



The Lyricist

Christmas Edition

A production of
The College of Arts & Sciences
Honors Interdisciplinary Program
Department of Christian Studies
English Department

Christmas 2017

CONTRIBUTORS

Laura Barney is a senior from Mocksville, NC. She is finishing her Biology BS in Physician Assistant Studies. She plans a career in the health sciences and has interest in medical missions.

Brittany Downs, affectionately known to the Santa Claus class as “B-Downs,” is a senior Biology BS in Pre-Dental Studies. She hails from New Bern, NC.

Dr. Adam C. English, volume editor, serves as Chair of the Department of Christian Studies. Normally he teaches theology and philosophy, but occasionally goes rogue and offers a course on Santa Claus in the Honors Interdisciplinary Program. The course investigates the historical Saint Nicholas of Myra and surveys the cultural, artistic, literary, and historical developments of Santa Claus customs and traditions.

Cody Fitzgerald graduated in May of 2017 and was commissioned as an officer in the United States Army. While at Campbell, he majored in Christian Studies and stayed active with ROTC. He is from West End, NC.

Ben Gurganus is a senior Christian Ministry Major from Greenville, NC. After graduation, he plans to enroll in divinity school with future aspirations of becoming a youth minister.

Andrew Hadley, a junior Christian studies major with a focus in Youth Ministry, is from the small community of Snow Camp, NC. After graduation he will pursue his career as a youth minister and possibly take on the family tax accounting business as his full time occupation.

Victor Knight is a junior Christian Studies major from Siler City, NC. He plans to pursue a masters, and eventually a PhD, in biblical studies.

Austin Price graduated in May of 2017 but is continuing his education at Campbell with dual enrollment in the PharmD and the MBA Business Administration program. Austin is from Boone, NC, where he likes to fish and hike.

Garrett Stang stays busy serving on SGA, managing science labs and organizing study groups as a Biology major. He hails from Fayetteville, NC.

Kenly Stewart graduated in May of 2017 with his bachelor’s degree and now attends Wake Forest Divinity School, working on his Master of Divinity and serving as a graduate assistant. He calls Autryville, NC, home.

Sterling Ta’bon is a senior from Sumter, SC. After garnering a successful high school record in basketball and track, Sterling decided to work on a BS in Exercise & Sport Science Pre-Occupational Therapy.

Natalie Wakefield is a junior Kinesiology/Pre-Med major with minors in Music and the Honors Program. She is from Lillington, NC, and plans to attend Medical school after graduation, with hopes to become a pediatrician.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring semester of 2017, eleven intrepid Campbell University students from a diverse range of backgrounds and academic majors took a risk and signed up for a course in the Honors Interdisciplinary Program titled “Santa Claus.” Meeting twice a week in the new Jones Hall classroom, we investigated the historical person of Saint Nicholas of Myra by looking at the documents related to his identity and reconstructing the cultural, political, and ecclesiastical setting for his life. Then we surveyed the cultural, artistic, and literary developments of the Santa Claus legends and traditions. We followed the curious evolution of Mr. Claus from stern church bishop to shaggy wild man of the wintertime forest until we located him in his current form as the jolly and beloved gift-giver from the North Pole, known worldwide for his bright-red suit and snow-white beard.



For the final assignment of the course, each student composed a Christmas or holiday themed short-story. The students read their creative writings aloud in class and then responded to each other's stories. We instantly knew we had created something special. We have assembled the stories from the class and presented them for your enjoyment, amusement, and reading pleasure.

Christmas invites storytelling. The December holidays arrive in the midst of short days and long nights, nipping cold and rattling wind. People tend to stay indoors, huddle around the fireplace hearth, sip hot cocoa. *And do what?* Tell stories. These days, we mostly experience storytelling through the medium of the glowing screen – by watching Netflix, YouTube, TV, or DVDs. The popularity of these new technologies reinforces an old fact. We love stories. Old stories. New stories. New stories that sound old. Old stories spiffed up and made new. Stories of faith in God's miraculous wonders. Sentimental stories about childhood adventures. Fantastical

fairytale about sprites, elves, and magical woodlands. You will find a dusting of all these themes in this volume. The contributors hope their submissions will provide entertainment and good company through the holiday season.

This volume would not have been possible without the support of Dr. Michael Wells, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences; *The Lyricist* faculty advisor, Mr. Nathan Salsbury, Lecturer in the English Department; Dr. Gina Peterman, Chair of the English Department; Associate Dean Dr. Glenn Jonas, Mrs. Jan Jernigan, Mrs. Elaine Smith, Dr. Ann Ortiz, Mr. Bert Wallace, and Mr. Brian Light of Cornerstone Custom Printing. Graduate assistant Sarah Wilson provided essential editorial help as did Abram Buckner, one of our Christian Studies student workers. Cassidy English, a sophomore at Harnett Central High School, created the miniature drawings you see scattered throughout the volume. Student worker Avery Herman converted them into digital images. Dr. Gina Peterman and Mr. Nathan Salsbury assisted with proofreading and editing the volume. Rebecca Smith, a *Lyricist* staffer, designed the cover, and Jordan Upton, *Lyricist* editor, helped guide the project.

We wish you and your family all the joys and blessings of the season. May the words of the prophet Isaiah become music on our lips:

For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God,
The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Dr. Adam C. English
Department of Christian Studies
Campbell University
Buies Creek, North Carolina



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cody Fitzgerald Diary Entries of Sergeant Christopher Brown	pages 7-12
Austin Price The Night Before Nikolaustag	pages 13-18
Sterling Ta'bon The Elves v. Santa Claus	pages 19-21
Natalie Wakefield Katy and Alto Find the True Spirit of Christmas	pages 22-27
Ben Gurganus How the Grinch Stole Baby Jesus	pages 28-34
Andrew Hadley The Only Light in Town	pages 35-38
Laura Barney One Lonely Christmas	pages 39-44
Brittany Downs The Fright Before Christmas	pages 45-49
Garrett Stang One Last Bottle of Christmas Ale	pages 50-55
Victor H. Knight The Old Testament Christmas Experience of Dr. Adam English	pages 56-62
Kenly Stewart A Family Christmas Story	pages 63-68

Diary Entries of Sergeant Christopher Brown

101st Airborne Division "Screaming Eagles"

506 Parachute Infantry Regiment

E Company 2 Platoon

By Cody Fitzgerald

December 16, 1944

As I awoke this morning I felt the chill of the morning air and could smell the ever-present stench of beans being cooked by Spotty and Cowboy one foxhole over. It is cold, cold unlike anything I ever felt back in Virginia. As my eyes began to adjust to the morning light, I could see the outline of PVT Harrison, the new guy. We call him Jumpy. Poor guy had the morning watch as we knew the Germans were in the wood line across the snow-covered field some 500 yards away. We knew they were there, and they knew we were here, but there was no gun fire. We wait, we smoke, we nap, and we wait for the inevitable.

Yesterday we had a company meeting. LT Seager told us that we should be getting relieved soon, and that there was no chance of us returning to England but maybe back to Paris for the week. I won't believe that for a second until I can smell fresh bread and can see some French girls. After the meeting we had some down time while Dragon Company covered our part of the line. I finally got to eat some beans and what the cooks said was day old bread. It doesn't compare to Aunt Jean's cornbread and chili back home, but it'll do for now.

1SG just called me, so hopefully I'll get a chance to write tomorrow.

December 18, 1944

The last 24 hours we haven't had a chance to sleep. The Germans are dropping mortar rounds all around us. It seems like the trees are exploding. We hear a faint whistle followed by a distant boom, then we pray that it doesn't land too close to our foxhole. The snow has let up, but



the cold persists throughout the day. Last night, we had a group of Germans patrolling too close to our lines. The guys about 200 yards down to our East fired a couple of shots, but nothing really happened. I was talking to our medic today, private Robles; he said the war would be over soon, we were in fact closer to Germany now than anyone had been since the war began. I sure hope so. Back in April they said we would be home by Christmas for sure, but seeing as it's only a week away, I doubt that's going to happen. What I wouldn't give for a nice Virginia Christmas. I would say white Christmas, but I already have all the snow a guy could want in a lifetime. The officers are getting restless, constantly checking the lines. It gives me the impression that something is about to happen. The most relaxing thing for me and Jumpy is cleaning weapons and talking about our families back home. It gives us the tools and reasons to fight. Regardless of what the guys might say, everyone is scared. No one wants to be sent back home in a box. Too many of our brothers have already been sent back since the beaches of Normandy. No one is invincible, and I pray I make it back to see my family.

I took a few moments earlier to think about Christmas. I wonder what Emily is going to ask Santa for this year, as it's hard to guess what an indecisive eight-year-old wants. Imagining the Christmas Eve dinner made my mouth water: the honey glazed ham sitting beside a bowl of roasted potatoes, yeast rolls warm with butter, and the Brown family apple pie. What I wouldn't give for a meal like that. I long to be home, sitting on the back porch just mindlessly watching as

the sun sets in the distance beyond the field. But for now I am here, in a fox hole, in Bastogne, a place far from home, fighting a never-ending battle against an enemy that never gives up.

December 19, 1944

I do not have much time to write this morning. We are being told to move at 0900. Cowboy and Spotty are already packing some of their things, making sure we don't leave anything behind that the Germans could use. There are rumblings that we are going to march ten miles north in order to help out our brothers in the second armored division. I am excited to be moving for the first time in nearly three weeks, even though it does feel like we are leaving a little home, a cold, dangerous, foreign home. I am sure our next stop will be much the same as Bastogne, although I hope we are close enough to a village to sleep inside.

We have marched all day and finally arrived in the small town of Werbomont. It is a quiet town, at least for the time being. Second Platoon has claimed the rights to an old bakery with a small family apartment overtop. There are pictures on the wall of the apartment of the family who used to live here I assume, unless they are just a creepy family who keeps random pictures in their apartment. In the picture is a mother dressed in a sundress, a father in an apron, a boy who looks to be in his late teens, and a young girl holding a small dog. I wonder if the young boy is now wearing a Nazi uniform. It is strange to think there are guys just like me, from small towns just on the other side of the world, who are fighting for the enemy. I assume that we all have our reasons for fighting, but it sure seems like the Germans are fighting for reasons that no one else in the world understands.

I am thankful to be sleeping inside tonight, even if it is on a squeaky wooden floor. It protects Jumpy and I from the elements. Also the small oil lamp gives me a little extra light to write tonight.

The small villages that are scattered throughout the countryside are beautiful, aside from some of them being destroyed by artillery fire. Even still, some locals in the villages have opted to stay, and many are extremely excited to see us. Often when we come across a new town or village there are moments of celebration. We bring a sense of hope to many of them. The one difference that I have seen is the fact there are no decorations here. It is Christmas time, but for some reason no one has any garland up, no figures of Santa, and not even a manger scene. It just doesn't feel like Christmas. This has given me an idea to try and bring Christmas to a place where Christmas is nowhere to be seen.

December 21, 1944

Yesterday I had down time in the afternoon so I decided to rummage through many of the vacated buildings around Werbomont. I found a red curtain which I am sure I can put to use in a few days. I am hopeful that I can remind some people what Christmas back home is like, and allow them to escape the war even for just a few moments.

As I sit and write, I see Colonel Henry standing at the edge of town on a ridge. He is dressed in his OD green uniform, metal helmet held at his side, left hand posted on the hood of his Willy's Jeep. When he drove past the platoon earlier, I could see exhaustion and frustration in his eyes. I've heard it said that the eyes are the window to the soul. I'm not sure where it comes from, but I believe it to be true. In the distance I can hear gunfire and artillery shells exploding.

Thankfully our village is proving to be a quiet post. Hopefully we can get through Christmas without firing another shot.

LT is calling us to the next house over, and I'm hoping it is good news. I will write more tomorrow.

