

THE FOREVER WREATH

**STORY AND PAINTING BY CAMILLE J.
BOLINGER**

WOODCARVINGS BY PAUL F. BOLINGER

SECOND EDITION 2020

**HAVE YOU EVER DONE SOMETHING FOR
SOMEONE NOT EXPECTING ANYTHING IN
RETURN? THIS IS A STORY OF A FAMILY AND
THEIR WOODLAND FRIENDS WHO UNDERSTAND
HOW GOOD IT FEELS TO DO SOMETHING NICE
FOR OTHERS.**

THIS BOOK WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED WHILE CAMILLE, PAUL, AND THEIR SON JAKE LIVED IN CALIFORNIA AND WORKED AT THE CARVING STUDIO IN THEIR 'THREE BEARS COTTAGE' IN THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS.

THIS STORY CLOSELY PARALLELS THEIR LIVES IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE THEIR FATHER CHRISTMAS CARVINGS CONSUMED THEIR FULL ATTENTION AND TIME TO THE POINT THEY REALLY COULD NOT PREPARE FOR CHRISTMAS UNTIL THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT.

THE CARVED ILLUSTRATIONS WERE DONE IN 1992 AND STILL LOOK GOOD. EACH ONE IS A SINGLE WOOD BLOCK CARVED AND PAINTED TO TELL THE STORY.

**I AM THE LARGE JOLLY WOODCARVER
FEATURED IN THE STORY; AT LEAST I HOPE I AM
JOLLY.**

**CAMILLE IS THE WOODCARVER'S WIFE OF THIS
CHARMING STORY, PAINTING EACH FIGURE TO
BRING IT TO LIFE; AND THAT IS EXACTLY RIGHT.
EACH CARVING, TO THIS DAY, COMES OUT OF
MY HANDS AWAITING HER COLORS TO MAKE IT
THE BEAUTIFUL HEIRLOOM FIGURE IT WANTS TO
BE.**

**JAKE NO LONGER SWEEPS THE WOOD CHIPS
FROM UNDER THE WORKBENCH. HE DID NOT
BECOME A WOODCARVER; HE IS AN ATTORNEY
NOW.**

**WE NO LONGER LIVE IN CALIFORNIA WHERE
OUR BELOVED THREE BEARS COTTAGE STILL
EXISTS IN THAT MOUNTAIN VALLEY. WE STILL
DO OUR CARVINGS, ALTHOUGH WE ARE MUCH
SLOWER THAN WE WERE WAY BACK THEN.**

Paul Bolinger
Haymarket, Virginia 2020

**READ THE STORY, ENJOY IT, AND SHARE OUR
STORY AND THE CARVINGS.**

TUCKED IN A MOUNTAIN VALLEY, FAR FROM A BUSY CITY AND DEEP IN THE WOODS, THERE SAT A SMALL, QUAIN T COTTAGE.

THE LITTLE HOUSE WAS A HAPPY PLACE INDEED. IT WAS THE COLOR OF A SOFT BLUE SKY. THE CHEERY FRONT WINDOWS FACED A GROVE OF OLD FIR TREES. AN INVITING RED BRICK PATH WOUND PAST SNOW-COVERED JUNIPER BUSHES TO A SMALL FRONT PORCH.

THROUGH THE GAILY DECORATED DOOR, LIVED A JOLLY WOODCARVER, HIS WIFE, AND THEIR YOUNG SON.

IT WAS EXACTLY THE KIND OF PLACE WHERE SOMETHING SPECIAL COULD HAPPEN AT CHRISTMAS.



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EACH AND EVERY MORNING THE WOODCARVER CLIMBED UP ON A STURDY STOOL BEFORE HIS OLD WORKBENCH. AFTER CAREFULLY SHARPENING HIS KNIVES AND CHISELS, HE CARVED EXQUISITE FATHER CHRISTMAS FIGURES FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN THE FAR-OFF CITY.

