

Bringing Outdoors Indoors



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

There was a time I absolutely dreaded Christmas. People claimed they never knew what to get me, so they always went the conservative route, clothes. I will state it here and now, clothes are not a suitable gift for Christmas, unless they are outdoor clothes. School or work clothes, socks, or underwear, are not, under any circumstances, acceptable gifts.

Well intentioned distant relatives would all buy me dress shirts and neckties. I did not wear dress shirts, and I did not even have a neck. And these people wondered why they were distant relatives.

I have been under the same management for over 46 years, and in the interest of marital bliss, I no longer worry or care what is under the tree. My wife takes care of all the festivities, and directs the decorating process, and gift giving with dictatorial impunity, and demands obedience. She hands me a list and I go buy her what is on it.

As a writer, I look at things in a completely different way than normal folks. I can go on a trip with someone and tell the story at the end of the day. The person with me will have a completely different version, to the point you would ask if we were on the same trip together. It is not that one of us is wrong, it is that I see things, and question things in a different light. Take for example, the Christmas tree.

My wife has had a tree at Christmas, every year since birth. Some trees were real, and some artificial, all decorated to the hilt with whatever lights and ornaments were available. Now days, she will drag me off to a tree lot, pick out the largest Douglas fir she can find, make me load it in the truck, bring it in the house, insert it in the tree stand, and get out of her way so she can decorate it.

All the while, instead of living in the moment, I wonder what ever



I think trees should remain in the outdoors, but my wife sees it otherwise. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

possessed the first person to go to the woods, cut down a beautiful evergreen tree, drag it home, and set it up in their hobble. Even worse, how did this catch on to the point that everyone is doing it? Perhaps they were trying to bring the outdoors to the indoors?

The history of the Christmas tree goes all the way back to ancient Rome, and expanded in Germany during the 1800s, before coming to America. Plants and trees that remained green all year carried a special meaning. Ancient peoples dressed up their dwellings with evergreen boughs over the doors and windows during festive seasons. In some countries it was believed that evergreens would keep away witches and evil spirits.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the longest

night, and the shortest day falls on December 21st or December 22nd, called the winter solstice. Ancient people believed the sun was a god, and winter came because the sun god grew weak. The evergreen decorations around their dwellings reminded them that green plants would grow again during the summer, when the sun god was strong again.

Early Romans marked the solstice with a feast called Saturnalia, in honor of the god of agriculture, Saturn. Knowing that the fields and trees would once again be green soon, they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs.

Germany is where the Christmas tree tradition kicked off, during the 16th century. Christians would bring decorated trees into their homes.

Some built pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreen boughs.

Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree. Walking home one winter evening, he noticed the stars twinkling amidst the evergreen trees, and he got the idea. He erected a tree in the house, and wired candles to the branches for light. Obviously, there were no smoke alarms in those days, and I am sure more than one neighborhood had a house burning for the holidays.

All the way up to the 1840s, most Americans rejected the idea of bringing trees into the house, not for the reason I objected to it, but because they saw it as pagan symbols and did not accept it. The pilgrim's 2nd governor, William Bradford called

the tradition a "pagan mockery" and tried to penalize anyone who took part in it.

Americans went so far to prevent this "heathen tradition" as they called it, that the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any observance of December 25th a penal offense, other than church services. People were fined for hanging evergreen boughs or decorating trees in their homes.

Alas, Americans began to give in, with the influx of German and Irish immigrants arriving, the Puritan legacy began to erode. By the 1890s, Christmas ornaments were arriving from Germany and the popularity of Christmas trees was on the rise.

Americans always do things in a big way, and Christmas trees were no exception. Europeans

liked their trees short, small, and compact, so everyone could see around and over them. Most European trees were shorter than 4 feet. Americans, on the other hand, wanted their trees to be wide enough to fill the room, and stood tall enough to reach the ceiling. Now we know where Clark Griswold of *Christmas Vacation* got the idea.

The early 20th century saw most trees decorated with apples, fruits, nuts, cookies, and eventually popcorn. Around the turn of the century came electricity and lights, and that changed the way we decorated trees forever. It was one of Thomas Edison's assistants that came up with the idea of Christmas tree lights.

Christmas trees are grown in all 50 states, including Alaska and Hawaii. The trees take up to 8 years to mature, and most are cut many weeks before Christmas. More than 1 million acres have been planted with Christmas trees, with about 2,000 trees per acre. Only about 2 percent of trees are cut from the wilds.

There are 25 to 30 million trees sold annually in the United States, and the industry employs about 100,000 people, so it is big business. This number compares to about 13 million artificial trees purchased each year.

Apparently, I do not stand alone in my questioning the practice. Theodore Roosevelt did not like trees brought into the White House, so during his administration, the practice was banned. He banned it because of environmental reasons.

Well, it is time for me to get the tree and stand set up. She has her crates of lights and ornaments down. Let the season begin.

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GOCO board awards \$33K grant for restoration efforts along the Dolores River

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) board recently awarded \$33,300 to help Montrose County partner with Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC) to continue restoration efforts along the Dolores River.

The area has a large infestation of tamarisk. Crews will spend three weeks removing the invasive

species from approximately eight acres. The area contains many cottonwood trees that provide cover for native plant species to thrive. Rivers Edge West will support WCCC with mapping, monitoring, retreatments, and revegetation to the site once this removal project concludes.

The grant is part of GOCO's Conservation Service Corps program. GOCO partners with Colorado

Youth Corps Association (CYCA) to employ conservation service corps crews across the state on outdoor recreation and stewardship projects. CYCA represents a statewide coalition of eight accredited corps that train youth, young adults, and veterans to complete land and water conservation work and gain professional skills.

To date, GOCO has invested more than \$7.7 million in projects in Montrose

County and partnered to conserve 5,367 acres of land there. GOCO funding has supported the naturescape playground at History Colorado's Ute Indian Museum, Naturita Town Park, and Holly Park, among other projects.

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers, and

open spaces. GOCO's independent board awards competitive grants to local governments and land trusts and makes investments through Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Created when voters approved a constitutional amendment in 1992, GOCO has since funded more than 5,600 projects in all 64 counties of Colorado without any tax dollar support. Visit GOCO.org for more information.