December 24, 1944

Cowboy's gone. He got caught yesterday in a firefight between the edge of the village and the wood line where a squad of Germans was waiting to ambush us. I wish I could write his family and tell them he was a hero, reminding myself to visit Missouri when I return to the states in order to see his family and give his little brother his helmet. Chaos erupted as soon as we reached the edge of the wood line. It seemed like they knew we walked right into their trap. Bullets came whistling past our helmets as we tried to find some sort of cover and make our way back to the village. We had no idea how many Nazis were hiding in those woods, but it seemed like hundreds, machine guns and all. Cowboy caught the unlucky side of a hay bale that was about a hundred yards from a barn. A machine gun spotted him. For the moments that followed, time seemed to be in slow motion. I saw Cowboy's face as he received three rounds to the back. I ran to him, but it was too late. He was taking his last breath as I held his head in my hands and the warm blood slowly ran out of his mouth and onto my arms.



With bloodstained hands, I write this to remind myself and others for years to come of the sacrifice that Cowboy gave for me to live. John "Cowboy" Richardson: Branson, Missouri. Twenty-one years old. Final sacrifice given in Werbomont, Belgium.

Christmas Eve seems much dimmer now. I'm not interested in bringing the Christmas spirit to Werbomont. But Cowboy had been talking about Christmas for the last few weeks now. If it weren't for him I would probably have forgotten about Christmas altogether. For Cowboy though, I will put on the old red curtain, grab the potato sack and deliver some goodies to the rest of the boys. I pray that the small gifts will give them a small Christmas to remember.

December 25, 1944

Last night after most of the platoon fell asleep, I crept around and left a small gift with a note. Cowboy had written the notes. Each contained a Bible verse and his favorite story of each person. For Jumpy we gave him a piece of cheese, Spotty got a fifth of whiskey, Robles woke up to a picture of a cute Belgian girl, and for LT we left a cigar and can of beans. It wasn't much, and it was really all we could find, but seeing the look on their faces this morning, some tears, some laughter, Christmas was in fact here in Werbomont, Belgium.

I hope next Christmas I can be back home, but for this Christmas we talk about past years with our families. We remember Cowboy and the others we lost, and we hope the Germans will lay low for the day. For now we stay in the village because there is no doubt we will be moving soon. This will be the end of my entry for today, as I wish to spend time with the rest of the platoon. Today's a Christmas I'll never forget.

The Night Before Nikolaustag

By Austin Price



Alfons sat down on the hearth next to the crackling fire, stretched his tired fingers, and relaxed his shoulders. The fire felt good on his tired back and he took off his itchy fur cap that had kept the frozen wind from biting at his ears. As he stared out the window of his little cottage, Alfons decided that Germany had not experienced a winter like this since he was just a *jugendlich*. Fresh snow blanketed the wild earth outside and the wind whined as if it was exhausted from its endless work. Alena, his wife, appeared with a pint of dark ale in her left hand and a pot of stew balanced in the crook of her right arm.

“Thank you, Schatz,” mumbled Alfons as he graciously accepted the food and beer. The smell of rabbit stew danced into his nostrils and his entire body anticipated the warmth the murky lager would soon deliver. However, as Alfons lifted the pewter mug to his lips, he noticed two pairs of eyes peeking out from behind his wife’s thick skirt.

“Come out from behind there you little rascals,” said Alfons with a refreshed grin. In the blink of an eye, two blonde children leapt toward Alfons and settled on his lap, buzzing with liveliness. Alfons beamed. His children’s enthusiasm always thawed the heavy fatigue that froze to his body after hours of hunting or chopping wood. Elise and Lukas were their names. They were especially excited this evening because tonight was Nikolaustag, or Nicholas Day. Tonight, if his children were fortunate, the wild Belsnickel would visit their home with gifts and treats.

“You should be in bed little ones,” said Alfons. “Belsnickel will not be happy if you are still awake when he arrives!”

His restless children resisted and begged for a story before bed. Alfons could not help but marvel at his children's love for stories. They often suggested tales about ghoulish giants, friendly bears, or brave Gallic warriors.

"One story only, then you must go to sleep," yielded Alfons. "What would you like to hear?" As the children struggled to determine a theme and even characters for their only story, Alfons' wife offered a suggestion from her chair as she quilted: "Why don't you tell them the story of Belsnickel?" inquired Alena. "Ja!" squealed the children in agreement.

Alfons grinned. The story of Belsnickel had been one of his favorites as a child, and what better night than Nikolaustag to recount the life and adventures of the untamed gift-giver.

"Very well then rascals, sit with your mother and I will tell you the story of the Wild Man Belsnickel." The fire popped with anticipation and the children curled up at their mother's feet. Alfons took a long draught of his beer, leaned back against the wooden hearth, and settled in for a long winter story....

The tale of Belsnickel began hundreds of years ago, perhaps even thousands, in the ancient land of Germania. That's right little ones, not too far from our own little village. Though I cannot say for certain when he was born, it is known that Belsnickel came into this world completely alone. He had no parents, no friends, and no family. Some say he was raised by a pack of gray wolves deep in the pine forests. Others reckon a giant bear mother took Belsnickel as her own cub and raised him on wild cherries and fresh fish. I like to believe that Belsnickel was raised by Nerthrus, Mother Earth herself, and roamed these lands as a free child of the earth. No matter who or what raised Belsnickel, it is agreed that what he became was a true man of the wild.

Belsnickel was at home in the woods. He knew the heartbeat of every tree, the breath of every flower, and the dreams of every creature. He recognized the berries that could make the sweetest summer jams, and the thorns that could kill a grown man in one night. He could whistle a simple melody, and the native trout would happily swim into his waiting net. In late August, he would trade the wild bee's bouquets of blue cornflowers for a comb of their milky honey. Often black birds would converse with Belsnickel about the weather and warn him of coming storms. Even the sly fox would visit with Belsnickel, always bringing him a freshly killed rabbit as a sign of goodwill and peace. Nature trusted Belsnickel with its deepest secrets, and he roamed these lands for many years without disturbance.

Belsnickel's first encounter with mankind occurred later in his life. His beard was thick, his shoulders were broad, and he wore a coat of heavy furs to protect himself from the strong winter wind of Germany. He carried a sturdy wooden staff and a deep leather sack to store his few belongings. One particularly bitter night, as he meandered through the Forests of Wismar, he stumbled upon a collection of wooden shelters and cook fires, huddled together in a tight circle. He watched from a distance and was surprised to see creatures that looked, walked, and spoke as he did. Intrigued, Belsnickel approached this human village cautiously to observe and listen. The humans were unlike any creatures Belsnickel had ever seen. They lived in large families and depended on one other for survival. They sang, danced, and cried at the winter moon for reasons Belsnickel did not understand. On this night, all the villagers were gathered in the middle of the simple village, talking with quick, anxious voices. Belsnickel noticed the concern that lined the faces of everyone present. He overheard the humans talking about a terrible harvest, ruined crops, and hunger. Belsnickel realized these human creatures were

starving. Their thin, worn bodies were begging for nourishment. Belsnickel knew he could help and he slowly crept off into the darkness.

The next day, Belsnickel spent hours fishing, hunting, picking winter gooseberries, and digging up wild onions. His forest companions helped him, and by dusk that night he had filled twenty sizable, wicker baskets with nature's abundance. When night fell, he snuck back into the sleeping human village with the baskets of food. Without a sound, Belsnickel placed a basket outside of every cottage in the village, careful not to give himself away. Once his generous task was over, Belsnickel disappeared back into the woods with his woodland friends.

When the sun rose the next morning, the humans awoke to find the wicker baskets of food waiting outside their homes. There was excitement and thankfulness throughout the small community, as the villagers had never seen such a harvest. No one claimed responsibility for this gracious act, and the humans had no clue whom their kind provider had been. They thanked the earth for their gifts and hungered no more.

Belsnickel returned to the village often, secretly checking in on his human friends and listening to their needs and woes. One night, Belsnickel overheard the human villagers discussing terrible illnesses spreading through their little community. Many villagers suffered from coughing, itching pox, and rashes. The humans were unfamiliar with medicine, and had no solution for such ailments. Again, Belsnickel realized he could help his human friends, and he disappeared into the forest.



With his knowledge of the healing powers of nature, Belsnickel began to collect plants and roots he knew could help the villagers. He gathered wild chamomile, thyme, peppermint, ginger, and lavender. He put bushels of each natural remedy into earthen jars, returned to the village just as before, and left the humans another secret gift. The village awoke the next day to

find the jars of medicine from their unknown gift giver. They quickly distributed the plants and roots to those in need, and the community was never threatened by disease again. However, they were still puzzled by the identity of their secret giver. They decided to post a guard in the middle of the village at night in hopes that they could spot their giver, and properly thank him.

On one certain night, Belsnickel overheard the people of the village lamenting their lack of warm clothing and blankets. The winter had been particularly harsh and they had very little wool and fur to make the clothes they needed. Belsnickel realized he could easily help his human friends as he had collected and stored plenty of furs, pelts, and wool throughout his life that he would never need. He snuck off to retrieve the chests of materials he would donate to the villagers. However, when he returned at night quietly to leave his gifts as he usually did, he was surprised to find a villager awake and expecting him. The guard called out to his fellow villagers to wake and meet their unknown gift giver. Belsnickel watched as the village residents poured out of their cottages and looked at him with awe. They began to cheer, sing, and praise Belsnickel for his generosity. The men clapped him on the back, the women kissed his rosy cheeks, and the children hugged his squat legs with laughter. Belsnickel was surprised and gladdened by the happiness he had given his human friends. He felt loved and appreciated, but he reminded the villagers that the true provider had been nature. The villagers begged Belsnickel to stay with them in the village, as part of their community and family. Belsnickel thanked them for their kindness, but the forest was his home and the untamed animals were his family. He bid his new human friends farewell, promising to return often to visit and help as much as he could. With one last smile and a wave of his hand, Belsnickel bid them all a goodnight, and disappeared back into the wild woods...

“And that is how Belsnickel became the legendary gift giver to humanity,” concluded Alfons. “He returns every year to human villages like ours and generously provides them with things they need and want, asking for nothing in return.”

Alfons raised his head and looked toward his wife and children. Lukas and Elise were fast asleep at their mother’s feet. Alfons slowly lifted his body from the hearth where he sat. The fire behind him had dwindled to glowing embers. He walked over to his wife and kissed her on the forehead.

“I believe it is time we all go to bed, before we are all in trouble with Belsnickel,” whispered Alfons as he scooped up Elise and Lukas in his tired arms.

Alfons carried his children to their small trundle bed that they shared and tucked them in under layers of warm quilts. He kissed each and then made his way to his own bed. Before Alfons gave in to sleep, he gazed out the window toward the forest. The snow and wind had moved on and the night was cold and clear.

“What a beautiful night for Belsnickel to visit,” mumbled Alfons to himself with a reflective grin. He blew out the candle in the window sill, lay down next to his wife, and surrendered to sleep.

Outside, the world remained frozen. An owl perched in a large beech tree opened its round, yellow eyes. It watched intently as a tall man, with a thick beard and broad shoulders slowly lumbered toward the small collection of cottages. He carried a sturdy wooden rod and a deep leather sack filled with dolls, trains, and apples. The world slept, and the man went to work.

The Elves v. Santa Claus

Who Would Have Ever Thought?

Drama at the North Pole

By Sterling Ta'bon

The argument started over who had the hardest job at the Workshop. The Elves figured that they worked the hardest between them and St. Nick. But the jolly old big guy says that it was he. So the question is, who really works harder, Santa or his Elves?

It all started when Santa was looking over his list – again. As the Elves were doing their daily duties of making and creating toys, he overheard one of his little helpers say, “Why does Fatso get all the credit for Christmas?”

