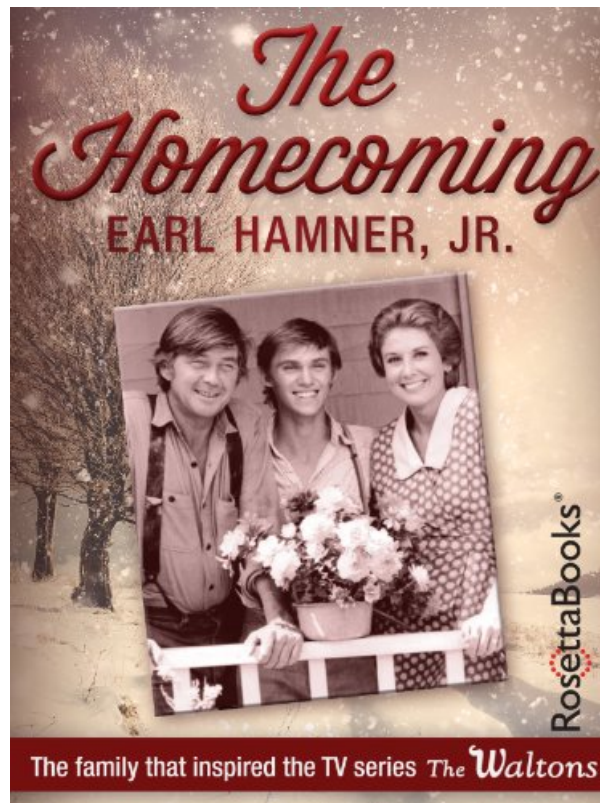
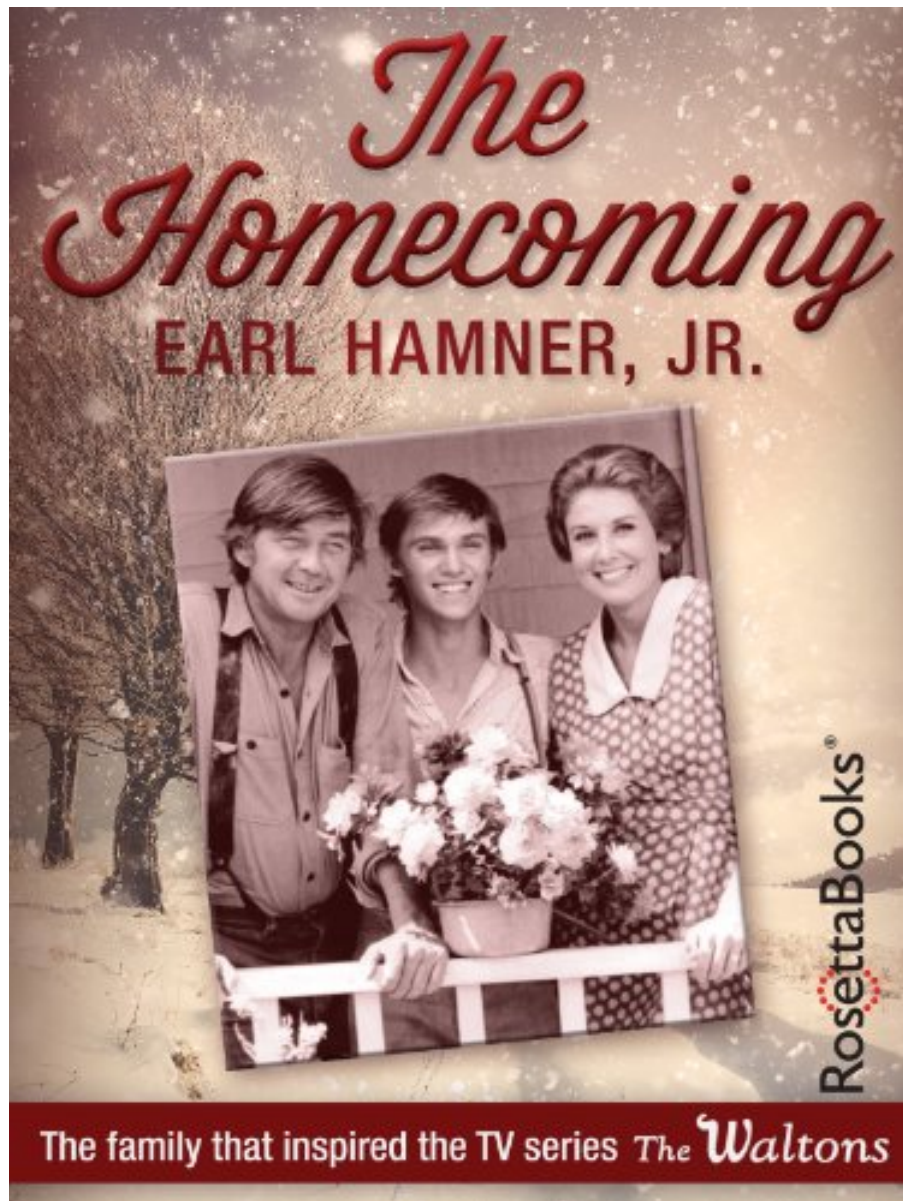


