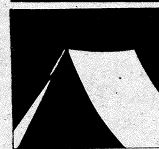


Christmas trees, noble trees

You walk our neighborhood these holiday evenings and everybody has the Christmas trees and Chanukah bushes up and glowing and then you come to our house and the tree is still in the carport.

It's like that every year and I, for one, kind of like it this way.

True, our Christmas tree is always the very last one to get put up. But it's also the very last to get taken down. Steady Eddy always says that you just can't turn the Holiday Season like a switch, you have to work up to it, so we work up to it.



North Country Notebook

DEC 20 1979

By George Vukelich

"It kills me," Steady says, "to see a Christmas tree thrown out on December 26th. Or for that matter, January 26th."

Me too. In our childhood neighborhood, more than one tree made it to March and in some households until the start of baseball season, albeit by then, bald as coat racks.

Jo and Vince cut our tree at Kellman's again this year and it's a full bodied little beauty. It leans against the carport wall casually in no hurry to come inside, like an actor in the wings, awaiting the onstage cue.

The tree is dark and its lifeblood is congealing and it seems a shame to kill a tree for

one day.

"Or a trout. Or a turkey," Steady observes. "Geez, you hang out with thinkers, you could wind up eating stone soup."

I thought about the living pines on the warm summer days when the fragrance of hemlock hangs in the air like wine and the forest floor is a coppery soft carpet.

The needles fall, Aldo Leopold had written, and are filed in the duff to enrich the wisdom of the stand. It is this accumulated wisdom that hushes the footsteps of whoever walks under pines.

Even as I peeked at our Christmas tree in the carport, a fox sparrow flew in, alighted on a branch and sat motionless as an ornament. Only a cardinal would have been sweeter. And sadder.

It was in midwinter, Aldo had said, that he sometimes gleaned from his pines something more important than woodlot politics and the news of wind and weather. This was especially likely to happen on some gloomy evening when the snow had buried all irrelevant detail, and the hush of elemental sadness lay heavy upon every living thing. Nevertheless, his pines, each with a burden of snow, were standing ramrod-straight, rank upon rank, and in the dusk beyond, he could sense the presence of hundreds more.

"At such times," Aldo said, "I feel a curious transfusion of courage."

I watched the sparrow in the tree for I don't know how long and for awhile, I was seriously figuring on how to get both of them into the house, the bird and the tree.

I fixed a cup of tea, hung out with the fireplace for a spell and waited a decent interval.

When I went back to the tree, the sparrow was gone.