



~ **SYMBOLS** ~

“Representing Unseen Ideas”

There is a gold-plated Christmas ornament in the shape of a leaf hanging from the shelf above my kitchen sink. It is part of a set my brother gave me years ago, from the Museum of Modern Art. But since I don't put up a Christmas tree, I have never hung them as Christmas ornaments. I could never bear to part with those ornaments though, because they are so beautiful. Every Christmas I come across them wrapped up in tissue paper, but they have never made it into the house as part of my Christmas décor.

Last fall, I decided to hang a fall wreath on my door. I had a plain grapevine wreath that I tied with an orange ribbon. That seemed a little too plain, not autumn-ish enough but then I remembered my gold plated ornaments. There were two oak leaves, one maple leaf and one ginkgo leaf. The oak leaves and the maple leaf seemed right for fall. The ginkgo leaf, not so

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much. Plus, rule of odd hang or place groups of fives, and so- not going to be things have to odd numbers. why, but it

works. Finally, a use for my beautiful ornaments. I would hang them from the center of the top part of the wreath underneath the orange bow. Simple and elegant.

On the trip from the shed at the back of my property to the house, not a very long walk, I managed to lose the ginkgo leaf. I never heard it hit the ground. I searched for it, looking in the ivy lining the walkway on one side, even though I could not imagine how it would have landed there. It wasn't like I was juggling them or anything like that. Never found it. It was a mystery as to what happened. Quite literally, it disappeared.

A month later, I exchanged my fall wreath for a Christmas wreath, and dragged out all my Christmas décor, involving multiple trips back and forth from the house to the shed. I did not see the missing ornament, but looked for it again mostly out of curiosity. Oh well. Still not found.

On the first of January, as I made the first of several trips back to the shed to put away all my Christmas stuff there was my ginkgo leaf ornament lying out in the middle of the asphalt in plain sight, about ten feet from the front of the shed. I couldn't believe it! Where did it come from? Where had it been for two months? It looked like it had just been dropped from the sky. Not weather-worn at all, either.

So, I did what any normal person would do, I immediately attributed it with a significant meaning; a special message from God to me. That's what you would do, right?

I looked up the meaning of the ginkgo tree to see if there was any. Really interesting what I found - in fact, a lot of trees have symbolic meanings, which is fascinating. I love symbolism.

The ginkgo tree symbolizes resilience, endurance and vitality. They were the only trees not destroyed by the nuclear bomb unleashed on Japan, and therefore became known as the "one that has experienced a nuclear bomb." They also symbolize peace and hope and are known as the "bearer of hope." I liked that. As you know from last month's column, I picked a word to focus on for the year 2017, and now I also had a symbol. A reinforcement, a back-up. Whatever works.

So imagine my surprise one night very recently when I was doing the dishes and staring mindlessly at the ginkgo leaf hanging right in front of me when I realized it was not a ginkgo leaf at all! A picture of the huge ginkgo tree planted on the corner of the cross-walk in front of King School in Akron, Ohio flashed across my mind and I realized that the leaf shape was completely different. Ginkgo leaves are fan shaped and kind of prehistoric looking.

WHAT???? What about my precious symbol, and what it symbolized to me about where I am on my journey and where I was going next.....what about my special message from God? What about hope and peace and resilience and the one who survives a nuclear bomb?

I realized that the ornament was a poplar leaf, and not the ginkgo leaf I thought it was. Ehhh. Whatever. The good thing about it was that it was heart shaped. At least I had that, but I have to say, I was disappointed. You know what happened next.

Yep, I looked up the meaning of the poplar tree. I wasn't sure there would be any, because its considered a common, weedy kind of tree. In fact, many people view them as nuisance trees because they throw their seeds everywhere and they need a lot of water. They merrily invade your space and aren't stately and noble or special at all like the ginkgo tree. Just figures. I get cheap and common and not stately and noble.

But to my amazement, here is what I found about the poplar tree. In Celtic mythology, poplar trees represent victory, transformation and vision. In the ancient art of Heraldry (please look it up, too much to write it all down, but very interesting), it represents great strength.

Oh yeah, this is even better. I will never lose the hope that I have in Jesus and his peace, and yes, resilience is good, but it's time to move on from only being resilient. At the place where I am in the journey of my life, victory, transformation and vision is a better goal and more fitting with what is going on internally. I want victory, I've tasted it; I have been and continue to be transformed and I need vision.

Are "nuclear bombs" going off in my life the only thing I can envision for myself? Am I going to let "nuclear bombs" keep me stuck in the same old place? Do I want to be proud that I can survive "nuclear bombs" and that's it? Or do I want my brokenness to be healed and move on?

What I looked at as cheap and common and a disappointment, turned out to be much better. I think I know what I want and need, what's good, what's within my reach and where I'm going or should be going, **but God always knows better.**

"My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8

Chris Macy....cjmacy@earthlink.net...February 2017