

Bullet holes, scary trees: The life of a lone woman

June 22, 2023
By Margo Oxendine

Sometimes you have a good day. Sometimes you have a bad day. Tuesday, I had both at once. I walked into my sitting room to gather my bags for Covington, and I couldn't help but notice a big, round hole in one of the windows, right next to my reading chair. The rest of the window was cracked.

It looked like nothing more than a bullet hole. (Although I don't think I've ever seen a bullet hole, thank heavens.)

I examined the opposite wall for evidence. There was nothing.

There was also something odd: While the window was broken, there was no hole in the screen. How did that bullet, or whatever it was (probably not a bullet), get through the screen to break the window? It is still a mystery.

But it's a mystery that must be fixed and is going to cost some money. And it's going to require a handyman who knows what he's doing when it comes to replacing windows. Handymen are rather rare around here.

I started down my driveway, only to find it blocked by a bunch of hard-hatted men in lime green safety shirts. They were cutting trees and brush. A lot of trees. A lot of brush.

For weeks now, I have been scared of a certain old pine tree at the very edge of my driveway, leaning dangerously close. I just knew I'd come home one day and find the driveway blocked. Or be on my way to somewhere important, and find the driveway blocked. Or, worst-case scenario, be actually on the driveway when the thing decided to come crashing down.

Friends I asked about who might cut down a dangerous pine tree told me, "Well, that's going to cost hundreds of dollars."

Sigh.

Tuesday, one of the hard-hat men walked toward me.

"Aren't you the woman who walks on that little road up in Ashwood?" he asked.

I said that I am. I often encountered those tree men working on "my" little lane, and I was always pleasant to them.

Suddenly, I wondered, what the hey, why not ask?

"While you fellas are cutting trees down, could you please take out that big, old scary pine tree leaning toward the driveway? Just push it over the side of the hill."

He studied the dangerous tree, and said, "It's in the path, ma'am."

When I got home from Covington hours later, the scary tree was gone and pushed to the hill.

Hurray! I was ecstatic! I thanked them all profusely.

We got to talking and I mentioned my bullet-holed window. The men trooped up to inspect it, and they were all as mystified as I about how it might have happened.

The next day, the hard-hat men were back in full force, with all sorts of loud, crunching, roaring equipment and chain saws to continue their work. I wondered, what could be left to cut down?

A knock came upon the door. My friend from the day before was there, along with another fellow, who "thinks he may be able to change out your window."

They asked for a tape measure, which I fortunately had, measured the window, and the window man said he'd go home and check to see what he had.

"And it won't cost you anything," he said.

Again, I was thrilled with hope. What were the odds?

So: A bad day on two planes turned into what might be a very good day on both sides.

Life ... You gotta love it!

Remembering a mishap-filled Thanksgiving Day

November 23, 2023
By Margo Oxendine

ALLEGHENY HIGHLANDS — It's that time of year again: Thanksgiving.

It's time for folks to start asking, "Are you cooking dinner this year?"

It's time for me to shout the answer, "No!"

Years ago, when Mom was recuperating from knee surgery, it befell upon me to cook Thanksgiving dinner.

It seemed simple enough. Any organized person could, with close attention to time management, easily pull off Thanksgiving dinner. I'm an organized time manager. Piece of cake, or so I thought.

To paraphrase Richard Nixon, I am not a cook. I've attempted two small dinner parties; by the time guests arrived, I was sweaty and swearing. I'm a restaurant girl, through and through.

I began my preparations at 1:30 that November afternoon, with a 6 p.m. deadline.

"Do the pie first," Mom instructed from her pillow-piled bed.

Studying the recipe, I calculated it would take 30 minutes. Sadly, I didn't allow time for scrubbing pumpkin off the walls and ceiling, after a frightful mishap with the can opener. At 3 p.m., the pie came out of the oven. Oddly, the crust had almost disappeared; what remained had the consistency of an eraser. I checked the box of just-bake-it crust I'd brought over from my own fridge; the expiration date was October 1995.

My home refrigerator serves as a display case for potentially delightful foods, until they get tossed in the garbage. I should just stand over the trashcan and toss in \$5 bills, sparing myself the drudgery of grocery shopping.

Next, I plopped a plump turkey breast into the roasting pan and rummaged through the kitchen drawer for a meat thermometer. Grabbing a mysterious mercury-filled glass implement, I made several futile attempts to stab it into the recalcitrant, clammy fowl. Something was awry.

I trundled back to mom's bedroom, holding the thing aloft.

"I can't get this meat thermometer into the turkey."

"That's a candy thermometer," she replied.

"Won't it work anyway?"

"Your Aunt Louise tried that and, when she opened the oven door, it exploded in her face," she intoned. "They never did get out all the glass."

Another disaster avoided.

Time ticked away. It was 4:30, and my "goose" was about the only thing cooked.

On to the stuffing – old bread, celery, boiling water, an egg, a shriveled apple I scrounged from the fridge.

By now, so many recipes were scattered on the counters, I was mistaking one for the other.

