

Birds in a tree and me



DEBBIE GIBSON

I wish you had been with me this morning as I stood by the kitchen window and watched as cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, a frisky squirrel, and mourning doves created an outdoor Christmas tree for my viewing. With the light dusting of snow that fell overnight, it was a glorious sight to behold and made me remember why I feed the birds here on the river. Apart from a snowman candy jar, a tiny indoor tree with what few ornaments I have left since the Great Christmas Tree Collapse of several years ago, and a tiny thatched manger nativity, the outdoor tree of birds is as close as I'll come to truly decorating this year.

I had always decorated everything before the Great Collapse. As luck, bad luck, would have it, I was frying bacon to take to the Gibson gathering of that year, and my tree crashed to the floor. It upset me so much that I refused to pick it up, feigned the chore of sweeping up years of kids' memories into a dustpan; and I walked out the door to gather with Gibsons while the tree stayed exactly where it fell. I distinctly remember stepping over it with a plate of bacon that was almost as heavy as my heart.

My precious husband, knowing that my heart was broken, just like years of ornament collection, found his way back home while we were gathered at his sister's house and picked up the tree, swept up the broken pieces of our collected memories, and placed what didn't break back on the tree.

I don't think I have ever loved him more than when I came home later to find what he had done. He spared me my tears, for I surely would have collapsed in a heap of melting sorrow when I viewed what I had lost in a dustpan. Up until that year, I had been an ornament collector. Fragile glass ornaments, Hallmark editions, hand-made dough ornaments of tiny baby fingers and toes, nativity

representations, dozens of glass frogs that reminded me to Fully Rely On God, ballerinas, bears, and tiny frames around the pictures of all five of my babies perished in the Great Christmas Tree Collapse.

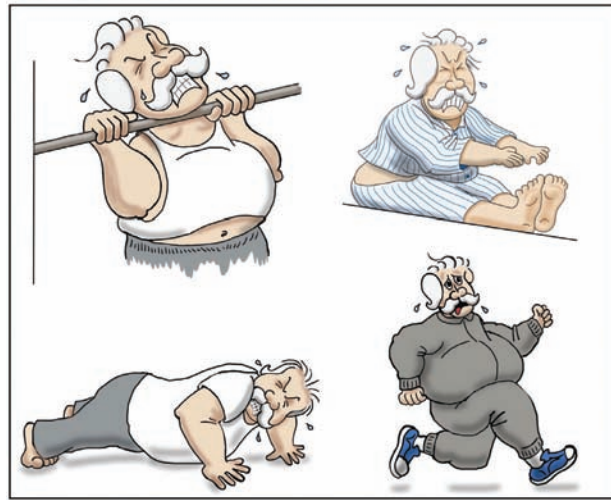
Since then, and because we gather for the holiday at my mother's home in Kingsport, I have shunned decoration and ornamentation. When I saw the bird/squirrel placement this morning, though, it made my heart swell and soar. It made me want to rethink my stubborn reluctance to renew my ornament collection. It made me want to top a tree with a star, run ribbons and garland, and gather bird ornaments of every shape and size.

As I walked by the nativity on the dining room sideboard, I picked up the tiny painted baby Jesus. No one else was up at the time and as I held him in my hand I thought about how His own mother had suffered a great collapse of her own. I thought about none of my own children have been taken from me, and I gave thanksgiving from the bottom of my heart for that. I also thanked that little baby I held in my hand for coming, for me and you, and for bringing the great gift of salvation.

It matters not what I lost. It matters much what I found, and once again, Christmas rose in my heart. It did not come draped in colorful paper with silky bows. It did not cost half a paycheck and leave my bank account bereft and crying for more. It came quietly, just after dawn this morning while snow graced the landscape and birds perched in a barren tree. Christmas arrived as I held a tiny painted baby in my palm.

My hope for you this season is that Christmas arrives for you, despite any circumstance, despite any collapse, despite any loss, and despite any lack. May you feel its fullness and promise, and may you be grateful for gifts you did not need to purchase. They are there. They will always be there. It's a miracle!

