

PROJECT LIFESAVER NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2020

The Ambassador's Column

Giving Back

Home Security and Autism

Happy Holidays!



THE CHRISTMAS TREE

THE AMBASSADOR'S COLUMN

BY RON YEAW

INTRODUCTION

"O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum, Your branches green delight us."

"O Tannenbaum", or in its English version, "O Christmas Tree", is a carol of German origin that pays tribute to one of the most recognizable symbols and traditions of the Christmas season. The evergreen qualities of the Tannenbaum (German for fir tree) have long inspired musicians to write songs in its honor. The first of which dates back to 1550. The best known version was written in 1824 by Ernst Anschütz, a Leipzig organist and teacher.

ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY

In the Northern Hemisphere, the shortest day and longest night of the year occurs on either December 21st or 22nd and is called the winter solstice. Many ancient people believed that the sun was a god and that winter came every year because the sun god had become sick and weak. They thought that the winter brought numerous evils and malicious spirits. The pagan peoples turned to the aid and magic of any spirits in nature that would help them deal with them. Plants and trees that remained green all year had a special meaning in the winter. The people had believed for a long time that such forms of vegetation had some special power against the darker magic of winter. They celebrated the solstice because it meant that the sun god was finally beginning to get well. The Celtic pagan civilizations (Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and British cultures) would celebrate and sacrifice to the god Jul (pronounced "Yule"). The Norse pagans (the Danes, Icelanders, Norwegians, and Swedes) hung evergreen boughs over their doors and windows and brought trees into their homes as they believed that the spirits of the trees would inhabit their home and bless its inhabitants. In many countries, it was believed that evergreens would keep witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness away during the darkest times of the year. Evergreens reminded them of all the plants that would grow when the sun god was strong again and summer would return.

The ancient Egyptians worshipped the god Ra, who had the head of a hawk and a blazing sun disk on his crown. When Ra began to recover from his illness at the winter solstice the Egyptians would fill their homes with palm tree branches which symbolized the triumph of life over death. Early Romans marked the solstice with a feast called the Saturnalia in honor of





Saturn the god of agriculture. The Romans knew that the solstice meant that farms and orchards would soon be green and fruitful again. To mark the occasion they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs. According to one legend Saint Boniface (the Bishop of Germany) attempted to introduce the idea of Christianity to the Northern European pagan tribes in the seventh century. In doing so he incorporated their tradition of bringing Tannenbaum trees into their homes and used their triangular cone-shape to represent the holy trinity and the occasion to celebrate the birth of their savior, Jesus Christ.

The mysterious Druid priests in England decorated their temples with evergreen boughs as a symbol of everlasting life. The Scandinavian Vikings thought that evergreens were the special plant of the sun god Balder and believed that the evergreen represented the promise of the return to spring once winter had passed.

The city of Riga, Latvia, claims to be the home of the first holiday tree. An octagonal plaque in the town has the inscription "The First New Years Tree in Riga in 1510" in eight different languages. The first reference to putting up a "Christmas tree" inside a home as part of the celebration of their savior's birth can be traced back to the sixteenth century Germans, though neither a person nor town have been identified as the origin of the tradition. The earliest record of a pine tree ever being decorated for Christmas was in 1521 by devout Christians in the Alsace region of Germany. Some of them also built pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles. During the 1530s, German churches began putting up Christmas trees and the guilds started erecting them in front of their guildhalls. It is widely believed that the sixteenth century German Protestant reformer Martin Luther was the first to add lighted candles to a tree. As he was walking home one winter evening he was awed by the brilliance of the stars twinkling amidst the evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family he erected a tree in the main room of his home and wired candles to the tree's branches.

