



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie CGCS

**Oh
Tannenbaum**

*The modern
lyrics are due to*

Leipzig organist, teacher and composer Ernst Anschütz, written in 1824. A Tannenbaum is a fir tree. The lyrics do not actually refer to Christmas, or describe a decorated Christmas tree. Instead, they refer to the fir's evergreen qualities as a symbol of constancy and faithfulness.

Anschütz based his text on a 16th-century Silesian folk song by Melchior Franck, "Ach Tannenbaum". Joachim August Zarnack (1777–1827) in 1819 wrote a tragic love song inspired by this folk song, taking the evergreen, "faithful" fir tree as contrasting with a faithless lover. The folk song first became associated with Christmas with Anschütz, who added two verses of his own to the first, traditional verse. The custom of the Christmas tree developed in the course of the 19th century, and the song came to be seen as a Christmas carol. Anschütz' version still had *treu* ("true, faithful") as the adjective describing the fir's leaves (needles), harking back to the contrast to the faithless maiden of the folk song. This was changed to *grün* "green" at some point in the 20th century, after the song had come to be associated with Christmas. *Wikipedia*

I love a good Christmas tree. Fragrant, green, resplendent with twinkle lights and glass ornaments. My brother's tree is simply

the most amazing holiday decoration I have ever seen. At least ten feet tall, each year the thin natural fir has its individual branches wrapped with separate strands of lights and then dressed with both antique and modern glass curios. Curt spends 12 hours setting it up and another 12 taking it down.

But for five weeks it faithfully symbolizes Christmas past and present in his house.

Growing up under the roof of a wood hoarder, one who covets rotting wood piles nestled and wasting in neighbors yards or standing dead trees just aching to be harvested and who has more timber split and stacked than he will ever use in his lifetime, was an education in Christmas Tree thriftiness. Always harvested from our property, we had an abundance of interesting and rather unique Tannenbaums and not-so-much Taunnenbaums in my youth.

Au natural, the specimens always looked 'pretty good' in the yard but often lost their luster upon entry through the sliding porch door. Wrestled across the living room carpet, each managed to mark a trail of ancient bird and insect nests, grasses and leaves; enough to fill at least one Electrolux bag! Of course the 'thin side' was typically turned toward the picture windows so we could appreciate the 'full' side...when there was a full side to appreciate.

Once the season was over and the tolerance level of audible falling dehydrated and abscised needles when walking across the room reached its crescendo, we would denude the tree of baubles, filling yet again numerous vacuum bags and reducing the life expectancy if the 'ol' Silverado'. In an effort to reduce any more waste of paper bags my Father would remove the double sliding windows and unceremoniously throw the now practically naked stump to its almost final destination two stories below.

Many spruce, pine and fir danced from the out-of doors and into our house over my years growing up, but perhaps the most impressive was the twelve-foot tall columnar arborvitae taken for the dual purpose of providing a destination for the ornaments as well as improve the view around a nasty bend in the road. The bad side, trimmed and turned toward the windows, was completely void of any greenery as it abutted its neighbor arborvitae (also soon to be removed as without a partner it too had a cavity the size of Wisconsin). Tall, skinny and rather challenging to hang anything upon because the compact branching left limited hook space, this tree looked like a brownish green five foot wide column holding our vaulted ceiling up.

This once in a lifetime Christmas Tree (thanks Mom for laying down the law!) was beyond an embarrassment. However there were three large pluses associated with its variety...it smelled great, never lost a

needle and was simple to dispose of out the open window!

Our ceremonial tree offered one last breath of family enjoyment after Christmas. Mid summer, or whenever Dad was tired of looking at the now rusty brown semi-needled conifer tossed haphazardly in the woods, we would cremate the shrunken and desiccated tree in the burn pit thus completing the cycle of its life. In a rapid blaze of glory our creosote tinder would flare the summer skies, one last memory of our loyal Tannenbaum.

With the exception of one spruce tree, four feet tall and six feet wide (well it looked good in Dad's yard, and I appreciate your contribution Big Guy!), as an adult I now prefer a tree harvested from the Covered Bridge Farm located a couple of miles down the road, the tradition of "Charlie Browns" continues in my house. We don't look for the perfect tree, just one to celebrate the season with. Through the front door, out the back and off the deck into the snow bank to be torched next summer, my family and I celebrate the season with faithful memories hard to forget.

Although not the picture of perfection like my Bro's, our humble tree stands almost straight and reminds us of the holidays with wonderful smells, colorful decorations, lights and the warmth of family and remembrances of Christmases past.

Wishing each of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!