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THE HOMECOMING BY EARL HAMNER JR. PDF

Years after the events of *Spencer's Mountain*, Clay Spencer—Clay-Boy's father—fails to return home on Christmas Eve. Leaving his worried family to keep watch at the homestead, Clay-Boy takes to the snowy Virginia hills in search of his father. Along the way, he meets an irate deer, a threatening county sheriff, a congregation of African-American churchgoers, and two elderly women who happen to be bootleggers. The story of Clay-Boy's search for his father is told with warmth and intensity.

Along with its prequel, *Spencer's Mountain*, *The Homecoming* was the inspiration for the popular television show *The Waltons*, which starred Richard Thomas, Andrew Duggan, and Patricia Neal, and ran for nine years between 1972 and 1981. Over fifty years after its publication, this novel still has the power to move and inspire.

About the Author

Born in the foothills of Virginia's Blue Ridge mountains, Earl Hamner, Jr., is an award-winning author, screenplay writer, and producer of several well-known teleplays and television series. He got his big break writing episodes for *The Twilight Zone*, including the popular "You Drive." His most well-known television series is *The Waltons*, which is based on his best-selling stories *Spencer's Mountain* and *The Homecoming*. Both novels were inspired by his own childhood.

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GREAT AND TOUCHING READ

By D. Blankenship

This of course is the beginning of the *Waltons* (TV). This book is now often overlooked, which is a shame as it is a well written piece of literature. This is the touching story of a typical mountain family during the depression years. I enjoy rereading this one ever so often, near Christmas. It is not a lengthy tale, it is one you can read on a snowy Saturday (get you in the mood). This is also a well crafted book, told by a master story teller. The author's character development is absolutely wonderful. I hate to use the word "classic" as I feel it is quite over used, but with this work I am tempted. It is certainly a book you should add to your list.

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Warmly Engaging

By Eowyn

"It is remembered in my family that on Christmas Eve of 1933 my father was late arriving home. That, along with the love he and my mother bestowed upon their eight red-headed offspring, is fact. The rest is fiction."

So begins *The Homecoming* (Buccaneer Books, 1970), a homespun family tale set under the "cold Virginia

sky" of Spencer's Mountain. Written by Earl Hamner, Jr., The Homecoming became the made-for-TV movie that launched The Waltons. It's a December staple around our house. But how close is the movie, The Homecoming: A Christmas Story (1971), to the book?

Starring Richard Thomas as John Boy and (a hopelessly miscast) Patricia Neal as Olivia, the movie's storyline is quite close to the book. However, some of the names of the characters differ: In the movie it's Clay-Boy, Matt, Becky, Shirley, Mark, Luke, John, and Pattie-Cake Spencer instead of John-Boy, Jason, Mary Ellen, Erin, Ben, Jim-Bob, and Elizabeth Walton. It's Misses Etta and Emma Staples sisters instead of the eccentric Mamie and Emily Baldwins.

The usuals in the book also appear in the film, sometimes in slightly altered form: Ike Godsey isn't a store keeper in the book, but rather a restauranter, chef, bartender, bouncer and pool hall owner (p. 76, 71). As in the movie, we also meet Sheriff Ep Bridges, preacher Hawthorne Dooley, the "backwoods Robin Hood" - Charlie Sneed, and even Chance the cow.

We meet a few characters in the book not appearing in the movie, such as Birdshot Sprouse, "a tall, obliging, not-too-bright boy" (p. 60) who tells the Spencer (Walton) children about the "city lady" with a Missionary Box of Christmas gifts "down at the post office" (p. 62).

All in all, the movie follows the book closely, at times lifting dialogue and plot right out of the book, verbatim:

- "I wish my daddy could fly" says little Pattie Cake ("Elizabeth") on p.13
- Olivia's Christmas cactus (p. 11, 12)
- Clay boy's complaint, "I'm an old mother duck" (p. 16)-
- "Son, you're goen to be sorry you did that" snarls Becky (Mary Ellen) on p. 19
- Olivia stirring her applesauce cake and singing/humming O Little Town of Bethlehem (p. 21)
- Bickering kids (p.p. 19-22, 48-50)
- "We don't accept charity in this family" declares Livy, p. 63
- "I wonder how news got all the way to the North Pole that you wanted to be a writer" observes Daddy Walton in both book (p. 121) and movie to young Clay Boy (John Boy).

