

## Down By The Berry Patch

### "The Christopher Tree, the Grave Blanket, the Planter, and the Evergreen Trees"

Julia A. Berg  
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**There are many cycles in life.** Four of them are the Christopher tree, the grave blanket, the planter, and the evergreen trees. All are related to our dear middle son, Christopher, who died of a sudden heart attack on June 12, 1994. Three relate to the cemetery where he is buried.



Every day, we look out our dining room window; and regardless of the season, there **we see the first cycle, Christopher tree**, in all its glory. The little tree's arrival, two days after Christopher's death, was a wonderful surprise gift from good friends, Joann Walraven and Arlene Waggoner — former school teachers of Christopher and current exceptional friends and former teaching colleagues of ours from Essexville.

Our first thought was “thank you” for such a wonderful gift that would continue to grow and be a memorial for Christopher. Our next thought was “where will we plant it?” We walked from window to window, knowing that wherever the little flowering crab tree was planted, we wanted to be able to view it from the house. We selected the perfect location, directly to the west, overlooking the herb garden, and backed by beautiful spruce and pine trees.

Lorain and friend, Bruce Maughan, planted the tree. Little did we realize at the time, that it would grow to be so large and so beautiful. In the spring, we watch the buds begin to form followed by green shiny leaves and long branches cascading with beautiful white flowers. In the summer, the tree is full with leaves and the small fruit begins to form. In the fall, the long branches cascade with wonderful red crab apples.

The backdrop of the evergreens make a perfect picture. Throughout the early winter months, the berries remain on the tree. We did find that in the early days of the tree, the deer would eat the berries and the lower branches. Now, the wild turkey fly to the herb garden fence and attempt to get the berries — sometimes with success. And then comes spring again and the cycle repeats itself. The only difference is that the tree gets larger and the memories, love, and missing of Christopher grow even stronger. But the cycle continues again and again and again.

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**The second cycle is the winter grave blanket.** Each year, my husband, goes to the woods, cuts branches from the evergreen trees, brings them home in the little red cart behind the four-wheeler, and prepares a lovely blanket for Christopher's grave. Sometimes he works on it on the porch; other times he works on it on the dining room table. Always, it elicits many wonderful, yet sad, Christopher memories.



Lorain is a perfectionist. The blanket is always beautiful. The adornments are a big gold metal quarter note in recognition of Christopher's wonderful musical ability, a cross woven from pine needles made by our daughter-in law, Janice, and a few silk poinsettias. It is delivered to the cemetery with love and remains there from late October to April first.

Christopher lies in rest at the cemetery near Lupton, Michigan, about five miles from our home. You drive through rolling hills to get there. When the location was selected, there was a beautiful, charming old barn that had seen better days. I thought Christopher would love the picturesque view — and so did I, as I sat and talked with him, or just sat with my many memories — sometimes with a tear, sometimes with a smile.

The blanket is put out before the snow falls, usually in late October. It is removed by April first. We believe and hope Christopher recognizes the love that goes into his annual blanket.

One year, when Lorain was returning from his annual trip from the woods with evergreens for Christopher's grave blanket, I looked out the window and saw him in front of the Christopher tree. I asked him to “halt — wait until I get my camera.” And I snapped a picture that I had seen so often. Now I had it on film as well as in my mind. The saying is that a “picture is worth a thousand words.” This picture may be worth a million to me.



**The third cycle is the planter.** This is just a simple name for something that means so much to us. When Christopher died, good friends, Judy and Pat Foss, sent a lovely huge gray/beige potter planter with beautiful annuals planted in it. We could have kept it at home, but decided to use it to adorn the cemetery plot where Christopher lies.

Every year since then, thirteen now, we have replanted the annuals and added a few beautiful silk flowers. Before Memorial Day, it is placed on the grave site. Cemetery rules dictate the date of removal by October first.

On our many trips to talk with Christopher, we take a bucket of water to keep the flowers alive. And when we stand there, we think of Christopher and our good friends who gave us this planter.

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**Cycle four is the eight blue spruce trees that frame the road that runs through the cemetery.** There are two cemeteries side by side. The older one allows upright tombstones, has trees and shrubs, and has character. Christopher's cemetery only allowed flat grave markers, had only one maple tree and one very lop sided spruce. It needed something.



We went to the Township Board meeting to obtain permission to plant blue spruce along the drive. It took them eight months to come to an affirmative decision. Then we hired "a man and a machine" to dig up blue spruce from our property, take the trees to the cemetery, dig holes, and place the trees for us. Son, Mike, and good friend and neighbor, Bob DeCraene, helped finish the planting.

Of course, one tree is very near Christopher. And as life would happen, Bob passed away a few years ago and is buried near Christopher. The tree for them is beautiful in all its glory every season. In the spring, it gets new growth; in the summer and fall we watch the beautiful blue green perfectly shaped tree as it grows each year; in the winter, we marvel at the beauty of the snow covered branches. And the cycle repeats itself.

We took a little of Michriste Manor to Christopher when we took these trees that were originally planted by Mike and Janice on our property. Michriste (Mich for Michael; chris for Christopher; ste for Steven) is a name we came up with when we purchased our property almost 40 years ago and it has been a good fit. We love this place; we love Christopher.

We love these Christopher memories season after season. When we are gone, the planter and blanket cycles may not continue. But we know the Christopher tree and blue spruce will continue their cycles for years to come. Memories! Memories!

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