

Kirk. The Christmas Redwood. Interview Q & A. 2020

Interview Questions/Answers for *The Christmas Redwood*

The Christmas Redwood, A Forest Parable

By Janice E. Kirk, author and illustrator

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How did I happen to write *The Christmas Redwood*?

The book was a labor of love. I wrote it as a Christmas present. One Christmas my husband, Don, and I decided not to buy gifts, but to make something for each other. I wrote this story as a gift to my husband, Don, who loved the redwoods as much as I do.

Where did I get the idea?

The redwood forest is a wondrous place. On our first visit to the redwoods, we walked the trail at Lady Bird Johnson Grove in Redwood National Park. The path was wet from the misty fog that drifted through trees. And what trees! They stood straight and tall with thickly barked columns that disappeared upward into the canopy. We nodded a greeting to a couple who came along on the trail. The woman replied in a whisper, and that is how we conversed. No one spoke out loud. Instinctively we all felt this was a holy place, a natural cathedral.

Walking among those trees and thinking about how old they are, sparks the imagination. I was awed by the fact that when a giant tree was a sprout in the ground, Jesus of Nazareth was walking the earth on the other side of the planet. In real time he was sharing the Good News that is still changing the world with a ministry of healing, forgiveness, and love. That realization led to the writing of this story.

How did I go about writing this book?

1. Rough draft – be sure to keep it! It's your freshest, most original thoughts. When you lose your bearings, you pull it out and start over.

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2. Critiquers – friends, family, writers’ groups –

...Pay attention to whatever they say or mark. Whether or not you agree with the reason, stopped reading in a certain place, something needed to be adjusted. Perhaps the wording was unclear, storyline got lost, punctuation was off, or rhythm of the poem changed?

... One knowledgeable critiquer said: Be sure to put the tree on every page, it’s the main character.

3. Story needed people. I put grandfather and the children in, had children ask the Scripture questions, critiquer showed me it was tighter to not do that with the children, so took them out, then took grandfather out, then put him back in again. Needed some warmth.
4. Beginnings and endings – not where you think they are! Re-work to get balance.
5. Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite: which I did sporadically for 8-9 years. Showed it to umpteen people. Had rejections.
6. Reference books: Picked up nature lore books at the Coast, used field guides, checked facts with my biologist/naturalist husband, checked Bible Commentaries and Dictionaries for underlying theology.

How did I do the illustrations?

We made the same camping trip to the Northern California Coast many times. We hiked the redwood trail first with our children, later with our grandchildren.

I sketched plants and animals that we saw there. For field sketching I use an HB pencil or drawing pen on standard drawing pad. Occasionally I use watercolor paper and apply a wash, then outline with pen. I took color snapshots of the ferns, the gnarly bark, the cones, the understory, the lovely rhododendrons blooming. When it came time to do the illustrations for the book, I had a lot to work from.

Reference books: Used nature field guides, Native Plant Society poster, other authoritative works, even looked up a couple photos on the Web – cougar, sheep, calf

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Must be accurate. Identify correct species. Check scientific sources. Don't copy as is, against copyrights. Also, other illustrators make mistakes.

What is my favorite illustration?

One trip as we were driving out of the park, I turned to look back at the big creek alongside the road. Through a break in the trees I caught a glimpse of an elk herd splashing across the creek, heads lifted, following the leader, a magnificent bull elk. There was no place to pull off, no camera at hand, no time to draw. It was a moment frozen in time. I never forgot that arresting scene and used it as illustration in the story.

How do I feel about the redwood forest?

I love the redwoods---the giant trees, the lovely understory, fields of ferns, the wildflowers, carpets of greenery, occasional glimpses of animals, all the abundant life found there. But above all, it's the sense of history, living history in the plant community where we can find the past, present, and even the future hope of the forest.

The abundant life found there is ours to enjoy, respect, nurture, and protect.

Some of those trees mark the story of the ages, when God's Son was born on earth. They echo those teachings. They await the return of our Savior. Till then it's a place of wonder, of awe, and great beauty. It is a showcase for the Creator's handiwork, a labor of love.