

## A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

One of my prized possessions is a 15 inch round tray on which one can serve chips and dip. My father turned this marvel out of one piece of wormy chestnut, even leaving a small ledge encircling the center so that the dip dish will not slide while the tray is being passed from one guest to another. I also have several picture frames made of the same attractive wood by the same artisan. When I was a young child, I remember my father pointing out huge white snags that were all that then remained of this once-dominant forest tree - the American chestnut.

It was some time before I realized that "wormy" chestnut was not a regular type of wood like oak or maple or black walnut. It was even longer before I realized that the small larvae that chewed their way through the wood giving it that "wormy" appearance were not the cause of the great tree's demise. No, the American chestnut fell victim to an imported fungus. But, before I tell that story, let me introduce you to the American chestnut of a century ago.

One hundred years ago, chestnut trees stood tall in the forests of the eastern United States. They had done so for about 2000 years since they re-colonized the area slowly after the last ice sheet retreated. Some of the trees alive in 1900 were 500-600 years old, well over 100 feet tall, and 6-8 feet in diameter. Many eastern woodlands were 25% chestnut, and some ridge-tops in Appalachia were nearly pure stands so that they looked like snow-covered peaks when the trees bloomed in June. Animals and people depended upon these trees for their livelihood. The nuts were the best tasting of the seven species of

## "Under the (late) spreading chestnut tree.."

chestnut in the world. They were shipped to cities for use in holiday celebrations, besides providing excellent nutrition for all kinds of forest dwellers.

One author describes the chestnut as the "perfect tree." After describing the form and fruit of the tree, Mr. Chad McGrath includes this paragraph: "So bountiful in life, this tree would be bountiful in death. Its wood would be strong and beautiful, with grain both colorful and intricate. Rot would not easily enter the heartwood, which would be dense and yet kind to saw and plane. Its coals would burn long and hot. Even the bark would be useful, perhaps containing a chemical, like tannin, to use in tanning leather." It was used for railroad ties, mine timbers, telegraph poles, shingles, paneling, plywood, furniture, and musical instruments.

But, in 1904, a fungal disease was discovered on American chestnut trees in New York City. It spread more than 20 miles per year and proved impossible to stop. All trees more than 4 inches in diameter would become infected by canker-type wounds under the bark, which would restrict the flow of water and nutrients to the growing parts of the tree, and death was the swift and sure result. By 1950 there were no native stands of chestnut trees remaining. It had been reduced to an understory tree as old roots continued to send up shoots which died before they could successfully reproduce. The nations two largest American chestnuts now live in Washington state - well out of their natural range - and are over 100 feet tall and over 6 feet in diameter.

Some people have never given up on this "perfect tree." The American Chestnut Foundation has as its mission statement the following seemingly impossible "prime directive": "It has only one

goal - to put the American chestnut, king of the Eastern forests, back on its throne." This non-profit organization supports scientific research and breeding programs with which they try to incorporate the disease resistance of the Chinese chestnut with the growth habits and flavor of the American.

It is theoretically possible to have a 98% genetically pure American chestnut which retains the disease resistance genes of the Chinese chestnut tree. The first experiment will be completed in the year 2000. If you are interested in supporting the work of this optimistic group, you can join them at \$35 or more a year. (The American Chestnut Foundation, P.O. Box 6057, West Virginia University, Morgantown WV 26506)

Meanwhile, other groups are promoting the orchard growth of other varieties of chestnuts which are smaller trees with larger fruit. Nutritionists, including Francis Moore Lappe in Diet for a Small Planet, point out that the chestnut is only 5% fat (other nuts are generally 50% fat), that they have very high quality protein, and that they are particularly appetizing with their sweet, nutty flavor. As such, they make an excellent staple food for humans. They are also particularly suited to sustainable agriculture since they do not require annual cultivation or agricultural chemicals. They are adaptable to a wide variety of climates and soils within the temperate regions of the earth. And, they live hundreds of years and produce abundant annual crops of nuts almost without fail.

Yes, our eastern forests were completely changed by the introduction of a fungus early in this century. Perhaps someday the American chestnut will again be more than a memory. But, until then, I will cherish a special wooden tray.

## As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

Hard to believe but we're coming up on Joyful Yuletide again. And that, kiddies, means it's time for the annual toy column. Whether you are planning to buy Christmas toys or not, this giga-billion-dollar market merits a look.

Your gaze is directed to the tottering Numero Uno of last year TOYS "R" US, whose top position is no longer a given. After sixteen years of growth, company earnings are way down. Shares were almost \$43 in '93 but slumped in the \$20s for most of 1995, when they lost a whopping \$5.2 billion in market value.

Chief Executive Michael Goldsmith gave The New York Times three reasons for the TOYS "R" quandary: Intense competitive pressure from discount stores like WAL-MART, who still has the best Barbie prices; lack of creative new toys like Power Rangers, which are at long last dying on the shelves; and an acute realization that the standard TOYS "R" format may not be the greatest for the long pull.

This third reason is simply that their stores are no fun to shop. Merchandise is piled up to high ceilings and no one is in sight to help. The overall impression is too much like the no-frills Sam's Club warehouses, and too "supermarket" for Mom and Dad out for

## Status report from the toy store front lines

an evening shopping tour. And if the kids are along too it becomes a painful mistake.

