

Local writer enjoys nature

by JAN ELDREDGE
Post correspondent

Many people are constantly escaping the fast pace of city life, but for Bob and Doris Freeman, country life has also offered a source for self-expression.

Upon Bob's retirement at 58, they bought a house in a beautiful location in Brightwood. Bob was a linotype operator for the Beaverton "Valley Times" for 16 years, later becoming a printing broker.

"When I retired early, people were always asking me what I'd do up here," said Bob. "I told them I'd like to sit and watch an ant go up a tree, then go around to the other side and watch him go down."

Actually, Bob and Doris had more on their minds than relaxation. They began to remodel their home and decorating their property. The closeness the Freemans feel for nature is evident while walking through their yard. There are many handmade

structures including a number of elaborate bird houses, a beautiful cemetery for pets and a screened-in pagoda for summer afternoon lounging.

"Everything is more relaxing here," said Bob. "There is just a different sense of feel up here."

Bob's relationship with nature is best exemplified by meeting Olmar, King of the Goochies.

Bob was clearing some land around his property with a small tractor when he decided to take out a rotting stump by the road. As he jammed the blade into the stump, he heard a small groan. Upon a repeated blow, he heard a definite "ouch." The stump then introduced itself as Olmar, and Bob found that even a rotted-out old tree has a place in nature.

Since that time, Bob has often turned to Olmar for advice and words of wisdom.

Who are the Goochies that Olmar is

the King of? The Goochies derive their name from goo, or in our language, humus. Humus is the material that is waiting to decompose to make organic compost so trees and other matter can grow.

The relationship between Bob and Olmar has been re-created in 17 children's stories; written by Bob from his office that overlooks his property and the forest beyond. The stories are in letter form, written to nine-year old David, Bob's nephew from California.

They are mainly stories of nature and animals, ranging from an owl who says "what?" instead of "who?" to a beaver who tries to take first place in the timber festival, only to lose his two front teeth.

Bob's stories usually contain some food for thought, but he tries not to make them overly moralistic. His stories also have an appeal to adults, as well as children.

Although at one time, Bob had an agent actively seeking publication for him, he has had little luck so far.

"I'm 68 now and I'm not really looking for it," said Bob. "But I don't feel badly about it. The way I see it, everyone has something they can do well and it doesn't always have to be commercial to be enjoyed."

Another thing that Bob does well is to tell the stories personally to children. For the past three years, children from the Kiwanis Camp have visited the Freemans for an afternoon of stories. Afterwards, if the weather is nice, everyone is given a container and they pick raspberries from the Freemans' yard. He has also entertained at Cottrell and Orient schools.

According to Bob, the most rewarding payment he has received is from the children themselves, who often become very enthusiastic after hearing his stories.

'Pojo was beside himself with fear. Then fear gave way to utter terror as he saw an older man with a shovel come into view.'--Robert Freeman

Pojo: A Christmas story

by
ROBERT L. FREEMAN

Author's note: The tales of OLMAR were letters to a nine-year old nephew, David.

OLMAR, King of the Goochies, is a stump residing at the home place. OLMAR is waiting to return to earth in the form of humus, or 'goo' as he prefers to call it. Thus he replenishes the soil so other trees can live. To him, all stumps are Goochies and he proclaims himself their king.

OLMAR of course is the story teller, having seen and lived the experiences he tells about.

Dear David:

Tail-wagging Rufus is lying at my feet by this stump I'm sitting on as I write to you this morning from my note pad positioned on my knee. We are looking down from our hill onto the traffic traveling like a huge multi-colored snake, slowly twisting up the snow slickery white highway toward Mount Hood. Most of the cars are carrying skis fastened in one manner or another to their tops. I keep wondering how much fun it would be to flop the cars over on their backs and watch them skid back down the mountain road with their front wheels facing skyward.

I'm not as interested in the cars going up the mountain as I am the ones that I notice coming down. So many are carrying choicely chosen, freshly cut Christmas trees roped to their tops. Perhaps this upsets me because Christmas is only two weeks away and I'm not in the Yule spirit. I tell myself it's not right that thousands of beautiful trees must give their lives each year just to decorate someone's living room. Then after Christmas, their only reward is to end up brown and lifeless on the community trash heap.

It is afternoon now and I've moved my location back to my desk in the house. I have a story to tell you now I didn't have earlier. It kept bothering me about all those chopped down Christmas trees, so on sudden impulse I decided to get OLMAR's opinion. Now, thanks to OLMAR's tale of little Pojo and his fight for life, I feel much relieved about the cutting of Christmas trees.

