

Jerry McKelvy's
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EASTERN RED CEDAR – THE GRAVEYARD TREE

When you visit cemeteries in the South, you will often find cedar trees scattered about especially in the older parts of the cemetery. It was once a common practice to plant cedars in cemeteries because they lived a long time and it was believed the evergreen foliage symbolized eternal life. The cedar tree came to be known as “the graveyard tree”.

The largest Eastern red cedar tree in the nation is located at the Lone Hill Cemetery in Coffee County, Georgia. It is believed to be over 200 years old. Many of the early settlers of Arkansas who came from states like Georgia and South Carolina continued the tradition of planting a cedar tree near the graves of their family members.

There are many superstitions in American folklore regarding cedar trees. The Cherokee Indians consider the cedar to be a sacred tree which offers powerful protection from evil spirits. Many Cherokees carry a small piece of cedar wood in their medicine bags around their necks or place a piece of cedar wood at the entry to their homes for protection against evil spirits.

You may have heard the story that you should never transplant a cedar tree because when it gets large enough to shade your grave, you will die. That superstition is said to have originated in the Ozarks, but I heard that from my folks when I was a young child. It was said that if you do transplant a cedar tree and it dies, you will die shortly afterwards. I once transplanted a small cedar tree in our yard many years ago. It lived and grew well, but when it got about twelve feet tall, I decided to cut it down. It was not in a good place to leave, but I think the main reason was that I remembered that old superstition. Why take a chance?

Another superstition says that planting a cedar tree in your yard will welcome poverty. Some think Christ was crucified on a cedar tree and that it will bring bad luck if you burn a cedar tree. I have always heard the story that Christ was crucified on a dogwood tree and that it was cursed so that it would never again grow large enough to make a cross

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and that the dogwood bloom symbolizes the suffering of Christ on the cross. The Bible doesn't tell us what wood was used to make the cross although it does tell us what wood was used to make Noah's ark. The Bible mentions "the cedars of Lebanon", so that may be why some think the cross was made from the cedar tree.

Another superstition says if a cedar tree comes up voluntarily in your yard, you should not cut it because as long as it flourishes, your family will have good health.

It is said that you should never bring a cedar tree or cedar boughs inside your home because it will bring very bad luck. The only exception is if it's used to celebrate Christmas, but all remnants of the tree should be removed by January 6.

When I was growing up, we usually had a cedar Christmas tree we cut from the woods. I spent a lot of time each year searching for the perfect tree. I don't remember us ever having a store-bought or an artificial Christmas tree.

Cedar trees have dense wood that is resistant to decay and is often used for fence posts and siding for homes. The wood has a pleasant aroma. It is often made into cedar chests because it repels moths. Most families usually had a cedar chest used for storage. The tree is valued by wood-working enthusiasts. Cedar mulch is often used in landscaping because it helps control weeds and repels insects.

Cedar trees also have medicinal qualities. A tea made from cedar is said to help cough, bronchitis, rheumatism, improve appetite and digestion, and for fighting infections and worms. Oil from the cedar tree can be used on the skin for treating wounds, skin rashes, hair loss, eczema, acne, warts, or rubbed on the chest for treatment of asthma.

Some farmers and ranchers consider cedars as weeds and try to keep them removed from their pastures where the cows graze.

Just out of curiosity, I went to the Find-a-Grave web site and called up a list of cemeteries with the word "cedar" in their name. A list of over 50 pages came up with cemetery names like, Cedar Hill, Cedar Bluff, Big Cedar, Cedar Cliff, Cedar Creek, Cedar Falls, Cedar Fork, Cedar Grove, and many others.

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Two of our local cemeteries (Bluff City and Ebenezer) have large cedar trees in the old part of the cemeteries. Bluff City Cemetery has the largest cedar tree I have seen in our part of the country (see photo below).



The largest of several old cedar trees at Bluff City Cemetery. It measures 35.8 inches DBH (diameter breast high).

Some of my Henry ancestors are buried about 15 feet from this tree.

BELOW—grove of cedar trees at Ebenezer Cemetery in oldest part of cemetery. My McKelvy great-great grandparents are buried under these cedar trees. .



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TIME

In the Bible we read in James chapter 4, verse 14— “Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (NKJV)

Here’s a little research somebody did on how the average person uses the time we are allotted. These figures are based on an average life span of 78.7 years.

Sleep—We spend about 229,961 hours sleeping which equals 9582 days or 26.25 years.

Eating—67 minutes per day (32,098 hours). That equals 1337 days or 3.66 years.

Driving—101 minutes per day (37,935 hours). That equals 1580 days or 4.3 years. This is based on a person starting to drive at age 17.

Working—40 hours per week (90,360 hours). That equals 3765 days or 10.3 years.

Surfing the Internet—32 hours per month or 28,300 hours. That equals 1179 days or 3.2 years.

Watching TV—2.8 hours per day (80,486 hours). That equals 3354 days or about 9.2 years.

Cleaning – 12,896 hours which equals 537 days or 1.47 years. This is for women. Men spend about half that amount of time cleaning.

According to these figures, the average person spends 58.38 years of their life doing these things. That leaves about 20.32 years to do other things.

One thing I noticed about the above statistics—they didn’t include any time for attending church services to worship God. Suppose we count two hours per week attending church. That would be 8185 hours. That would equal 341 days or a little less than one year. That’s a small price to pay to give back one year of our life in worshipping God because we know that without His help, we would not have air to breathe to accomplish all the other things in life that we do.