THE WOODCARVER'S SON WATCHED HIS FATHER AS HE SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY CHIPPED AND CUT AWAY AT THE STRONG STRAIGHT WOOD. OFTEN THE SMALL BOY DREAMED OF BECOMING A WOODCARVER HIMSELF.

AT THE END OF THE DAY THE BOY HELPED HIS FATHER SWEEP UP THE WOOD CHIPS THAT LAY SCATTERED BENEATH THE BENCH. THE BOY WAS ALWAYS HAPPY TO WORK WITH HIS FATHER.



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THE CARVINGS WERE NOT COMPLETE WITHOUT THEIR COAT OF PAINT. IT WAS THE WOODCARVER'S WIFE WHO USED HER SKILL AS AN ARTIST TO COLOR THE HAND-CARVED FIGURES.

SHE OFTEN WORKED AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, SKILLFULLY BLENDING OIL PAINTS ON HER PALLETE. WHEN SHE HAD JUST THE RIGHT COLORS, BACK AND FORTH HER LONG-HANDLED BRUSH WOULD GO AS SHE PAINTED THE UNIQUE FATHER CHRISTMAS CARVINGS.

THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF EACH PIECE BEGAN TO SHOW ITSELF AS SHE WORKED. FINALLY, WITH A TOUCH OF BRILLIANT BLUE, THE EYES TWINKLED TO LIFE.



THROUGHOUT THE YEAR THE FAMILY SPENT MANY HOURS WORKING TOGETHER, COMPLETING THE FATHER CHRISTMAS FIGURES.

THEY ALSO TOOK TIME TO ENJOY THE PEACEFUL SURROUNDINGS OF THEIR LITTLE COTTAGE. THE BEAUTIFUL WOODS AND MANY FOREST FRIENDS GAVE THEM GREAT PLEASURE.

EVERY MORNING THEY OPENED THE COTTAGE DOOR TO SCATTER SEEDS FOR THE BIRDS AND SQUIRRELS. OFTEN THE DEER COULD BE SEEN USING THE SALT LICK THE FAMILY HAD BUILT AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS.

AFTER FINISHING THEIR EVENING MEAL, THE FAMILY SET OUT LEFTOVER VEGETABLE GREENS FOR THE RABBITS AND CRUSTS OF BREAD FOR THE RACCOONS' NIGHTLY VISIT.



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NOW, THE WOODCARVER AND HIS FAMILY WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES LUCKY ENOUGH TO LIVE IN THE COZY LITTLE COTTAGE.

A SMALL, FURRY MOUSE LISTENED EACH DAY TO THE TAP-TAP-TAP OF THE WOODCARVER'S Mallet. HE HAD GNAWED A HOLE IN THE KITCHEN WALL AND HAD MADE A WARM SNUG HOME INSIDE. HIS NEST CONTAINED PIECES OF OLD FABRIC, SOME WOOD SHAVINGS, AND A COLLECTION OF STRING. HERE THE MOUSE LIVE VERY COMFORTABLY.

THE WOODCARVER AND HIS FAMILY KNEW THAT THE LITTLE MOUSE LIVED WITH THEM AND LOVE THEM. EACH MORNING THEY SET OUT CHEESE IN A SMALL DISH BESIDE THE OPENING IN THE WALL.



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THE LITTLE COTTAGE MOUSE OFTEN OVERHEARD THE WOODCARVER AND HIS FAMILY TALK ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS FOR THEM TO CREATE THE FATHER CHRISTMAS FIGURES.

THE FIGURE MIGHT BE THAT OF AN OLD MAN, HOODED AGAINST THE COLD WITH A WALKING STICK IN ONE HAND. PERHAPS IT WOULD RESEMBLE A TALL BISHOP DRESSED IN GRAND, RED ROBES. WHATEVER THE DESIGN, THE FATHER CHRISTMAS CARVINGS RECALLED THE CENTURIES-OLD STORY OF ST. NICHOLAS, WHO IS REMEMBERED FOR HIS KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY TOWARD EVERYONE HE MET.

