

A Star on the Boulevard

by

[Scott Pickard](#)

In 2002 I did something that I had never done before and have not done since, which is to take a full two weeks of vacation at the end of the year. It was a *use it or lose it* situation for me and I wasn't about to waste those precious vacation days. The first week of this vacation my wife was still teaching and my kids were still in school and not yet out for holiday break, so I was *home alone*. I asked myself, *what should I do?* The Bible says *idle hands are the devil's workshop*, so while I wasn't about to do anything devilish, I was determined to have some fun!

We didn't have HBO back in that day but my young-adult son (just graduated from college) had become a fan of the *Sopranos* so he sent me a box set that had several DVDs covering the entire first season. On my first day of vacation right after my wife and kids had left for school, I settled in with the first DVD and as you might expect I didn't come up for air until I heard my wife driving up the driveway coming home from school. When she walked in the door I said, "I've done something very bad," and informed her that I hadn't gotten off the couch since she left that morning. Now that's not the worst thing in the world but for me it was extremely slug-like and I don't think I've ever done that since. But of course *binge-watching* TV episodes is now the new normal, so I guess I was ahead of my time.

To atone for my extreme laziness, I decided I'd do something constructive the next day and I thought maybe I would get started on the outdoor Christmas lights. But then a thought popped into my head and I don't know where this came from, but as I looked up at our big pine tree at the southeast corner of our house, I thought maybe I'd put a star on top of that tree. It was to be a big surprise for my wife and kids that evening.

I had climbed on buildings and train bridges and water towers and up tall trees since I was five years old, so I had no problem with heights. I just thought I'd start climbing the tree and if I ran into a problem such as an irritated squirrel, I'd abandon the idea. No big deal.

So I made the rounds of the big-box stores and found my first star at Lowe's. I came home, laid out 200 feet of electrical extension cord, and set up a ladder so I could make it up to the first branch about 20 feet off the ground. I fashioned a harness so that I could carry the star around my neck and attached the electrical cord to my belt so I could pull it up with me as I climbed the tree.

It was a very cold day and a little snowy as I started to climb the tree, branch by branch, very slowly and carefully, until I got as high as I could go (close to 80 feet), swaying in the breeze and afraid I might snap the top of the tree trunk. I secured the star to the trunk of the tree, plugged in the extension cord and slowly descended. I got down safely and ran the extension cord around the house and plugged it into an outlet in the garage. I walked around the house and looked up and saw the star glowing. It worked!

I unplugged the star and waited until my wife and kids came home and then when it got dark I asked them to come outside so I could do the big reveal. They were flabbergasted! My wife looked at me and said, “How did you get that up there?” I said nothing but just looked at her and then she looked at me and said, “You climbed that tree, didn’t you?” I nodded and smiled and I have been smiling about that ever since.

So every year now since 2002, people have been asking me how I got that star up there. They all seemed to think I rented a cherry picker (boom lift). I would just say, “Oh, it’s a really easy tree to climb.... lots of limbs.” But most of them were skeptical that I actually climbed up the tree. The most recent skeptic asked, “Did you use a drone?” Nope, no drones in my air space, just me and the squirrels. I made a little video of me replacing the star one year called [Star on the Boulevard](#).

I decided to keep the star on until January 6 (epiphany) which is when we would typically take down our Christmas tree. But I didn’t climb back up the tree to take the star down. I left it up there with the cord running down the trunk and then I tied it off to a limb about 20 feet in the air, ready to be plugged in the next year. But it didn’t quite work out that way. You see, squirrels will chew on anything from a gutter to a garbage can to an electrical cord to a star. So about every 3-4 years I’ve had to climb back up there and replace a squirrel-mangled star with a new star. But each time I got a better, bigger, brighter star!

The holiday star has become an iconic feature of our neighborhood for all these years and gives me a great source of pleasure. Every year our neighbors look forward to seeing the star go on the first weekend after Thanksgiving and they are sad to see it go off on January 6.

I appreciate that this is a very small accomplishment in the big scheme of things. I didn’t scale K2 or bring peace to the Middle East. But it is these simple traditions that make life so pleasurable and meaningful in a neighborhood such as we have on the Boulevard. We’ve been in our house for over three decades and plan on being here three more. I don’t know how long I will keep climbing up that tree for the inevitable star replacement. My kids remind me that I shouldn’t be doing this anymore. But how could I not?

This simple story has no best-practice takeaways for the busy professional except to say I hope you can follow your star during the holidays while enjoying the fellowship and love of your family and friends.



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