"Maybe," said OLMAR, after hearing my complaint regarding what I considered useless waste in the cutting of the trees, "just maybe Christmas trees live only to have their one short moment of shining glory."

"Let me tell you about puny Pojo," OLMAR continued. "Pojo, a little fir tree, lived a hundred or so feet up and beyond Mount Hood's timberline. It was a mistake but somehow his tiny birth seed got blown farther away from his mother than should have happened. Pojo's first recollection was that he was hidden from full view behind a gigantic rock. His roots were in parched soil and being so high up on the mountain made his breathing difficult. Of course the huge boulder was Pojo's true friend and helper. Its immovable weight shielded him from the high winds that sometimes screeched by. During the long winter months Pojo tucked his little top the best he could under a rocky ledge sticking out from the huge stone. This kept him from being completely crushed to death by the terrible weight during the snow season. The helpful boulder also let the melting snow in the spring-summer melt-off, seep into the soil slowly and aided to hold the moisture back from running carelessly away down the mountain. Of course this meant Pojo could keep his little root feet damp during most of the hot summer."

Pojo stood only twelve inches high and was quite badly misshapen and weather worn. In the fifty years he had lived at this lonely mountain spot, by contrast, all his newer ten-year old cousins were tall, straight, healthy and happy.

Pojo in his moments of sad loneliness and self pity would call to his mother standing at the outer edge of the timberline for help. "Oh, mama, look at me, so small and bent. I'm so hungry and thirsty all the time. I get so little nourishment up my roots. It's such an effort to keep going. I'm getting so tired of trying. Oh, why was I born?"

On these occasions when Pojo was feeling his worst was when his mama was her sternest. "Pojo", she would say, "try and straighten up. Hold your top higher. Of course it's hard. Mama knows what you are going

through. But don't let me hear you talk about why you were born. You were born from love as all things are. The hurt and pain that sometimes comes from love was never meant to be. You alone weren't singled out to suffer. We are supposed to do the best we can with what was given us, like it or not."

Then she would soften as she usually did after one of Pojo's sad laments and say not

to dry out his needles. He dug his little root fibers deeper into the drying soil looking for any kind of moisture tucked in some hidden dark cranny, that his boulder friend might have saved for him.

Suddenly Pojo was startled to hear voices. This was unusual, because people seldom ever came on his side of the rock. He had only felt human presence by the vibrations of

voice in the background. "Be brave, my little Pojo. Mama loves you very much."

Pojo was sick at heart. Everything he knew was being wiped out. What was the use? Pojo relaxed every fibre in his being and was about ready to give up and die. Then, even though he didn't want to remember, his mother's words came back to him. "Do the best you can with what you have." "Well," thought Pojo, "I won't give up—not just yet anyway."

Summer went, then came handsome Prince Fall dashing and splashing his golden paint brush on the trees that were scheduled for new seasonal paint jobs. Next in turn was King Winter, blowing his blustery best, whipping snow flakes ahead of him.

Another Christmas came and went with Pojo's mama feeling very sad. She had taken little notice of the season's change since her little Pojo had disappeared. She looked sadly down the slope at the holes in the forest floor that had formerly been this year's Christmas trees. How she wished little Pojo could have been bigger and more shapely. Perhaps he too, could have been a Christmas tree.

The bright spring sun was barely peeking over Mount Hood when Mama was aware of the first returning robin resting in her branches.

"You must be Pojo's mama," the robin chirped excitedly. "Pojo described you to me often enough."

Mama became instantly alert. "Do you mean you've seen my Pojo?" she asked, not willing to believe what she had just heard.

"Yes, yes," called the robin. "I left him ten days ago. He insisted I look you up on my way North. I left him as a matter of fact, sitting in a pot in the pleasant California sunshine. He told me to tell you he is very happy and well taken care of. He wanted you to know that last Christmas he was placed on a big table in the living room of his new home. Beautiful little ornaments were strung about his limbs and then he said a most wonderful thing happened. A miniature set of tiny lights were attached through his branches. Pojo said you would have been so proud of him. He wanted, me to tell you he flexed his muscles and held on tight to the little lights. Visitors coming in, first saw the huge impressive tree cousin of his standing in the hall. However, when they spied little Pojo they would cluster around paying him all sorts of compliments."

"Pojo loves his colorful pot that gets moved around to various places in the house and yard. He is looking forward to next Christmas. Pojo wanted you to know he is most happy and that he will never forget his mama and all of her goodness."

The robin prepared to take off. He had now delivered his message and had a great many miles to travel north before nightfall. "Oh, one more thing. Pojo wondered what the little girl that took him away means when she says, 'I love you, my beautiful Oregon bonsai'." And with that the robin flew away."

