

## **Top Tips**

Top tips for November are a bit difficult as there is always a bit of a lull before Christmas. However, as you might expect from the shop, here's some quick thoughts relevant to this eco-friendly world.

Go cone hunting. Young and old love the idea. It's amazing the different sizes and shapes you'll find. Also collect branches with cones still attached and bring everything home in a bucket or carrier bag. Put it all into a big bucket and leave somewhere to dry till you're ready to use it. They'll be fine and not too brittle, so what we're saying here is don't fuss them.

Next get into these Christmas boxes you've stored in a cupboard or up in the loft and go through them, chucking out anything you've not used for a while, or anything that's broken, looks faded, is on its last legs – or is just plain awful: things like the star that's been on the tree too long or the angel that's seen better days.

We brought down our Christmas boxes and we now have customers raking through them before we have a clean out. Our bunch of happy helpers never throws anything out so I'm grateful for the November lull which gives me a bit of time to chuck out stuff while they're not around. What amazes me is that they'll remember what's in these boxes from previous years and when they return at Christmas, it'll be 'where's so and so balls/bells/ribbon from last year/three years ago/etc. /etc.?' Answer: 'It's oot!'

The magazines this year are heavily promoting make your own decorations! Great stuff! At the moment we're road-testing giant tissue pom-poms to hang from the ceiling of the shop. Watch out – they should be in place on Biggar Christmas Shopping Night, Friday 29 November this year. We'll be open from 5pm onwards, serving our award-winning coffee with a wee pick-me-up and some mouth-watering mince pies and shortbread. These are not just your ordinary pies and shortbread. You watch people go 'Oh my goodness, they are good. Aaaha!' and reach for another, so pop that date into your diary, as they say, and we'll see you then.

## **Rosie's Rants**

Well, after the last load, or perhaps you felt it was more of a deluge, of rather serious rants on being self-employed, we're back with some stories about visitors to the shop over the years – some paying customers and some not; some human; some animal! You may have heard some of these before and, if so, we hope you enjoy reading them again. They're in no particular order, as they say, and we mix the animals stories with the human as we like them both equally well. Here we go:

An older lady customer arrived. Wool coat, hat, bag (circa 1950s) and it's raining and windy. 'Hello Rosie,' she says, 'I'm waiting for the WRI bus to turn up so I just thought I'd wait in the shop before going down to the cross.'

'Okay, no problem. Here's a seat. When's it due?'

'In 30 minutes!'

Okay dokay...

Our neighbour's cat, Tubs, came in looking for her owner one day. Please note that Tubs has never previously moved out of her garden round the corner from the shop. We've also had

two lost dogs come in and stay while we found owners. Once a hedgehog was near the door. We got him in a shovel and took him to the bushes nearby - but not before someone tried to pick him up!

A jackdaw with a white flash round his neck, quite a smart chap, had been living in the trees outside the shop. One day, he just hopped in and straight through into the back shop. Help! We had to call on Big Tam, a neighbour, to get the wee guy out safely to which he commented, 'Aye, that yins aye trying' to get into my hoose.' We never saw the jackdaw again, mind you!

We get visitors and friend who regularly drop in if they're passing and it's lovely to see them as they travel through. We also get people looking for the public toilets - the sign in the middle of the town gets a bit bent now and then and points up to us. There's the people with SatNavs that don't work, people with parcels wrongly addressed, more people needing the toilet. There's people looking for advice on (a) where to eat/drink/stay (b) journey time to their destination or (c) looking for anything we don't sell, (d) seeking advice on their lives and loves, (e) looking for a lift home, (f) looking for a free cup of coffee, or (g) a glass of water on a hot day (understandable).

We've had people who've taken ill and we'll phone a relative or take them home or to the local hospital. We get people who've lost glasses, brollies, bank cards, purses. I think they've probably asked in lots of shops but by the time they reach us at the end of the town they're tired and need someone to try to sort something out. We're regularly asked for directions and phone numbers, so having the internet is wonderful and easy - a quick search and we can help them on their way.

We also get people who seem to have lost their way in life and have taken the bus from Edinburgh for a wee day out and end up getting off the bus to spend time in Biggar visiting shops and end up chatting and about things that have happened. The most recent visitor, who really was quite upset about his situation, stayed for a while then returned around five o'clock offering to help me take in the outside display. All good, but I had the feeling he might have been sitting watching me shut up shop. Anyway, the secret is to keep smiling and be very calm and pleasant and away they go...

As you can see we have happy visitors and sad. Hopefully we can send them on their way refreshed, or uplifted, or at least with the information they need.

For December we will be telling you some stories and secrets, the daft mistakes we've made (and managed mostly to get away with!). I have to say the mistakes are mainly mine (i.e. Rosie's) but our helpers are not that perfect either. To put you in the mood, we'll be focusing on the last two Christmases in the shop:

- Who ate the chocolate cake house handed in by a customer?
- Malky has a serious brussel sprout crisis just before Christmas dinner at home.
- Rosie mistakenly sells someone's favourite decorations left at the shop to be added to their order.
- Our delivery guys bring the wrong plants, and then return with the wrong plants again.
- Carolyn forgets that wet wellies leave big muddy footprints all over the floor of the front shop, while she tucks into a tasty treat in the back.

- Archie gives his verdict on the best Christmas cake by tucking into a huge slab – guess the make!