THE WOODCARVER AND HIS WIFE BELIEVED THAT THEIR CARVINGS COULD TOUCH HEARTS EVERYWHERE, REKINDLING THIS SPIRIT OF LOVE.



ONE PARTICULAR AFTERNOON, FROM BEHIND A Mallet ON THE WORKBENCH, THE MOUSE OVERHEARD THE WOODCARVER TELL HIS FAMILY THAT MANY PEOPLE WANTED CARVINGS THIS YEAR. THE FAMILY WOULD HAVE TO WORK STEADILY UNTIL CHRISTMAS DAY. SADLY, THEY WOULD HAVE NO TIME LEFT TO DECORATE THEIR COTTAGE IN HONOR OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

THE WIFE OF THE WOODCARVER KNEW THAT THEIR WORK MUST BE FINISHED. NONETHELESS, SHE FELT THE CHRISTMAS WOULD NOT BE AS WONDROUS WITHOUT DECORATIONS FOR THE COTTAGE. SHE WAS ESPECIALLY SORRY FOR THEIR YOUNG SON AFTER SEEING HIM BLINK BACK HIS TEARS. SHE KNEW HOW TERRIBLY DISAPPOINTED HE FELT.



“OH”, THOUGHT THE MOUSE TO HIMSELF, “A CHRISTMAS WITHOUT DECORATIONS HOW SAD THAT WOULD BE!”

THE COTTAGE MOUSE KNEW THERE MUST BE A WAY HE COULD HELP THESE PEOPLE WHO HAD ALWAYS BEEN SO GOOD TO HIM AND THE OTHER ANIMALS. HE STARTED THINKING AND BY THE NEXT MORNING HE HAD A PLAN HE WAS SURE WOULD WORK.

AT DAWN THE MOUSE SQUEEZED THROUGH A THIN CRACK IN THE COTTAGE WALL TO THE SNOW-COVERED GROUND OUTSIDE. HE IMMEDIATELY SOUGHT OUT HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS TO TELL THEM OF HIS PLAN, AND TO GET THEIR HELP.



BY MID-DAY THE MOUSE WAS STANDING ON AN UP-ENDED WOODEN BUCKET. HE WAS SHELTERED FROM THE LIGHTLY FALLING SNOW BY THE GREEN BOUGHS OF AN OLD FIR TREE. GATHERED AROUND HIM WERE WHITE RABBIT, CARDINAL RED, BROWN SQUIRREL, DEER AMBER, AND THE RACCOON FAMILY.

AS HIS FOREST FRIENDS LISTEN QUIETLY, THE MOUSE TOLD HOW THE FAMILY HAD NO TIME TO DECORATE THEIR COTTAGE IN HONOR OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON. THE ANIMALS WERE ESPECIALLY TOUCHED WHEN HE DESCRIBED THE LITTLE BOY'S TEARS.

THE MOUSE REMINDED HIS FRIENDS HOW MUCH THEY THEMSELVES HAD ENJOYED THE COTTAGE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS IN THE PAST.



DEER AMBER DECLARED THAT HE WOULD MISS PEEKING THROUGH THE COTTAGE WINDOW TO GAZE UPON THE BEAUTIFULLY DECORATED TREE.

CARDINAL RED THOUGHT FONDLY OF THE SOFT GLOW THAT THE STAR ATOP THE TREE CAST THROUGH THE FOREST. OTHERS NOW CHIMED IN RECALLING THE FRESH GREEN GARLAND DRAPED AROUND THE COTTAGE DOOR AND THE TINY WOODEN ANGELS THAT HUNG IN THE MANY-PANED WINDOWS.

OF COURSE, NONE OF THEM COULD FORGET THE YEARLY GOODWILL WREATH THAT THE FAMILY COVERED WITH APPLES, NUTS AND SUET FOR THE ANIMALS' SPECIAL ENJOYMENT.

WHILE THEY WERE ALL STILL TAKEN WITH THESE MEMORIES, THE MOUSE CLEARED HIS THROAT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY.