Here's how the basic plot reads in the book:

While awaiting their Daddy's arrival on a cold Christmas Eve in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia during the Depression, matriarch Olivia Spencer sends 15 y.o. Clay-Boy out in search of his father. The clan patriarch, Clay Spencer, is a somewhat different man from the John Walton later portrayed by Ralph Waite:

"Clay Spencer was a hard man to measure up to. Like all Spencer men he was a crack shot, a good provider for his family, an honest `look-em-in-the-eye' man, an enthusiastic drinker, a prodigious dancer, a fixer of things, a builder, a singer of note, a teller of bawdy stories, a kissing, hugging, loving man whose laughter would shake the house, and who was not ashamed to cry." (p. 25)

There's no mention of a bus going off the road as a possible explanation for Daddy Walton's lateness, as in the movie. Clay Sr. is simply, inexplicably late. Olivia and her brood of eight - along with Grandpa Homer and Grandma Ida are newsless as to Clay's dilatory arrival and can do nothing but wait. Later, Olivia sends out young Clay Boy to search for Clay, Sr.

While looking for his father, Clay Boy runs into Sheriff Bridges at Ike Godsey's pool hall. The Sheriff has arrested Charlie Sneed for "hunten out of season" (p. 78) - not for relieving local merchants of their foodstuffs, as in the movie. The verbal exchange between Charlie and the swaggering Sheriff Bridges (p. 79-80) is almost word-for-word from the book (p. 78-80).

Clay-Boy gets a ride to the turn off of the First Abyssinian Baptist Church from Sheriff Bridges (not borrowing Sneed's car), and has to trudge to the church on foot in the dark due to road conditions. In the dark and snow, Clay Boy is guided to the church by the sound of singing *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* (p. 85) and is invited in by black preacher Hawthorne Dooley. At the close of the Christmas Eve service, Dooley offers Clay Boy "a ride on General" - his horse - to the Staples' home in search of Clay, Sr. (p. 93).

After being regaled with a rehearsal of the charms of Ashley Longworth (p. 102, 103) and Enrico Caruso on the Staples' Victrola (p. 104), Clay Boy accepts a horse-drawn sleigh ride home from Misses Etta and Emma (p. 107-108). The sisters make Clay Boy a gift of "a Mason jar of recipe" (p. 110), not eggnog as in the movie. Arriving home, Clay Boy presents the jar to his mother who declares she'll use it "to make frosting for my applesauce cake" (p. 110). The recipe for both cake and frosting appears in the back of the book.

Daddy Walton finally arrives home after 1:00 a.m. on Christmas Day:

Snuggling with packages, Clay entered. He placed his bundles down on the table, knelt and opened his arms and immediately they were filled with children, brushing the snow from his face, hugging him around the neck, crushing his chest with their frantic embraces. Now he rose and the children watched with delight as he crossed the floor to Olivia. He kissed her tenderly on the cheek, but then, and this was what the children were waiting for, he picked her up and danced about the kitchen shouting joyously, "God, what a woman I married!" while Olivia shouted indignantly, "Put me down, you old fool!" (p. 117)

...After the children open the gifts their Daddy has brought, little Pattie cake observes, "You didn't get nothen, Daddy." (p. 121) Gently Clay lifted the little girl in his arms and looked around the room at his family. "Sweetheart," he said, "I've got Christmas every day of my life in you kids and your mama." He turned to Olivia. "Did you ever see such thoroughbreds?"

Good night Mama. Good night Daddy. Good night Jason, Mary Ellen, Erin, Ben, Jim-Bob, Elizabeth, Grandpa and Grandma. Good night John Boy.

Good night Spencer's/Walton's Mountain. Merry Christmas.

22 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

Heartwarming little novel.

By Fanshawe

I picked this up at the library one day, being in a Christmas mood and after years of watching *The Walton's "Homecoming"* Christmas special and loving it. The story is quite different from the TV movie, somewhat more bleak in tone...Olivia here is worrying that her husband's delay in coming home is because he is off

drinking somewhere instead of hurt in a bus accident. Probably a bit more accurate feel of the Depression here. Still very absorbing and touching, the characters are no less lovable. A nice short read for a rainy day.

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