Rueben



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Support Group For Female Survivors Of Sexual Assault

Women survivors of sexual assault are invited to attend regular support group meetings or individual support if you prefer. Survivors meet in a safe environment with other women who have had similar experiences. Clinch Valley Community Action, Inc. Family Crisis Services knows and understands what a survivor is going through. The fact that you are alive and reading this means that you are incredibly strong, courageous and intelligent. We are here to aid in the recovery process with individual support sessions. Please call and let us help. We are a confidential service. For information, call Ranetta Davis (276) 889-8206 or Haley Slade at (276) 988-5583.

Recovery Program

Recovery Program every Thursday evening at Lebanon Community Fellowship Church. Supper starts at 6:00 p.m., Worship begins at 7:00 p.m., various open sharing groups start at 8:15 p.m. and all activities conclude around 9:30 p.m. Child care is available.

Russell County Rotary Weekly Program Meetings

The Russell County Rotary welcomes all to attend our weekly program meetings held on Thursdays from 12:00-1:00 p.m. at Pat's Kountry Diner in Lebanon. Here are our December programs coordinated by Rotarian Dlane Bodmer:

December 14th-A Special Christmas Gift-God's Wonder in our World.

December 21st-Rotary Christmas Party at the State Farm Office.

December 28th-No Meeting-Merry Christmas!

Bluegrass & Stained Glass Christmas Concert

Everyone is invited on Sat., Dec. 16, at 3 PM to a festive bluegrass and traditional music celebration in the beautiful stained glass sanctuary of Lebanon Memorial United Methodist Church, 24 Tate Ave. For more info: 276-889-2721 and "The Crooked Road" or "MY SWVA" online event calendars.

Christmas Play

Springfield Baptist Church, Carterton, VA, December 16th at 6:00 p.m. Come join us for our annual Christmas Play and dinner. Bring your favorite dish and soda. Dennis Scarberry 276-762-5080.

Christmas Play

Chestnut Grove Community Church, Hidden Valley Road, Abingdon, VA invites everyone to join us for our Christmas Play "A Not So Silent Night" December 20th at 7:00 p.m. and December 24th at 11:00 a.m.

Travis Fletcher, Pastor.

Cedar Bluff Christmas Concert In The Square

Experience an event from Christmas past as Cedar Bluff celebrates an age-old holiday tradition with the annual Concert in the Square Monday, December 18th at 6:00 p.m. A special performance by RHS Choir directed by Terry Hall. The Cedar Bluff Business and Professional Association invite you to make this evening in the Square your special holiday tradition.

Special Service At Swords Creek Block Church

The Neal Family Ministry from Johnson City will be at Swords Creek Block Church on Wednesday, December 13, 2017, at 7:00 p.m. Pastor Steve Perkins and congregation invite everyone to attend.

LPS Before/Afterschool Program To Present Play

The Lebanon Primary School Before/Afterschool program will present Toys! The Night They Come Alive!; on Wednesday, December 13th, 2017 at 4:30 PM in the school cafeteria. Everyone invited. TOYS is directed by Kelsey Sykes, assisted by Lebanon Primary 21st Century Faculty and Staff.

Special Service At Emmanuel Baptist Church

Emmanuel Baptist Church, Lebanon, VA, would like to invite you to join us on December 17, 2017, at 3:00 p.m. for our new Pastor, Rev. Jacquelyne Booher, Installation Service. Rev. William Reid and Rev. W. A. Johnson, will be officiating the service, with Rev. Dwayne Mabry as Moderator of the Schaeffer Memorial Baptist Association. Dinner will be served immediately following service.

Four County Transit Christmas Schedule

Four County Transit will be closed with no buses running on Friday, December 22 and Monday, December 25, 2017, in observance of the Christmas Holiday. Regularly scheduled bus service will resume on Tuesday, December 26, 2017.

Celebrate The Magic Of "Old Christmas"

The Historical Society of Russell County invites all of you to a celebration of "Old Christmas" at the Old Courthouse at Dickensonville on Sunday, January 7, at 2:00 p.m. Join musician/storyteller Ron Short, formerly a member of Roadside Theater from Appalshop at Whitesburg, Kentucky, as he performs stories and music from an earlier time.