By the early eighteenth century the custom of erecting an evergreen tree in homes during the Christmas holiday period had become common practice in the towns of the upper Rhine (western Germany). The tradition was regarded by the Catholic majority along the lower Rhine as a Protestant custom and, as a result, it remained confined to the upper Rhine. The custom was spread to the lower Rhine by Prussian officials who were relocated there in the wake of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 (the reshaping of Europe following the downfall of French Emperor





Napoleon). In the early nineteenth century the custom became popular among the nobility and spread eastward from Germany to the Russian royal courts. Princess Henrietta introduced the Christmas tree to Vienna, Austria in 1816 and the custom was quickly transferred throughout the rest of the country. The first French Christmas tree was introduced in 1840 by the Duchess of Orleans.

The Christmas tree was introduced in Great Britain in the early nineteenth century by King George III's German Queen Charlotte. Thirteen year old Princess (future United Kingdom Queen) Victoria wrote in her journal on Christmas eve in 1832 how the family would put candles and sugar ornaments on their tree and place presents around its base in celebration of the holiday season. After Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert in 1839 the custom became even more widespread. The use of evergreen trees continued to spread throughout Great Britain and served as a symbolic defense against the harsh realities of winter in the same way as they had for the Pre-Christian Germans. Illustrations of the British royal family during Christmas celebrations helped popularize the Christmas tree throughout Great Britain.

Christmas was sacred to the New England Puritans in America and William Bradford, the pilgrim's second governor, tried to stamp out the "pagan mockery" of using trees as part of the observance. The Puritans found no scriptural justification for celebrating Christmas other than in church services and associated all other celebrations with idolatry. In 1659 the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any non-religious observance of Christmas a punishable offense. That mindset continued until the 19th century when the influx of German and Irish immigrants undermined the Puritan legacy. The German settlements in Pennsylvania had community trees as early as 1747. Cattle barons from Britain brought their tree customs with them when they settled in Texas in the mid 1830's. However, most 19th century Americans still found Christmas trees to be an oddity and, like many other festive Christmas customs, the tree was not initially adopted in the United States. As late as the 1840s Christmas trees were still seen as pagan symbols by many Americans.

Several cities in the United States lay claim to putting up the first Christmas tree, mostly by 18th and early 19th century immigrants. The city of Windsor Locks, Connecticut claims that, while imprisoned there in 1777, a Hessian soldier put up an evergreen tree to remind him of his homeland. Easton, Pennsylvania also lays the claim as German settlers purportedly erected one





there in 1816. Lancaster, Pennsylvania claims to have recorded the first Christmas tree in America in 1821.

Another account credits Charles Follen, a German immigrant to Boston, for being the first to introduce to America the custom of decorating a Christmas tree. August Imgard, a German immigrant living in Wooster, Ohio, is credited by the National Confectioners' Association with being the first to popularize the practice of decorating a tree with white candy canes.

By the 1890s, Christmas ornaments were arriving from Germany and the popularity of Christmas tree decoration in the United States began to increase.

MODERN TIMES

In the early 20th century most Americans were still decorating their Christmas trees with homemade ornaments. The German-Americans continued to use apples, nuts, marzipan cookies, and popcorn (after being dyed bright colors and interlaced with berries and nuts) to decorate their trees.

The advent of electricity in the early 1890's ushered in the age of Christmas lights, thereby making it possible for trees to glow for days on end. Christmas trees began to appear in town squares across the country and having a Christmas tree in the home became an American tradition. Many cities, towns, and department stores put up public Christmas trees for everyone to enjoy such as the Rich's Great Tree in Atlanta, Georgia and the Rockefeller Center Tree in New York City. During the 1970s and 1980s the largest Christmas tree in the world was put up every year at the National Enquirer building in Lantana, Florida. The tradition grew to become one of the most spectacular and celebrated events in the history of South Florida. In 1856, President Franklin Pierce brought the Christmas tree tradition to Washington, D.C. In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge started the National Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony which continues each year on the White House grounds as part of what has become a major holiday event. In 1979, President Jimmy Carter only lit the crowning star atop the tree in honor of the Americans being held hostage in Iran. In 1980, the tree was only fully lit for 417 seconds, one second for each day the hostages had been in captivity.





