



"Lighting the way..."

Have you ever wondered why we have a live tree in our living rooms decorated to the nines throughout the month of December? There are several theories on where the first "Christmas Tree" was used and the reason for it.

One such story is that in the seventh century a monk from Devonshire, England, had traveled to Germany to teach his beliefs of Christianity to the Germans in an area called Thuringia. Thuringia was a sparsely populated, heavily forested area, but yet one that was appropriate for what he would be teaching to the Thuringians. The monk would hold a small fir tree upside down and teach them the story of the Holy Trinity. Ironically during the twelfth century, the trees were being hung upside down from ceilings of homes of Christians during the month of December.

In the story the first lights were placed on the trees early in the sixteenth century.

Martin Luther began the tradition of placing lit candles on the trees at night to show his children how the stars would twinkle in the sky.

Soon the other decorations would follow!

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tinsel was made from silver coated with tin and lead, and hung on the branches, but this was found to be too heavy for the branches; they would often break under the weight. *Not a good thing when you had lit candles on the branches.* Small beads, would be hung on the inside trees, whereas dried fruit and popcorn would be strung and hung around the outside trees to show gratitude to birds. By this time in history the tree was sitting upright as it is today.

Numerous family traditions have made their way into the twenty-first century, such as: when to set up the tree, when to take it down, themes for decorating, and whether to use a cut tree or one that is rooted in a large pot with soil, otherwise known as a living tree.

I have been to friends' homes, several here in the mountains, that purchase a living tree each year; then plant them in various locations on their property. It is always enjoyable to walk around their property listening to the stories of the Christmas when the tree was used. *Normally the trees are not planted in a row because they are different heights due to being purchased in different years.*

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the owner of The Southern Tree Plantation, south of Blairsville. Howard McCombs and his family own and operate the plantation where the focus is always "to have a great memorable holiday." It is amazing to view the various species of tree, along with the numerous acres where they grow in rows according to age. Until now I had not thought of using a "living tree" for decorating my living room during Christmas time-*especially since I live back in the forest.* But then I thought: **Why not?** They are beautifully shaped, along with being of a different type that I don't

have on the property. Years from now, I can do as others have done, and show them to visitors, with each one having a story to tell about Christmas' past.

On Saturday, December 2nd, I will have on display, at The Southern Tree Plantation, my wildlife paintings and photography. I will also be autographing copies of my children's book ***"Paw Paths on a Mountain: from the eyes of a black bear"***. Hopefully you can stop by, pick up a socking-stuffer or two, and purchase a unique present for that special someone, either from me or many of the craft booths that will be set up while you're picking out your family Christmas tree.