Maybe, I thought as I stirred the glutinous glob, the egg was supposed to go into something else?

The stuffing was a sodden mass, but I forged onward.

It was 5:30. Dinner was due in 30 minutes and there were still mashed potatoes, yams, cranberries and, oh geez, the table to set.

"Don't forget the gravy," Mom called from her bed.

"Forget the gravy!" I shouted. "I don't do gravy!"

Some women putter around the kitchen. I muttered, and slammed cabinet doors. I, the neatnik, sported an apron streaked with doughy globs, flour and pumpkin goo. I even had pumpkin in my hair.

It was time for a sip of sherry. Better yet, a tumbler of scotch.

I decided to scratch the yams; who needs two kinds of potatoes, anyway?

I was never so glad to see my sister than when she strolled in at 5:45, ready to don her bib and tucker.

She surveyed the counter, filled with bowls, drifts of flour, eggshells. She saw the pumpkin streaks on the wall. She looked at the table, strewn with cookbooks and the brown, crustless pie.

"Lovely table," she sniffed.

She read my splatter-splotched menu and checked the stove.

"Where are the yams?"

"We're not having them; we're having mashed."

"It's not Thanksgiving without yams."

"There they are; be my guest."

My sister, the professional chef, deftly sprinkled the yams with brown sugar and honey and popped them in the microwave. Why didn't I think of that?

Though I've never cared for cranberry sauce, I learned to love it that day. It comes in a little can. It is served cold. I opened one end of the can I'd brought from home and, holding it over a crystal bowl, opened the other end. The gelatinous glop plopped into the bowl. That's when I noticed "Dec. 97" clearly stamped into the top. I covered it with a sprig of fresh parsley.

At 7:15, dinner was finally served. I sensed my little family searching for something gracious to say. Finally, my sister spoke.

“Interesting.”

They say that laughter is the best medicine, and we’ve never laughed so much over a dinner in all our lives.

For that, we are truly thankful.

Dogs and a Christmas parade: Anything can happen!

December 14, 2023, By Margo Oxendine

HOT SPRINGS – The annual Hot Springs Christmas parade is this Saturday.

I covered this parade for more than a decade. Shoot, I even once served as a judge, but let’s just say that did not go well. I’ve never been asked again.

My favorite thing about the Christmas parade was always the dogs. For years, I dreamed of Brownie taking part in the doggie parade. And several times, she did. It was so much fun! But I certainly learned a few things.

First of all, Brownie absolutely did not like costumes of any sort. The best I could ever do was a green and red collar, like something a court jester designed.

I remember once, browsing through the Walmart doggie costume aisles, I found the most gorgeous emerald green velvet coat, trimmed with silver fur. I was struck by its beauty. I bought it right away. Wouldn’t little Brownie look absolutely adorable, wearing that coat, strutting down Main Street?

When I tried to get it on her at home, however, she was having none of it. She scrambled under the bed, plunked herself in the middle where I could not reach, and stayed there for more than an hour. I think she glared at me.

So much for the gorgeous green coat.

Another time, Brownie and I had been to a big picnic at my boss’s house. The boss had a passel of small children. They had a huge red wagon, with high sides. They embraced cute little Brownie, put her inside the big red wagon, and then pulled her around the yard, in a small parade of their own. Brownie sat there proudly.

Hey – I thought – wouldn’t Brownie look great trundling down Main Street in the Christmas parade sitting in that wagon? I borrowed it. It was very, very heavy. I could barely wrestle it into the car.

What I failed to realize is, the kids were pulling the wagon around in the grass. Grass is soft and quiet. When I got up to the parade staging ground, wrangled the red wagon out of the car, and put Brownie inside it, she was fine. Then, we began to move. There was no grass. There was pavement and gravel. It created such a racket, Brownie immediately leaped out, and scrambled away. I asked a fellow to put the useless wagon back in the car. So much for that.

I think that was the year the Bath Animal Welfare Foundation organized a big doggie parade. All sorts of dogs – about a dozen or so — wearing all sorts of perky Christmas costumes were taking part. Brownie? She was naked, save for the jester collar.

Nonetheless, I strutted along holding Brownie’s red leash, having such fun in the parade. Then, I heard a friend call to me through the crowd of onlookers. “Margo! Brownie’s gone!”

Sure enough, Brownie’s fancy collar had allowed her to slip the leash, and she spotted my friend through the audience of hundreds and trotted over to say hello. I looked down, and discovered I was marching proudly along holding an empty leash.

We got that glitch taken care of and continued on the doggie parade route. It was a rather long route, for a small dog like Brownie. By the time we made it to the firehouse, she was determined to walk not one step further.

I knew if I wanted to get her back to the staging area and the car, I’d need help. That’s when a friend with a bright red fancy car – I think it’s a vintage BMW – said, “Hop in!” We did.

Wouldn’t you know, Brownie hopped up in the passenger seat, sat there with her head held high, and smiled at the crowd. They loved it!

She was the hit of the parade, despite being naked.