DATES

Both setting up and taking down a Christmas tree were originally associated with specific dates. In early Europe, Christmas trees were, in accordance with pagan traditions, set up around the winter solstice. After the practice was adopted into Christian practice and the Church set December 25th as the birth of Christ, the pagan date was supplanted by the tradition of erecting and decorating the tree on December 24th and then removing it the day after the twelfth night (January 5th). To have the tree up after that date was considered to bring bad luck. Modern commercialization of Christmas has resulted in trees being put up much earlier, sometimes as early as mid September by some department stores and taken down after January 7th (sometimes referred to as Little Christmas). American families average putting up their tree around the second week in December and take it down during the first week of the New Year. Some traditions suggest that Christmas trees may be kept up until of February 2nd, the day of the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Candlemas), when the Christmas season officially closes.

TYPES OF TREES

Most Christmas trees are firs, pines, and spruces, although other types are also used. The most popular species in the United States are Scotch Pine, Douglas Fir, Fraser Fir, Balsam Fir, Blue Spruce, and the Eastern Red Cedar. Almost all of the Christmas trees in the United States are grown on Christmas tree farms where they are cut after about ten years of growth and new trees planted in their place.

In the late 19th century, the artificial tree, particularly the German's Goose Feather Tree, started to become popular. In the 1930s, the Addis Brush Company created artificial trees made from animal hair bristles that were dyed green. They were sturdier than the feather branch trees so they could support heavier decorations and were not nearly as flammable. Most artificial trees currently in use are made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC) or other plastics. The advantages of artificial trees include their lower cost, they can be used for several years, they do not require messy needle cleanup, and they reduce the potential for allergic and fire hazards. The use of such trees has been criticized because they cannot be recycled as mulch. In 2012, seventy percent of the Christmas trees in American homes were artificial and that percentage has been increasing every year.





SUMMARY

Throughout history the significance of bringing an evergreen into the home represents life in the winter, light in the darkness, hope for the New Year, and the return of warmth to the earth in the spring. The choice of the evergreen is universal through all cultures that have adopted the winter celebration such that “holiday trees” represent a human celebration as well as part of the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. The term “holiday tree” serves the purpose of engaging larger groups of people in the occasion regardless of their religious preference. Thus, the adoption of trees as part of the Christmas season has become an addition to the various other celebrations that take place around the winter solstice.



Happy Holidays!



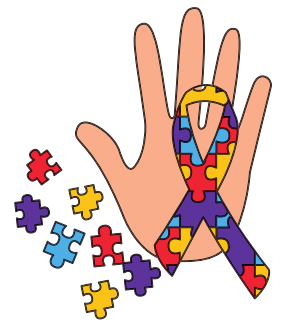
Giving Back

TO THE COMMUNITIES AROUND US

This year has been extremely hard on everyone. We, at Project Lifesaver, understand that the need is greater than ever this year for so many families. As we donate to help families in the Project Lifesaver programs around our offices, we encourage all to help your communities also. Reach out to your local non-profit or advocacy groups and see if there is a way you can help. Donations or just a little bit of your time volunteering can give so much hope to someone's life.



HOME SECURITY AND AUTISM



Maintaining safe home security plays an important role for a family with an autistic family member. Most parents of children with autism face challenges that families with neurotypical children don't usually encounter. Keeping a safe and friendly home environment is very important to prevent stress for everyone involved. A home security system is a great option for the home, whether you have an autistic family member or not. Research and discussion is the best way to find what would work best for your family.

While Project Lifesaver works to bring your loved one home if they wander, security within the home can help minimize injuries and accidents. For example, a lot of caregivers are working from home these days. Having a home security camera, such as CCTV, can help you in tracking your child within the home when you are not able to give 100% of your full attention. You can easily be alerted if your child opens a door to wander. Most home security cameras have a live video feature where you can watch your child using your smartphone. Additionally, some home security cameras have sensors. Placing sensors in your house in areas where you think a potential hazard can occur can help you protect your child. Once your child opens a door, knife drawer, or chemical cabinets, you will be immediately notified.

