

Christmas Cheer



The Christmas Tree Angel



by Kathy Warnes

Jackson sat up in bed so quickly that he kicked his dog Sherman who slept on a quilt at the foot of his bed. Sherman jumped off the bed yipping sleepily.

‘Hurry, Jackson, it’s snowing,’ his mother called up the stairs.

“Today’s Christmas tree day!” Jackson told Sherman. “Coming, Mama!” he shouted. Quickly he pulled on his knickers and shirt. Quickly he put his collection in his pocket –the fish hook that had belonged to Grandpa, his jack knife, and some of his best stones from the creek.

“Papa’s already in the woods,” Mama said as she sat a plate of pancakes, eggs, and bacon in front of Jackson. “Eat your breakfast so you can catch up with him.”

“Why couldn’t Papa wait for me?” Jackson asked with his mouth full of pancakes.

“One of the pigs got out and ran into the woods,” Mama said. “Papa had to go after him. He said to follow him to the woods on the other side of the pasture. “

Jackson put on his warm coat and hat and gloves and called Sherman.

“Don’t forget your scarf,” Mama said, tucking the warm blue scarf she had knitted for him around his neck. “The wind is busy today.”

When Jackson opened the back door, the wind blew them out into the dancing snow. Since Sherman was a white dog with black spots, he looked like pieces of coal dancing in the snow.

Jackson and Sherman followed Papa's tracks across the barnyard and pasture. The snow was coming down so hard and fast that it quickly filled in Papa's tracks. Jackson and Sherman entered the silent, snowy woods. Snow topped the tall pine trees like frosting on one of Mama's apple cakes. Snow piled up on the ground like white haystacks.

Sherman jumped into one of the snow haystacks barking, so hard that it sifted into his mouth like flour. Jackson followed him, kicking his feet and spinning his arms to make a snow angel. Suddenly, Sherman stopped barking and froze in his snow tracks. He pointed like the arrow on the weathervane on top of the barn. Jackson sat up. A man wearing a red plaid coat and a coonskin hat stood in front of them. His long brown beard nearly reached down to his black galoshes.

Kindness shone from his blue eyes as he returned Jackson's stare. "You'd better hurry. Your father needs you," the man said.

"Where is he?"

"Listen," the man said.

Jackson listened and he heard the thunk thunk of Papa's axe as it bit into the trunk of a tree.

Jackson ran toward the sound. "Wait for me, Papa!" he shouted.

He ran through the snow, the fresh tangy scent of the pine tickling his nose. The sound of the axe grew closer and closer and finally Jackson saw Papa standing in front of a pine tree holding his axe high in the air.

"Papa, where's the pig?" Jackson cried.

"The pig's long gone," Papa said. "He probably went to the Boone's farm. It's pretty close to here, you know. We can go get him later."

"Why are you cutting the Christmas tree by yourself? You said you couldn't cut down the Christmas tree without me." Jackson said.

"I was remembering your Grandpa. We used to come out here every year and cut our Christmas tree when I was a boy," Papa said.

"The Grandpa that got buried up on the hill before I was born? Mama and me planted daises on his grave last summer."

“That’s the Grandpa. “

“Did you want to be alone with him, Papa? Is that why you didn’t wait for me?”

“I think about him a lot at Christmas,” Papa said. “But now you’re here. You can pull and tug on the tree after I chop a few more licks.”

Papa lifted his axe just as Sherman rushed barking into the clearing. Sherman’s black spots resembling coal dots danced in a circle around Papa. Sherman so startled Papa that he dropped the axe on his hand.

“Ouch!” Papa cried. He grabbed his finger.

“Papa,” your finger’s bleeding,” Jackson cried.

Blood spurted out of Papa’s finger. He grabbed his glove and wrapped it around his finger, but blood quickly soaked the glove. Jackson wrapped his scarf tightly around Papa’s finger. He picked up the axe and with a goodbye glance at the half chopped down pine tree, he started up the path. “We have to hurry back, Papa.” Sherman nipped at their heels making Papa walk quickly.

As they hurried through the woods Papa’s steps got slower and slower and he finally sat down on a tree stump. “I’m tired, Jackson,” he said. “You run ahead and I’ll rest and follow you later.”

“No, Papa, I’m staying here with you. Sherman, go home and get Mama! Go Sherman!”

Sherman ran ahead of Jackson and he and Papa watched the black spots running through the snow.

“Mama should be here soon,” Jackson said. “Does it hurt, Papa?”

Papa didn’t answer him. His head leaned over on his right shoulder and his eyes were closed. Jackson thought maybe a nap might do Papa good. When he woke up they could keep walking home.

“Don’t let him sleep. Keep him talking.” The man in the red plaid coat and coonskin cap stood beside the stump. His long brown beard brushed across Jackson’s hand as he leaned over to examine Papa’s finger.

“Is he going to die?” Jackson asked the man.

“No, we won’t let him,” the man said. “You did a good job of wrapping his finger. Now we have to pack some moss and snow on it to stop the bleeding even more.”

As the snow continued to sift down, Jackson and the man worked on Papa’s finger. Jackson dug some moss from under the snow and handed it to the man. Then he and the man packed piles of snow on top of the moss. Then they tied Jackson’s scarf firmly around Papa’s finger.

Finally, Papa finally lifted his head up and shook it like he was trying to clear it. “What are you doing, Jackson?” he muttered.

“Me and the man are fixing your finger, Papa.”

“What man, Jackson?”

“That man.” Jackson pointed, but he was pointing to empty air.

“Papa, there was a man here.”

“He was wearing a red plaid coat, a long brown beard, a coonskin hat, and galoshes with latches,” Papa said.

“How did you know, Papa?”

“He’s your Grandpa, Jackson. It’s Christmas tree time.”

“Papa, are you feeling any better?”

“I feel a lot better, Jackson. It’s pretty cold out here. Let’s try to get back home.”

Before Papa could get up from the tree stump, Sherman burst through the pine trees with Mama close behind him.

“Shame, on you, Aaron, to scare me like this,” she scolded Papa. She quickly untied the scarf and examined his finger. “The bleeding has stopped. I hitched up the horses to the sleigh and we’re going into town to see Doctor Hewitt.”

Ignoring Papa’s protests, Jackson and Mama helped Papa walk out of the woods and across the pasture to the waiting sleigh. Mama took the reins and they sped away into town to Doctor Hewitt’s office.

Jackson and Sherman stood watching the sleigh disappear. Jackson wondered about the unfinished Christmas tree. "Come on Sherman, let's go get the Christmas tree," Jackson said.

He and Sherman went back across the pasture and through the woods again. They had to make new tracks because the snow had completely covered their old ones. They arrived at the Christmas tree clearing, but the Christmas tree wasn't there. There were no signs that anyone had cut down a tree. Papa's axe was gone too.

Jackson and Sherman walked slowly home. When he and Sherman finally got home, he saw that the Christmas tree nestled snugly on the back porch like it had grown there. Papa's axe lay beside it. As Jackson ran to the tree, he heard someone shout "Merry Christmas!" He looked toward the woods and saw the flash of a red plaid coat through the trees.

Stuart's Spruce Christmas Story

By Kathy Warnes



There were enough spruce trees in Stuart Spruce's family to make up a small woods near the top of Spruce Mountain. His Aunt Mathilda who extended her branches to grab the summit of spruce society told everyone that they lived in a copse of trees, which was her snobbish way of saying they lived in a small woods.

Stuart grew fourth in a zigzag line of his thirty brothers and sisters marching up Spruce Mountain. His father grew close to the top of Spruce Mountain and he stood tall and steady against the winds and snows that circled the mountain top and danced up and down its sides. Stuart's mother grew beside his father, slender and flexible, bending with the winds of time and change. Stuart grew across from his sister Molly. In the winter they threw snow at each other and had creaking contests trying to see who could make the loudest noises when the wild, whistling wind blew through their branches.

