

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



Since folks are more worried, anxious and depressed this season than usual, I certainly don't want to add to your burdens. Instead a few stories to read while relaxing with a well-earned, warm cuppa, perhaps to share with the children, in a warm and quiet moment.

First two folk tales from Sheryl Ann Kara's book *The Solstice Evergreen: The History, Folklore and Origins of the Christmas Tree*

The Dancing Brothers (Iroquois Tribe)

Long ago there lived seven brothers who; on hot summer nights, slept outside their hogans in the cool grass. One night they were awakened by the most beautiful singing. It seemed to be coming from the stars.

The sound enveloped the brothers, lifting them up and lightening their very souls. They began to dance a rhythmic weaving dance in the soft moonlit night. Entering a trancelike state they danced and danced until they found themselves climbing up into the sky.

The youngest brother was the first to pull his attention away. "My brothers! Look at where we are!" he exclaimed. "How can this be? Why are we here?"

"You have been chosen to be stars in the heavens," answered the moon. "In the season of the new year, when the council fires are lit, you shall dance over the lodges of the people."

The moon raised his arm to set the brothers into the sky, but the youngest suddenly became distraught because he could hear the sound of a woman weeping.

"That's our mother!" he cried. He turned to look back and fell out of the sky. His body struck the earth with such force it was buried deep in the ground. His mother watered his grave with her tears every day for many long months. One day a tiny green sprout sprang up from the earth at that very spot. Before the amazed woman's eyes it grew larger and larger, becoming a towering pine tree, full of branches and pointing to the other brothers in the sky.

This next one made me laugh out loud, as I have been overcome by similar fits, though hopefully not from the same cause.

The Two Pine Cones (Finland)

Laplander wizard, who was on a journey through Finland, arrived at a town early one evening hungry and bone-weary. Oh, how he wished he could spend the night in a warm inn, but with no money his only choices were to find a protected spot outside or beg for a place to sleep.

On the edge of town was a small hut made of logs. It would have been so nice to be able to stop walking right there, but the wizard passed by, thinking, "These people have so little themselves. If I go to a larger home the people will be more able to help me."

The next house looked promising, large and well-kept, obviously the home of well-to-do folk. He knocked on the door but at first there was no answer. He tried again and a cold harsh voice called out, "Who are you? And what business do you have knocking on decent folk's doors at this hour?"

The wizard answered, "Pardon me. I am but a poor wayfarer who needs a place to rest his head. Would you allow me a corner by your stove for the night?"

The woman answered, "Go away! I have no room for beggars. Move on or I'll set loose the dogs."

The wizard returned to the poor hut where he was welcomed in by a kind-looking woman and her husband. They shared their small evening meal with him and, at bedtime, gave him their only bed.

In the morning the wizard wished to repay them by giving the woman the ring he wore on his finger, but she said no, she couldn't take it. The wizard then drew a pine cone from his cloak. "Take this then instead. It will help you prosper in the first task you do today."

The woman took the pine cone and thanked him. Then she turned to her work. Her first job was to measure the linen she had woven the day before. She measured and measured, but, to her surprise, the more she measured the more there was. It took her three days to measure it all. By that time there was enough linen to last her family for the rest of their lives.

The story of the poor woman's good fortune was told throughout the village. Her rich neighbor fretted about her lost opportunity and decided she would treat the stranger differently if he ever came back.

A year passed by and, sure enough, the wizard did pass through town

again. He stopped again at the big house and this time was ushered in with a smile. The woman of the house prepared a feast of the finest foods and gave him the finest feather bed to sleep on.

In the morning the wizard wished to pay her for her kindness but she refused his money. He drew a pine cone from his cloak as he had done before. He said, "Take this then instead. It will help you prosper in the first task you do today."

The greedy woman was looking forward to this moment and had set a purse of gold on her table all ready to count. But in her excitement she sneezed before she reached the table and without thinking ran to get a handkerchief.

To her horror she found herself unable to do anything but sneeze, run for her handkerchief, sneeze and run, sneeze and run again. It took three days before she could stop sneezing long enough to put away her purse.

These last two may not be appropriate for a child's understanding. The first is everyone's nightmare in the floodmud. The second describes perfectly the schizoid experience of going from Vernonia into the valley. Taken from a marvelous little book by John Updike called *The Twelve Terrors of Christmas*, this tiny tome, illustrated by Edward Gorey, is a delight for the Scrooge in all of us.

Electrocution

It's not just the frayed strings of lights any more, or the corroded transformer of the plucky little Lionel. It's all those battery packs, those electronic games, those built-in dictionaries, those robots a-sizzle with artificial intelligence. Even the tinsel tingles this year. And isn't it somehow terrible, the way shed tinsel shivers in the gloomy ice-clogged gutters?

The Dark

Oh, how early it comes now! How creepy and green in the gills everyone looks, scrabbling along in drab winter wraps by the phosphorous light of department-store windows full of Styrofoam snow, mockups of a fictitious 1890, and beige mannequins posed with false jauntiness in plaid bathrobes. Is this Hell, or just an upturn in consumer confidence?

Solstice is on Saturday, December 22nd. The days begin to get longer then and we can begin to believe that Spring will return, as the good green earth will recover and our lives remember laughter and repose.



Church Directory

NEHALEM VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH

Gary Taylor, Pastor
Grant & North Streets, Vernonia
503 429-5378
Sunday School 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Nursery available
Wednesday Service 7:00 p.m.

VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

Carl Pense, Pastor
850 Madison Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-1103
Sunday Worship Service: 10:30 a.m.
Children's Sunday School

VERNONIA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Grant Williams, Pastor
957 State Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-6790
Sunday Breakfast 9:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 9:45 a.m.
Children and Nursery 10:00 a.m.
Youth Group 6:00 p.m.
Preschool Tues. & Thurs. 9:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer 7:00 p.m.
Friday Adult Volleyball 7:00 p.m.

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Rev. Luan Tran, Administrator
960 Missouri Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-8841
Mass Schedule
Sunday 12:00 Noon
Religious Education
Sunday 10:30 a.m.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

2nd Ave. and Nehalem St., Vernonia
503 429-8301
Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m.
Bible Study 9:15 a.m.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

359 "A" Street, Vernonia
503 429-5190
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Sunday Worship Service 11:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer Meeting 7:00 p.m.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

375 North St. (Vernonia Grange Hall)
Vernonia, 503 705-2173
Please call for service schedule.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

Marc Farmer, Branch President
1350 E. Knott Street, Vernonia
503 429-7151
Sacrament Meeting, Sunday 10 a.m.
Sunday School & Primary 11:20 a.m.
Relief Society, Priesthood and
Young Women, Sunday 12:10 p.m.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Wayne and Maureen Marr
662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia,
503 429-0373
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

VERNONIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Sam Hough, Evangelist
410 North Street, Vernonia
503 429-6522
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Every Wednesday:
Ladies' Bible Study 9:30 a.m.
Ladies' Worship 10:00 a.m.
Children's Choir 3:00 p.m.
Family Bible Study 7:00 p.m.