

Creating Holiday Traditions

As best I can recall, my son, Eddie, was around 8 years of age when we began our tradition of choosing our Christmas tree on a local farm. We were living in Hickory at the time. There was a farm with a field of Scotch pines not far from our home and we scoured that field in the late fall for the family tree.

If my memory is correct, we were handed a handsaw and it was up to us to find the tree, cut it and drag it back to our vehicle.

By the time Eddie had a family of his own, I was settled in Sparta, North Carolina, something like choose and cut headquarters for the holidays. It soon became a Thanksgiving tradition for Eddie and his family to come to Sparta for Thursday's meal. Friday was set aside for visiting a local farm and selecting that special tree. Saturday we always found ourselves lined up on Main Street for the Christmas parade.

Choosing your Christmas tree in the field is

a great family tradition. Any child, no matter how young or old, enjoys the excitement and challenge of finding just that right tree and it is one time when a youngster's opinion counts as much as their parent's.

The days of cutting your own tree are long past. Farm hands are there with a chainsaw to make quick work of cutting the tree and transporting it to your vehicle where it is wrapped in netting or cord and secured to the roof.

My son lives in Florida and he has never reported any problems transporting a tree atop his vehicle during the 700-mile ride home.

Sparta's Christmas parade has become as much a tradition as choose and cut. There are not any rented professional floats. Instead there are homemade entries from churches, businesses and civic groups, marching Boy and Girl Scouts, antique and classic cars that are the pride and joy of their owners, fire engines, and horses and

riders bringing up the rear.

You never know what the weather will be like on parade day. Occasionally there is a warm streak and bystanders will be dressed like Floridians in short sleeves and sandals. And some parades have marched through snow.

I remember one particularly cold Saturday when it was spitting snow and I was standing beside the road with my granddaughter. A friend passed in a decorated golf cart and waved for me to occupy the empty seat. I scooped her up and joined the parade with her in my lap. One minute we were watching the parade from the sidelines, the next we were part of it. That only happens in a small town.

Next year that granddaughter will graduate



from high school and probably enter college. I'm hopeful that in a few years, I'll be introducing great grandchildren to choose and cut and hometown parades.

A choose and cut weekend is a great family tradition. I can't think of a better way to get in the holiday spirit. And you come home with the

freshest possible tree. If you keep the tree watered, it should stay fresh well past Christmas.

No matter what weekend you choose, the choose and cut operators are glad to see you and there is always something happening to make the weekend more special.

Bob Bamberg
Sparta, N.C.



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