Santa got hot, first because he was working on his figure, and second, because he figured that he had the toughest job of them all. The elves don't have to slide down dusty chimneys. The Elves then stacked themselves on top of each other so that they could be face to face with ole' Saint Nick. They collectively agreed that without their hard labor no toys would be made to bring joy and cheerfulness to children of the world. Santa snapped back, telling the Elves that without him they would just be food for the winter hounds that roamed the North Pole. Santa



and the Elves bickered back and forth until Mrs. Claus had to step in and say, “Let us hear each other out and solve this fair and square.”

So the elves decided to sue Santa Claus for the credit of Christmas. Santa and his Elves were headed to court.

The case of Jolly Saint Nick vs. The Elves was a star-studded event. The world hadn't seen a bigger case since the OJ Simpson trials of 1995. The trial brought out stars such as the Easter Bunny, New Year's Eve Baby, Father Time and Cupid, who hadn't been seen since being

stabbed by his own arrows when a relationship went badly. News outlets such as *The Today Show* and *Entertainment Tonight* covered the story, and even *Fox News* made an appearance. Judge Jack Frost opens the case of Jolly Saint Nicholas vs. The Elves of the North Pole. Judge Jack Frost then addresses the plaintiff, Elves of the North Pole, asking them why they wanted to sue the defendant. The Elves then went on to plead their reasons as to why they thought they deserved the credit of Christmas. Elf #4354 stated that he felt that they should have the credit of Christmas because they were the ones putting the toys together. He stated, “If it wasn’t for us and our toys, there would be no giving and without giving means no Christmas.”

Santa objected saying, “If it wasn’t for me delivering the toys, then kids would not receive them, and have the Christmas joy. The letters are not addressed to you, nor do young tots sit on your lap.”

Elf #6785 then objected and said “Us Elves work day and night making toys and get overlooked.”

Santa then proceeded to tell the court that although they have a year to work with each other, he had just one night to finish his job. The court was filled with voices and chatter that Judge Frost had to call back in order. The courtroom was getting out of hand. The court went into recess.

The Elves came back in wearing shirts that read, “Elves Lives Matter”. The gesture by the Elves infuriated Santa Claus and he called for the Elves to remove their shirts. Judge Frost agreed that the Elves should continue the trial without their shirts of activism. The Elves were aware that Santa Claus would object to them wearing these shirts. So they decided that they all should link themselves together in candy cane chains representing the oppression they have endured in the North Pole. When the elves raised their chained arms in the air the courtroom

erupted, with some cheering and agreeing with their stance and others booing. Judge Frost threatened to freeze the whole courtroom if they continued to turn his courtroom into a circus. Once the courtroom settled down and both the plaintiff and defendant got their points across, Judge Frost then turned to the jury. The jury were: Dasher, Dancer, Donner, Blitzen, Comet, Cupid, Prancer, Vixen and Rudolph. This jury was one of the toughest juries this courtroom has ever had together. They deliberated for hours and hours and came to a decision.

Rudolph came to the podium and said, “After a long deliberation, the jury has decided that the credit for Christmas should belong to the hard-working reindeer.”

The crowd went into a frenzy. Rudolph said that the fate of Christmas fell on their shoulders, literally. All the other reindeer loved his comment. But no one else did. Judge Frost was in disbelief but then began to chuckle at the thought of even hearing out such a dumb argument. He slammed his gavel, almost breaking it in half.

Judge Frost said, “Christmas is bigger than a holiday, it is bigger than toys, gifts and even ‘credit’. It takes more than one individual to create the joy and happiness of Christmas. The Elves and Santa Claus are an oiled machine and without each other everything crumbles.”

Everyone in the courtroom immediately agreed with Judge Frost’s statement. The Elves, Santa and his reindeer agreed that there was no other way to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas than to have a nice glass of milk and cookies. They walked out of the courtroom hand-in-hand singing “Kumbaya My Lord.” The case of Santa Claus vs. The Elves was closed.

Katy and Alto Find the True Spirit of Christmas

By Natalie Wakefield



Once upon a time, there were two cats, Katy and Alto, who lived in a boring little town. During the long summers they would bathe in the sun and sit at the windows watching the birds fly by. Now, all of this was great, but after a couple months, they began to get bored and wanted something new and exciting to do. Luckily for them, it was beginning to get cold outside, which meant it was almost their favorite time of the year: Christmas!

Why do Katy and Alto love Christmastime so much? For Alto, Christmas is the time of year when the great Christmas tree comes to stay at the house. She loves hiding under the tree, drinking the tree's water, running circles around the tree, and playing with the ornaments that are placed on the tree for decoration. She also loves to play with all of the other Christmas decorations that get put around the house. Obviously it is a very exciting time for Alto. Katy, on the other hand, has a very different approach for enjoying the Christmas season. Once presents are under the tree, Katy surveys all her options and chooses one present each year that will be her sleeping spot for the remainder of the season. She also enjoys some peace and quiet since Alto is busy playing with all her newfound toys and does not have as much time to bother her.

This Christmas started out like any other; the leaves fell off the trees, it got colder outside, Christmas music was heard throughout the house, and decorations were being put up all around. When the Christmas tree was brought into the house, there was, of course, the usual excitement from both the humans and the cats. However, there seemed to be something different about the tree this year, but what could it be?

Being curious, Alto decided to check it out. She walked around, looking at it from every angle, but it seemed to look about the same as it usually did. She sniffed the tree, but it smelled the same as usual. She drank some of the tree's water and it tasted pretty normal, but a couple of minutes after she drank it she started to feel funny. Alto quickly beckoned Katy over to see what she thought about the water. Katy had already lain down for her mid-afternoon nap and did not want to get up or play any of Alto's silly little games. Unfortunately for Katy, Alto is very persistent and does not give up until she gets what she wants. She likes to remind the humans of this persistence when they do not feed her quickly enough!

Eventually Katy gave in and walked over to the tree with Alto. She tasted some of the water and thought to herself, "Why do I let Alto talk me into these things; there is nothing weird about this water!" But just as she was thinking this, she began to feel what Alto had described, and before they knew it, they were being transported to a place they had never seen before.

"Whoa! Where are we!?" said Alto. "There's so much snow; let's run around in it!"

Katy was not as impressed because she likes to stay curled up in her favorite chair at home and this was definitely not her favorite chair or anywhere near home. Alto soon realized that the snow maybe was not as great as she had first thought. The snow was cold and wet. Cats do not like to be cold and wet. Even though they each had some issues with this new place, they were determined to figure out where they were and how they got there. So, they began to explore.

As they were walking around, Katy saw something small and green run into a big building off in the distance. Obviously they were not going to pass up the chance to check this out, so they ran in the direction of the building to see what that little green thing was. Once they reached the building and walked inside, they were completely amazed by what they were seeing.

The whole building was lit up with sparkly red and green lights, Christmas trees were in every corner of the room, and toys were everywhere! That little green thing they saw earlier must have been an elf, because they now saw a bunch of them busily making toys.

“We must be in the North Pole and this must be Santa’s workshop,” Katy said.

They had always heard stories and songs that talked about the North Pole and Santa and his elves, but they did not know this place really existed. After doing some exploring of Santa’s workshop, they remembered that they still had no idea how they got there. They walked up to the elf that was standing at the front of the workshop keeping an eye on all the other elves. Before they could ask him how they ended up in the North Pole, the elf asked them the same question. He was shocked that two cats managed to get into the workshop, because no one but the elves, Santa, and Mrs. Claus were allowed to be in the workshop. No one else had ever even found out where the North Pole was. Katy and Alto explained that just a few minutes ago they were at home checking out the Christmas tree and then all of a sudden they wound up in the snow outside of the workshop.

The elf decided he better call in Santa to see if he knew what could have happened. The elf pulled out what looked like a candy cane and pressed a button at the top of it. Shortly after, Santa came running into the workshop, asking what the emergency was. The elf explained the situation to Santa while Katy and Alto stood there in awe of what they were seeing.

Katy whispered to Alto and said, “Wow, that is really Santa Claus, and he is standing right in front of us!”

Alto replied, “I wonder if I should go ahead and tell him what I want. You know I am pretty specific about what I want.”

“Yeah, we all know that!” Katy said.

Now that Santa had heard the whole story from the elf, he turned to Katy and Alto to ask them some questions. First of all, Santa told them they must be pretty special since they were the first beings ever to come to the North Pole, other than himself and the elves, of course. Then he asked Katy and Alto exactly what they were doing when they were transported to the North Pole. Again, they explained that all they knew was that they were checking out the Christmas tree, and when they drank the water that the tree was in, they felt all tingly. The next thing they knew, they were sitting in the snow.

Santa said, “Hmm, let me think just a minute...I might actually know what happened.” By this point everyone in the workshop was eagerly listening to what was going on and all eyes were glued to Santa as they waited to see what he was going to say.

After what seemed like an eternity, Santa began to explain that there had not been enough Christmas spirit this year so the Christmas trees could not grow as well as they normally do. Wanting to save Christmas as much as he could, Santa sent one of his trusty elves to deliver perfectly green and lively Christmas trees, grown in the North Pole where there is a lot of Christmas spirit, to the Christmas tree farms across the world. He further explained that Katy and Alto’s humans must have picked out a tree from one of the farms that had North Pole Christmas trees. This particular tree must have had some of the magic dust that is used to transport the reindeer back to the North Pole after a long night’s work on Christmas Eve. When Katy and Alto drank some of the water that the tree was sitting in, they got some of the remnants of that magic dust and were transported to the North Pole.



“Wow, we are like the reindeer now!” Alto said. “Speaking of the reindeer, can we go see them now?”

Usually no one is allowed to see the reindeer, but since Katy and Alto had already seen the elves and the workshop, Santa said, “Why not?” They followed Santa over to the barn and got to see all the reindeer in their stalls.

Santa then said, “You know, it is actually time to feed them. Would you like to help?” Of course they wanted to help; this was a once in a lifetime opportunity!

Katy and Alto each carried a bucket of reindeer food on their backs and walked around to each stall letting the reindeer get a bite to eat. They thoroughly enjoyed this experience; however, as the excitement began to wear off, Katy realized that she had missed her late afternoon nap and was ready to get back and sleep. She turned to Santa and asked him how they were going to get back home. Santa told them that he would take them home on his sleigh if they promised to help all the people in their town have more Christmas spirit. He reminded them that when people do not have Christmas spirit, Christmas would fade away. Katy and Alto promised that they would do their best to bring back the spirit of Christmas to everyone when they got back home.

The cats said goodbye to all their new friends and hopped onto Santa’s sleigh. They flew over many cool looking places that were all lit up with lights, and then they flew over some that had no Christmas lights.

“See that?” Santa said, “All those people down there have no Christmas spirit, and that is what we need to fix.”

Katy and Alto agreed that something had to be changed so that more people would believe in the spirit of Christmas. The fun adventure with Santa Claus quickly came to an end as Santa landed the sleigh in their front yard. They said their goodbyes to each of the reindeer and gave Santa a purr and a lick before he got back in his sleigh. Santa once again reminded them

about their promise to spread the Christmas spirit, and he told them that if they were ever in need of a little extra Christmas spirit themselves, they now knew how to get to the North Pole. As Santa and the reindeer flew off into the night sky, Santa yelled his signature phrase, “Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night! Ho Ho Ho!”

Katy and Alto then walked into the house, vowing never to forget this amazing experience. As they came through the front door, they saw their humans sitting on the couch together looking at the beautifully decorated Christmas tree and reading the Christmas story from the Bible. The cats looked at each other, and without saying a word, knew exactly what each other was thinking. They were looking at the true spirit of Christmas right in front of them.

