

O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum

Christmas trees today are decorated as masterful stylish creations with themes and color schemes. Not so in our house when we were growing up. I was the youngest, and by the time I was old enough to help decorate, a routine was set in place.

Each year my brothers went out into the woods across the street to select a tree and cut it down with a hatchet. As these trees were wild, not tended and sheared, they were always rather ragged. The sharp, woody scent of pine filled the air as the tree was brought inside. Once the “good side” was found, it was secured to neighboring window frames with string. My oldest brother, Jim, went off to work on his train set. Then the decorating began.

Our decorations were hand-me-downs. The string lights were cloth covered wires with cone lamps. Brother Tim would ensure the lights were evenly spaced with colors equally dispersed so there weren’t too many reds or greens in one area. We did have a few bubblers that, of course, would tilt and eventually hang upside-down. If one light loosened in the socket, or went out, the entire string would go dark. Locating the offending lamp was the boys’ job - their patience would wear thin quickly, and the grumbling increase. Eventually, the lights were on and my sister, Cathy, and I could join in.

Our mother loved her collection of Christmas balls probably handed down from a long-dead relative. Many were covered in some kind of rusty metal mesh and had little color remaining. Most were plain colors, shaped as balls or fruit, dull and scratched. A few clip-on birds perched crookedly on the branches. Of course, we each proudly placed our own handmade items. Then it was time for the tinsel. My sister and I were of the opinion that more was better and hurled handfuls of tinsel onto the branches. You can imagine what that did to Tim who carefully placed his tinsel strand by strand while giving us precise directions as to how to do the job.

Lovingly placed under the tree was the Nativity. Mary and Joseph must have marveled at the community of glitter-covered cardboard houses and churches

that surrounded the stable where they were set up. Though I suspect Mary wasn't too happy with the chug-chug- chugging of the train that went 'round and 'round the base of the tree.

With decorations completed, we waited until it was dark outside, turned off all the house lights and plugged in the tree. Every year it was so beautiful and magical. Hope and wonder filled our hearts each night. What marvelous memories!

A few months ago, while going through my late sister's things, I found Joseph. Being plaster of Paris, he is a bit worn. The last survivor of our family Nativity, he now sits on the window sill and looks out on nature's beauty.

NOTE:

In the November membership meeting we heard Richard Pyves speak about his book which chronicles his father's experiences in WWII. He explained that reading the correspondence between his parents during the war had triggered his desire to write the book.

My father kept a daily journal for years simply writing a sentence or two about what he had done each day – no opinions, no feelings. Even something as simple as that provides a picture of his life and the times in which he lived. The correspondence between my parents when they were courting reveals a love story that I could never have imagined. The memories my siblings and cousins have shared also brought insight into our own lives as well as those of family that has passed on. I am not a good writer, but putting these memories to paper brings me joy. This is not a memoir...just a few short paragraphs about some experiences in my life – childhood summers at the beach, the family turtle, and my Aunt's missing brandied peaches are a few.

Christmas with family provides the perfect opportunity to start writing your own collection of memories. Perhaps your descendants will be fascinated by your stories as well.