

Little black dog had killed more than its share of grizzly bears



America's Heartland
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There's an old story about a teacher who wanted to show a little boy in her classroom just how ridiculous his exaggerated tales had become. So she made up one of her own, telling the child that she had seen a grizzly bear in her backyard eating from a garbage can, and that a little black dog came along, pulled that grizzly out of the garbage can and killed that bear right there on the spot.

"Now, do you believe that story," the teacher asked.

"You bet I do," the little boy said. "That was my little black dog, and that was the fourth grizzly he's killed this week."

That's one of hundreds of jokes that have been told by the late, great Minnie Pearl, a comedian who graced the stage of the Grand Ole Opry for decades and who was a regular on the long-running TV series Hee Haw. My friend Judy Williams gave me a book containing many of Minnie's best-loved stories, including the one about the little boy prone to exaggeration.

Did you ever notice that some true stories need no exaggeration to make them spellbinding? That tends to be the

case for all those involving Jesus. Everything about Him is enthralling, including his birth, which we celebrate each Christmas. Let's listen to Luke tell about the night of Jesus' birth:

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

"And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, ly-

ing in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

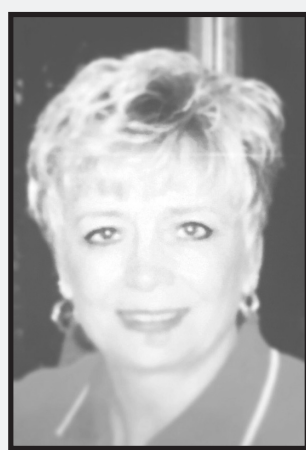
"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

"And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (Luke 2:1-20).

Now that, my friends, is a true story about God's only begotten Son being born in a stable in Bethlehem, about God's perfect gift to mankind being wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

The little boy prone to exaggeration could tell that magnificent story over and over without ever feeling the need to embellish in the least, because that is, of course, the greatest story ever told.

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Times Remembered
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In the 1950-60s era, the weather in Kentucky turned much colder in December than it is now days. The declining temperatures along with sights, sounds and scents of the holiday season are forever etched in my mind.

I recall the chilly nights and the frosty walks to the school bus stop and the scent of burning coal on a cold winter's morning. I remember my Mother shaking and rattling the clinkers down in our big Warm Morning stove. She added more coal to the red hot coals that produced a gray-white smoke that swirled up the chimney.

I remember Dad stocking the old coal pile with an abundance of coal in the anticipation of snow. Dad and my Uncle Bev usually went somewhere in the mountains to a coal tippie and picked up the coal. Other times he bought coal from the Estill Ice Plant.

I can still smell the crisp

Sights, Sounds & Scents of Christmas

winter air and the glorious scent of the freshly cut cedar tree. Back then our Christmas trees were always cedar from our farm or my grandparent's farm on Crooked Creek. To a child in the late 50s (years removed from video games, the Internet and more than two channels of black and white TV), this procuring of the Christmas tree was a magical event in my young life.

Bundled in my hodgepodge hand-me-down apparel of bulky coats and rubber galoshes we would pile into our red Ford pickup truck and travel out to my grandparent's place to look for a perfect cedar tree for Christmas.

After the grown-ups spent a vast amount of time talking and catching up on the news, we began to look for the perfect tree on top of the hill. Dad would take an ax from the truck, and we would trudge through the snow; breaking fresh trails through the newly fallen snow. Other times we would walk the frozen ground covered with weeds and briars.

Cedars usually grow in fencerows and on hill sides. A lot of times they look good from afar, but when you get to them they are too thin. They are shaped by nature, and sometimes the side is missing or too

little. So it takes a while to find that perfect tree.

Of course, we would always have the guidance of Dad to decide which tree to cut. He seemed to always want small trees and I wanted a big tree. But usually some of the tree had to be cut off to fit in the living room to add the star at the top of the tree. He was right again!

By today's standards, those Charlie Brown trees of my childhood were haphazardly decorated creations at best; but were magical to me. Their glowing and aromatic presence enlivened a drab winter season for me.

Those long again trees were lit by a frayed strand of glass bulbs that neither blinked nor chased. The tree was wrapped with garland, ornaments and draped tinsels, (icicles) that I called them.

Those scruffy ornamented cedars seemed truly magnificent to my eyes; but the lasting significance was the love of family and the promise of baby Jesus born in a manger.

Today when I smell the cedar trees in the midst of December, a renewed faith in "peace on earth, good will to men" never fails to remind me of those cedar scented memories of yesteryear.

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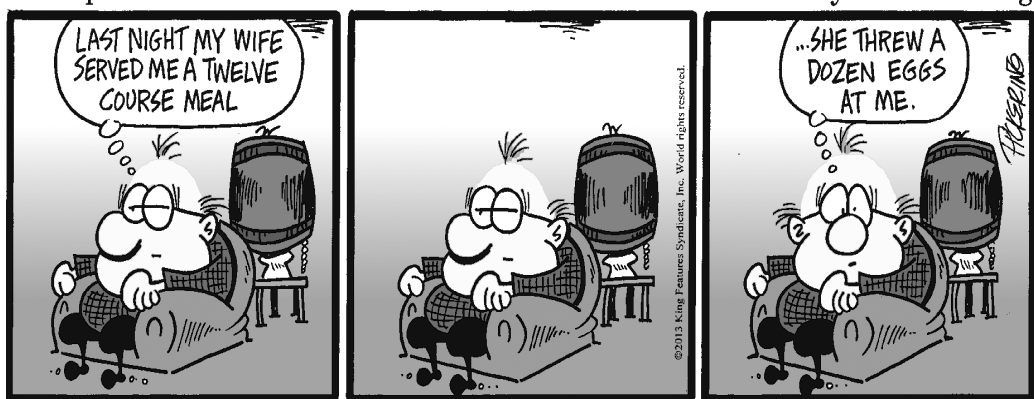
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