

# Tree time

## Roommates deal with new addition to home

By Paula Lavigne  
and Brian Sharp

This is the story ... of two people on a mission to get the mother of all Christmas trees, and have their story told by them.

It's what happened when we, Paula and Brian, stopped being festive, and started being the nagging roommates we know one another to be.

The air was crisp. The kind of air you'd get on a chilly Nebraska December day. It was cold. Too cold.

We hopped in the rusting rice rocket (That would be Paula's pick-up ... sorry to interrupt. I'm Brian, by the way) and jetted off down O Street to the Christmas tree forest.

(OK, now I am going to interrupt. This is my first Christmas not living at home. I had to have the tree. What's Christmas without a tree?)

(As we travel on this jovial sleigh ride, I point out all the "free" trees there for the plucking. By "free" I'm talking trees that aren't for sale, but aren't sprayed with "stinky fox urine.")

(I sometimes wonder just how "stinky" stinky fox urine is. Mildly stinky might mask the odor of a week's worth of dishes and a month's worth of trash wafting from the kitchen. It might even give the place a sort of potpourri scent.)

Brian, the point?

(But, alas, there are no tree people at the tree place to sell us trees. So we wander. Again, I notice the opportunity for plucking, but we're good, honest tree-loving, industry-supporting youngsters. And we'd probably get caught.)

(We meet some Charlie Brown trees, some thick astroturf trees, and then we meet Steve — huggable, yet manly in a tree sort of way.)

Ah, but this is where Brian proves his manliness and won't hug Steve. I hugged Steve, and felt much warmer for it.

(Excuse me Paul, I have the conch. I believe most would find it odd for a man to simply walk up to another — a complete stranger, mind you — whom he is about to hack off at the ankles with a saw and embrace him in jovial holiday glee.) (Anywho, the tree folk never show, and we leave treeless.)

**Day 2** — Back to the now-tropical forest, wearing shorts and sunglasses, which ruins that snow-covered Norman Rockwell image.

We search for Steve, shouting his name over and over again, but no answer. We finally see him, with a goofy pinecone grin.

"Brian," I say, "you must hug Steve. You must bond with the tree."

Brian looks both ways, then gives Steve a quick, Charmin squeeze.

"Ow!" Brian cries. "He pricked me." (No, he bit me Paul — bit me.) Go Steve.

We saw many trees, but none were as huggable as our own little Stevey.

Stevey, standing a mere 4 feet 3 inches tall and weighing in at about 80 pounds, was no match for us. With the first cuts of the saw, his turpentine blood flowed from his trunk.

(Oh, that's the holiday image we all needed to see. And what's with this "Stevey" crap? It's Steve ... Women.)

We, no, sorry, I — the one with the bare legs exposed to pine needles — lug the tree to the "finishing station" where Mr. Tree Man puts the trees through ROTC basic training.

Steve, meet Mr. Shakee. Mr. Shakee is an interesting device that

wiggles the tree violently, sending needles, bird nests and squirrels flying in all directions. I think the trees find it a thrill, because it works like a giant vibrator. Um, not that I'd know or anything.

After that, Steve goes through this giant meat-grinder thing, and he's squished together and slid into a net. (Uh, it was a straight jacket Paul — see, Steve has gone a bit loony.)

Brian hurls Steve into the truck, and we're off like a herd of turtles. We stop by Brian's "real" home for Christmas lights and a Chihuahua. Mmmmmmm ... puppies.

Steve, Taff (that would be my dog), Brian and I finally get home. (Taff didn't much care for Steve. She didn't much care for him either. In fact, she didn't really care at all.) We try to prop him up in a metal bowl. No go. And, Steve really sheds.

So Brian jets to Target for a tree stand. He tries to secure the stand, a minor feat in modern engineering meant to be understood only by Zen Buddhists. I patiently hold the tree and watch CNN. (OK, a minute please. Yes, she held the tree. Upright? No. I doubt she even looked at Steve, which would explain his 45-degree tilt and the reason we left him teetering for a time.)

Steve's slurping it up in his groovy stand (Slurping? Excuse me Paul, but I think chugging the nectar of the gods would be more appropriate.), decorated with lights and a \$5 Santa topper (don't forget the popcorn). His top half blinks, his bottom half doesn't. I call him Schizo Steve.

Steve's become a part of our lives. That is, until he dries out, ignites and turns the apartment into a blazing inferno.

(Huh? ... whatever. I'm going to get my man Steve a beer.)

# Christmas quiz reveals little-known holiday facts

By The Associated Press

Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat, time once again to find out what you really know about all that.

This Christmas quiz challenges your knowledge of our most fervent, festive and frantic feast, the "only time in the long calendar of the year," as Charles Dickens put it, "when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely."

These questions will test your holiday IQ, or stump your guests with a gala Christmas game show as they gather round the fire after the table has been cleared and the presents unwrapped under the tree.

So chuck another log on the fire, top off the goblets of eggnog, mulled claret or smoking bishop, and let us begin without further ado or ho ho ho.

### THE QUESTIONS:

1. Santa Claus is the pop version of which canonized saint?
2. Where did Christopher Columbus spend Christmas 1492?
3. How did the Pilgrim Fathers celebrate their first Christmas in the New World in 1620?
4. What was the real occupation of the white-bearded Father Christmas who brought a doll to the little girl in the Christmas crime solved by Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret?
5. Who is best remembered in the role of "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas?"
6. Where did George Washington spend Christmas night 1776?
7. How do Santa, Rudolph and Tiny Tim fare in humorist James Finn Garner's "politically correct" versions of favorite Christmas sto-

ries?

8. Why does Pope John Paul II go to Rome's Rebbiba prison at Christmastime?

9. What executive order did 8-year-old Tad Lincoln successfully beg of his father on Christmas Eve 1861?

### THE ANSWERS:

1. St. Nicholas of Bari, a fourth-century Italian bishop depicted by Fra Angelico as the patron of sailors, maidens without a dowery and pawnbrokers.
2. Aboard the Santa Maria, hung up on a reef near Cape Haitien in Haiti. Damage was so extensive he switched to the Nina for the homeward-bound passage.
3. By shunning all celebration and rituals and getting down to hard work building the colony at Plymouth.
4. Gold smuggler.
5. Boris Karloff.
6. Crossing the Delaware River.
7. Santa is "an overweight patriarchal oppressor, reindeer enslaver and exploiter of elves." Rudolph is a "nasally empowered reindeer with a unique luminescent olfactory organ." And as one might expect in a socially sensitive reworking of Dickens that begins: "Marley was non-viable to begin with," Tiny Tim is "a vertically challenged pre-adult with a birth-induced delayed trauma disorder."
8. To visit Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turkish terrorist who severely wounded him in an assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.
9. A stay of execution and a full pardon for Jack, the turkey fattening on the White House lawn, who thereafter became a nuisance, intimidating guards and tourists.

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