This is what Santa was talking about when he said people need more Christmas spirit—not more materialistic Christmas spirit, but the true spirit of Christmas. When people spend quality time with their families and learn about Jesus, the true reason for Christmas, then they will have true Christmas spirit. Light shines from the people who have this true Christmas spirit, and that is the light that shines even brighter than the lights bought at a store. They realized that Santa did not necessarily mean that people need more store-bought lights to light up the night sky, but instead, they need more light that comes from within by having true Christmas spirit. And with this realization, Katy and Alto curled up on the couch with their humans to partake in the joys of the true spirit of Christmas.

The End

How the Grinch Stole Baby Jesus:

A Slightly Fictional Tale

as told by Ben Gurganus



The story of Jesus is one you may know, born in Bethlehem one winter night that was lacking of snow.

A gift from God baby Jesus was, he lay in a manger with a head full of fuzz.

The wise men came bearing some super awesome gifts, gold, myrrh, and even frankincense.

With angels on the hillside singing out loud, shepherds listened as they were mesmerizingly wowed.

The night went on and heaven was here, as God looked down grinning from ear to ear.

The true meaning of Christmas is all about Jesus, born the Christ savior to come down and free us.

I break from this rhyme to begin our story, as we fast forward in time to a strange new territory.

The land of Whoville is where we are now, looking upon the Grinch as he furrows his brow.

“It’s almost that time of year again,” he thinks to himself. “Christmas is coming and I have no clue how I am going to stop it.” The Grinch was upset because every Christmas the people of Whoville always had a grand celebration. The celebrations were so loud that the Grinch could hear them all the way up in his mountaintop cave. All the Grinch wanted was some peace and quiet this year, and in order to do that he knew he had to stop Christmas from happening. As he sat in his chair brainstorming ideas, there came a knock at his door. *Who*

could that be? he thought to himself, *the carpet cleaning lady isn't supposed to be coming for another week.* Reluctantly, the Grinch stood up and answered the door. He was shocked to see two men, standing side by side, dressed in white button ups, black slacks and black ties.

“Can I help you?” the Grinch asked.

One of the men responded, “Hi! I’m Steven and this is Earl, and we’re from the Whoville Mormon Tabernacle! Would you be interested in hearing about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?”

The Grinch stood in the doorway staring blankly back at the duo. He was just about to slam the door in their faces when Earl chimed in, “We can share with you the true secret of Christmas and what it’s really all about!”

Hearing this, the Grinch’s ears perked up and his attitude immediately changed. *This could finally be my answer on how to stop Christmas,* the Grinch thought to himself. *If I could harness the true secret of Christmas, I would be able to defeat it once and for all.*

The Grinch invited the two into his lair and they shared with him all of their knowledge about Jesus and the true meaning of Christmas.

After the meeting, the Grinch escorted Steven and Earl out his cave saying to them, “Thank you gentlemen. You’ve been more than helpful this evening.”

As soon as they left, the Grinch started to devise a plan. He now knew that Jesus was to blame for the horrid Christmas celebrations that occurred each and every year. The only problem was, the Grinch had no idea how he was going to travel back in time to stop Jesus from being born. Then suddenly it dawned on him, Santa Claus had been delivering presents since the beginning of time. If anyone had access to the technology of time travel, it was jolly ole Saint

Nick. The Grinch had to act fast. Santa would soon be here, delivering presents to the people of Whoville. Only this time, the Grinch would be up waiting for him.

As the sun sank below the horizon, the town of Whoville seemed to settle down with it. One by one the lights in the windows disappeared and soon all was quiet in the peaceful valley. The Grinch knew that this was his best chance to finally put an end to Christmas. He settled in to his ambush position and waited. It was quiet in his lonely lair, the only sound coming from his muffled breathing. As the Grinch waited, his mind couldn't help but think about the agony if he failed his mission. The town of Whoville would be up bright and early the next morning celebrating all the gifts that they had been given. The Grinch gagged at the thought of their cheerful and joyous festivities. Anger swelled within him, only motivating him more to accomplish his task. Then suddenly, a faint sound broke the stillness of the quiet night. At first the Grinch wasn't sure if he was hearing things, but as he paid more attention he could definitely make out the distinct jingle of Santa's sleigh bells. The jingling grew louder and more obvious now as Santa neared the lair. The Grinch's breathing grew heavier as a wave of adrenaline rushed over him. He hummed, *His palms were sweaty and his knees grew weak, his arms, they were heavy, there was vomit on his Christmas sweater already: Mom's spaghetti.*

The sleigh touched down, landing with a soft thud and a skid as the reindeer slid to a halt on the soft snowy roof. A few nervous prances could be heard above as the reindeer settled down. With a labored sigh, Santa rose out of his sleigh and stepped onto the roof.

"Something doesn't feel right," Santa mumbled to himself.

"Can we just go then?!" Rudolph shouted out at the front of the sleigh.

"Rudolph, I swear by all that is holly and jolly, if you ask one more stupid question I will never let you come on another Christmas ride again." Annoyed, Santa went back to work. He

pulled out his sack of toys and made his way over to the chimney. The Grinch, eagerly waiting below, knew that it was time to act.

Santa made his way down the chimney and entered into the Grinch's lair. He walked cautiously towards the tree and began placing the presents underneath it. The Grinch watched from his hiding spot, waiting for the perfect time to strike. As Santa finished placing the presents, he walked over to the plate of milk and cookies to reward himself for all the hard work he had just accomplished. Distracted by the delicious treats, Santa never saw what happened next. The Grinch lunged from his hiding spot, hitting Santa over the head with a weighted candy cane, killing the jolly ole elf with one swift blow. "I've done it!" exclaimed the Grinch. "Now no one can stop me from ending this wretched holiday."

The Grinch scurried back up the chimney and peeked out onto the roof to behold Santa's actual sleigh and nine little reindeer. The Grinch pulled himself up and out of the chimney, startling the magical flying beasts. "Little reindeer! I mean you no harm, I only wish to access this sleigh's time traveling capabilities. Which one of you knows how it works?"

"WE'LL NEVER TELL YOU!" shouted Rudolph.

"Geez, pipe down kid," said the Grinch.

The reindeer chuckled at this. They couldn't help but like the Grinch and decided that they would help him use the sleigh's time traveling capabilities.

"All you have to do is flip the switch on the dashboard from 'Christmas Magic' to 'Time Traveling,'" Comet replied.

"Really? It's that simple?" asked the Grinch.

Comet rolled his eyes at the Grinch's disbelief, "Yes and we also have to get the sleigh up to 88 mph."



“Alright then!” the Grinch shouted eagerly, “Let’s do this thing!”

With that, the Grinch hopped into the sleigh, flipped the switch from “Christmas Magic” to “Time Traveling”, gave a crack of the whip and they were off. The reindeer built up their speed, growing closer to the magical 88mph. Time and space began to collide and fuse together as the sleigh’s magic began transporting the team back in time. Then, in the blink of an eye, the sleigh vanished off into the night like a shooting star.

The sleigh ripped through the fabric of time as the Grinch headed toward ancient Bethlehem. He could see the end of the wormhole now as the sleigh streaked through the ancient night sky, entering with a sonic crack. The squad crashed down in a field behind some shepherds who were being serenaded by some strange flying men in white dresses. The Grinch crawled out of the wreckage and looked over the crash site.

“Is everyone alright?” he called out.

Everyone appeared to be fine, except for Rudolph. He was dead. The Grinch told the reindeer to stay put until he came back. Then he turned towards the city and began to look for Jesus.

“Steven and Earl told me that Jesus would be in a manger located under the brightest star in the sky.”

The Grinch looked up and surveyed the nighttime sky. It did not take him long to find what he was looking for. The star was directly in front of him and he began making his way towards it. The Grinch ran toward the star, and with each step he took he imagined Christmas finally being over. His anger for the holiday fueled him in his sprint and soon enough the star was directly overhead. The Grinch saw the stable and knew that the baby Jesus must be located inside. He charged at the doors and burst through them, startling all who were there. As the

Grinch rose up, he looked down at the manger and there, right before the Grinch's own eyes was the baby Jesus.

He lay there in his golden fleece diapers, the little eight pound six ounce newborn infant Jesus, don't even know a word yet, just a little infant, so cuddly, but still omnipotent. The Grinch swelled with emotions. This was his moment to end Christmas forever. He pounced for the infant, reaching out his long green, hairy fingers. Joseph and Mary both tried to stop him but the Grinch was too fast. He was determined to let nothing stop him on this night. The Grinch picked up the child and bolted for the door, hurdling animals and Magi on his way out. Just as the Grinch reached the outside, he caught a glimpse of a large blur moving towards him out of the corner of his eye. Before the Grinch could react, the object collided with him, halting his dramatic getaway. When the Grinch opened his eyes, he was face to face with a baby faced, curly headed creature.

"Who are you?!" the Grinch snarled.

"I'm Buddy the Elf" the creature replied, "and you've been very naughty this Christmas."

"Get off of me!" yelled the Grinch, "or else I'll kill you, just like I did your fat Santa friend."

At hearing this, Buddy became filled with anger. "Why you little cotton-headed-ninny-muggins, how could you do such a thing!" Buddy cried. The elf man postured up and began dropping bows down on the Grinch, punishing him for all he had done. Baby Jesus finally stepped in and stopped the vicious barrage.

"That's enough, Buddy" baby Jesus said, "I'll take it from here." Using his powers, he banished the Grinch to a torment unlike any other, to serve as the hospitality manager of Santa Claus, Indiana (Yes it's a real town). Now every day for the rest of his life, the Grinch would

have to live in a town that was nothing but Christmas. Every waking moment he would have to suffer through all of the Christmas festivities that he had tried to end. After the Grinch had been dealt with, baby Jesus turned to Buddy and thanked him for all he had done.

“You saved Christmas, Buddy, you are a true hero and the world thanks you.”

“But what about Santa?” Buddy asked as a tear rolled down his cheek.

Little Jesus looked up at him and replied, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” and with that, baby Jesus returned Buddy back home.

We bring back this rhyme to end our story. Baby Jesus grew up and was exalted in glory. Buddy returned home to a pleasant surprise as he found Santa to be quite alive. For those who are wondering just how Buddy got there, you see, he liked to take naps under the sleighs driving chair. Christmas continues now every year but with the help of one less reindeer. This story is over because I’m out of things to write, merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

The Only Light in Town

By Andrew Hadley

The snow was violently coming down, the wind was howling, all the bulbs in the streetlights had shattered and no light was shining from them. The entirety of the light in this sad little town was emanating from a single house in the center of town. That single house was filled with the entire population of that run-down, one-horse town. Even though the town had a minuscule population, all the townsfolk still struggled to huddle together for warmth in the Perry household on that long Christmas Eve night.

My name is Otis Perry III and this is my story of the Christmas that has been in my memory for the last seventy years. That was my first Christmas that I can still remember. I was only at the young age of seventeen when this occurred. My story begins in the year of 1930. I was born into a family of nine children, where I was the youngest, and a mother who supported us all entirely on \$500 a year. My father had abandoned me before I was even born. We barely



had food, we all had to share everything. We never had enough money to have a proper meal for the holidays. That is, until the year that everything changed.

Our family had been struggling to survive for years and years. Every single man in the house had to work to help provide for the family. One day, when I was seventeen, after all of us men, and my mom, got home from work, we had an unexpected visitor. I answered the door to find a man informing us that my grandfather had passed away and that he had left me \$10,000. I stood there stunned, no idea what to do or say. My mother ran up behind me and hugged me while she was crying. She said, "The recession is over."

That was on the last day of November. I became the main support of my family on that day. We all bought new clothes and food, and decided to move to the area that my mother had

been born and raised. It was a tiny little town; however, it was the most beautiful place I had ever seen. We found a house in the middle of town. It was in the same spot that my mother's childhood home stood. The house wasn't huge, but it was much more than what we had before. By the time we had gotten situated, it was coming up around December 20th, the week of Christmas. The only thing I could think of was Christmas coming up. We as a family had never had a nice Christmas meal together. We usually never had enough money to even provide the smallest amounts of food throughout the year. How could we have afforded to have a fancy meal just for Christmas?

