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A-Wreathing We Will Go

Keith Long

Summer ago last, my wife Anna decided we needed more rocks in the yard. Not gravel, mind you, but big rocks we could stack along the flower beds “to bring the eyes to the flowers.”

“But flowers don’t have eyes,” I said.

“I mean the eyes of people passing by.”

To make a long story as short as possible, she and I drove the dirt roads in the county, found a place where some rocks had been graded up, and got out and filled the pickup bed up with them. In no time at all — say four days and four trips — we had enough rocks to surround our flower beds.

I discovered very quickly that I have no talent at rock placement. Everytime I put one down, Anna exclaimed “not like that!” She would then step over, move the rock a millimeter or two, and stand back in satisfaction, hands on hips.

“Oh,” I said.

When we (read: she) were (was) finished, Anna looked around the yard. “We need more flower beds,” she said.

I was able to talk her out of that one, but I’ve found it domestically soothing to go along with her on most of her “crafty” ideas. Like this Christmas season. Last Christmas, because I had my own family and my new in-law family to consider, the Christmas joy went up two-fold, but so did the Christmas bill. Sometime in January, shivering because the gas had been turned off and squinting because of the lack of electricity, Anna and I sat down and computed the cost of Christmas. We figured the preliminary cost at \$800. Sales tax and batteries were not included.

“Well, next Christmas we’ll just make all our presents,” Anna said.

“And what will we make?” I asked. “Rock beds?”

“I have a lot of crafty-type ideas,” my wife said.

And she did.

So we did. Make this year’s presents, I mean.

She created these wreaths, made out of some typical form of stink-weed which literally litters the countryside. I had the task of collecting said weeds. I would go out in a pasture, without permission, and pull these weeds, putting them in a trash bag, while Anna sat on the hood of the wagon and came up with crafty ideas.

“What kind of animal is that?” she called one day.

I looked up from the weeds. “Cows,” I said.

“Will they hurt you?” she asked.

“No, they’re tame.”

The next minute I was hurdling the barb wired fence. Someone was raising untame cows, which, it seemed, were very protective of their stinkweed. I didn’t lose much during the trip, save for the ripped jeans, the 37 stitches, my favorite cap, which was trampled, and a whole trash sack of stinkweed.

When we got home, Anna made a “short list” of the store-bought materials she would need to make the wreaths. The list included hot glue, hot-glue gun, floral wire, floral tape, other floral stuff, 47 colors of ribbon, 23 packages of potpourri, 18 packages of baby’s breath, tiny birds (preferably stuffed), model log cabins, glitter, styrofoam, craft sticks, and one per each of every other article in Wal-Mart’s arts and crafts department.

Anna’s mind ran towards wreaths this year. A week later, she asked me if there were any good grapevines



around. Had I been smart and learned from the untamed cow adventure, I would've told her no. But I said yes, that in fact, I knew where there were jungles of grapevines.

I got to harvest grapevines for the next wreath project. It is a harder task than it might look. I can understand now how Tarzan could swing on them. They are attached, way up in the trees. My job was to pull these vines down, while Anna sat on the hood of the wagon and thought up crafty stuff. I was doing okay until I became a little ambitious and went for a vine about two inches in diameter. I had to put my weight behind it, so to speak, and wound up rolling down an embankment, coiling myself in grapevine, and settling, finally against the front tire of the wagon. I didn't lose much, save for the ripped jeans, the 37 stitches, my favorite cap, which was rolled to oblivion. The vine, fortunately, seemed unbruised.

Anna looked up from her crafts magazine. "Are you hurt?" she asked.

"Not too much," I said. "Just scraped a lot."

"Good, because there's a really good vine over there."

After I collected enough vine, and went to Wal-Mart and bought out the power-tool department, Anna began work on the vine wreaths. She finished the first and

stood back to admire. "Gosh, but I do good work, huh?" she asked.

I moaned something through my bandages, which she must've taken for encouragement because she sat down and made another.

Last week, Anna finally had enough wreaths for everyone on our Christmas list. They took up the entire laundry room.

"How's that?" she said, waving at the stack of wreaths. "And all by our own labor."

"Right," I said. "But I did take the trouble to add up our expenditures."

"And what were they?"

"Well, taking into account my wardrobe, the emergency room, the gas mileage, and the misc. stuff, the cost of the wreaths comes out to \$1,200."

"Well, next year won't be nearly as expensive. I've already figured out what to use for wreath material—cattails."

I moaned something through my bandages that she must've taken for discouragement, because we haven't spoken since.