"Old Christmas" was first celebrated in the British Isles, after Pope Gregory XIII had dropped 11 days from the Julian calendar (put in effect by Julius Caesar) to make it correspond with the solar year. In the minds of the strictly religious Protestants, this upended the true birth date of Jesus. The English and Scots Irish who settled in the Southern mountains brought this holiday with them and held January 6 as the true Christmas. This celebration centered around hearth and family—a time of gathering to sing traditional ballads and hymns and listen to folktales handed down from times long past.

Lots of superstitions grew up around this sacred time. The fogs, ice storms, winds, and rains on the first twelve days, beginning with January 6, will foretell the weather to come each month throughout the New Year. Elderberry bushes often bloom out of season in honor of the Christ Child. Barnyard animals kneel in prayer at midnight on Christmas Eve, and until dawn on Christmas morning, ghosts are free to walk—remember Hamlet's father?

Join us and enjoy 18th Century decorations of native greenery and candlelight. Stay for old-timey refreshments and for good fellowship to create a holiday to cherish and remember.

Christmas Music Origins

Scores of artists have released Christmas albums or holiday-infused singles during their careers. Christmas music can be broken down into two distinct categories: traditional hymns and carols and popular secular songs.

Some believe that the religious standards have been passed down since the earliest days of Christianity. However, that is not so. Before the 12th century, music wasn't typically included in religious services, and even then music was included only sporadically. In present day, religious tunes identified as Christmas music typically are not sung until Christmas Eve and thereafter until the Epiphany.

Many of the oldest Christmas songs are not old at all. Many popular carols sung today are less than 200 years old. The world's most popular Christmas carol was originally a poem penned in 1816 by Austrian Catholic

priest Josef Mohr. Two years later, Mohr asked Franz Xaver Gruber, an organist and local schoolteacher, to put his words to music. The resulting song, "Silent Night," was not translated into English for 40 years.

"Hark the Herald Angels Sing" also originated from a poem and had the original opening line of, "Hark how all the welkin rings." The subsequent version was more catchy, and the faster-paced accompaniment was courtesy of Felix Mendelssohn, added 100 years after the poem was written.

"Jingle Bells," a nonreligious tune that has become synonymous with Christmas, was not originally written as a Christmas tune. In fact, the song was intended to celebrate Thanksgiving. Christmas music is diverse, with lively tunes, modern interpretations and religious classics enjoyed through the years.

Supervisors Hold December Meeting

By Heather Powers

The Russell County Board of Supervisors regular monthly meeting was held last Monday evening.

A public hearing was held for a Storm Water Management Ordinance with no comments received from the audience. The board took no action.

Coordinator of Education Training at SWCC Lebanon Center Leslie Brooks provided an introduction of herself and spoke briefly about classes and activities that will be provided.

Russell County Administrator Lonzo

Lester presented reports and requests.

The next Russell County Mountain Movers Faith-Based Forum on Community Development and Support meeting will be Monday, Dec. 18 at 6 p.m. in the RC Conference Center.

The Russell County Employee Christmas Dinner was set for Dec. 20.

Board members were informed of a letter of thanks on behalf of the Roger W. Jessee Memorial Food Bank in Castlewood for the donation to the Nov. food distribution. Over 400 local families

were given boxes of food, including turkeys for their Thanksgiving dinner.

The board approved an authorization of VDOT property ownership transfer resolution for the development of the Russell County and Saint Paul Welcome Center site.

An authorization of VDOT land use permit resolution for commercial entrance of the "Dogtown" disposal site was also approved by the board.

Further, the board authorized its participation with the CPPD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

the board:

Vicki Porter was appointed to the Appalachian Juvenile Edward Tiller was appointed to Finney Community Center Linda Cross was appointed to Highway and Safety Commission

The board entered into a closed session and made a motion and all approved an appropriation to be made in the amount for up to \$60,000 for Russell county Water and Sewage Authority VRA Loan Payments through Dec. 1.

The board adjourned to reconvene on Thursday, Dec. 7 at 3 p.m.