Since I still had a little over \$1,000 from the inheritance, I decided we would do Christmas the right way this year. I planned for the few days that I had left before Christmas, all the way up until the morning of Christmas Eve. I picked out the ham that we would cook and eat. I picked out all the different side dishes and drinks we would have go with our meal. I even picked out all the ingredients to make the best sourdough bread that anybody had ever eaten. My mother helped cook along with my 3 older sisters. I had planned the most amazing meal. That's when it started snowing...

It was 8 am on Christmas Eve, the clouds rolled in out of nowhere. I had never seen the weather change so quickly before. The snow started piling up and by the time it was noon, the snow was up to three feet tall in some places. This wasn't just any old snow storm; this was a blizzard. My entire family huddled together in our house as I sobbed, thinking about how my plans for an amazing Christmas had been ruined. As the day continued on, I noticed more and more houses seemed to be losing power, and when they lose their power that means they're also losing heat. I was waiting for the moment when our lights would flicker out, however, that time never came. The day continued until it was dusk. I was looking outside the window and noticed

that none of the streetlights were lit. I examined closer and realized that the blizzard had broken out the bulbs from the streetlamps.



I started to realize that our house was the only house in town that still had power.

I pitied the rest of the town. We had an entire house full of food and enough heat to keep every single one of us warm. As the weather continued to become harsher and harsher, my feeling of pity grew more and more towards the rest of the town.

It was Christmas Eve after all. I hated knowing that people were hungry and cold during a time of year that was supposed to be such an amazing time. I knew how it felt to be hungry and cold on this day and I hated the fact that everyone in town was feeling that right now. I decided to invite the entire town to our house for a Christmas Eve meal. I went out into the streets fighting the cold winter storm, and went to every single individual house to ask them to share in my fortune. As I was walking from house to house I realized that this is what Christmas is really all about. Christmas isn't about the food or the presents. Christmas is meant to be about spending time with those you love and sharing the blessings that God has bestowed upon the individual. Once I had informed everyone in town of my invitation, we all walked to my house and settled in for the night. My mother and sisters were all hard at work in the kitchen making a town's worth of a meal. We had to clear off all the tables and nightstands and every single flat surface in the house so that everybody would have a place to eat and get comfortable as we waited out the storm.

As we all enjoyed our time in fellowship together, I realized that I didn't recognize some of the faces that were in my house for dinner. Apparently, a few homeless people had seen that there was food and heat in here. I didn't mind them coming here, however it did give me a very

different view of what I was doing. I didn't realize that I had participated in an amazingly huge act of charity that affected the entire town, including the homeless.

It was amazing how such a terrible night was made into such a memorable experience, not just for my family and me, but also for the entire township. That night inspired me, in my middle age, to always serve a Christmas Eve meal to the entire town from my own house, the exact same house from those many years ago. My mother has long since passed so I had to learn how to cook for myself, however my sisters were a lot of help in that department. I've devoted my life to helping the less fortunate and I always, every single year since 1947, have a massive dinner on Christmas Eve. And every single year I sit everybody down and tell this exact story of how this all came to be. I tell them how I grew up knowing what poor was, having to rub nickels together for heat and the entire family sharing one single bed. My family hit a stroke of luck, however that isn't always the case.

Christmas for me has never been about presents or the pretty lights or for the shopping or even for Jolly ole' Saint Nicholas. Christmas for me is sitting down for a meal with my closest family and friends and being able to share my wealth with the less fortunate. I am the only sibling left from the Perry family, and sadly I was never able to find a wife and was never able to have an heir to my cause. This is my first year on my own without a single sibling by my side to assist and support me. This story will be the reminder of that cold and horrendous night in 1947, the blizzard of the century. What kept my house from not losing power that night I may never know, however, to this day my house is still referred to as "The Only Light in Town."

One Lonely Christmas

By Laura Barney

The figure stumbled along the snow-dusted sidewalk of Winston-Salem, holding a tattered newspaper and a set of keys. Flurries started falling and within minutes it became steady with no sign of stopping any time soon. The figure continued to walk down Broad Street with hopes of finding a pub open on this cold, lonely Christmas Eve. He passed his usual bar, Smitty's Brewery, but today, unlike the other 364 days in the year, the neon lights were off and the barstools were up on the tabletops. The man continued down the sidewalk until off in the distance, he noticed a dull red glow. He thought to himself, "Finally, a place where I can get some of the good stuff." His pace increased due to anticipation; when he grew close enough to see the place was open for business, he sighed a sigh of relief. He shook the snow from his worn coat and his tennis shoes and stepped inside.

The bar was covered in memorabilia: pictures of local celebrities and news articles about the opening of the newest spot in town. Named after the four trees in the town square, 4 Oaks Saloon hadn't been open for half a year but they had doubled the business of Smitty's down the street. The dark chestnut barstools were under a counter as red as a candy apple at the county fair. The bar was lowly lit and at least thirty types of ales and liquors lined the back wall. The man was surprised to see the room empty except for a young girl with brunette locks and a heather grey toboggan. Her back was to the door and to him. She didn't even turn around when the small bell on the handle of the entrance door rung. The man, named Collin, stood in the doorway trying to knock the chill off his arthritis-ridden joints. This weather quite literally froze him and the thawing process took a while. He eased himself onto the closest barstool and looked around for the barkeep; seeing that there was no one to be found but the mysterious girl in the

corner of the bar, he pulled out his scratched flip phone and looked at his text messages. No new messages to read. He closed out of his messages and stared at the photo set as his background. A little girl with red curls and an infant boy sat there in this year's Halloween costumes. The girl was in a cheerleader uniform and the boy in a pumpkin outfit with the green woven toboggan to match. They were grinning from ear to ear because they knew that their bags were soon going to be full of sugary candy and treats. Collin remembered taking the picture with his since-passed wife of five years, Rachel, peeking around his shoulder and giggling as sweet little Anna tried to hug Thomas; Thomas, being the wiggle worm that he was, made his way out of her grasp and onto the checkered blanket on the ground. Collin heard a voice and was drawn away from the cherished memory. He closed his phone and looked toward the noise. The noise had been the bartender, Sarah.

Sarah, a college student studying Communications, was a bartender in her spare time to save money for graduate school. Her junior year had been particularly hard and she felt as if her life was going nowhere. Her grades weren't too hot and her friends partied way too hard at the fraternity houses. She was in desperate need for her mother's embrace and her father's forehead kisses but that would have to wait. Her entire family lived two states over and the forecast of snow caused her flight home to be delayed. She was missing out on wrapping presents by the fireplace, warm hot cocoa with her closest friends, and snuggles from her dog Max on that tacky green and blue plaid couch she loved so much.



Loneliness had been a reoccurring feeling over the past semester; she had gone out a few weekends with some of her girlfriends from broadcasting class, and Sarah seemed always to be left behind as they chased guys all over the limelight of downtown. These nights usually ended with a silent stroll back to her lower level apartment on the other side of the city. These walks

allowed for a lot of thinking; thinking about her future, her past, and her dreams were among the many topics pondered. Tonight proved to be full of these kinds of thoughts in the lonely 4 Oak Saloon; that is, until this man walked into the bar. His wet hair and his pale face reminded her of someone homeless. “He doesn’t look homeless,” Sarah thought. Was he here to drink? To seek shelter? Her eyes followed him as he made his way to the bar. He sat there for a minute and then pulled something out of his pocket: a flip phone.

“Who even uses a flip phone anymore? I thought those were extinct,” she judgmentally stared.

He flipped it open and pressed a few buttons and then stared at the screen for a while. Sarah turned around and finished the *Odyssey* article she was reading, “6 Gifts Your Sister Really Wants.” She peered around and saw him still staring. She assumed he was waiting for a bartender so she stood and made her way over to him.

Collin turned his head to where the noise had come from and he was looking at a girl in her early twenties. Her eyes seemed tired but her face was pink with life.

She repeated her question sweetly, “Do you need a drink?”

Collin thought for a few seconds and replied “A scotch neat, please.”

She turned the corner of the bar and made the drink quietly; after setting it down on a napkin, she smiled slightly and returned to her booth. Collin took a sip of the drink, closed his eyes, and returned to his memory...

He was sitting in his study, which was right across the hall from the bedroom he once shared with his beloved Rachel. It had been three weeks since he had slept in their bed; he had made the study his new living space, sleeping on the couch and showering and changing in the attached bathroom. He sat there staring into the fire below the mantle where their family portraits

from the past four years sat. The past three weeks had been the worst. The kitchen table was littered with covered dishes, the mailbox was stuffed with cards beginning with “Thinking of you...” and the house looked as if it hadn’t been touched in days. This all was because Rachel, Anna, and Thomas had passed away in a head-on collision. A car swerved into their lane and hit them going twenty over the speed limit. The driver had fallen asleep at the wheel and woke up just in time to see Rachel’s headlights coming. After the deputy called Collin, he raced to the scene to find his worst nightmare. That day, his whole life was shattered into a million pieces. Pastor Cantrell and members of their church came and went during the next couple of days trying to console Collin but all he wanted was to wake up from this living hell. The scotch he had poured was now lukewarm and the fire was starting to turn to embers. As the scene dimmed to black, he shook his head and buried his face in his shaking hands and started to weep.

Sarah looked up from her newsfeed full of photogenic photos of presents and typical Christmas posts about family gatherings; these just made her even more homesick than she already was. She heard a faint whimper and turned her head to see the man crying into his hands. She sat there awkwardly, not knowing whether to check on him or to ignore the obviously audible sorrow. She made the sudden decision to make sure the customer was all right. As she eased her way to the bar, he sniffled and whipped the tears on the sleeve of his flannel. She was standing before a man broken by life’s tragedies. She stared into his hazel eyes and saw the pain and the hurt and she herself began to cry. The man, a total stranger reached for her and gave her a strong embrace. She didn’t understand why she was crying for a man with which she had no connection.

As the hug ended, she said to him, “I’m sorry. I don’t know what came over me. Please forgive me; I’m not usually like this.”

The man simply stated, “It’s okay; it’s been a long time since I had someone to cry with and to hug.”

They both sat down on their respective wooden barstools and introduced themselves; little did they know that this chance encounter was going to include healing.

These two, Collin and Sarah, told each other their stories. Collin told Sarah of his little family and how they lost their lives; he proceeded to tell her about the lonely nights spent laying on that couch looking at the ceiling fan spin for hours. Each hour was filled with thoughts of guilt and regret. He wished he could have been in the car with them and perished with him; he felt as if his life meant nothing without the most important people in his life. He told Sarah of the screaming pleading with God to bring them back or to take him. He just wanted to see his family again. As Collin told her all of this, he could see tears streaming down her face. This sight was almost comforting because someone, a total stranger, cared enough to listen to him and his grieving without trying to empathize. Sarah grabbed a pile of napkins from behind the bar, handed a few to Collin, and proceeded to wipe her eyes. Then, she told Collin of her experiences here at the university. She told him of her late nights out on the town with girls that turned into a solo appearance at her doorstep the next morning. She told him of her family who were putting any extra money they had into her fund to attend a school so prestigious. That is why she was here at the bar, working to pay on her loans. She missed them so much but she knew she was here to earn a degree and return home to pay them all back for the sacrifices being made. She was somewhat shocked as she watched him stare deep into her soul; for the first time in a long time, someone was actually listening to her. As she finished telling Collin all about her struggles, she looked down at her watch and saw the clock’s small hand hit twelve: it was Christmas Day.

