

Loving birds and trees, ruing squirrels

By Ginny Gregory

My naturally curly haired girl, Chloe sits with me as we gaze out the window. She leans on me, turns upside down, squeezes next to me ... anything to nuzzle and get a hug. In the winter, this window is my early morning perch. I sit watching our winged friends grab and go with seed. Jackson sits in the other chair; on alert, watching ever vigilantly for "the squirrel." Chloe pretends to watch the birds with me, but I suspect she, too, is scanning for a sighting of our nut-gathering friends.

The fire is warm as I watch my birds zoom in for seed at the feeder...barely perching and then retreating into our discarded Christmas tree that we set, stand and all, in the garden to offer a dense hiding place for the birds to have their meals. Over time Jackson lies down, crosses his front paws and basks in the morning sun as it streams in on him through the window. Chloe feels the squeeze in our chair together and launches herself from chair to her dog puff in front of the fire.

Ritual is such a soothing part of life. I adore this one. As I sit mesmerized at the window, I know I have done this before. I am taken back to my Rocky Mount days, having breakfast on Saturday morning with my parents. There was a bird feeder outside our kitchen window and watching birds was just part of my life with them. Being born to older parents offers unique pastimes for a child. The bird book lived on the kitchen table and I can remember the conversation that always led to..."Well, look it up!"

My mother was the real birder, but my father was a person to never be undone or wrong so he, too, became a faux birder. In reality, he was Jackson in that he had a real war going against the squirrels. Years back he found a baby squirrel abandoned on the ground in our garden. He brought it in the house and nursed it for weeks. Now, you must understand that my mother only let our family dog in the house under



The crabapple tree heralds spring with sweet smelling flowers and provides fruit for jelly in the summer.

extreme pressure as she felt animals of all kind lived outside. Period.

I don't know how my father pulled off the squirrel. He kept it in a shoe box nested in an old dusting rag on the closed-in back porch next to the old refrigerator that was used to store Coke cola and beer. I guess that was not technically "in the house" in my mother's eyes.

This new found baby grew up and my father proudly claimed him to be his new friend. He would hold him and carry him around until the fatal summer day that, in excitement when my father was feeding him, he bit through the nail of my father's thumb.

Now, anyone with good sense would know that nothing good was going to come of having a pet squirrel. Not my father. It was only this bite that finally got his attention to the fact that this was a wild animal. He was furious. He claimed betrayal and huddled that poor creature out into the yard to fend for himself. From that moment on, my father was on constant squirrel alert!

Since he was responsible for keeping the feeder full, he began to notice how much the birds actually got to eat and how much the squirrels were stealing. He immediately marched out and got the metal skirt and perfectly secured it on the bird feeder post to keep "those animals" out. He then realized, after constant attention to the bird feeder, that the squirrels were climbing up the nearby crabapples and leaping onto the top of the feeder and then helping themselves to the constant seed buffet.

These crabapple trees were there from the time of my birth. Their spring flower show was magnificent. We gathered their fruit each year and made crabapple jelly to eat on our morning toast. This jelly making would happen after we came home from our annual family beach trip. This was a yearly ritual I had with my mother. These trees were a huge part of my childhood.

Since my father did not "do sand," he never accompanied us to the coast. Unfortunately, now the stage was set. Not to worry, my father then preceded to call the tree men to come and cut down our beloved crabapples that summer of the fatal "bite." Remember, the rest of the family was away at the beach. He was going to get the squirrels one-way or the other.

And thus my love affair with crabapples came and went that summer.

I was heart broken. My second favorite climbing trees, my sweet smelling spring flowers and the fruit that made our traditional jelly for toast were gunned down over squirrels. I never see a squirrel...never... that some part of this story doesn't come to mind.

Jackson has the squirrel gene. He comes by it naturally. He is a dog after all.

Ginny Gregory is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. She is the owner and creative energy behind Beyond The Pail... Creating Gardens and Beyond www.beyondthepail.net.

You can't take it with you, and your children don't want it, either

By Gia Miele

When my mother had to move to assisted living two years ago, it took my sister four days just to separate what would go to auction, estate sale, ebay and charity. We kept very, very little. So, these words have true meaning for me. So why do people keep so much stuff?

I have been a professional designer and organizer for years and what I see is that most people know they need to get more organized and clear out clutter but they do not know where to begin.

You can begin by asking yourself: "If I haven't used something in five years, what makes me think I may use it in the next five?"

"Of all the rooms in my house, which is the most cluttered and bothers me the most?"

"If none of my children or grandchildren care about inheriting my fine china and silver, should I sell it on Ebay, have an estate sale or give it away for tax deductions?"

"If I want to keep all of my books with me as long as I am able, what other pieces of furniture can I eliminate so that I can have room for them?"

"I know I will probably have to sell this big house soon, but should I wait until then to start working on eliminating my clutter?"

These are just some of the many questions a professional organizer will ask you to consider in order to assist you in making an organization

plan that will work for you. An organization plan will only work for you if it meets your particular needs and desires.

Whether you get the help of a professional or do it yourself, have a defined plan as to what to do first and always keep in mind the benefits that you will reap from organizing and de-cluttering your space.

There are many emotional and physical benefits to living in an organized and neat environment. First, it is less stressful because you are not constantly being reminded of your clutter. Clean, neat spaces give the sense of peace and calm. They help to reduce the stress you are carrying with you when you come into them. This is the essence of what home should be.

Very often people tend to postpone tasks they consider unpleasant (like

de-cluttering) and forget to remind themselves of the benefits once the task is completed. Remind yourself often, during the process, of the benefits of a well organized and de-cluttered space.

Gia Miele is the owner of Urban Sampler, a gift shop in Pittsboro and The House Therapist, her design and organizing business.



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