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“THE WOODCARVER AND HIS FAMILY HAVE BEEN SO KIND TO EACH OF US IT’S TIME FOR US TO DO SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR THEM,” THE MOUSE DECLARED. “IF WE USE OUR UNIQUE ABILITIES AND WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A LOVELY GIFT.”

THE GIFT THE MOUSE PROPOSED WOULD HANG ON THE COTTAGE DOOR... THE ANIMALS COULD MAKE A CHRISTMAS WREATH FOR THE FAMILY.

BROWN SQUIRREL WAS THE FIRST TO VOLUNTEER. HE HAD SPENT HIS BRISK FALL DAYS COLLECTING AND STORING NUTS FOR THE WINTER. NOW HE COULD SEARCH ALL HIS FAVORITE HIDING PLACES AND SELECT THE BEST HICKORY NUTS, CHESTNUTS, AND BLACK WALNUTS HE COULD FIND.



WHITE RABBIT HAD LISTENED CAREFULLY TO ALL THAT HAD BEEN SAID, HER LONG SOFT EARS BENT SLIGHTLY FORWARD, SUDDENLY HER EYES BRIGHTENED. SHE FLUFFED HER ROUND TAIL AND HOPPED QUICKLY TO HER HOME BENEATH THE OLD FIR TREE.

NO ONE COULD GUESS WHAT WHITE RABBIT WOULD BRING FOR THE WREATH. WHEN SHE RETURNED, SHE HELD IN HER FRONT PAWS A LOVELY PASTEL BOUQUET. THROUGH THE SUMMER SHE HAD GATHERED FRESH FLOWERS. BUNCHES OF COLORFUL STATICE IN PINK, YELLOW, AND PURPLE HAD HUNG, UPSIDE DOWN, IN HER WARREN TO DRY. NOW WHITE RABBIT'S DRIED FLOWERS WOULD BRING COLOR TO THE WREATH.



DEER AMBER, THE STRONGEST OF THE MOUSE'S FRIENDS, USED HIS SHARP HOOVES TO DIG BENEATH THE CRUSTED SNOW FOR RUNNERS OF FRESH GROUND PINE. THE GREENERY HE FOUND WOULD FORM THE BODY OF THE WREATH WHEN TWISTED AROUND A CIRCLE FASHIONED FROM GRAPEVINES.

CARDINAL RED SCoured THE WOODS, FLYING TO THE TOPS OF THE HIGHEST TREES ON HIS STURDY WINGS. HE SEARCHED FOR CLUSTERS OF BRIGHT RED BERRIES AND SHINY SPRIGS OF HOLLY. WITH THESE TREASURES IN HIS BEAK, HE FLEW BACK TO THE MOUSE. AGAIN, AND AGAIN HE FLEW UNTIL JUST ENOUGH HOLLY AND BERRIES HAD BEEN COLLECTED TO DECORATE THE WREATH.



THE COTTAGE MOUSE SCURRIED BACK TO HIS NEST TO GATHER PLENTY OF STRING TO BE USED TO BIND THE WREATH TOGETHER. THE RACCOON FAMILY WITH THEIR NIMBLE FINGERS WOULD ASSEMBLE THE CHRISTMAS WREATH THAT NIGHT.

UNDER THE GLOW OF A FULL MOON, THE RACCOONS WORK STEADILY. FIRST, THEY WRAPPED AND TIED THE GROUND PINE AROUND THE CIRCLE OF GRAPE VINES. THEN THEY ADDED HOLLY TWIGS AND BERRIES ALONG WITH A VARIETY OF NUTS. FINALLY, THE COLORFUL DRIED FLOWERS WERE TUCKED INTO THE WREATH.

AS THE FIRST MORNING LIGHT FILLED THE WOODS, THE GLORIOUS WREATH WAS COMPLETED. THE ANIMALS STOOD BACK TO ADMIRE IT. THEY ALL AGREED... IT WAS PERFECT! THEY WERE PROUD THAT TOGETHER THEY HAD PRODUCED SUCH A BEAUTIFUL GIFT.