This Christmas was not a normal Christmas for Collin or Sarah. Collin had planned on spending it with his family, cuddled up by the fireplace in the living room and passing around the stockings that were hung on the brick mantle. Sarah had planned on being home today doling out tight embraces and kisses to all three of her younger siblings and giving her parents her Christmas bonus from the bar. Neither expected to find themselves in the bar talking to the other and crying about their troubled lives. That Christmas, they received an unexpected gift: a person who would listen.



The Fright Before Christmas

By Brittany Downs

On a frosty Christmas Eve as the final hours clicked by in Santa's workshop, the anxious children of the world were excited for the arrival of Santa Claus. The snow on the grounds of the hilltops surrounding the North Pole was as white and fluffy as the clouds in the sky. The aroma of the gingerbread cookies baked by Mrs. Claus, and the beautiful sound of the bells on the reindeers' reins made the atmosphere of Christmas Eve at the North Pole even better. The elves excitedly wrapped gifts, packed the sleigh, and rounded up the reindeer, but little did they know, their excitement would not last much longer.

This is a story of the nightmare every child fears on a jolly Christmas Eve.

Most of the elves in Santa's workshop belonged nowhere else. They completed their jobs with excellence and never failed to make each and every toy unique to each and every child. The wood of the train sets was silky smooth and the rims of the bicycles were as shiny as a new penny. However, one elf in particular just could not quite master the art of making toys and handling the fast pace of the Christmas season in the North Pole. Milo was an unusually small, but exceptionally high-strung and curious elf. He loved living in the North Pole with his dear elf friends, but he was not of much help. From the time Milo was just a young boy, he destroyed almost everything he touched. He had rotated through almost every department of the North Pole, but never proved to be skilled at anything in particular. From causing a citywide blackout or setting the kitchen on fire while baking with Mrs. Claus, he just did not fit in.

Each elf, as a young adult, is required to attend classes on how to make toys and learn the operations of Santa's workshop. On his first day of classes, Milo had drilled a hole right through the table while trying to build a small birdhouse. Needless to say, Milo is not allowed to work in

the workshop. However, an exception was made this Christmas because an unusual amount of children made their way to the nice list at the last minute. It was all hands on deck, even the clumsy hands of Milo!

“It’s twelve hours before takeoff! All elves report to the workshop immediately!” announced Santa Claus.

The head elf in charge, Jack, stood tall on his platform and reported to the workers, “Please check your lists that have been posted at your assigned stations. Each child on these lists has been added to the nice list and we have fallen short on gifts! Make each gift with care, but produce them with a sense of urgency.”

At that time, Jack heard a faint but enthusiastic voice coming from below. “What can I do to help?! What toys do I get to make?!” said Milo.

Hesitantly, but knowing the desperate need for help, Elf Jack replied, “Okay Milo. I’m going to assign you to the dollhouse station. You are going to work with Elf Jamie and she will show you what to do! If you don’t think you can handle the job, come find me and we can assign you something different.”

“I CAN DO IT, ELF JACK! I promise I won’t let you down!” exclaimed Milo.

Without another word, Milo dashed to his station, eager to dive in. Without reporting to Elf Jamie, Milo bolted to the supply shelf to gather the essentials he needed. “Wood, hammer, paint, and paintbrushes. I’m ready to go!” thought Milo. Milo quickly became distracted by all of the shiny knickknacks and processes that were occurring in the workshop that he had forgotten to look where he was going. He tripped over his own two left feet and fell flat on his face. The buckets of paint went flying and busted all over the bicycle assembly line, ruining all of the bicycles. The wood and the hammers went soaring across the



room and landed right on the head of Santa Claus himself; and just like that, Santa was out cold. The elves rushed to get Santa some help, but an elf at the welding station forgot to turn off his flame when he rushed off to help Santa. The open flame caught the table and toys on fire, but all the workers were too distraught and distracted by the incident with Santa Claus that no one even noticed the workshop going up in flames. Ten hours until takeoff.

By the time anyone had begun to smell and see the blazing flames, parts of the workshop had already fallen to the ground. The fire had spread all the way to Santa's sleigh parked in the loading station outside the back entrance of the workshop. There were crashing beams and piles of ashes everywhere. All of the toys loaded in Santa's sack were now engulfed in flames and they departed the sleigh as a pillar of black smoke into the frigid winter air. All that was left was hot embers of the gifts that no longer remained.

This particular Christmas was a beautiful, calm Christmas to the eye, but to the skin, the air was piercing and bitter. In fact, it was so cold, that the water pipes had frozen. The fire department was unable to extinguish the fire due to the lack of water, so the elves were forced to watch their life's work plummet to the ground.

To add to the chaos, Mrs. Claus had consumed slightly too much eggnog while doing the laundry and accidentally washed Santa's suit with pure bleach rather than laundry detergent. The reindeer had all escaped their stalls when the barn keeper left them unattended during Santa's incident, and the teeth of the shredder began gnawing away at the naughty and nice list as Milo began feeding it through the machine. He figured that if the gifts were gone and Christmas was ruined, there was surely no need for the lists to remind them of all the children that will not be receiving gifts this year. No gifts, no naughty or nice list, no red suit, no reindeer to be found, hardly a living Santa, and no magic.

In just a few short hours, the children of the world would no longer believe in their beloved Santa Claus when they would be greeted with an empty tree skirt on that quiet Christmas morning.

With a look of dismay, Elf Jack fell to his knees with a single tear falling down his cheek. He sat in silence. Overwhelmed with grief and hopelessness, Jack contemplated how to inform dear Old St. Nick of all the Christmas chaos when he awoke from his injuries. The rest of the elves darted around in a frenzy. They tried everything they could to build more toys to replace the ones they lost, but they all knew that Christmas was ruined. Grief had just swept the town. Eight hours until takeoff.

Santa finally regained consciousness, but he did not need anyone to tell him what had happened. As soon as his eyes opened, he could sense that a disaster had occurred. Santa called Elf Jack to his bedside and asked him to explain. As Jack interpreted the order of events that now seemed to be a blur, Santa became saddened. His rosy red cheeks faded away, and his face turned a ghostly white. Never in the history of Christmas had Santa encountered a catastrophe so significant. The magic of Christmas was gone.

When Santa regained his strength, he made his way to the workshop to review the damages. The soft, velvet seats of the sleigh had been burnt to a crisp, and the wooden supports had become too brittle to hold the weight of a driver or even a sack of gifts. Santa's heart was shattered. He tried to think of a way that he could reach the people of the world in one night without his sleigh at least to explain the reason for no gifts this holiday season, but could think of nothing. Seven hours until takeoff.

Santa called an emergency meeting in the town square to discuss solutions to all of the recent events, but while they were there, the fire that was thought to be over, traveled in a path

like a stick of dynamite to the gasoline pumps next to the workshop where the elves fill their cars to travel around the town. BOOM!!

An alarm began to sound and Santa's eyes shot open wide. The atmosphere was bright and jolly. No fire had begun, and the sleigh was not destroyed. The gifts still remained, and Milo was only a figure of Santa's imagination in that awful nightmare. Santa was not knocked unconscious; he had just fallen into a deep slumber after devouring Mrs. Claus's Christmas Eve dinner. Two hours until takeoff.



The bells on the reins chimed louder and more beautifully than ever. The reindeer were being fed their final meal before takeoff and all was well. Santa's gift sack was packed full to the brim and he was dressed in his freshly cleaned red suit. The snow fell softly and the air was crisp and clear. Perched on his beautiful velvet sleigh bench, he waved a final farewell to his hard-working elves and his lovely wife. Gripping tightly, he whipped the reins on the sleigh, signaling his reindeer for takeoff.

"On Dasher! On Dancer! On Prancer and Vixen! Now Comet! Now Cupid! Now Donner and Blitzen!" chanted Santa. The reindeer lifted the sleigh into the air and with a flash of light they vanished into the starry night.

A wave of relief from the chaos of the Christmas season washed over the elves and they poured out of the town square and into their houses. The town fell silent. The elves in the North Pole and the children of the world were all snuggled in their beds, at peace knowing that Santa would soon bear gifts and worldwide happiness this Christmas and every Christmas season to come.

One Last Bottle of Christmas Ale...

By Garrett Stang

Inmate #345600,

Most families are surrounded by the smell of chestnuts roasting on an open fire, the warmth of a family hug when Jack Frost is nipping at your nose, or even the laughter of the children playing around the tree during Christmas. Well, that is not the case for my family. I welcome you to meet the Robison family, where Christmas is met with the smell of roasted road kill, the coldhearted shrug of one sibling to the next, and the screams in the house while you throw your beloved Christmas Ale at my head. The story I am about to tell you offers no happy ending, no joyous family hug at the end, or even the simplicity of a blissful carriage ride in Central Park. Rather, I riddle you this- a Christmas story that outlines the foundations for the man I am today. Oh, I guess I should probably introduce myself- my name is Dr. Curtis Robinson, your son.

Our story begins in the slums of New York, more specifically Lower Manhattan, and I am 15 years old now. The nickname 'Windy City' never did it justice. The piercing cold winds of winter felt like stabbings, but those winds never stopped you from getting your annual Christmas Ale. You were that of the Chicago fool. You were a man who boasted over the simple things in life, like your repeated scam of cashing our deceased Aunt Ginger's social security check, from which I had never seen a single cent. There was no doubt in my mind that you loved my brothers and me, but I was certain that your love for Christmas Ale was greater. From my earliest of memories, I remember our race to the gas station, year after year and case after case. I guess you could say it was our first and only Christmas tradition during my childhood. It taught me that once you put your mind to something, it takes some dedication to follow through with it.

I was tired of waiting for some Saint Nicholas or any other savior to rescue me. I had to come to the realization that I could only rely upon myself.

As the oldest brother of three I felt that it was my job to try and keep the Christmas spirit alive in my brothers' hearts as long as possible. Unfortunately, that ship had sailed when you or mom were nowhere to be found and I had to rely upon road kill for our "special Christmas feast." You would swear that our home sounded more like a yuletide screaming match than carols during that year. My brothers had the ill conception that you were the greatest man alive during Christmas time. They idolized your jokes, laughed at your drunk rambles, and mimicked your trembling motions as if they were those of Santa himself tiptoeing through the house. They were blind to your abuse and they found faults in my detesting remarks against you. I was done with you, I loathed you and your addiction. I felt that you deprived us of our childhood. As much as I wanted to run away and never look back, I knew that for the sake of my brothers' wellbeing, I could not. So, I searched for any inspiration or prayer that I could find- and hell, would you believe me if I found it staring at those wretched Christmas Ale bottles? I was determined to get them some type of real Christmas gift this year.

I found myself becoming the primary and only caregiver in the family that year. It was barely the beginning of December and you were already lost in the sauce, mom was nowhere to be found for years, and my brothers were still blind to your acts of foolishness. But I will give you one thing- your inability to throw away beer bottles did leave me with some bright ideas. Maybe it was the dodging of the bottle hitting my face or the numerous times that I stared at the bottle asking it, "why did you come into my life?" when I came to an epiphany. The bottle depicted that of a jolly 'ole Santa Claus with some rosy-cheeks throwing one back. I then began to think to myself, "wasn't Saint Nicholas the patron saint of brewers?"

Before long I began collecting these bottles and throwing them in a large, never-ending sack until it was full to the brim- ironic, don't you think? Once the sack was full I began to lug it all the way to the recycling plant to exchange it for cash. It wasn't the most effective or productive source of income, but it was all I had going for me. The money I gathered would then be used to pay off our bills for the month. You would think that would be a good enough present, but come to find out, little kids are more fans of tangible items around their Christmas tree rather than electricity. I decided to pick them up a shiny red truck for this Christmas. It was not what they necessarily wanted, but it was the best I could do. But come to find out, Chris and George would never get to enjoy that red truck... thanks to you.