In the spring they showered each other with raindrops and sang for summer with their combined branch music.. In the summer and fall, Stuart and Molly grew and stretched out their branches toward the sun. They made shade blankets and stretched them out on the ground for the forest animals to play and rest under.

One day an old man with a long white beard shuffled through the spruce forest. He moved slowly, leaning on a thick wooden stick much thicker than Stuart's trunk. The old man stopped and leaned against Molly. Stuart watched, terrified that the old man meant to hurt his sister. The

old man muttered and sank down into a heap under Molly's branches. Stuart continued watching the old man as the black and gray patchwork quilt of night covered Spruce Mountain.

"Molly, is he hurting you?" Stuart whispered.

"No, but he's breathing like a chattering chipmunk" Molly said.

Stuart whispered to his parents, asking them what to do about the old man collapsed at Molly's feet.

"Cover him with your branches to keep him warm," his parents whispered back.

Stuart and Molly bent over nearly double like they did when the wild, whistling wind blew through their family growing on Spruce Mountain. They covered the old man with their branches and the old man sighed and slept.

Stuart gazed up at Father Spruce to see if his father had any more advice to give. The moon shone like a golden ball and it shone so close that he thought that it had fallen down from the sky and come to rest on Father Spruce's head.

"Molly, the moon is sitting on Father's head!" Stuart cried. "It must have fallen down from heaven."

"Father, the moon's on your head!" Molly and Stuart shouted. Father smiled. "Watch" he told them.

The moon shone so bright that the other trees in the Spruce family thought that morning had come and they awoke yawning and stretching, ready to spend another day with the sunshine and birds and squirrels traveling through their branches. The moon shone so bright that the old man woke up with a start and grabbed his cane. "I've got to keep up!" the old man cried. "Wait for me!" he shouted, struggling to his feet.

Stuart stretched out one of his lower branches to stop the old man and Molly used one of her branches to grab his arm, but the old man kept stumbling through the spruce trees. He had gotten as far as where Stuart's brother Allen grew in the family row of spruce trees, when Stuart heard an answering shout. "Ephraim, are you there?"

"I'm here, I'm here," the old man shouted. "Wait for me, Hezekiah."

The old man called Ephraim stopped and made his way back to Stuart's feet. He sat down and leaned his back against Stuart's trunk. "The moon is bright," Ephraim muttered. "It will light our way the entire journey. But oh, I'm so tired I can't go beyond these trees."

"Ephraim, are you so weary you can't continue?" The man called Hezekiah squatted down beside Ephraim. He had a black beard and his joints didn't creak when he knelt down beside Ephraim.

"I will continue," Ephraim said. "I have rested well under these spruce trees."

Ephraim put his hand against Stuart's bark and scrambled to his feet, but he swayed and almost fell when he tried to grab his stick and walk away.

"You need a bigger and better cane," Hezekiah said. "I'll look around for a tree branch."

"The moon shows enough light to find many branches, but I don't see any," Ephraim said. "I must have a cane strong enough for our journey."

Stuart called the wild, whistling wind. He had just the branch for Ephraim's cane. It grew on his left side about two feet from the ground and it was at least six feet long,

"Give him my branch," Stuart told the wild, whistling wind.

The wild whistling wind tugged the branch loose from Stuart's trunk. Stuart dropped the branch on Ephraim's head.

"Ouch!" Ephraim said, rubbing his head and beard. "I think I have found the wood for my new cane."

Ephraim sat under Stuart and Hezekiah sat under Molly with Stuart's huge branch between them and each whittled and smoothed the branch until they had fashioned it into a large staff.

"It is a true strong cane," Ephraim said proudly.

"We have a fine new cane and the moon will light our way," Hezekiah said, jumping up and dusting off the back of his coat. "Now we must travel with the moonlight so we can finish our journey."

"I'm leading the way now," Ephraim said and he walked into the forest ahead of Hezekiah.

Ephraim walked so well with his new cane that Stuart had donated the wood to make that he walked faster than Hezekiah. They traveled over Spruce Mountain and across other mountains, rivers, and plains. They crossed seas and deserts and finally reached the fields outside of Bethlehem where they joined other shepherds. Ephraim still kept up with the other shepherds, even when they ran to a stable.

"Why are we running?" Ephraim gasped.

"A babe is born tonight," Hezekiah said. "We must witness the birth of this babe."

Ephraim was the first one to reach the stable and see the baby asleep in the hay inside of the manger.

He was the only one to see that one side of the manger was coming apart. He took a piece of Stuart's wood from his cane to fix it before the rest of the shepherds arrived.

Hezekiah walked slowly up to the manger while the rest of the shepherds were still in the distance. "

"What are you doing, Ephraim?"

"I am helping a miracle," Ephraim said. He listened to the wind whistling through the olive trees growing around the stable.

"Listen to the wind whistle," Hezekiah said. "It sounds like the wind on Spruce Mountain."

"The wind in the olive trees will tell the story of Stuart's cane to the wild whistling wind and it will blow across the world and tell Stuart," Ephraim said.

The wild, whistling wind blew the story of Ephraim's cane back to Stuart on Spruce Mountain and Stuart still whispers the story to the rest of the world.

The November Abby Christmas Trees in Copper Harbor, Michigan



By Kathy Warnes

Randy wasn't looking forward to Christmas this year of 1930 in Copper Harbor, Michigan. Miss Bergstrom, his fifth grade teacher told him and his classmates that something called the Depression covered the entire United States and that's why the mills and the mines had shut down. Randy knew from firsthand experience that the Depression had snatched Pa's job in the mine away from him. He knew that from firsthand experience that the Depression forced Ma to make him shirts out of flour sacks to wear to school and it forced her to pack blueberry jelly sandwiches in his lunch.

"Trade you one of your sandwiches for one of mine," Randy's pal Ben said one day at school in late November 1930.

"What have you got?" Randy said.

"A bacon grease sandwich. Ma made it just this morning," Ben said proudly.

"I'll trade you halvesies," Randy bartered. "I'll give you half a blueberry for half a bacon grease."

"Done," Ben said, handing Randy half a sandwich. "What are you asking for Christmas?"

Randy didn't even have to think about his answer. He forced a bleak, hopeless answer: "Nothing."

“Why don’t we go to the lighthouse after school?” Audrey said as she slid beside them on the wooden seat. “Ouch! I got a splinter!” she said, rubbing her leg and working it out with her fingernails. “Got it!” she said.

Randy stared at her. “You are really a dumb sister. Why should we go to the lighthouse?”

Audrey stared back. “You are really a dumb brother. We should go to the lighthouse to ask Dr. Vaughn for a job so we can buy Christmas presents this year.”

“Let’s go!” Ben said.

They went to the Copper Harbor Lighthouse after school.

“This is stupid,” Ben complained. “It’s Christmas time. Dr. Vaughn won’t be around now. He’ll be back in Chicago where it’s about twenty degrees warmer than 20 below zero.”

“Dr. Vaughn has a caretaker and his name is Grandpa Cramer,” Audrey said.

“You mean old Grandpa Cramer? What does he know that we don’t?” Randy said.

“He knows a lot. He knows about the lighthouse and he knows about Douglass Houghton,” Audrey argued.

“Everybody knows about Douglass Houghton. He discovered the copper here. So what else is new?” Ben muttered.

“We need a job and Grandpa Cramer can give us one. That’s what else is new,” Audrey told him.

“Well, here’s the lighthouse. Are you going to be the one to knock on the door?” Randy said.

“Why do they call him Grandpa Cramer?” Ben asked.

“Because his Grandma used to be the caretaker here before he took over,” Audrey said.

“Why don’t people call him Grandchild Cramer, then? Randy wondered.

“Stop being a smart aleck and knock on the door,” Audrey said.

Ben had just raised his hand to knock when Grandpa Cramer flung open the door in their faces.

