

## EVENTS

## The great urban Christmas-tree hunt



James Ruchbamer/Herald photographer

## You can chop down your own without ever leaving the city

By Hunter Drohojowska

**M**rs. Natural I'm not. I eat in restaurants, hire a maid to clean the house, send laundry to the dry cleaners. I adore urban life, abiding by Andy Warhol's dictum: You can bring a little bit of country to the city, but you can't bring a little bit of city to the country. During my rare travels to rural burghs, I huddle in a hotel, never a tent.

In other words, manual labor is not my idea of a good time, and as far as getting back to the land goes, I can think of plenty of reasons why people left it in the first place. Why, then, does the idea of cutting down my own Christmas tree seem so appealing?

Nostalgia, no doubt. Especially in Los Angeles, we Easterners start to feel a seasonal longing for the blizzards reported on the nightly news. Oh, for the sight of a snow plow, the sounds of school closings on the radio. My husband feels the same way, whooping a little cry of delight every time it rains and groaning at the arrival of yet another sunny day. Sentimentality, that's why I want to cut down my own Christmas tree.

You might think it would be tough to find anything but palm trees at yuletide, but the old tannenbaums are raised all around Los Angeles county on — what else? — Christmas-tree farms. You don't get there in a horse and sleigh exactly — you take the car over the bounding freeways. "The earliest memory I have of my father is watching him cut down a Christmas tree. We didn't have lots in Linton, we went to the woods," recalled my husband, nostalgically.

I guess my father wasn't Mr. Natural because he never actually cut down a tree, but I do remember seeing such scenes in Currier and Ives prints. It was the idea of cutting down a tree that spawned my sense of excitement as we arrived in Torrance.

The lights of the Mobil refinery glittered festively through billowing clouds of smoke, and we passed industrial parks, pumping oil derricks

and Reynolds Metals, Aluminum Can Division, before we were greeted by the cheerful red-and-white sign for Lyon's Christmas Tree Farm and Nursery. Silhouetted against mammoth yellow industrial storage tanks are 10 acres of Monterey pines, which thrive best in the Southland, away from severe frosts.

It was dark and nippy and only two other families were there to cut trees. We browsed among the conifers, trying to choose from among the short and shaggy or tall and stately. The air was rich, fresh, and a sign from the Christmas Tree Growers Association explained why: The pines consume carbon dioxide and reintroduce large quantities of oxygen into the atmosphere.

Since all the trees were the same price — \$39 — we opted for a big, fat one to fill the living room. The farm manager, Jim Roderick, handed me the bow saw. It was the first I had ever handled, but my confidence was bolstered watching a 10-year-old girl fell her family's sizable pine.

On my knees, I gently pulled the saw across the trunk and felt the surprisingly soft flesh of the tree give way. An intense snap of pine odor floated up. Halfway through, after some five strokes, I let my husband finish the deed. It was finished so quickly, we forgot to yell "Timber."

Suddenly, we felt like murderers. Before we hauled the carcass back to the car, Roderick reassured us. "We raise these trees like lettuce or tomatoes, for harvest." We reached down to touch the pulpy, sap-sticky stump, a little amazed that a tree had ever been there at all.

In the car on the way home, we were intoxicated from the smell of the fresh pine. For a couple of hours between work and sleep, we had had a Christmas adventure, and though we were only in Torrance, we felt we had been far, far away.

The Christmas-tree growers provide the saws and also will tie the tree onto your car. Some tree lots charge by the foot, others set a flat fee for a tree, no matter what the size. Most offer assistance if your muscles tire or your palms blister. And if you change your mind about all that green, pine-scented



James Ruchbamer/Herald photographer

## Dan Kazarian cuts

and his wife, Deborah, holds the tree while twigs fascinate the kids — Kyle, 7½, left, and Karly, 4½.

nature, many farms will flock your tree or give away free boughs.

It's the early lumberjack who gets the best tree. Most growers open their "choose and cut" lots on Thanksgiving weekend. Roderick said that they make more money on Christmas trees in two weeks than they do in their nursery all year. They sold about 80 trees the first day they opened, but soon, said Roderick, it will not be uncommon to see 300 cars parked, and just as many families hunting their trees.

**Andrews Christmas Tree Farm**, 10954 Independence Ave., Chatsworth, corner of Rinaldi Street, open 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekends. Average of \$30 per tree (818) 341-9858.

**Cerritos Christmas Trees**, 16401 S. Piima, west of Studebaker and South Alondra. Open 10 a.m.-7 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. weekends. Average of \$4 a foot. \$5 a foot for Sierra redwoods. Free candy canes. 865-7330

**Christmas Tree Lane**, 7150 Jackson St., Paramount. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

weekends, \$29.95 flat fee per tree 429-1484.

**Elkins Choose & Cut**, 6901 Atlantic Ave., N. Long Beach. Open 9 a.m.-6 p.m. daily. Flat fee of \$26.95 per tree. 863-4668.

**Fairgrove Christmas Tree Farm**, 14855 Fairgrove Ave., La Puente, between Sunset and California. Open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Trees start at \$35 (818) 917-1080.

**Frosty's Forest Inc.**, 23256 Lyons Ave., Newhall. Open 10 a.m.-8 p.m. daily. Trees under 5½ feet are \$22.53; taller trees are \$27.23. Offering pictures with Santa Claus. (805) 253-9266.

**Grand Avenue Tree Farm**, 1135 S. Grand Ave., Glendora. Open 12-5 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekends. Average price of \$26 for a 6-foot tree. (818) 331-4553.

**Grandpa's Christmas Tree Farm**, corner of Clementina and Paso Verde, Hacienda Heights. Open 12-5 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekends. From \$3 to \$4 a foot. (818) 968-9804.

**Green Acres Christmas Trees**, 16401 Roscoe Blvd., corner of Havenhurst, Sepulveda. Open 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. daily. From \$25 to \$45, tagged. (818) 892-1021.

**Green and Fresh Christmas Tree Farm**, 3190 E. Del Mar, Pasadena. Open 3-30-9 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. weekends. Average price of \$29.98 for a 7½-foot tree. (818) 792-6725.

**Lyon's Christmas Trees**, 23711 Crenshaw Blvd., Torrance, between Sepulveda and Lomita boulevards. Open 10 a.m.-9 p.m. daily. Flat fee of \$39 per tree, 530-6220. (Lyon's also has tree-farm lots in Rosemead, City of Industry and Commerce, where the fee is only \$34.)

**Santa's Forest Christmas Tree Farm**, 5911 E. Firestone Blvd., Downey. Open 12-5 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekends. Ranging from \$4.75 to \$5.25 a foot. 928-0722

**Sturrock Christmas Tree Farm**, 6700 San Dimas Canyon Road, San Dimas. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Average of \$5 per foot. (714) 599-2630.

**Windmill Christmas Tree Farm**, Rye Canyon Road, Valencia Industrial Park, Valencia. All trees \$28 with tax (805) 255-6943.

Hunter Drohojowska writes regularly for the Herald.