TOYS "R" have gotten away with their no-service displays because of low prices and their huge selection. New stores, and intensive revamping of old stores, were to take all this into account in 1996 ... wider aisles, lower displays made more "touchable" and - at last - visible customer service. Finally, 15,000 items will be trimmed to 11,000 with all displays heavily spiced up with more educational toys.

Is it working? We'll see. On your behalf I explored the big store in Wilkes-Barre and respectfully submit my surveillance report: No trouble parking in the nearly empty lot. Just inside greeted by two identical signs reading "WELCOME FRIENDS!" Three more read, "Where Holiday Magic Begins." Several others said games were alphabetical (from A to Z) and that coming up were "Lower Prices and Bigger Selection."

To the right were 13 checkout aisles, only two of which were working. After some 90-degree turns, two left and one right, surrounded by 1001 stuffed Dalmatians, I found myself in one of the main concourses, all looking exactly like last year, flanked by towering stacks of stuff, forbidding pile after pile of ... well, say MONOPOLY games, for instance. There were six sections of \$10.99 standard models. (K-Mart's is \$9.86 and Wal-Mart \$10.97) Of course if you want the classy 60th

Anniversary Monopoly (celebrating the years 1935 to 1995), you can spend \$39.95.

Hey, don't knock it. I also found those ancient favorites Lincoln Logs, Erector sets, even Tinkertoys ... all full of colors they never used to have. Their boxed set prices seem hooked on the number nine ... \$49.99, \$69.99 and \$99.99. There was also a box of 28 plain wooden blocks, once my favorite toy, which sold for \$14.99. (Why not? Look at today's 2x4 price.)

Perhaps the least forbidding and most relaxing display in the whole emporium was the children's book section. I spent most of my time there, looking for Tom Swift, The Bobsey Twins, and The Rover Boys. (Didn't really expect to find that old favorite, "The Rover Boys Up In Mabel's Room," but I looked anyway and struck out.) Not a sign of even one of those classics.

However I did find a book titled "I Want My Potty." British. Cost \$6.95. And Genichmo Yagyu of Japan for \$11.95 will sell you his ten-page book entitled "The Holes in Your Nose." Genichmo devotes his colorful pages to similar subject matter such as "The holes in your ears and he admonishes you to keep them the hole in your mouth" clean.

One of his pages refers to "The Hole In Your Behind" (How could I possibly be making this up?) and "The Hole Where the Pee Comes Out."

Color me speechless.

## Yanchik named to Geisinger diabetes education team

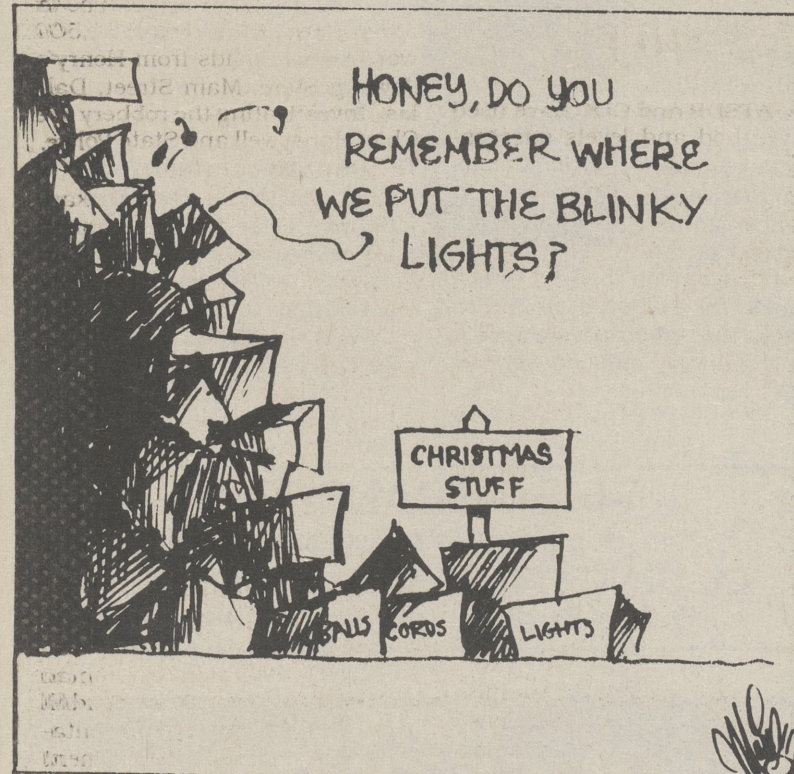
Denice Yanchik, R.N. of Lehman was recently named to the diabetes education team for the eastern region of the Geisinger health system. In her new role, she will be assessing and meeting the educational needs of diabetic patients.

Yanchik has been a member of the intensive care unit at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center since 1981, providing

primary nursing care to seriously and critically ill and injured patients. Certified in adult critical care nursing, she is a past president of the Luzerne/Lackawanna Chapter of the American Association of Critical Care Nurses and serves as an advanced cardiac life support instructor. Prior to her association with Geisinger she was a medical/surgical nurse at Tyler Memorial Hospital.



DENICE YANCHIK



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