“Gotta run, have an emergency in the harbor!” Grandpa Cramer exclaimed. “Come back later.”

He hurried past them and ran down the dirt path that led down to the harbor.

“What kind of emergency?” Audrey shouted after him.

“Christmas trees,” Grandpa Cramer shouted back.

Audrey, Randy, and Ben followed him down to the harbor that led out into the vast inland ocean of Lake Superior. As they reached the harbor, sure enough they saw an army of Christmas trees bobbing up and down like summer swimmers soldiering in Lake Superior’s chilly water. Several of them washed up on the beach and Ben ran over and pulled one of them further up the beach so it wouldn’t wash back out into the lake.

Grandpa Cramer pulled several trees out of the surf and Randy ran to help him. Audrey ran over and stood in front of another batch of Christmas trees that washed up onto the beach. “Leave them alone she shouted above the pounding of the surf. They don’t belong to us.”

Grandpa Cramer kept hauling in trees and so did Randy. Ben was the only one that stopped and listened to Audrey. “Who do they belong to then?” Ben shouted at Audrey.

“They belong to Lake Superior!” she shouted back. “They belong to a ship and the people that bought and loaded them on the ship.”

“They belong to the people that pull them out of the water,” Randy said.

“Tell him, Grandpa Cramer,” Audrey said.

“They belong to us. It’s the law of Lake Superior,” Grandpa Cramer grunted and kept pulling Christmas trees out of the water.

Audrey turned around and ran from the harbor to the schoolhouse that stood a few blocks away from the lighthouse. Miss Bergstrom was still there washing the blackboards.

“Miss Bergstrom, “what are you supposed to do with things that wash up on the shore of Lake Superior? she asked. “

Miss Bergstrom brushed a lock of her blonde hair away from her forehead and touched the wrinkles in her forehead thoughtfully. “The tradition says that anything that Lake Superior washes up can be claimed by the person who found it.”

“What about something like Christmas trees,” Audrey asked her.

Miss Bergstrom put down her washing rag with one hand and pulled her coat from the back of her chair with the other hand. “Oh dear,” she said. “It sounds like another Christmas tree ship has gone down. November is such a terrible time for Christmas trees on Lake Superior. Where are the Christmas trees?”

“Down at the harbor. Ben and Randy and Grandpa Cramer are watching them.”

“Let’s go rescue them,” Miss Bergstrom said. She didn’t say whether she meant Ben, Randy, and Grandpa Cramer or the Christmas trees.

Audrey and Miss Bergstrom hurried down to the harbor where Grandpa Cramer and Ben and Randy had collected a huge pile of Christmas trees. Some of them were wet, but most of them were light enough to float and soon the water that had collected on their branches froze in the cold air.

“Christmas trees with readymade icicles,” Miss Bergstrom said.

As soon as Grandpa Cramer saw Miss Bergstrom he said, “I claim these Christmas trees by beach comer’s law.”

“You can do that if you have to, Grandpa, but they probably came from a ship that’s still somewhere out in the lake. Maybe it’s still floating. What about the crew? Are you going to take their cargo before you know if the Lake has taken them or not?”

“It’s getting dark,” Audrey said. “Why don’t we pile up some of the trees and see if we can get them to burn. Why don’t we make a bonfire to guide the sailor’s into shore?”

“You don’t even know that they’re out there,” Randy said.

“I can see the money that we can get for those trees better than I can see the sailors,” Ben said.

“I have four words to say to that,” Miss Bergstrom said. “Remember the Rouse Simmons?”

“That don’t apply to these trees. That ship sank on Lake Michigan and nobody from the crew came in alive. The only thing left alive were the Christmas trees.”

“Do you want the same thing to happen here?” Miss Bergstrom asked him.

Grandpa Cramer put down one of the trees. “Well...

Miss Bergstrom and Audrey glared at Ben and Randy. Together they said, “Do you?”

Ben and Randy started piling up Christmas trees. Miss Bergstrom glared at Grandpa Cramer. There’s a firepot in the schoolhouse, Hezekiah.”

Audrey snickered. “Hezekiah??”

“Not now Audrey,” Miss Bergstrom said sternly. “We must get a fire going here. “You children pile Christmas trees.”

She turned and hurried behind Grandpa Cramer. Audrey and Ben and Randy had built a mountain of Christmas trees by the time Miss Bergstrom and Grandpa Cramer returned with half of Copper Harbor with them. Some of the women carried blankets and others pots of hot soup and hot tea. The men carried grappling hooks and a several lugged and tugged a skiff just in case the waves tamed down enough to allow them to launch it and rescue stranded sailors.

Miss Bergstrom searched the crowd with her eyes.” Hezekiah?” she said softly.

Grandpa Cramer appeared at her side with a firepot which was an iron pan with hot coals in it. Miss Bergstrom took the pan of coals and sat it directly under one of the tree branches. Then she put some small scraps of paper from her pocket on the coals and faced into the wind. The wind blew on the coals and the coals lit the paper. The wind blew the paper flames and fanned them into a strong, steady flame that caught the evergreen branches on fire and soon the pile of Christmas trees was a blazing mountain of fire.

“Anybody out there will see this,” Miss Bergstrom said.

“Nobody out there could have survived,” Grandpa Cramer said.

“Maybe somebody did,” Audrey said. “I think I hear something.” She ran to the edge of water straining to hear above the wind and the people sounds and the flames crackling in the Christmas trees.

“Be quiet everybody!” Audrey shouted. “Somebody’s calling for help.”

The people kept talking, the wind kept blowing, and the flames kept crackling in the Christmas trees.

Ben and Randy and Audrey all shouted together, “QUIET!”

The people stopped talking and moving around, but the wind still blew and the fire kept burning. Above the sounds of the wind and fire, Audrey and the rest of the people heard a faint cry. “Help!”

The men with the skiff hurried to the edge of the water with it and peered down the path that the flames made across the water. Soon a huge wave swept a board raft carrying two men into the flame path. The men tried to paddle with their bare hands, but they were so weak that they didn’t make much progress against the waves. The men on shore quickly launched the skiff and rowed out to the raft. They pulled the men into the skiff and battled the waves back to shore. Just as

quickly, the women filled the rescued sailors with hot tea and soup and dried them out by the Christmas tree fire.

Audrey faded into the shadows beyond the Christmas tree bonfire, but Ben and Randy stayed by the fire long enough to discover that the two men had left Houghton for Copper Harbor on the Abby, carrying a load of Christmas trees to sell in Copper Harbor. The Abby had filled with water and capsized and the two men had managed to climb onto a wooden door and stay afloat until the people from Copper Harbor had rescued them.

“We brought you a load of trees, but we didn’t imagine that you would have to use them this way,” one of the men said.

“I’m glad you used them this way, but I have to explain what happened to the Abby to my wife. The ship was named after her,” the other man said.

Some of the women took the two rescued sailors up to their houses for some clothes and a good night’s sleep before they went back to Houghton to explain what happened to the Abby.

Grandpa Cramer walked over to Ben and Randy. “What did you boys want to see me about?” he asked.

“We wanted a job to earn Christmas money, but you probably don’t have one now,” Randy said.

“I have more than one,” Grandpa Cramer said. “See those Christmas trees burning?”

“They’re still burning,” Ben said.

“When the fire goes out we need to collect bucketfuls of ashes for the outhouses. You know ashes are necessary to keep the outhouses cleaned out,” Grandpa Cramer said.

“Yes, we use our ashes at home for the same thing,” Randy said.

“We’ll have enough ashes for the school and the post office and the lighthouse for a long time,” Grandpa Cramer said. “We just need to haul them off the beach.”

“There are still trees coming in,” Ben said.

“That’s another job,” Grandpa Cramer said. “We need to collect all of the trees that wash in and dry them out. Then we can give them back to their owners,” he said, looking at Miss Bergstrom out of the corner of his eye. “Then, maybe they will sell them to us.”