So David, that is the story on one Oregon Christmas tree that didn't think it had a chance, yet made it real big. You have a merry Christmas and enjoy your tree. It is trying hard to make you happy.

As ever, love,
Your Uncle Bob

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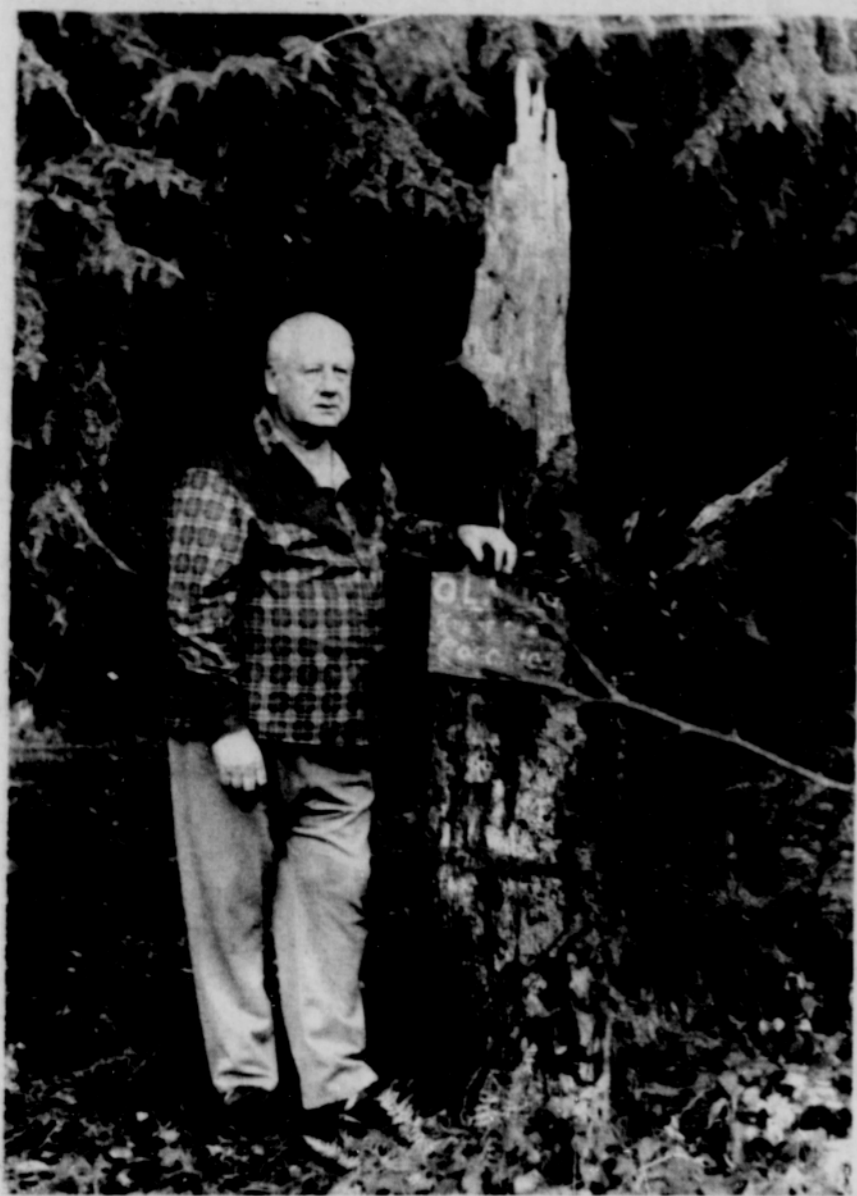
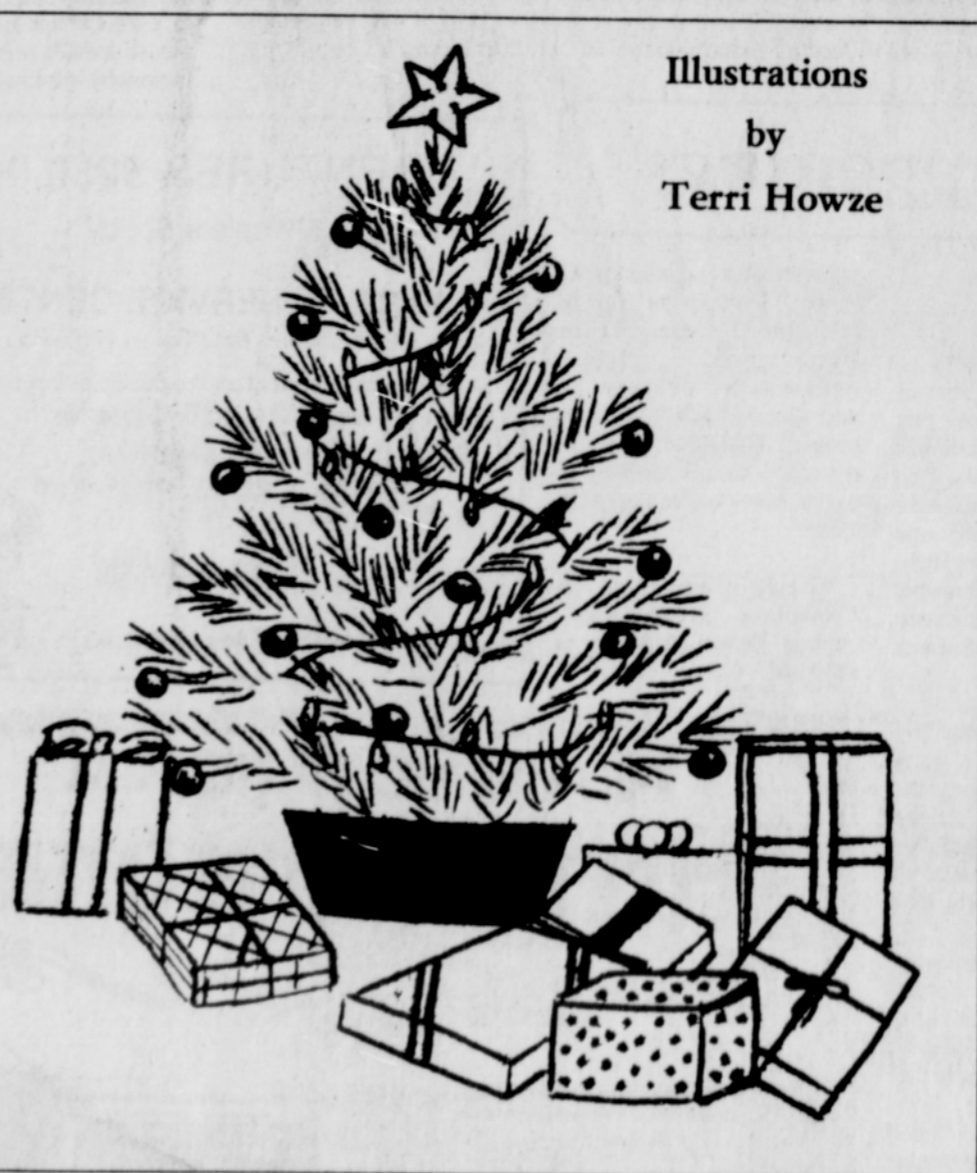


