



Made in Talmoon

My husband says I am a cheap date. When he said it, we had gone together to do some collecting. With scissors in hand, I was the one doing most of the collecting. Grasses, sages, and miscellaneous plants with interesting seed pods were my target that night, to hang and dry from the bed springs in my garage. He was mostly walking around with the dogs, watching the ascent of one of the biggest harvest moons you ever did see. Pure and simple, it was a lovely evening for being outside.

I had been collecting all summer, but with somewhat less drive than I generally have, feeling somehow a bit out of sorts. I think it boils down to missing my girls. I finally confessed to the man that I needed him along for the moral support. My original plan was to make a couple of wreaths. One was to be for my daughter; the other for myself. I've made a lot of wreaths over the years, but somehow I never manage to have one hanging on my wall. One way or another, invariably I end up giving them away. Although I thought I liked the idea of rectifying that situation, when it came right to it, I just was not working up much enthusiasm for building up the critical mass of dried materials in all its infinite variety that would lead to a nice product.

And then rather late in the collecting season I hit upon the idea of inviting a few of the ladies from my neighborhood to work on ornaments together. Normally, pulling dried things together into various creations is a solitary pursuit for me. But these weren't to be just any ornaments. They were to be ornaments for the Tree to D.C. If you haven't heard, this year's Capitol Christmas Tree is coming from the Chippewa National Forest, along with 10,000 ornaments. The ornaments are coming from the citizens of Minnesota. They are being made by school children and families at the County Fair, 4 H, the Disabled Veterans, Lake Associations, and other groups of folks with an interest in doing such things. Ordinary people; people like you and me.

When it finally occurred to me that not only could I make a few of these ornaments, but that it would be lots more fun to do so with some others, I posted on Facebook the chance to come work together in the blue garage at my place in greater Talmoon. We live about three miles from the crossroads that seems to be the center of Talmoon, and still home of that infamous, oldest bar in Minnesota. Just the other day, someone asked me if it's true that there used to be a post office in that bar. Well, surely there was, although now it has moved across the street to my favorite one-stop shopping spot, where I can not only gas up, but pick up a newspaper, a jug of milk, some stamps, and a sack of chicken feed. Every corner should be this convenient.

At any rate, three delightful ladies showed up to make ornaments, share coffee and treats, and visit about life. I quickly learned that 4 sets of hands can go through your stash of dried stuff at a pretty good clip, and it is a darn sight more fun than working in your garage by yourself. Besides, when else would I get the chance to serve up a potluck on my grandmother's china out in a garage? So here I was out collecting yet more interesting plants to use, and with lots more enthusiasm for the collecting than I had earlier in the year. I guess that's because I enjoyed the ornament making, but I think I liked the visiting even better. Perhaps this is why my partner referred to this little group as the Talmoon Ladies' Social Club, even though one of the members was actually from Spring Lake.

To the back drop of Christmas carols, our little collection of ornaments grew. Many featured pine cones, goldenrod, grasses, and lichens. The list of plants I collect includes some you will recognize from the roadsides. Joe pie-weed and purple prairie clover for their bright purple colors; pearly everlasting and yarrow for the white; green sand sage, Indian tobacco, wild baby's breath, and Canada mayflower heads. A couple of birds' nests got used, blown out of trees by some distant storm. I don't even know all of the names of the grasses, but knowing names isn't essential for this game. More important is that you keep an eye on the roadside for whatever is ripe that night, and be willing to experiment with drying so that you learn when it is to harvest something so that it opens up just far enough, but does not shatter. Trial and error is how you build this skill.

I was amazed at the creativity that was expressed in that garage. So many different ornaments, but they all had one thing in common. Affixed to each one was the tag indicating that they had been "Made in Talmoon". I'm thinking that the recipients in D.C. might appreciate that.

Although there won't be a Tree to D.C. next year, we could do this again next fall. If you are interested, there's room for you, too in the blue garage. No previous experience required. Just bring your scissors, glue gun, and appreciation for the gifts from the Chippewa.



by Kelly Barrett
Wildlife Biologist
Chippewa National Forest