“I already talked to them about that and they said we could have all of them that we can rescue.” Audrey appeared from behind Miss Bergstrom. “They are very grateful to us for rescuing them and they want their trees to be rescued too.”

By Christmas time, one of the Abby’s trees stood in the center of the town square with decorations made and hung by the children of Copper Harbor. Many of the Abby’s trees decorated parlors and sheltered gaily wrapped packages underneath their boughs. At Ben’s house, the Abby tree ruled over the kitchen, its boughs strung with popcorn chains and paper ornaments. Randy’s Abby tree stood on the front porch with suet ornaments, cranberry chains, and birdseed bells. Randy’s mother and sisters wanted to help the birds survive the Depression, too.

Audrey’s Abbey tree had the strangest fate of all. She put up her Christmas tree by one of the Copper Harbor Lighthouse outbuildings. Audrey set up her tree by the outhouse with the

children's seat because she wanted them to remember the Abby trees when they grew up. They did.

Santa's Christmas Eve Adventure



By Kathy Warnes

"Ho, ho, hum," Santa yawned as he pulled his reindeer to a halt on top of the Brown's roof.

"Slow down Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen. Rudolph, tone down your nose! I'm so tired that I'm going to sit by the fireplace and take a nap after I give Jenny and Adam Brown their gifts."

Santa eased his chubby body into the chimney opening. "You reindeer wait here for me. I'll be back in about an hour." "Ho, ho, hum, here I come!" Santa shouted.

He waited for his feet to touch the bottom of the Brown's fireplace, but his feet still dangled in mid air.

Santa tried again. "Ho, ho, hum, here I come!" he shouted. His feet still dangled in mid air.

"Ho, ho, hum I'm out of luck, Ho Ho Hum, I think I'm stuck!" Santa groaned. "What about my nap? What about the rest of the presents for the rest of the boys and girls?"

Santa made so much noise that he woke up Adam Brown. Adam hadn't been sleeping very soundly anyway because he was too busy dreaming about what Santa was going to bring him for Christmas. When he heard Santa's voice, Adam jumped out of bed and ran to his bedroom window. He saw the reindeer parked on the roof. Adam ran to his sister Jenny's room.

"Jenny, wake up! Santa's reindeer are on the roof. Let's go out and find Santa!"

Adam and Jenny pulled on their winter coats quicker than the blinks of their Christmas tree light. They opened Adam's bedroom window and climbed out onto the roof.

"Why, it's Santa Claus," Jenny said. "Santa, why didn't you stop by the welcome mat at the front door? What are you doing in our chimney?"

"Wow, Santa, can I pet your reindeer?" Adam asked.

"Get me out of here!" Santa shouted. "I have to finish my deliveries. What about Amy's doll and Joshua's truck and.."

"We can push you down the chimney, Santa. Come on Jenny, let's push!"

Jenny and Adam pushed Santa. Jenny pushed on his red knitted hat and Adam pushed on his arm. Santa didn't move.

"Of all the bad luck, I'm thoroughly stuck!" Santa groaned.

"Rudolph's nose is really glowing. Maybe he can light your way down the chimney," Adam snickered.

"That's not very funny," Santa grumbled. "How will I deliver all of these Christmas presents?"

"I know what we can do," Jenny said. "Wait here, Santa. Wait here, Adam."

"What are we waiting for?" Adam asked.

"You'll see. Just wait," Jenny said.

"I don't think I'm going anywhere," Santa said. He squirmed and turned and wiggled, but he didn't go anywhere. Jenny climbed back into Adam's room through the open window. She ran on tiptoe into the bathroom and grabbed two chunky bars of soap. She ran on tiptoe back to the window and climbed out onto the roof again.

"Here, Adam. Help me." Jenny handed Adam a bar of soap. "Soap Santa down," she said.

"Soap Santa down? Don't you mean soap Santa up? Why should I soap him down or soap him up?" Adam asked her.

"Soap him," Jenny said.

Jenny slipped her bar of soap on Santa's right side and rubbed it up and down.

"Ho, ho, ho," Santa giggled. "Hee, hee, hee," Santa chuckled. "Ha, ha, ha," Santa laughed. "That tickles!"

Adam soaped the left side of Santa. "OOOOOFFFFF," Santa wheezed.

"Oh, my belt buckles that tickles!" Santa giggled.

"Push him," Jenny told Adam. "See if we can't push him all of the way down this time."

They pushed on Santa as hard as they could, but Santa didn't slide down the chimney. He still stayed stuck in the middle.

"Maybe we can pull him from the bottom," Jenny said. "Come on!"

They climbed back in the window and ran downstairs. "Shhhh! Don't make so much noise," Jenny said. "We'll wake up mom and dad."

Jenny and Adam ran to the fireplace in the living room. They peered up the chimney. They saw Santa's feet dangling far up in the chimney.

"Maybe we can pull on his feet and get him down," Jenny said.

Adam stretched up his arms, but he couldn't reach Santa's feet. "How are we going to reach them?" Adam asked.

"We can take the poker and pull him down," Jenny suggested.

Jenny and Adam grabbed the poker and shoved it up the chimney. They tried to hook it on Santa's boot, but they couldn't reach. There was at least three inches between the edge of the poker and Santa's black boot.

"What do we do now?" Jenny wondered.

"We can get the wooden stool from the kitchen and stand on it. Then we can reach," Adam said.

"I'll get it." Jenny walked toward the kitchen.

"No, I'll get it. You know, it's too heavy for a girl to carry," Adam said.

"I told you I'd get it," Jenny insisted. "I'm just as strong as you are."

Jenny and Adam both grabbed the stool at the same time.

"I'll get it," Jenny insisted, pulling the stool toward her.

"I have it!" Adam pulled the stool toward him. They both tugged on the stool and it slipped out of their grasp. CRASH! The stool fell to the floor.

"What's going on down there?" Santa shouted from the chimney. "I thought you were trying to get me out of here!"

"What's going on down here?" Mr. and Mrs. Brown both stood in the living room doorway rubbing their eyes. "What are you children doing out of bed at this hour of the night? Santa won't come while you're awake."

"He already came," Adam said.

"No, he didn't," Mrs. Brown told him. "The cookies we left out for him are still on the plate."

"He didn't eat the cookies because he's stuck in the chimney," Jenny said. "He was on his way down to eat the cookies when he got stuck."

Jenny's mother laughed. "Santa stuck in the chimney? You've got to be kidding!"

"I'm not kidding. Look up the chimney, Mom," Jenny said.

Mrs. Brown looked up the chimney. "Santa, is that you?" she shouted.

"It's me and I'm stuck! Get me out of here!" Santa shouted.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown reached up the chimney and pulled and tugged on Santa's feet. Chunks of soot fell down into the living room, but Santa didn't. He stayed stuck in the chimney.

"Oh dear me, what shall we do?" Mrs. Brown said as she swept the soot into the dustpan.

"We could get a crow bar and pry him out," Mr. Brown suggested.

"I have an idea," Jenny said.

She ran into the kitchen and got out a can of red pepper from the spice rack.

"Look, this is the same color as Rudolph's nose," Jenny cried. "Maybe it will work."

Jenny hurried back upstairs to Adam's room. Mr. and Mrs. Brown and Adam ran behind her.

"Jenny, where are you going with the red pepper?" Mrs. Brown asked.

"I know!" Adam shouted. "Hurry up and you'll see."

Jenny opened the can of pepper. "It's just like your nose," she told Rudolph.

"Look at Rudolph smile," Adam said.

"Reindeer do not smile," Mr. Brown said.

"He looks like he's smiling dear," Mrs. Brown said.

Jenny held the red pepper under Santa's nose. "Take a deep breath, Santa," she said.

Santa took a deep breath. AAACCHOOOOOO!"

Take another deep breath, Santa," Jenny said.

Santa took another deep breath. "ACHOOOOO!"