Using good locks and alarms is an important thing that you should consider in your home, especially if you have a child with ASD. It is recommended to place locks and alarms on your exterior doors and windows. That way, it can help in preventing your child from leaving or going outside your home. You can also activate the notification, so you can be notified if your child tries to open a potential exit route.

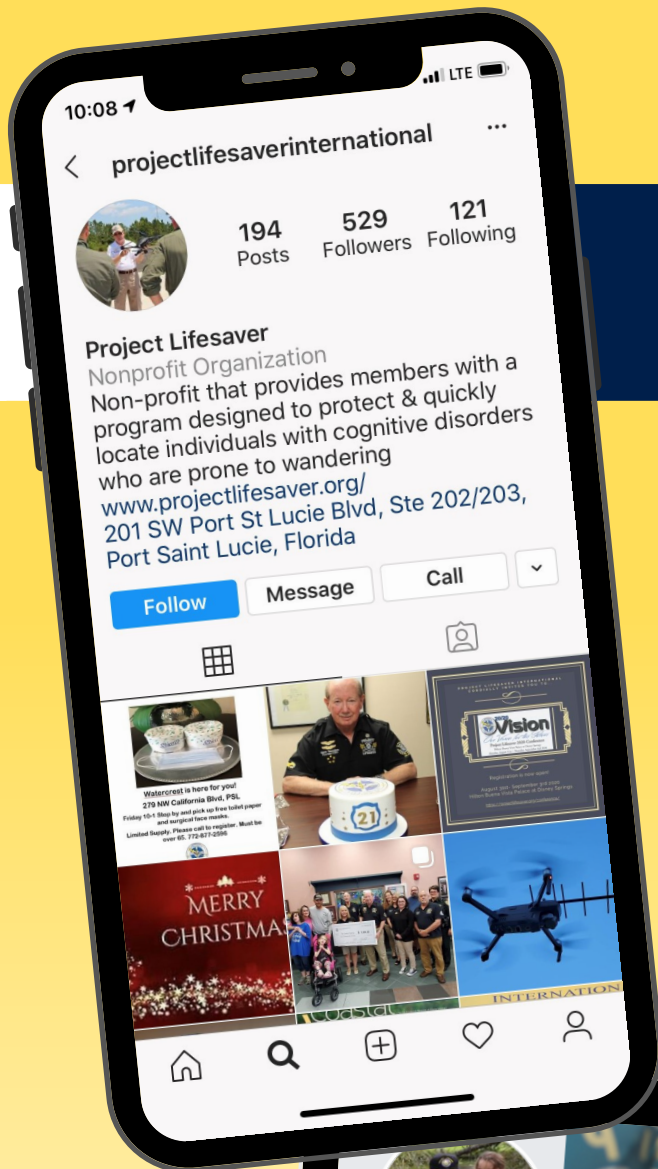
Raising any child can be stressful, challenging, and a big responsibility. Home security systems play an important role in protecting your child with ASD. You can overcome challenges with proper preparation and the right tools. Research is the best way to know what is right for your family. Online research guides like those found at www.homesecuritystore.com can help you make the right decision.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS

PROJECT LIFESAVER WISHES
EVERYONE A HAPPY AND
SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON. WE
THANK THOSE THAT WORK
TIRELESSLY TO KEEP THEIR
COMMUNITIES SAFE.





CHECK US OUT!

We enjoy interacting with you on social media!
We also post articles, events, and updates so it's a great way to stay informed!

Twitter: @Projectlifesavr

Instagram: @projectlifesaverintl

Facebook: Project Lifesaver International

Youtube: Project Lifesaver International

