

Gnome Countryside

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only the size of the end of your thumb, Humphreys will find a milkweed pod and point out what a nice bed it would make for a gnome. Gnomes also use pressed queen Anne's lace for curtains, and fireflies provide light for them at

night, according to Humphreys.

He points out that gnomes wear special shoes, with birdfoot prints on the bottom. And gnomes are pigeon toed for fast running over sticks and leaves. Sometimes footprints of these unusual shoes can be found in the woods.

There is an interesting Christmas fern growing there, whose tiny leaves resemble stockings. Gnome parents take two of these

and stitch them together for a Christmas stocking for their gnome children, Humphreys will tell his visitors.

Bees' nests make excellent mailboxes for gnomes, and there is a rolled up paper in one of the holes of the nest Humphreys shows.

He talks about the "wonderful trees" that abound on his small acreage, and explains that gnomes have the same respect for trees that native Indians had.

Humphreys makes it clear that he hopes a visit to Gnome Countryside will encourage families to do things together out of doors, and learn to enjoy the outdoors together. Humphreys says, "Parents are often afraid of what they'll find in the woods." He adds, "We've done a fair amount of winter backpacking, and you can have a lot of fun if you're dressed for it."

Gnome Countryside is definitely a family undertaking, with Humphreys' four-year-old son Luke frequently accompanying his father. Luke wears a gnome hat and knickers and enjoys the fun of the activity.

When Humphreys' wife was pregnant with their second child, they learned it would be twins.

Since gnomes are always born as boy and girl twins, it was Humphreys' greatest wish that their twins would be one of each. Sure enough, when the twins were born there was a boy, Kesse, and a girl, Kourtney. They will be two in this month.

There is a gnome at the Humphreys household who plays jokes which won't hurt people's feelings. "Jerome Gnome" often leaves notes for Luke when he does something commendable, and he even helped establish a family Christmas tradition.

Humphreys recalls that as a child it was always disappointing to open the last gift on Christmas morning, and so his father would lessen the sadness by putting a present somewhere else. Now Jerome Gnome leaves a note which leads to a treasure hunt in the woods for the last present. This year, Jerome left a birdfeeder.

For every visitor at Christmas time there was a tin Gnome on the outdoor Christmas tree, and each visitor was invited to take one

home. Humphreys hopes they will remind the visitors of their trip, and, as he tells visitors, "To gnome me is to love me." Visitors also receive a wooden gnome gnickel.

The Gnome Countryside will become quiet for a few winter months as Humphreys takes stock and prepares for the busy spring, when busloads of school children will find their way to rural Kirkwood for an unusual educational experience in the out of doors. He won't be idle, however, because he is already booked for several gnome presentations to interested groups.

For Humphreys, operating this business based on legends that are centuries old brings complete satisfaction. He points out simply, "I like playing the guitar. I like children, the out of doors, and telling stories. I used everything I really enjoy in life to create a livelihood. I am really fortunate."

And fortunate he is—as are all the visitors who look for gnomes along with him at the Gnome Countryside.



The Gnome Ranger, this one carved in wood, rides around the area of the Gnome Countryside on a great horned owl.

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