Santa sneezed so hard he blew himself right down the chimney. When Jenny and Adam and Mr. and Mrs. Brown raced into the living room, they saw Santa sitting at the bottom of the fireplace rubbing his forehead.

"That was a rough trip," Santa said. "I won't have time to take a nap now. Here are your gifts. Let me grab one of those cookies and I'll be on my way."

"Are you going back up the chimney, Santa?" Jenny wondered.

"I don't have time to take the chance. Will you hold Adam's bedroom window open for me so I can climb out?" Santa asked.

"We will, Santa," Adam and Jenny said together. They held open the bedroom window while Santa climbed safely out. Jenny kissed Santa goodbye. She and Adam patted Rudolph and the other reindeer on the head while Santa climbed into his sleigh.

"Merry Christmas, Santa," they shouted as he flew away on a gust of cold wind.

"Merry----AH.....CHOOOOOO, Christmas." The breeze from Santa's sneeze flapped the bedroom window curtains and blew the bed around the room. It pushed Jenny and Adam down the stairs to the Christmas tree.

"Merry Christmas, Santa," they said as they started to open their Christmas gifts. "Merry Christmas Father Christmas, St. Nicholas, Pere Noel, Papa Noel, in Santa Klaus, Pai Natal, Babbo Natale!"

The Green Christmas Beer Feud



By Kathy Warnes

Jim started the green Christmas beer feud between Uncle Patrick and his Dad two weeks before Christmas 1926 when most houses in Milwaukee had Christmas trees in their windows and Santa Clauses on their doors. The air was crisp and cold enough to throw your breath back. If the wind blew right, Jim could hear the sleigh bells on Santa's sleigh tinkling.

Since Jim was only seven, he was wrapped up in unwrapping Christmas presents and trying to find out what Ma had hidden in the hall closet. When he burst in the kitchen door that Friday night after school, his cheeks were cherry red from the cold. ”

“Hurry and get washed up. Uncle Patrick is coming for the night,” Ma said.

Jim danced an Irish jig and sniffed the tangy smell of corn beef and cabbage. Uncle Patrick was Dad's youngest brother and favorite uncle.

An hour later, Uncle Patrick burst in the door in a wave of cigar smoke and with bear hugs for everybody. He was wearing a new green cloth hat.

“Gee, I like your hat, Uncle Patrick.” Jim touched a corner of the smooth, green expanse with his fingertips and admired the fur-line ear flaps. He touched Uncle Patrick's ears. They were warm.

“Sit down, sit down, Patrick. Supper's just about ready, “Dad said.” How about a glass of home brew to warm up your insides?”

Uncle Patrick winked at Jim. “I like my insides toasty warm, maybe even boiling hot!” He laughed his hearty, deep laugh that made everyone laugh right along with him. “Still making that

good stuff?” Uncle Patrick watched Dad, settle the crock of beer closer to the radiator behind the kitchen table.

“I’m making up a new batch. It should be ready for Christmas,” Dad said, patting the crock. Jim sniffed the yeasty odor rising from the steaming warmth of the radiator and listened to the sighs of bubbling of content coming from the fermenting mixture.

“Have you changed your mind about telling me your secret recipe?” Uncle Patrick asked sitting his green cloth hat on top of the crock of beer.

“No, Patrick, you ought to know better than to ask that,” Dad chuckled. “It’s Prohibition and we have to make our own secret brew. No, I haven’t changed my mind.”

Uncle Patrick grinned and slapped dad on the back. “Sure and begorrah I would have been disappointed if you’d said anything else, Dan.”

Once in awhile at the supper table, Jim glanced at the green cloth hat sitting on top of Dad’s new batch of brew, Then after supper he helped Ma with the dishes, everybody played gin rummy and Jim forgot about the hat on the beer.

Uncle Patrick could have used his hat at bedtime. He slept in the day bed in Jim’s room while Jim slept in the twin bed. “Sure and begorrah, are you going to leave that window wide open all night, lad? It must be 20 below zero in here!”

“Uncle Patrick, I gotta leave the window open in case Santa and his reindeer fly over and need a place to stop and get warm. Ma told me they make scouting trips sometimes just to be sure of their Christmas Eve route. And I sure wouldn’t want them to freeze to death on our roof!”

“Don’t worry your head about that!” Uncle Patrick’s teeth chattered and he pulled the bedclothes tight enough around him to be a glove. “They’ll freeze to death quicker in here than they will outside.”

Jim didn’t sleep very well, because Uncle Patrick didn’t sleep very well. He kept Jim awake with his shivering and “Sure and begorrah, it’s iceberg chilly in here” every few hours.

Finally, Jim heard Ma rattling around in the kitchen and jumped out of his warm bed. “Uncle Patrick, it’s time to get up. Santa Claus didn’t stop last night, but maybe tonight,” he said, closing the window.

“I can’t get up until I thaw the icicles off my feet,” Uncle Patrick moaned.

Uncle Patrick was still grumbling when he staggered into the warm kitchen where Ma fried pancakes, eggs and bacon. Dad and Uncle Patrick ate them as fast as she could fry them, and Jim

gobbled not far behind them. Jim stopped eating to ask a question. “Dad, do you think Santa Clause might stop tonight?”

Jim moved his chair around a little as he reached for another piece of bacon. As he moved, he exposed Uncle Shamus’ green cloth hat on the beer to Dad’s full view. Dad stopped in mid-bite. “What the devil is that sitting on my beer?”

“It’s my hat, Dan,” Uncle Patrick growled. “And too bad I didn’t have it on my head last night. I nearly froze to death sleeping in that bedroom with that snow man son of yours.”

Dad rushed over to that crock of beer faster than an Irish jig. He grabbed the hat off the top of the crock. The hat made squishing sounds as Dad held it and Jim saw green drops of water dripping down on the floor. The muslin cloth on top was also green. The dye from the cloth hat had seeped into the beer and turned it a bright Shamrock green.

Dad glared at Uncle Patrick. “You’ve ruined my Christmas beer. The whole batch is green!”

Uncle Patrick jumped out of his chair and grabbed the still dripping hat from Dad’s hands. “Beer! Never mind your precious beer, what about my hat? I paid a pretty price for it and your beer took all of the color out of it. What do you put in that stuff, vinegar?”

“None of your business!” Dad bellowed. “And is this another one of your fool schemes to get my beer recipe? If it is, it’s not gonna work.” Dad put his finger in the green beer and then in his mouth. He made a face. “Awful, just awful! Patrick, you ruined my beer!”

“Dad,” Jim said.

Dad stared at his beer, a broken-hearted expression on his face. Uncle Patrick stomped to the closet and took out his coat. He rammed the soaking wet, beer-smelling hat on his head. “Never again will I darken your door, Dan!”

“Dad, I have to tell you!” Jim cried.

Dad glared at Uncle Patrick. “All you care about is your hat!” he hollered. “What about my beer? Beer is harder to replace than a hat! This is Prohibition!”

Uncle Patrick stomped to the door. He bowed to Ma. “I’m sorry for any inconvenience I may have caused you, Rose.” He slammed the door so hard that the breakfast dishes rattled.

“Inconvenience!” Dad shouted. “I just have to throw out a whole batch of green beer that tastes like baked skunk!”

Ma went over and put her arm around Dad. “Calm down, Dan. The beer isn’t worth losing your brother over, is it?”

By the time Ma had calmed Dad down a little, Jim had on his coat. “I’m going after Uncle Patrick.”

Uncle Patrick was almost to his apartment before Jim caught up with him. “Please Uncle Patrick, I have to talk to you.”

Uncle Patrick stared straight ahead and kept walking. “We don’t have nothing to talk about. His beer ruined my new hat and he hollers at me!”

“It was my fault, Uncle Patrick. I saw you put your hat on the beer and I wanted to see what would happen, so I didn’t say anything. I’m sorry, Uncle Patrick. If you come back, I’ll leave the bedroom windows closed when you stay overnight, I promise.”