THE ANIMALS CARRIED THE WREATH ACROSS THE SNOW AND CAREFULLY PLACED IT ON THE COTTAGE PORCH. QUICKLY THEY EACH HID NEARBY TO WATCH THE DISCOVERY OF THEIR GIFT.

THE WOODCARVER'S SON OPENED THE COTTAGE DOOR TO TOSS A HANDFUL OF WILD SEEDS TO THE GROUND. SUDDENLY HE STOPPED, HIS ARM IN MIDAIR, AS HE SPIED THE WREATH LEANING AGAINST THE SIDE OF THE HOUSE.

EXCITEDLY HE CALLED HIS MOTHER AND FATHER. WHEN THEY REACHED THE DOOR, THEY TOO SAW THE LOVELY WREATH.

SURPRISED AND PUZZLED AT HOW THIS BEAUTIFUL WREATH CAME TO BE, THE WOODCARVER QUIETLY LOOKED ABOUT. HIS WIFE ASKED WHO COULD POSSIBLY KNOW HOW MUCH SUCH A WREATH WOULD MEAN TO THEM THIS YEAR.



“I KNOW!” THE LITTLE BOY SHOUTED WITH GLEE. “LOOK THERE IN THE SNOW SEE THE TRACKS LEADING UP TO OUR DOOR?”

SURE ENOUGH, THERE ON THE NEW FALLEN SNOW, THE FAMILY COULD MAKE OUT THE MANY TRACKS LEFT BY THEIR FOREST FRIENDS.

THE LARGE JOLLY WOODCARVER BENT DOWN ON ONE KNEE AND CAREFULLY LIFTED THE WREATH. HE TURNED AND HUNG IT FROM THE NAIL IN THE CENTER OF THE BEAR COTTAGE DOOR. THE ANIMALS WATCHING FROM BEHIND THE TREES, COULD NOT SEE THE LARGE PLOPPY TEARS ROLL DOWN THE FACE OF THIS BIG MAN AS HE PUT UP THE HANDSOME WREATH.

THE FAMILY WAS DEEPLY TOUCHED BY THE THOUGHTFULNESS OF THE ANIMALS. THEY PROMISED TO ONE ANOTHER THEY WOULD THANK THESE KIND FRIENDS IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY.



THE GIFT WREATH STILL HUNG ON THE DOOR THE FOLLOWING SPRING. ONE MORNING, THE WOODCARVER AND HIS FAMILY STEPPED OUT ONTO THEIR FRONT PORCH. THE YOUNG BOY WHO HAD GROWN TALLER OVER THE WINTER MONTHS, REACHED UP AND LIFTED UP THE NOW-WEATHERED WREATH FROM THE NAIL ON THE COTTAGE DOOR.

IN ITS PLACE THE WOODCARVER HUNG ANOTHER. THE NEW WREATH WAS CARVED FROM WOOD AND PAINTED WITH BRIGHT COLORS. THE FAMILY HAD HANDCRAFTED IT TO LOOK EXACTLY LIKE THE ONE THE ANIMALS HAD MADE FOR THEM. THERE WAS ONE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE THOUGH... IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS WREATH WAS A CAREFULLY CARVED LIKENESS OF THE LITTLE MOUSE.

THIS GIFT OF LOVE WOULD HANG FOREVER ON THE COTTAGE DOOR TO SAY THANK YOU TO THE MOUSE AND HIS FOREST FRIENDS.



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THIS IS A WOOD-CARVED WREATH CREATED BY THE BOLINGERS AFTER THEIR BOOK BROUGHT REQUESTS FOR A REAL WREATH LIKE THE ONE IN THE BOOK. THIS CARVING IS 20 INCHES IN DIAMETER.

**THESE ARE SOME
OF THE VINTAGE
FATHER
CHRISTMAS
CARVINGS FROM
THE PERIOD OF
THE FIRST
EDITION.**



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