Some quotes about time---

1. “If you love life, don’t waste time, for time is what life is made up of.” ~ Bruce Lee
2. Don’t say you don’t have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein.” ~ H. Jackson Brown
3. “The bad news is time flies. The good news is you’re the pilot.” ~ Michael Altshuler
4. “Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.” ~ Carl Sandburg

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5. "The great dividing line between success and failure can be expressed in five words: 'I did not have time.'" ~ Franklin Field
6. "You wake up in the morning, and your purse is magically filled with twenty-four hours of un-manufactured tissue of the universe of your life! It is yours. It is the most precious of possessions. No one can take it from you. And no one receives either more or less than you receive." ~ Arnold Bennett
7. "If, before going to bed every night, you will tear a page from the calendar, and remark, "there goes another day of my life, never to return", you will become time conscious. ~ A.B. Zu Tavern
8. "Don't waste your time in anger, regrets, worries, and grudges. Life is too short to be unhappy." — Roy T. Bennett
9. "Time is free, but it's priceless. You can't own it, but you can use it. You can't keep it, but you can spend it. Once you've lost it you can never get it back." – Harvey Mackay
10. "The greatest gift you can give someone is your time because when you give your time, you are giving a portion of your life that you will never get back." – Anonymous
11. "Time and health are two precious assets that we don't recognize and appreciate until they have been depleted." – Denis Waitley
12. "How you spend your time is more important than how you spend your money. Money mistakes can be corrected, but time is gone forever."— David Norris
13. Never waste a minute thinking about people you don't like." – Dwight D. Eisenhower

A PRESIDENT VISITS PRESCOTT

In October, 1909, President William Howard Taft passed through Nevada County. He was traveling on a special train headed toward Texarkana. The train stopped at some towns along the way where he made a short speech. He was having trouble with his throat and could barely speak. He made a short talk at Benton, Arkadelphia, and Texarkana. The train did not stop at Prescott, but went through town at a very slow speed. There was a great crowd of people estimated to be over 1000 lining both sides of the track to catch a glimpse of the president. President Taft stood with his hat in his hand and a smile on his face as he bowed to show his appreciation.

President Taft was a very large man weighting about 350 pounds, so he stood out in a crowd. At one point as the train came through Prescott, the crowd was focused on

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another very large man standing between the cars about the middle of the train and mistakenly thought they were seeing the president. They soon realized when the last car went by that President Taft was standing at the rear of the last car.

A story circulated around the country that President Taft once got stuck in the bathtub and six men had to lift him out. According to historians, that story is probably not true, but he did have an incident involving a bathtub at a hotel. He had filled the tub with water, but when he got in the tub, the tub overflowed and water began to trickle through the floor onto the heads of diners in the hotel dining room which was directly below his room.



Henry Brothers store at Bluff City (about 1909)

Henry Brothers are prominent merchants of Bluff City, enjoying a fine trade. They handle everything in the mercantile line. (from an article in Nevada County Picayune in 1909)

RAINFALL RECORD

Oct. rainfall – 4.8 inches Total for 10 months – 59.7 inches Normal for year – 52 inches

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An Arkansas Christmas -- by Don Mathis



I come from a long line of large families. There was so many of us at Grandma Mathis' house at Christmas time, we would draw names to get a gift for a cousin, uncle, or aunt. Still, Grandma would have a handmade gift for each of her dozens of grandchildren. It might be a puppy dog made from a bar of Ivory soap and a washcloth or a coat-hanger covered in yarn. One year it was a sock monkey. Whatever it was, gifts from 'the Camden Santa' made each of us grandkids feel special.

Grandmother Walker would have a gift for all her descendants, memorable gifts – like a bicycle or a tape player. And then there were the stocking stuffers – like stockings for my aunts, underwear and socks for the grandchildren. Mom once told me that she never bought a pair of panties in her life – until after her mother died. Looking back on my childhood, I think everything in my dresser drawer was a Christmas gift from Grandmother.

Oranges and nuts were traditional presents during the Great Depression of the 1930s – and that tradition continued into my family of origin. A bowl of mixed nuts was always a feature on the coffee table at holiday time. Nutcrackers and picks helped get the pecan morsels out; the smaller the treat, the sweeter the meat! I think Christmas was the only time of year we had Brazil nuts or walnuts; the almonds were the easiest to crack. Yum!

In the Dan Mathis clan, we would each open a gift, one at a time. We would 'ooh' and 'aah' over each present, then it was the next brother's turn. And Mom would be right there, folding the wrapping paper to use the next Christmas.

No matter where the family lived – Washington, D.C., San Antonio, Fort Hood, or Texarkana – Daddy would drive to Camden, Arkansas, to spend Christmas with my paternal and maternal grandparents.

It was a time for cousins to play and for aunts and uncles to talk and drink coffee. The best part for us kids; we would celebrate Christmas twice! Grandmother and her maid, Maudie, would serve a feast! At Grandma's, the adults would sit at the big wooden table (with the lion's feet on the legs) and the kids would dine on card tables.

Life was good at Christmas time!

Don Mathis is the son of Bernadine Walker Mathis Gillespie (of Bluff City) and Daniel Mathis (of Fordyce)