Uncle Patrick hugged Jim. “Sure and begorra, how can I resist an offer like that?” he chuckled.

Ma was waiting for them in the kitchen doorway. “Finish your breakfasts,” she ordered. Dad and Uncle Patrick shook hands and slapped each other on the back.

“I’ll hang up your coat and hat, Uncle Patrick,” Jim said. Jim took Uncle Patrick’s coat and hung it in the closet and went back for his hat. Uncle Patrick could not get that hat off his head. The beer soaked hat had frozen solidly to his hair. It took Ma two hours to get that hat thawed out enough to take it off Uncle Patrick’s head and five days before Dad and Uncle Patrick would speak to each other.

Finally, Dad and Uncle Patrick wished each other a Merry Christmas. Jim got them laughing when he said, “I guess I’ll have to give you beer hugs instead of bear hugs!”

Christmas Clock Radio, Christmas Engagement

by Kathy Warnes



The old G.E. clock radio sits here in Dad's workshop in the shed behind the garage, solid, reliable and old fashioned, just like Dad. Every year in this workshop, Dad made lots of bird houses and planters to sell at the flea market in the summer. Every year in this shop Dad made a new wooden Christmas tree stand for our Christmas tree and Christmas gifts for people.

It's Christmas Eve and I came out here to recover from my fight with Laurie. Mom would say I was pouting. The old G.E. radio stares at me like it used to when I was a little boy out here working with Dad. It's Christmas Eve and cold and I don't want to be cold, so I put some logs in Dad's old wood burning stove and light some kindling. It doesn't take that old wood stove very long to warm up the place and just out of habit and for old time's sake I turn on the old G.E. radio and sit in Dad's rocking chair.

"It's Christmas Eve and you're playing P.S. I Love You? How can you be so dumb?" I shout at the radio. Don't you know that Laurie and I had a fight this morning? Don't you know you should be playing Christmas carols? Don't you know it's Christmas Eve and I'm alone instead of being with Laurie?"

Suddenly, Dad is here standing by the radio. He turns around, reaches up to the shelf where the radio sits and fiddles with the dial. He turns up the volume. I slap my hands over my ears. I remember this song. Dad and Mom won't ever let me forget this song. It's called P.S. I Love You, and the Beatles sing it. People from my Dad's generation love the Beatles and some backward people from mine still love them, but I don't. Whenever it played, I always said, "Put on something else. Dad, please put on something civilized like Moonlight Sonata or Rhapsody."

I knew Dad would never change the station. I knew he couldn't bear to change the station because P.S. I Love You was Mom's favorite song. P.S. I Love You was playing when Dad asked her to marry him. Mom stands there beside him telling me the story one more time. Every time Mom tells me the story she has a misty, remembering look on her face like she does now. Mom used to tell Laurie the story too. That's part of the reason I'm in trouble now.

When I was still a kid I just rolled my eyes and made gagging noises when Mom told me the story. When I was a teenager I just rolled my eyes and kept working with Dad in his shop. I worked with Dad in his shop listening to his music from that old G.E. radio until I was a senior in high school. By then I had learned to tune out his horrible music with my own and I just grunted and followed my teenager business agenda.

Laurie Adams was the most important item on my teenage business agenda during those years. Just like some of Dad's other horrible songs say, Laurie was the girl next door. She lived next door.-on the right next door side of our house to be exact. I have loved Laurie since the second grade when we were in Mrs. Brown's class and she sat behind me and jabbed me in the back. I had to fight lots of guys to keep them away from Laurie, and for awhile it looked like she was going to go steady with Tim Johnson when I was a junior and she was a sophomore. But I managed to convince her that she should go steady with me instead. Then her Mom made her give me back my ring because she said we were too young to be so serious.

Now I'm old. I'm going to graduate from Cranbook Music School in June and I already have an orchestra spot lined up for me and my violin. Laurie is graduating from Allison University and she already has a job teaching music in an elementary school. I want to give her a ring a second time with a question attached to it, but this morning, Christmas Eve morning, we had a fight, over music of course. Laurie believes in teaching kids songs like Row, Row, Row, Your Boat and Old MacDonald Had a Farm. I believe in starting them out with Mozart and Bach. Dad always said that I'm some kind of genetic throwback to the classical generation, especially when I shudder every time I heard songs like P.S. I Love You. I say I like good music and I will teach my children to like good music. Laurie usually calls me a musical snob in a teasing tone of voice, but she wasn't teasing this morning when she called me an inflexible, musical snob.

All I said was that I would see to it that our children would hear good music before they heard the bad stuff. Laurie took what I said personally. She said that if I didn't respect or try to understand her music that I didn't really respect or try to understand her. She ran out of Dad's wood shop crying.

I touch the old G.E. radio and I feel tears running down my face. It was such a part of Mom and Dad that I couldn't get rid of it after the car accident that killed them. It is the only thing besides my music that is solid in my life. The old G.E. clock radio, my music, and Laurie are the only things I have left. How can Laurie expect me to change my music, the Bach, the Mozart, the Beethoven that I had when Mom and Dad were alive and life was solid?

The old G.E. clock radio blares like someone had turned the volume louder. For the first time I listen to the words of P.S. I Love You. ...”Remember that I’ll always, be in love with you...” I know that I will always be in love with Laurie. Can’t I at least try to listen to something beside classical music and appreciate more than one kind of music? Maybe I am being inflexible like Mom used to tell me.

By the time I listen to the final I Love You! I know I have to find Laurie and make up even if I have to sing all twenty thousand verses of Old MacDonald Had a Farm. I switch off the radio. Maybe she’s still at her Mom and Dad’s.

I reach down to turn the doorknob when it starts turning by itself. Laurie’s startled blue eyes meet my startled brown eyes. She hums a few bars from Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata and then she kisses me.

I put another log in the wood stove and turn the on knob of the old G.E. clock radio again. It’s still playing P.S. I Love You.

“Ei ei oh, Laurie I love you so, “I sing. “Laurie, will you marry me?” I sing.

“I’ve always wanted to get engaged to you at Christmas,” she says.

Now Dad’s old G.E. clock radio is playing, We Wish You a Merry Christmas! and a Happy ever after!

Listen to the Angels!



By Kathy Warnes

Since I've been spending December mornings at home, Bob Cat scratches on my bedroom door until I open it. Then he jumps up in my arms and won't move until I hug him. Right now, I need the hug more than he does, right now that I don't have a job. I bury my nose in his white fur and scratch him behind the ears. He purrs so loud that I call him Bob Cat.

Bob isn't really a bob cat. If he had to swear with all four paws on the Bible about his ancestry, he would claim alley cat. Technically, Bob isn't even a true alley cat. He is part tabby, part calico but mostly mystery. He can't wipe his paw prints on any definitive feline door mat. He's definitely a fat cat because he doesn't do much of anything all day except eat and sleep and he wouldn't recognize an alley if it rolled a garbage can at him.

I feel flattened like an alley has rolled a garbage can at me since I 'm not getting up and going to work every day. Two months ago Mr. Brunner called me into his office and told me he was laying me off. I signed up for unemployment right away, and I started sending out resumes and trying to network a new job, but the economy is flattening job hunters like a garbage truck, not a garbage can. I know it's early to expect anything, but I do anyway. I have several interviews, but nothing happens.

My emotions are as tangled as Bob Cat gets my shoe laces when he plays with them. Some days I feel like I'm on vacation and I eat popcorn and catch up on my movies. Other days I spend glued to my computer, chasing an elusive job that moves faster than a mouse click. "The jobs that are there go faster than a mouse click," I complain out loud. Bob's ears wiggle at the word mouse, but he isn't motivated enough to move out of the recliner.

