

There isn't anything earth shattering about them, really. They are just Styrofoam balls with some fabric around them. But the story behind them is so much more than what meets the eye.

She thought of the idea a long time before the project actually began. She figured it would be nice to have a tree with a theme, one that had ornaments with similar colors and patterns. The trees with random ornaments were just fine, but she wanted something a little different.

They didn't have a lot of money and so she knew that she would have to be creative with her project. She thought of possible materials to use – yarn, ribbon, fabric, pins, lace...there were plenty of affordable materials, but she wanted something that would look nice...not tacky or garish.

She decided that Styrofoam would work well for the base of the ornaments. That was an easy decision. But what to put around the Styrofoam?

She decided to use fabric. That would give her a lot of choices about colors and patterns. And then she realized that it would be pretty simple to simply push the fabric into the Styrofoam to make the fabric stay. It would save money so she didn't have to buy glue and she wouldn't have to do a bunch of sewing.

She decided to use traditional Christmas colors for her theme. She chose fabric that had reds and greens, and a few pieces were white. She chose a lot of different patterns. Stripes and polka dots, solids and plaid.

She bought ribbon to use as a loop to hang each ornament. Now she was becoming very excited about her project. There was so much material, and so much work to do, but what a thrill it would be when the project was finished!

She knew she spent a lot of time planning and meticulously choosing materials for her ornaments, but she didn't care. She wanted nothing but the best. What she didn't plan for was how long it would actually take her to make the ornaments.

It was very time consuming to poke the fabric into the Styrofoam. Each ball took about a half hour to complete, and that was if there weren't interruptions from her husband or grandchildren. She had a busy life, with most of her family living very close to her.

Her two sisters lived down the street from her, and her great aunts lived just as close by. Her daughter and son-in-law lived in the same town and they had five children to watch over. Family gatherings were always happening, either to celebrate birthdays or retirements or graduations or baby showers. She feels blessed to be able to be with her family so often.

Christmas is one of her favorite times of the year. She loves to host Christmas Eve dinner. All the relatives gather at her house, she cooks lasagna...enough to feed an army. She loved Christmas so much that she would write an essay every year and send it to the local newspaper to be published. And the paper published it year after year...people knew to look for her Christmas Reflections.

And so all of these things...the busyness of daily life and family gatherings have made this ornament project much more prolonged.

But she doesn't mind. She has a helper. Her helper is her grandson. He is very diligent with poking the fabric into the ornaments. It is a project that the two of them have enjoyed. They have spent countless hours with fabric strewn about and Styrofoam balls littered all over the floor. She knows this is precious time she has with him and so she cherishes the moments. She hopes that one day, he will have the ornaments and hang them on his own tree.

Days pass and then months pass. The ornaments continue to be created. Then years pass. New family members are added, some family members die, and yet she continues to be devoted to those decorations. Finally, five years after beginning the project, those ornaments are complete. There are about 150 total. Each one was a work of patience, a work of love.

And she would enjoy these ornaments for many years to come. Year after year, her family would gather and decorate the tree with her. Over the years she gathered many more decorations, most of them homemade by her grandchildren. Those all were saved and were hung up around the house.

And then, many years later, her family put the ornaments on the tree for the last time. She was diagnosed with cancer and she knew that her time on earth was ending. Her entire family was there at that last Christmas. They surrounded her with happy memories from the past and told her how much they loved her. The one grandson who had helped her decorate those ornaments was now married. Him and his wife were expecting a baby that spring, and she was sad that she would not live to see her first great-grandchild.

She passed away a few months later, with her two children by her side. But there was one thing that she didn't know would happen after her death. Her grandson took those ornaments from her house. He stored them in his basement until this last Christmas.

Then he went out and chopped down a beautiful tree. He and his wife set that tree up and took out those ornaments that had so lovingly been crafted many years before. And they hung them up on the tree, one by one. He told the story to his wife about how he remembered making them with his grandma, and he was proud to hang them on the tree branches.

And I have one of those ornaments here with me today. Matt's grandmother, Donabelle, crafted these so many years ago, and we are honored to be able to have them in our family.

The dedication that Donna had to making these ornaments reminds me of the Psalm that we read this morning. Psalm 139 is a powerful testimony to how much God loved us.

We hear through the words of the Psalmist, "you sewed me together in my mother's womb...I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Like Donna spent so much time crafting those ornaments, God spent time crafting each one of us. We hear that God has searched us and that God knows us...every part of us. Our successes and our failures, our dreams and deepest hurts. Our fears and our joys.

I said this earlier, when I was talking about Donna, "She knew she spent a lot of time planning and meticulously choosing materials for her ornaments, but she didn't care. She wanted nothing but the best." And God knows that he spends a lot of time planning and meticulously choosing materials for his children, but he doesn't care. He wants nothing but the best.

And sometimes we choose to do things that dishonor God. We fail to live as the people God created us to be. We hurt others instead of lifting them up. We turn away when someone is in need. We say things that we don't mean. We choose lifestyles that lead to addictions and run ins with the law and broken relationships. We can be downright nasty to other people.

And we can turn on ourselves. We don't believe that God delighted in creating us. We don't understand how much time God spent creating us. We don't remember that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus Christ into the world. And if that wasn't enough, he sent Jesus Christ to bear our sins on the cross, which would lead to forgiveness of our sins. All of our sins.

And so these ornaments remind me of the time God spent with each one of us. We are created to love God and each other. We have the invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. And the question to ask, then, is how are we going to share that love with those around us? Amen.