Upon your return home that evening I was greeted with a Christmas Ale bottle thrown at my head rather than a “thank you for stepping up and being the man I could not be, Curtis.” You were livid that I had removed all your beer bottles and you began to curse my name to the high heavens. I yelled right back at you, saying some not so choice words that would probably make Santa’s elves run and hide. My father, the faint of heart that you are, began throwing anything that you could at me. Before long my brothers awoke to the ruckus and ran towards me. I had to act fast to shield them from you. I was throwing myself in front of every lamp post and book as though I was taking heavy gunfire. Then, out of nowhere, a shiny red truck hits me across my face and knocks me out cold.

“Curtis. Curtis. Curtis, are you with us buddy? Curtis, my name is Dr. Metz, do you know where you are?”

Disgruntled and still in shock, I had no idea where I was. Dr. Metz began to tell me that you had hit me with a blunt object that knocked me out cold. Apparently, George had run to a neighbor’s house and got them to call the police and an ambulance for me. She proceeded to

inform me that I suffered a severe head trauma and that I had been in a medically induced coma to reduce the brain swelling. Still confused and disoriented, I asked her how long I had been out. She informed me that it was Christmas Eve, meaning I was out for almost two weeks. Frantic and worried about my brothers, I rushed to remove my IV and get out of bed, which was a harder task than one would imagine after being asleep for two weeks. Dr. Metz tried to calm me down, but her words made no impact. I was still trying to get out of bed. She then forced me down and called a nurse over, who proceeded to give me a shot, and before you know it, I was out like a light.

I woke up a few hours later, a little more relaxed this time. I was soon to be greeted by a committee of individuals in suits. The first to approach me was a detective. He informed me that you had been arrested and had been in lockup for the past two weeks. The next was a social worker. She informed me that my brothers had been placed in a foster home with a family on the upper side of New York City. The final suit was a court appointed attorney. He informed me that I was being represented as a dependent and had the chance to put you behind bars for what you did. Overwhelmed with information and sorrow, I asked them all to leave. They were compliant with my request and their absence allowed me to sulk in private. I then turned on the television to distract me from the news I just heard. And then, a rush of anger and hostility came over me when I saw the commercial for my father's favorite Christmas Ale. Outraged, I threw my remote at the TV, shattering the screen. Dr. Metz rushed to my room, followed by a nurse holding a familiar looking shot. She stopped the nurse and then came over to my bedside and held onto me. I pushed and shoved, but she didn't stop. I eventually succumbed to submission and began to sulk on her shoulder.

Outraged, confused, and miserable could not even begin to describe the depth of emotions I was feeling as I looked outside my hospital room window. This Christmas was in fact the worst time of the year. I had no more fight left in me. The boy who collected wasted beer bottles in order to become Santa was no more. I sat there and began to ponder the idea of Christmas and what it meant to me. This Christmas had come and gone. It had disappeared faster than the cookies you leave out for Santa. I literally had nothing left, no family or a home to go back to. However, I still needed the reassurance that my brothers were okay.

It was not hard to track down the social worker, since she is a frequent flyer in the Bronx County system. I gathered the phone in my hospital room and dialed the number faster than you could say “Kris Kringle.” To my surprise my phone call was met with the joyous laughter of a calm, almost warm-hearted voice. There was no doubt in my mind that I could hear Chris and George in the background of the phone call giggling over *A Christmas Story* on TV. Struck by a moment of silence, I let a small tear run down my face. The woman, who later introduced herself as Mrs. Apple, reassured me of their safety and their anticipation to see my father and me again. She boasted about how she loved their joyous and whimsical character around her house during this holiday season. Eventually I talked to Chris and George, their outlooks sounding both calm and happy. As much as I wanted to see them, I knew I could not. I had to face the decision of your fate on my own, without them.

Following up with the detective was a harder task than expected. Christmastime in New York was beyond hectic for all types of emergency service responders. Fortunately, he left his number with my nurse. He met up with me later that night and discussed the charges being held against you. Child neglect, public intoxication, and fraud were only the beginning to the long list of charges that awaited your trial. As the detective was talking to me, I could not help but think



about Chris and George and the true Christmas that they were going to have this year. Some would say my decision to press charges against you was rash and lacked logical merit, but I did not care. I wanted nothing else to do with you. Maybe I would be hated by my brothers and you for some time, but I was tough and knew that their wellbeing came before any personal feelings I had. It was truly the best Christmas gift I could give all of you, even if you did not know it. The clock then struck midnight, and just like that, Christmas day was here.

Christmas became more of a reminder of my past than any type of celebration. My realizations behind that one Christmas served as a stepping stone in my life. The copious amounts of life lessons during the holiday season to follow provided me a foundation for my success. So, as I sit here in my office, on the top floor of the Lower Manhattan Hospital, I ask you, “what does Christmas truly mean to you, Dad?” Cheers to you, and cheers to that last bottle of Christmas Ale that sent you over the edge that one starry night.

Yours truly,

The son who put you behind bars,

Dr. Curtis Robinson

The Old Testament Christmas Experience of Dr. Adam English

(to be read with a thick Southern accent)

By Victor H. Knight

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all throughout the Old Testament, not a character was stirring, not even A-mos. Well, actually, that isn't completely honest. You see, this time of year all of the Ancient Hebrews are eagerly anticipating Santa Claus' coming. Good ol' Isaiah even went so far as to call him the messiah! It wasn't like nowadays where all of the children go to bed early in anticipation of the morning to come. Nope, all of the folks in the Old Testament try their best to see that sneaky little Santa Claus. Ezekiel's buddy Jeremiah is the most fervent anticipator of them all; he just can't ever seem to outwit ol' Saint Nick, though. Jeremiah even wrote a series of lamentations in his first book because he was unable to catch up to Nicholas in Babylonia.

Amos, who is a good buddy of Hosea's, just wanted to get Santa's autograph this year. You see, one time when Amos was a young man he stayed out late dressing sycamore trees and Santa's sleigh flew overhead. Santa must have been dumping out an old cup of melted snow when he flew over, 'cause poor Amos got drenched. Well, without even thinking Santa was autonomously saying "Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!"

Amos was so overcome by the sensation of water in the dead of night – as snow covered the ground and the shining star of Father Christmas lingered overhead – with the joy of St. Nick's jolly red belly that all Amos could say for the next five days was, "Let Justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Some old man employed at the temple, Amaziah I think it was, finally made him stop when he got Amos to say, "I am neither a prophet nor a prophet's son."

Of course, this year's Christmas was different from that. You see, on Palm Sunday this year, all of the Hebrews got out of their houses to see a peculiar looking fella on a donkey riding into town and – wouldn't ya know it – Santa Claus flew over to witness the event. I mean the ACTUAL Santa Claus! Ol' Saint Nicholas of Sion was so overjoyed that he threw out a bunch of funny looking pieces of something square and kinda shiny with writing on the back. All of the Hebrews at this point were genuinely confused. They had never seen animal skin with funny little pictures on them before.

One of the more educated folks – Ezekiel I believe his name was – figured that it was some kind of magical papyrus. He managed to decipher the Ugaritic Script, being that it was the Akkadian Language written using the Ugaritic Alphabet and all. It was an easy decipherment, in all honesty. Ezekiel just had to apply his foreknowledge of the mystical Throne-Chariot in order to conjunct the Peculiar Alphabetic Sign with Akkadian Syllabary as the pristine sheet of snow blanketed the cozy land of Canaan. Ezekiel made his discovery as several small children in the backdrop placed a corn-cob pipe in the mouth of a jolly white snowman.

What Ezekiel ultimately discovered was that it was an invitation to the Hebrews to celebrate Jesus' birthday by asking Santa for presents at the mall. Of course, Santa couldn't invite everyone to the mall, 'cause then all of the young'uns wouldn't have no time to sit in his lap. He had sent out six invitations on *eight-by-ten color glossy photographs with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back of each one explaining that each one was to be used as evidence against us*; yeah – that was what he did all right. Naturally, the six invitations went to the six most important people in the town: Job, Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Dr. Adam English, and Arlo Guthrie.

Now, we have already met Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; but Dr. Adam English, Job, and Arlo Guthrie are another story. They are all a bit peculiar, to say the least. The first guy – Dr. Adam English – he is a Professor of Theology at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina. He wrote his dissertation tracing the shift of Maurice Blondel from phenomenological philosophy to ontological theology – and did a darn good job of it, I might add. Anyways, he was only in Ancient Israel, as the soft jingle of bells sounded in the backdrop of this peaceful Christmas nation, on sabbatical looking for ancient Latin and Greek documents relevant to the historical St. Nicholas of Myra. This was all good and well, but he was too easily distracted. He kept on trying to ask the ancient prophets theological questions; they pretty much just ignored him to build snowmen in the hilly countryside of Israel. This was the bitter-sweet fortune of Dr. English.

Speaking of being ignored, Job’s invitation could not have come at a worse time! Job was in the middle of being punished by God for no apparent reason – when all-of-the-sudden he had to drop everything he had been working towards and go to the mall?! Well, this was a fine how-do-you-do. Anyways, Job accepted the invite. Did he really have a choice? As a snowman danced in the backdrop, Job knew that the spirit of Christmas Suffering was on his heart; the tender pitter-patter of reindeers’ feet on his skull assured him that he was destined to attend.



I reckon that brings us to our last odd-man-out: Mr. Arlo Guthrie. He is the son of legendary 1930s folk singer Woody Guthrie and has made a name for himself playing a similar style. He got here – well to tell y’all the truth, he doesn’t remember exactly how he got here. You see, he comes from the 1960’s. All he can remember is that he got out of school and went to meet some

friends behind the hardware store at 4:20, and the next thing he knew, he was in Ancient Israel; unfortunately, Alice's Restaurant, where he was supposed to be, had just relocated from Ancient Israel to the bell-tower of the ol' Baptist church down past the bridge. The peaceful breath of friendship and community filled the bones of the local community as the jolly season encroached upon the weather. Snow was falling, the air was crisp, and the days were short.

Now, it came to about December 6th and it was time for our six heroes to redeem their six *eight-by-ten color glossy photographs with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back of each one explaining what each one was to be used as evidence against us*. They met up at the town square where the snow crisply blanketed the hard, earthen ground, and Ezekiel, the most tech-savvy protagonist, called an Uber.

Well, the driver wasn't much fun. He went by the name of Christopher West – he kept babbling about some philosophy of History by a Mr. Georg Begel, I believe it was. After Brother West took them all into the portal of a thousand suffering hells, they arrived at the cheery, well-lit mall. There was a tender blanket of fresh hay on the ground to shield the visitors from the harsh cold coming from the soft, tender, undisturbed, miraculous snow outside. It was a bit toasty inside for Job's taste, but he figured he would just suffer through the pain, however awful it may have been.

All of the people in the crew decided it was about time to get in line to sit on Nicholas of Myra's lap. The line was unbearable. The heat wasn't as bad as Job's complaining about it, though. Job kept on asking God why he was punishing him. Eventually God just showed up and told Job to suck it up. When they finally got to the front of the line, they saw that Santa's lap kinda looked like the legs of a goat; it was okay though, Dr. English had explained to them the thesis of Phyllis Seifker on the origins of St. Nicholas of Smyron and they pretty much knew

what to expect. Job was the first person to sit on Santa's lap and he asked to be back home. And so it was, Job was transported back to his home where his family suddenly died as a toasty fire roasted their bodies like Christmas chestnuts. His flocks perished soon thereafter, falling onto a fresh quilt of Christmas snow, and his leprosy flared back up, of all things!

Amos was next and finally got to ask for his autograph. Unfortunately, Amos also wanted widows and orphans to have equality and peace, but Santa would only let him have one gift. It was a necessary sacrifice, but Amos got his autograph. Some number of years later, Amos walked into a fast-food restaurant where two men got into an argument, and Amos, who had always made the best peace, tried to break them up. Amos was stabbed in the throat. He died almost instantly as he lay there in the soft Christmas snow, mistletoe overhead.