He can stay in the recliner. My boyfriend Tim's coming over for dinner tonight and I have to become human before he arrives. Becoming human involves cleaning house, cooking dinner, and talking calmly, not screaming the word JOB multiple times. Bob doesn't clean. When Bob isn't sleeping, he is a retriever. He slips a sliding paw in my dresser drawer and brings my underwear out into the living room for show and tell. Tim enjoys that. One day last week, Bob slipped and slid a paw into my purse and fished out a twenty dollar bill. He pranced proudly into the living room with the money in his mouth. I managed to retrieve it before he ate it.

Today Bob needs to stay out of trouble. Today I am going to put up my Christmas tree and Tim is coming over tonight for a tree admiring party. The tree branches scratch my face as I take it out of the box and suddenly there are tears in my eyes. My tears keep falling on the ornaments as I put them on the tree. They're so bright with the hope and promise of Christmas, yet they spend most of the year waiting for new life in dark shadowy boxes. "Sort of like my life at this point," I tell Bob.

Bob twists my Christmas spirit to fit his own agenda. While I'm in the bedroom looking for my extra Christmas tree skirt, he wrestles an ornament off of my newly decorated tree and bats it around the floor. The ornament retaliates by shattering into several reproachful pieces. While I clean up the ornament mess and eat lunch, Bob moves on to the next activity. This time he investigates my choir of angels that I put under the Christmas tree every year. While I am washing up my lunch dishes Bob makes friends with the angels. He gets overly friendly with a Styrofoam angel with a song book in her hands. After lunch when I go in to hang extra ornaments on the tree I discover a headless angel with a song book in her hands in the angel choir.

I interrogate Bob for the rest of the afternoon and even threaten him with the torture of no cat food in the can, but he doesn't tell me what happened to the Styrofoam angel's head. Somehow in my mind the headless angel becomes the Grinch in my Christmas – the Christmas that losing my job and feeling worthless has stolen. I sit on the couch by the Christmas tree and cry.

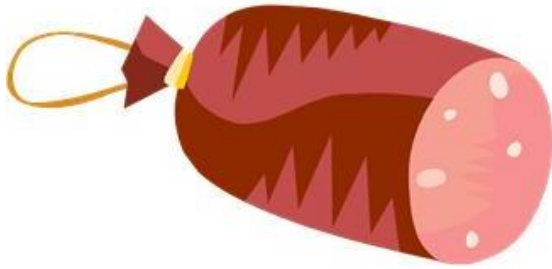
I want to curl up on the couch under my afghan and eat chocolates for the rest of my life. I want to throw the words resume, job, and earn a living in the garbage disposal and chop them into atoms. Bob jumps up in my lap and rubs his head against my chin. I bury my face in his polka dotted fur and keep time in my head with the steady rhythm of his heart. He licks my hand and purrs and I feel the warmth of his love. He depends on me. He knows that I am his source of cat food and comfort. I may want to throw up my hands and throw in the towel, but Bob will be there. He'll rub against my thrown up hands when he's hungry and retrieve the towel when he needs it. What's worse, he'll keep depending on me and purring at me.

I need to depend on me. I need to retrieve the angel's head. I look in Bob's favorite hiding places – one behind the refrigerator and the other under my bed. All I find is cat hair, dust, and a toy mouse I bought for him. I move to the living room and investigate the bookcase. No angel. I check behind the couch. The Styrofoam angel's head isn't there. All I find is a pair of my socks that Bob retrieved from my dresser drawer. I keep looking and late in the afternoon I find the Styrofoam angel's head behind the recliner.

I retrieve the Styrofoam angel's head and get out my Super Duper glue. It takes me a good hour, but I kept trying and drying until I get that angel's head glued back on. Fixing up the angel makes me late fixing dinner so the spaghetti is still boiling when Tim rings the doorbell.

I throw open the door and hug Tim. "Dinner isn't ready yet, but a headless angel and a Bob Cat angel talked to me this afternoon and I'm going to keep listening."

A New Kind of Spam for Christmas



By Kathy Warnes

On Christmas Eve, 1944, the American soldier knocked at the door of the wooden house, one of the last in the circle on a bomb pitted street located on the outskirts of Marseilles. Half a block away, a circle of American soldiers sat eating.

One of the soldiers said, “Spam, like war, has been around forever.”

Another soldier said, “It’s kept up with the times. It will probably change for the better when the world changes for the better.”

The American soldier knocked harder, drowning out the sound of their voices. He didn’t have time to listen to such nonsense. He clutched the canteen closer to his chest. Andy had given him the canteen and whispered directions to this house. He listened intently for the sound of footsteps inside.

All he heard were the American voices. Americans had occupied Marseilles since last August. He remembered that the generals had called their battle Operation Dragoon. He and his buddies were from the U.S. Seventh Army that had landed in southern France and fought its way inland. In the following days the French First Army arrived and the French and Americans had driven German Army Group G to the Vosges Mountains near the border with Germany. He and Andy had fought their way to Marseilles together and Andy had told him about Claudia and the child and promised him a warm welcome at his mother in law’s house.

Now he heard footsteps inside, so he knocked harder. “Don’t be afraid- n’avez pas peur- he shouted in French. I am an American.”

He cleared his throat and looked across the street at the skeletons of houses. He shivered. War produced enough human and building bones to destroy the skin of civilization.

Slowly the door opened and he looked into the softly faded blue eyes of an old woman. The rest of her face was covered with a bright red and green plaid shawl, but somehow he knew that she had seen many winters in this city called Marseilles. Marseilles had been one of Andy’s last words.

He held out the battered canteen to her and she took it in one hand and with the other led him into the room. She pushed him into a chair by the fire. "Sit down and warm yourself," she said.

The soldier took off his fatigue jacket and draped it over his knees. The old woman took the jacket from his knees and hung it on the back of the other wooden chair and moved it closer to the fire. She carefully placed the canteen on the hearth, next to a pair of slippers resting there. Then she returned to the soldier who fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

The soldier finally broke the silence. "How is it that you speak English?" he asked.

"My daughter married an American. I visited her in America. How is it that you speak French?"

"My mother spoke French and my Dad spoke German. It's been handy speaking both of them," the American soldier said. He moved closer to the fire. "Winter is milder in these parts than it is back home, but I'm cold anyway."

"It is cold, the old woman said. She sat in the chair opposite the soldier and they silently watched the firelight melt into the canteen, making it glow liquid fire like sunlight on a Mediterranean June day.

The old woman reached out and rubbed her finger across the canteen. "It is a santon of this war," she said.

"It is Andy's. He told me Claudia bought it for him. "The American soldier didn't look at her. "He asked me to give it to her," he said, staring into the fire.

"I have a santon to give to you," she said. She hoisted herself up from the chair and walked over to the chest of drawers sitting in a shadowy corner of the room. The American soldier watched her rummage through the drawers.

"I know I don't know much French, but I've never heard of a santon," the American soldier said.

"The figures in the manger are called santons. Skilled artists make them and they have passed their knowledge down from father to son for generations. The santons are made in the images of Provencal residents. Their costumes reflect Provence so much that some French people sarcastically say that by looking at a manger with santons, one would conclude that Jesus was born in Provence. The old woman continued to rummage through the drawers while she spoke.

"Where do you buy a santon?" the American soldier asked her.

"In the marketplace before the war, but now they are scarce."

"How did the custom begin?" the American soldier asked. He really wasn't that curious, but he had to say something to break the silence.

“St. Francis of Assisi made the first santon in Italy centuries ago. He was a man of peace. We make his santons here, just here in Marseilles.”

“There hasn’t been much peace in this century,” the American soldier said.

The old woman kept talking like she hadn’t heard the American soldier. “He made a stable out of pieces of wood and then he put in moss and straw. He put in figures of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and the villagers who rode to Bethlehem on donkeys and oxen to witness the birth of the Christ Child.”

Bitterness dripped from the American soldier’s voice. “I know, it’s that time of the year- the Peace on Earth good will toward men time. But you have no Christmas tree and you said St. Francis lived in Italy, not France.

