

A Story for the Evergreen Garden

• Joan Almon

Author's note: After fifteen years out of the classroom, I stepped back in as a nursery teacher at the Washington Waldorf School in fall of 2009 to help a friend who was recovering from an illness. As Advent approached I knew I needed to approach the winter holidays anew. In the past I had drawn heavily on Advent circles learned from European teachers. Now I needed something that spoke to a 21st-century group of American parents and their children and was meaningful to me, as well.

I thought deeply about the families in my class. Of the thirteen, there were six Jewish families, two Islamic families, one Hindu Sikh family, and the rest I was not sure about. I sought for images that could feed the souls of the children but be accessible to all who walked the spiral of the Evergreen Garden (Washington Waldorf School's name for the traditional Advent Garden).

Over the years I had told many stories about Mother Earth and her creatures, and the changing ways of the forest through the seasons. Now she came strongly to mind. The resulting story also touches on elements of our fall festivals when we cut the apple and revealed the star inside, and when Mother Earth and her creatures observed Halloween and Lantern festivals. The children were used to her by now, and these little three-year-olds listened intently in the darkened garden.

In the past I did not publish stories or songs until I had used them for several years and they had passed the test of time. I had not thought of sharing this one, but one of the lyre players who was present encouraged me to send it to Gateways. I am glad to do so, but please take it lightly and if you wish to use it, feel free to change it as needed. Best of all, let it stimulate your own ideas of how to approach this beautiful garden which seems as relevant today as it did thirty-five years ago when I first created one in my kindergarten.

Winter was beginning. Snow and ice covered the ground and the days were growing dark. Mother Earth called her creatures together and said, "It is time for our Evergreen Garden. It will bring warmth and light to the earth in deep winter. Who will help me?"

"We will help lay a path through the woods," said the stones. "And we shall sparkle in the candlelight like the stars in the sky," said the crystals.

"We shall lay a spiral path of evergreen branches," said the pine and the fir. "We shall hold the candles," said the apples, "for we have stars in our hearts." The queen of the bees said she would give the wax from her hive to make golden candles. "I shall bring new life to the garden," said the red, red rose.

The animals of the forest spoke. They would guard the garden and make sure no harm came to those who walked it. The stars said they wanted to take part, and some fell to earth to light the pathway of the garden. Mother Earth thanked them all and said only one thing was missing – the children's love was needed to fill the garden.

Then came the children, and one by one they walked the spiral of the garden, lighting their candles and setting them down on the golden stars. Soon the garden shone with light.

(Music while the teacher walks the spiral, lighting her candle. She is followed by each child and parent, one by one. At the end the co-teacher or assistant lights her candle. The music ends and a closing is said.)

"Now our garden is full of light.

It shines with love in the dark winter's night."

Joan Almon is the director of the U.S. branch of the Alliance for Childhood. She is a former Waldorf kindergarten teacher, was co-founder of WECAN, and has worked internationally as a consultant to Waldorf educators and training programs.