Jeremiah had never been so happy about anything as he was about sitting on Santa's lap and getting to see him face-to-face. He asked if they could run away together to Babylonia like he had always hoped when he was a young man. They would live a simple life as farmers, palling around and causing mischief. Santa told him that he could not ask for another gift and that he didn't want to do that, so Jeremiah didn't get a gift on that tender, joyful Christmas. Jeremiah returned to his homeland a broken man. He continued his professional career to write the biblical book of Lamentations using his heartbreak here as inspiration. As time went on, we saw less and less of Jeremiah and Vern until, eventually, they became just two faces in the decked Christmas halls...

Next in the Christmas line was everyone's favorite prophet, Ezekiel. He sat on Naint Sick of Smyron's snowy Christmas lap to ask for, and hopefully receive, his present. Ezekiel asked for the one thing that he had always wanted – to become the first great Christmas-themed mechanic. Nick Cage of Crayon imbued Ezekiel with the knowledge of a trillion mistletoe

chariots; that's right, Ezekiel became a chariot expert and, therefore, the foundational book of the Bible for *Merkivah* mysticism! Timmy and Tommy became an architect and a contractor.

Ezekiel grew up and married Wendy Peffercorn. They have *nine* kids. They bought Vince's holiday Drugstore, and they still own it to this very snowy, cheerful, Christmas day. Arlo Guthrie was supposed to go up next, but he got really into the sixties and no one ever saw him again. I like to think, on a cheerful Christmas morn such as this, that as I watch the reindeer trample the elves outside the workshop, Arlo made it back to Alice's restaurant for *another Thanksgiving dinner that couldn't be beat*.

Dr. Adam English was the last to sit on Nicholas Cage of Myron's lap. Dr. English sat and thought of what he wanted for Christmas. The snow fell outside of the nearby window at a gentle, but noticeable pace; snowmen sang and sugarplums danced; Reindeer slowly licked their hooves in preparation for their upcoming Christmas flight; Elves loaded the sleigh in the background with Christmas presents for all of the good boys and girls; and yet, the snow that continued to fall outside of the window closest to Dr. English took all of his attention. In one instant, there was but one lonely Christmas snowflake in the window. In this flake, Dr. English



saw his destiny and was dumbfounded. He was to give his most brilliant student – Victor Henry Knight IV – an A+ on his brilliant Creative Writing Christmas Narrative.

Dr. English closed his eyes and clicked his heals three times repeating, “There's no place like home,” with each click. The next thing he knew, he was looking up at Victor who had just finished reading his paper. Dr. English had been so drawn in by Victor's vivid imagery, cultural references, and deep philosophical statements, that he was literally sucked into it for the while. After class, Dr. English rushed *over the river and through the woods* to his office where he

entered a “97” into Victor’s Blackboard gradebook. After Victor got his A+, he went on to study Old Testament at Yale University, under John J. Collins, where he received his M.A.R. and Ph.D. Today, he is the world’s most renowned professor of Comparative Cuneiform Studies and Exegetical Theology; men want to be him and women want to be with him. The End.

A Family Christmas Story

By Kenly Stewart

It was early in the morning when I woke to the rising sun. It had been many years since I had made the journey home. But the order from the Romans was not a suggestion, so I prepared accordingly for the trip. I looked over to my young wife who was still fast asleep near the fire. No need to wake her just yet and deny her a few extra moments of precious sleep. This trip had been harder on her considering how far along she was in the pregnancy, and she would need all her energy for the last track of the journey. If all went well, we should arrive at my hometown by nightfall. We needed to hurry too, because the baby was coming soon and I needed help bringing this new life into the world, especially this child.

As I packed, I thought about how much I had changed since I left home those many years ago. If my parents had lived to see me become a man, I believe they would be proud to know I had become a respectable member of my new community and stayed devoted to the faith and God. Everything I am now I owe to my parents and God. My father had taught me the skills that now provided my livelihood and my mother had instilled in me the importance of faith and knowing the scriptures. This journey home brought both pleasant memories of my childhood and the painful memory of losing them when I was not yet twenty.

In my new community, a small village of a few hundred people, we were all predominately craftsmen of some trade. While the area was not very wealthy, there was plenty of work to be done thanks to the Romans. After a number of bandit raids from Sepphoris, the entire city was destroyed by the benevolent Romans. In hopes of regaining favor with the people, the “king” ordered the city to be rebuilt and renamed Autocratoris. I assume he hopes to capture the

same glory as his father through these building projects, though neither one is truly a king. They are but pawns used by the Romans to appease the population.

After I finished breaking camp and packing the animals, I walked over to where my wife lay, got down on one knee, and gently whispered for her to get up. Her eyes opened slowly and squinted while they became adjusted to the sun. She nodded silently and I helped her stand up. We ate a small breakfast of bread and fish that we had carried with us, and afterwards I helped her mount one of the donkeys. The other carried our supplies. I made sure the ropes attaching the two animals were secured and made sure she was comfortable before we departed for the last part of our journey.



The final stretch of the journey, much like the first stretch, was filled mostly with silence. It was not because my wife had angered me. She was a very obedient and dutiful wife, and very pleasing to the eyes. However, we were separated enough in age that I could be her father and we had very recently married. A marriage that was... unique to say the least. There had been whispers around town, for small towns live off such gossip, about her being with child before we had married. Further rumors suggested I was considering divorcing her. No doubt she had heard the gossip. A unique beginning to a marriage indeed.

Of course, what no one back in the village knew was that for once all the rumors were true. She was indeed carrying a child that was not mine. She had told me herself before the wedding that she was with child, and like most men, I reacted with anger. But something in her face, an innocence and sincerity in her eyes, calmed me. She explained she did not want this to stop our marriage or bring disgrace to me. But how could a man hope to maintain his honor and wed a bride that was no longer a virgin? Worst yet, she was carrying another man's child.

I did not understand it then and cannot explain it now. Maybe it was her innocence and sincerity, but my rage quickly disappeared. I resolved that the best course of action to keep intact both her and her parents' honor and my honor, was to quietly seek a divorce. There was no reason to publicly embarrass and ruin her future. Besides, there would be some who would argue for a harsher punishment, even death, once the truth was discovered. I wanted more than anything to avoid that outcome. I planned on recommending that her parents send her away until after the child's birth and then she could return. She could claim the child was a distant relative. It was a merciful and well thought out plan, one that proved to be unnecessary.

A quiet voice behind me brought me back to the present. My wife was asking me a question. I had to ask her to repeat it. Once again she softly asked me, "Do you remember what we agreed to name him?"

I turned back and confirmed I indeed remembered. After my answer she sunk her head low and I knew there would be no more talking between us for a while. This had not been the first time she had asked me, but I was not annoyed and I answered each time, "Yes I remember what we agreed to name him." But why does she insist on saying *him*? What if the child is a girl? What will we name her? That thought did not seem to cross her mind. Her main fear was that she would be too weak, or worse, she would die during childbirth, and so I had to promise to name *him* what we had agreed on. The name was important to her, so it was important to me.

We had been on the road for a good part of the day and we were nearing home, the city of my birth and home to my family for generations. It would be night time once we arrived and too late to find accommodations, so we would camp outside the city and go in to be counted in the morning. Hopefully we can be on the road back to our new home the day after tomorrow. As I once again adjusted to the silence and slow rhythm of my feet walking beneath me, I began to

think of that night once again, the night I decided to forsake the divorce, marry her, and raise the child as my own, no matter the consequences.

Being but a simple carpenter, I do not have the words to describe exactly what happened. I had not spoken a word of it to anyone for fear they would think me mad. But I had a dream... or at least I believed it to be a dream. Something... no, someone appeared to me and told me not to fear the marriage or the child that was to be born. At first I tried to ignore this dream or vision, but I could not, so I resolved to take her as my wife and raise the child as my own.

It would be dishonest if I suggested part of me did not care for her already, and that I was not looking forward to being a father. I had been married once before, and had lost both my first wife and child during the birth. I prayed every night this would not be the case for my second wife and her... our child. Yes, I wanted to be married. Yes, I wanted to be a father. But listening to a dream? Maybe I am going mad. No matter, I have faith in the Lord and he will lead me through it.

My thoughts continued to race as the sun began to set but soon we reached the top of a hill and I could see my hometown below. We had made it, our journey complete. I told my wife we would make camp on top of the hill and go into town in the morning. I untied the donkey with our supplies and tied him to a nearby tree. I went to help my wife down, but when her feet touched she stumbled in obvious pain. I had seen similar expressions when my first wife neared the time to give birth. I knew I had little time to waste, and trying to take both animals' would slow us down, so I resolved to leave our pack animal tied and hoped he would be here when I returned. It was an expensive gamble, but I can replace a donkey. My wife and child, I cannot.

I helped her back onto the donkey that she had ridden during the journey. It pained me to see her in obvious discomfort. There was no time to lose. We headed down the hill and

immediately into town. As I feared, because of the large number of visitors in town due to the Roman proclamation, there were no rooms available. I ran to multiple taverns and inns asking for an available room but met defeat at each one. I turned away from the door of one inn, after another failed attempt, and ran to check on my wife. She was now barely able to contain her pain. The child was coming soon. I prayed silently, “Lord please help us, your servants.”

As soon as I was done saying this silent prayer, the Lord provided. The door I had just walked away from in defeat opened, and the innkeeper and his wife stood in front of us. The innkeeper offered the small stable behind his inn and by this point it was better than nothing. His wife also offered to help deliver the baby, assistance I gladly accepted. The innkeeper escorted us around to the stable while his wife went to get blankets and water for the birth and wine to calm my nerves. We got my wife down and in a comfortable position, while the donkey helped himself to a well-deserved meal.

The innkeeper’s wife came back and told us the baby would be coming very soon. She began to help my wife get ready for the delivery of the child. At this time a thought came to my



mind that I had not really thought about since the dream. This child was not mine. How was I to love a child that was not mine? How was I to be a father and raise a child that was not mine? For the first time since the dream or vision that convinced me to continue through with the marriage, I began to have serious doubts, doubts that I had not had on the entire journey. With doubt now flooding my mind, I went outside while the innkeeper’s wife began to encourage my wife to push.

I paced back and forth outside trying to decide what to do. I had decided to marry her and raise the child, but if I could not love the child as my own, was it right to attempt to even be the father? As these thoughts plagued me, I soon heard crying from the inside of the stable. The

innkeeper came outside and congratulated me on my new son. Slowly I gathered the courage to reenter the stable and while I could not yet see the child- the boy- I heard him. So did the animals who did not appreciate the interruption to their dinner or sleep. The innkeeper joked and, said to be the cause of such trouble, the kid wasn't much to look at. The innkeeper's wife told him to be quiet and asked if I was ready to hold my son... my son?

When she handed him to me he was concealed by the blanket. All I could see were his small hands and feet. He tossed and turned until I was looking this little bundle in the eyes. He then wrapped his small hand around my finger. All doubts I had a few minutes before went away. He was my son and I would love him until my last breath. I said a silent prayer thanking the Lord for his mercy on me, my wife, and my new son. The innkeeper commented that he looked just like me. I bent down and sat, carefully holding my son in my arms until I was beside my wife. She looked up with tears in her eyes but beaming with pride. I asked her softly, "Mary... Mary are you okay?"

She looked at me and smiled and said she was proud to be the wife of Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth, and happy to be a mother. I smiled back, looking at my son in my arms and Mary beside me. I was truly blessed by the Lord. A miracle had happened this night in Bethlehem, the city of David. The innkeeper's wife asked his name. Without hesitation I responded, "This is my precious son, Jesus."