Photo by Jan Eldredge

Local children's writer Robert Freeman stands by OLMAR, a tree stump on his property that gives him advice and story ideas. Freeman, a Brightwood resident, tells one of OLMAR's Christmas stories elsewhere on this page.



unkindly, "It does seem unfair, this problem of living, getting nowhere, seeing others so much better off, wondering what to do. But honey, your job is to keep stretching your limbs upward and keep digging your little roots deeper, always deeper."

After his mother's voice spanking, Pojo would shake a resin tear or two from his branches, look down at his little self and dream. How he longed to be like his cousins waiting for their chance to be a Christmas tree. Pojo imagined how wonderful it must be to wear all those gorgeous jeweled decorations and lights. To be able to stand, the center of attraction, as people came to admire and put gifts at his base, seemed to him a dream he couldn't live without. Yet what kind of a chance did he have? None, he thought, sadly shaking his top.

"So time went on as it always does. King Winter finally gave Princess Spring permission to warm up the few cold breezes that got left behind after his long stay on the mountain. They summer came and Pojo felt the east of the mountain, frying pan heat start

winter skiers as they skimmed over his snow roof during the mountain's winter play time. Now the voices were upon him and he almost died of fright as he saw a little girl come into view from the other side of the rock.

Excitedly he heard, "Daddy, look! look! Here is just what we have been searching for all this time."

Pojo was beside himself with fear. Then fear gave way to utter terror as he saw an older man with a shovel come into view. "Yes, Gloria, you are right," the man said. "We will settle on this one." Suddenly Pojo felt the ground shake as the shovel started to tilt him sideways. Then it was the other side. Back and forth he went.

Panic welled up in his voice as he called out. "Mama, Mama, they are tearing me up by the roots. Oh mama, please don't let them take me away."

Suddenly darkness closed in around him as a gunny sack went over his top and the world he had known suddenly disappeared. Now the sack was being lifted up across the shoulder of the man as he was being carried away. Faintly Pojo could hear his mother's

