

Going for the Christmas Tree: A True Story

Maryfran Stulginsky

Kenn Yapsangco, Illustrator

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Cold, crisp winter air, the smell of evergreen trees, friends and family: these are the foundation for the children's book *Going for the Christmas Tree*, a sweet story about one family's Christmastime tradition, how it began, and how it grew through the years.

The story illustrates how the author's parents bought their first Christmas tree from the May family, leaving the tree up through Valentine's Day that first year. Every year since, except once when they couldn't find May's Christmas Tree yard because they had moved, the family had a tree from the Mays, each year inviting more friends to join them. And currently, going for the Christmas tree is more about a party with old friends and family than getting a tree.

Maryfran Stulginsky, a first-time author, has created a retelling of her experiences in a simple, enjoyable read. She includes visual phrases, such as the children "practically fall out of the vans," revealing the kids' excitement, and "car parade," describing the line of cars following one another to the Christmas tree lot. The author creates the scene by describing it in an interesting way: "It smelled like a forest," which has more depth in smells than saying that the tree lot smelled like pine.

Kenn Yapsangco's illustrations are mostly bright colors, except when they are muted to set the tone for the text. The illustrations are computer generated, and while they are a little flat, they include some detail that helps set the mood, such as the cracks in the old buildings, as seen on the book cover, and the wrinkles and folds in the people's clothes throughout the book.

The formatting of the book has the illustrations on the left page, and the text on the right, with a festive background of red or green, alternating every other page. The words are left justified, which leaves them a little too far to the center of the book. Also, especially on the early pages, the text looks to be set up in stanzas, as if it would rhyme, but it does not: it makes those early sentences read slightly choppy.

Stulginsky's freshman children's book is a pleasant, enjoyable story about family and traditions, based on the author's experiences growing up. Before any family heads out to buy their Christmas tree, they should stop and read about this family and their tradition of *Going for the Christmas Tree*.

BETH VANHOUTEN (October 18, 2013)

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