“The people from Italy carried the custom of the santon across the border into Marseilles and we have celebrated it since. We make santons instead of Christmas trees. The custom did not spread to the rest of France.”

Suddenly the American soldier stood up so quickly that he knocked over the wooden chair. His mind groped for something to absorb his anger at the horror and waste and brutality of it all. His fingers groped for something to smash his anger against. Andy should be sitting here talking to his mother-in-law, not him. He picked up a block of wood that stood on the scarred fireplace mantle. He threw it into the fire so hard that sparks scattered onto the bare wooden floor and he had to stomp them out with his heavy boots.

The old woman didn’t even turn around. She kept rummaging in the drawer. The American sat down hard in the chair and put his head in his hands. He felt tears seeping through his fingers. He heard the shuffling sounds of the old woman shifting through the drawer’s contents.

Then he felt a touch on his shoulder. He raised his head and saw that the old woman had put her arm around him. “I had forgotten,” she said. “The santon was on the mantle. It is the figure of a woman washing clothes and a lamb running beside her. The lamb is the pet of the washerwoman.”

“Why would St. Francis send me a figure of a woman washing clothes?” he asked, his voice choked with laughter and tears.

“The washerwoman , too, came to the crèche to see the Christ child. So did the lamb,” the old woman told him.

The old woman looked at the mantle. Then she looked at the fire where a lump of wood still burned. “My husband carved the lamb with Claudia when she was a child. It was their santon. Claudia will teach her children to carve their own santons.”

Jumping up, the American tried to rake the burning wooden lamb out of the fireplace, but it had burned to ash by this time. He sat in his wooden chair, trying to choke out “I’m sorry,” over the tears in his soul. He sat and stared at the pile of ashes.

The old woman hurried to the wall cupboard and took out a loaf of bread and some cheese. “It is Christmas Eve and they are coming.”

The American jumped at the knock at the door and reached for his weapon. Before he could point it, the old woman opened the door. A young woman with long, dark hair stood there, holding a little girl by the hand.

“Joyeux Noel, Mama,” she said. The little girl threw off her shawl and ran over to the old woman. Joyeux Noel, Grandmamma,” she cried. “I have learned a new song. Listen, Grandmamma,

“Let there be peace,
No more war
We will ne’r tire of praying,
No more war. Let there be peace.”

The old woman patted the American’s hands. “The goodness of bread, the gentleness of the lamb,” she said.

The American soldier reached down and picked up the tarnished canteen from in front of the fireplace. He walked over to the young woman and handed her the canteen which still shone with firelight, even though the soldier had carried it away from the fire. It reflected the glint of tears in the young woman’s eyes.

The little girl laughed and took a package from under her shawl. “I have brought Christmas dinner,” she said.

“I saw you take something from that soldier,” her mother laughed. I hope it is not cigarettes. “

“No Mama, the soldier did not give me cigarettes. He gave me a tin of something.” She ran over to the American soldier and put the tin in his hand. “What is this?” she asked him.

The American soldier laughed through his tears and he knew that somewhere, somehow Andy was enjoying the symbolism that he hoped that in the post war years he could explain to his wife and child.

“It’s Spam,” he said. A new kind of Spam.”

The Christmas Coal Box

By Kathy Warnes



“I don’t want to go to grandma’s for Christmas! She’s old!”

Tammy stared at me, her green eyes so much like Josh’s blazing with indignation. “It’s just so boring there, mom. There’s nobody to hang out with and you and grandma just sit and talk about things that happened a hundred years ago.”

“At least it’s only a hundred years ago,” I said. “Two hundred would be too much!”

She sighed as loud as she could. “Oh mom, you always exaggerate!” She got up from the couch. “I’m going to do my homework.”

I sighed back as I heard the door of her room click shut. I hadn’t told her the worse part of our Christmas story yet. Our trip back to my mother’s house in Hayes wasn’t just going to be a visit. It was going to be permanent for a couple of reasons. My salary wouldn’t stretch to cover our mortgage and car payments and other living expenses here in the big city of Detroit. I had gotten a job with a small legal firm in Hayes. I called the realtor and put up the house for sale this morning and I also called mom who was delighted. She had been urging me to come back to Hayes to make a new start for years. Tammy and I would live with her until I found a house for us. I wanted Tammy to grow up safe and with a good foundation of values.

Mom laughed. “You didn’t always think my values were so good.”

“I’ve done a lot of growing up in the past few years, mom.”

“Yes, you have Karen, but you’ve got to remember that Tammy is still a kid, even though she’s a mighty teenager!”

“That’s right, she is a mighty teenager!” I had to keep reminding myself that Tammy is indeed a teenager. She had turned thirteen on October 25th. It was hard to believe that she had grown so fast. She had been the center of my life since she was born and now she was the biggest obstacle that I had to overcome to make the move smoothly and I wasn’t at all sure I could do that. In fact, my stomach had enough knots in it for a major macramé project.

The knots just got tighter on the two hour drive to Hayes. “Did you remember to pack the coal box?” I asked Tammy as we settled into the car and fastened our seatbelts. “

“I forgot where it is, mom.”

“Tammy how could you? “ I shut off the ignition. “You have to find it before we can make a move. And you heard the weather report. We’re supposed to get four inches of snow and you know I hate driving in the snow.”

“Chill out, mom.” She fumbled in her backpack. “I was just kidding. It’s in here.” She waved the coal box. “I don’t know why you’re getting so excited. It’s just a piece of coal in a coal box.”

The coal box. That’s what she called it when she was a little girl. Mom had somehow mounted the piece of coal in a box made out of some kind of transparent plastic so you could see it laying there on its piece of cotton backing like a big black diamond.

“It’s more than a piece of coal, Tammy. You know the story. I’ve told it to you from day one.”

“I know the story, mom.”

“You used to ask me to tell it to you over and over.”

“I grew up, mom. It’s a kid story.”

I spent the two hour drive to Hayes trying to explain to Tammy why her grandma’s story wasn’t a kid story. At least trying to change her mind about the story took my mind off the knots in my stomach tied around trying to tell her that we were moving permanently to Hayes.

My knots got untied a lot sooner than I thought. In fact, mom told Tammy while she was helping us carry our suitcases to our rooms. “I have a surprise for you Tammy,” she said. “Now that you’re going to stay here for a while, I decided that it would be a good idea to redecorate your room. We can go shopping after Christmas.”

Tammy slammed down her suitcases. “What do you mean we’re going to stay permanently? We’re just here for the Christmas holidays, and then we’re going back home!”

Mom looked horrified. “Karen, I thought you would have told her already. I’m so sorry.”

Tammy glared at me. “Told me what, mom?”

“I was hoping that we could have a calm discussion about this, Tammy. “

She sat on her suitcase. “Tell me what, mom?”

“I’ve put up the house for sale, Tammy. We’re going to stay in Hayes permanently and here with grandma until we find a house of our own.”

Tammy didn’t react the way I thought she would. She didn’t throw her suitcases around the room or open them and throw her clothes out the window. She just sat down on the bed like she was in a trance.

I walked over and put my arm around her. “Honey, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner. I wanted us to have a nice Christmas without arguing.”

Mom went over and sat beside Tammy on the bed. She put her arm around Tammy. ““You don’t know the entire coal box story, Tammy. Even your mother doesn’t even know the entire story.”

I sat down on the bed beside them. “What’s the entire story, mom?”

Mom got up and walked over to Tammy’s backpack. “Where’s the coal box, Tammy?”

Tammy fumbled around in her backpack and handed the coalbox to mom.

“Listen to me and I’ll tell you the important part of the coal box story,” mom said.

We listened, even though Tammy rolled her eyes and fidgeted. Mom didn’t seem to be worried about how we were listening. She just went ahead and told her story.

“It was 1932 and my brother Bert and I had been playing the railroad tracks game since the summertime. The railroad tracks game worked like this. