

**“Help Santa Find the Perfect Real Christmas Tree Contest” - \$5000 College Scholarship**

It could have been our last real Christmas tree – but now I know it won't. When my dad was lying on the ground sawing at the trunk and I was holding the seven-footer steady, he said, “Next year you'll be away at college. I'm not sure I'll do this without you. We've cut our own since you were three and it won't be the same.” That evening, the same tree was up in our living room, covered with decorations from each of my seventeen years.

The next morning, we had a visitor. Tristan is the five year old from two doors down. I baby-sit him Thursday nights when his mom is at night class at Harrisburg Area Community College. He has Asbergers – a form of autism. He heard we had a tree – a big one, so he dragged his mom over. Standing a little over two feet tall, face up almost into the needles, he was taking in the smell. (His mom whispered to us, “Ours doesn't smell like pine – I drag the box up from the basement and build it.”).

My dad walked in with coffee cup in hand as Tristan turned to his mom and said “Can we get one like this too?”. He looked at her, she looked at me, I looked at Dad. Our looks were all asking the same question, but without the words. A sigh and a smile followed by Dad telling me, “Go with your little friend to the shed and get the rope. I'll get the bow saw.” And off we all went to the tree farm, for the second time in twenty-four hours.

That's why this year's tree is the “perfect” real Christmas tree – because it's not going to be the last one. Next year, I know that we're going to cut two, and the year after that, and...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dad" or "John", located at the bottom right of the page.