

DOWN HOME: Welcome Tree shines nightly_41904

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If you drive down our street after dark, you'll recognize our house. It's the gray contemporary Cape Cod. Not distinctive enough? It's the one with the Welcome Tree out front.

My friend Rusty inspired our Welcome Tree. He has a dry sense of humor. Imagine the Sahara Desert. You sometimes have to stretch to get Rusty's humor, but it's worth the effort.

Late last year, Rusty confessed in his church newsletter that he once left his Christmas Tree up until April. He got too busy in December and didn't have time to enjoy the tree enough, and he wasn't ready to take it down by New Year's. So, he left it up until after April Fool's Day.

MARV KNOX <i>Editor</i>

Rusty's Christmas-to-Easter Tree floated in my imagination in late December, the day I rolled up the lights that bordered our front yard, packed the wreaths and hauled them all to the attic.

Darkness dominated the winter sky as I walked around to the garage to get

the tall stepladder. I'd removed every token of Christmas-just-past except the tiny white lights clinging to the branches of the weeping-holly. (I know that's not the name of it, but it looks like a cross between a holly bush and a small weeping willow.) I decided to ease my chore by turning on the lights on that tree-easier to see and untangle them in the looming dark.

But as I climbed that ladder, a truth dawned brightly. "This tree, with these lights, is too beautiful to enjoy only at Christmas." And in one of the best moves I made all last year, I put the ladder away and left the lights on.

At first, Joanna, Lindsay and Molly acted like I'd fallen off the ladder. On my head.

"What's with the tree lights?" they asked.

"It's the Welcome Tree," I replied.

Through January and February, I often turned on the Welcome Tree as I got home from work, as the sun began to set. The bright lights and beauty of that tree warmed my winter nights. (Plus it made our house look sorta like a really cool Tex-Mex joint.)

Turns out, I wasn't the only one enjoying the Welcome Tree. Some evenings, it already glowed before I opened the front door to flip on the lights. Molly began using it as a landmark to tell her friends how to find our home.

Well, you know how hard Texas winds blow in March. They took a toll on the Welcome Tree. Seemed like every morning as I picked up the paper, I had to tuck a strand of lights back on a branch. One Saturday, I got out the ladder, rolled up the lights and stacked them by the front door.

When Molly noticed, she hurried into the den. "Daddy, you can't take down the Welcome Tree," she insisted. "It's distinctive."

Notice she said “distinctive,” not “weird.” I'd say “beautiful,” “festive” and “joyous.”

And it reminds me of Christmas, even past Easter.

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