side). Dora's son who we know is autistic also did not read as he usually does in these books. And I hated the big reveal about one of the sister's just kind of thrown out there.

Julie says

A Lowcountry Christmas by Mary Alice Monroe is a 2016 Gallery Books publication.

You will want to have a box of tissue close by when you read this one! I promise you, it will touch you right down to your very soul.

As a special bonus, fans of this series will have a chance to touch base with their favorite characters, which brought a big smile to my face.

The author has also included a few recipes from the famed 'Queen of Southern Cooking', Nathalie Dupree!

Overall, I couldn't be happier with this book and I highly recommend it to one and all!! Merry Christmas!

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Sherri Thacker says

I haven't read the other in the series so maybe that's why I don't love this book??

Michele says

Actual Rating: 4.5 Stars

A Lowcountry Christmas was an incredibly touching story about the McClellan family's struggles during one of the toughest holiday seasons they had ever endured. A classic Dickens novel, a brave and loyal service dog, and the love of their community ultimately helped the family find the true meaning of Christmas and strengthen their bond.

Now I'll be honest in that I haven't read all of the Lowcountry Summer series yet but I've had a great time with those that I have checked out. I think, for me, going into this Christmas story with no preconceived notions about who should or shouldn't be included probably had me at an advantage compared to longtime fans of the series. I personally loved getting to know the McClellans and thought that their situation felt real. From the Captain's lack of dependable work, to Miller's wish of a getting a dog, to Jenny's hope for a wonderful Christmas for her kids, and even Taylor's troubling PTSD, there wasn't anything that felt too outlandish or untrue.

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Original Notes:

A Lowcountry Christmas was the type of holiday story that gives a reader all of the feelings of the season wrapped up in a down-to-earth setting and with characters that were easy to relate to. Told from three different POVs: wounded warrior Taylor, ten-year-old Miller, and their mother Jenny, we got a true sense of how this Southern family struggled to band together during one of the most difficult Christmases they had ever faced. I loved that author Mary Alice Monroe included quotes from a Christmas Carol at the beginning of each chapter and enjoyed how reading Dickens' classic story became a special bond between Taylor and Miller--in addition to their love of Taylor's new service dog Thor. *happy sigh* Full review to come.

Patriotic Bookaholic says

A Lowcountry Christmas is the story of a family coming together during Christmas at what seems to be the worst time of year for everyone. Ten year old Miller McClellan only wants one thing for Christmas and that is to own a dog but with his father's shrimping business not doing as well, his mother having to work two jobs to provide for the family and having his older brother, Taylor come home from war with PTSD, nothing is going as planned. As Taylor finally comes home after being holed up in a apartment due to his PTSD, he soon discovers what his family is going through while fighting his own demons.

It takes having a breakdown and a phone call to get Taylor, the help he needs in the form of a service dog named Thor. With Miller discovering that Taylor gets a dog while he can't, it's makes Miller wonder why is everything bad happening to him this year. As Miller wants to help out his family by going out to the forest to cut down a tree with the help of Thor, it all comes down to a rescue that will bring the entire family together in a way that was made for the holidays!

This book will have you crying during certain parts due to what both Taylor and Miller are dealing with. Just reading Taylor's part of the story of having him wanting to end his life until a service dog comes along and it just makes you think about everyone who is dealing with PTSD and why are we not doing more to get them a dog that might help in a way that only a dog can understand. After learning this book is part of a series, I'm gonna have to go back and read the other books just to get more of the backstory that happened in the last chapter of this book!

Thank You to Mary Alice Monroe for bringing awareness to PTSD during the Christmas season and for having a book that me wished that I was back in the Lowcountry once again!!

I borrowed this book from my local Public Library!

Cindy says

MAM never fails to amaze me with her writing. She is one of my favorite SC authors and my favorite storyteller-a storyteller is quite different from an author. Storytellers keep your attention with the twists and turns of the tale they are weaving. After reading each MAM book, I always say it's my favorite, but this time it's the truth! MAM's tale grabs you from the beginning and doesn't let you go. She sends you through a barrage of emotions-you will laugh, you will cry, you will cheer, you will pray, you will go up and down this roller coaster throughout her story. The plot twists and turns and each chapter causes you to keep reading to discover what happens next. MAM has written another Best Seller! Buy this book and enjoy the wonderful and heart wrenching tale of "A Lowcountry Christmas"!

Patricia Williams says

Really good, quick read, Christmas story. A lot to do with "A Christmas Carol", two characters in the book were reading the book and there was a play. Quotes from the book at the beginning of every chapter. This book involved a lot of my favorite things: Christmas, wonderful dogs and a Marine. So, it's a good Christmas story with a happy ending about a Marine and his therapy dog. Definitely recommend if you would like a quick and easy Christmas read. This book was a gift and I really enjoyed it.

Mayda says

This novel was predictable from the start. While it does expound on the PTSD the returning soldiers can suffer from, there is not much of a plot or character development. Trite at times and sappy at others, it misses the mark.

Nicholas says

I had the pleasure of meeting Monroe as she signed my copy of this book and I listened attentively as she spoke passionately about the story. After reading the book, I can see why.

Monroe created memorable, relatable, passionate characters that remind the reader of their own family. Granted, this is not your typical "Hallmark Christmas Movie" Christmas story. Nope, it contains heartache, a few tears, meaningful arguments and a sad little boy. Tear-jerking? A bit, but readers will be more than delighted to hear the outcome of Taylor's story.

Taylor suffers from PTSD when he returns home to the Charleston area. A Lowcountry Christmas delivers a patriotic tale with family values that any reader can relate and the detail of the Charleston area will surely bring home memories to the locals who were born here.

A Lowcountry Christmas is the perfect size for a book that reads evenly paced. It also is a great introduction to the Holiday season. I, personally read Dickens' A Christmas Carol every year and the relative quotes at the beginning of each chapter were warranted as Monroe created a story with the values of the classic tale, but she did not retell the story. This was more than appreciated as I remembered why I read Dickens every year.

I give Monroe's latest title 4 stars simply because I have nothing else to compare it with. I am not normally a reader of this warm and cozy style read, but I was pleasantly surprised on how much I enjoyed the book.

Mary Alice, thank you for introducing a new genre into my library, it was a pleasure to have A Lowcountry Christmas as my first holiday read this year. Looking forward to many more of your stories.
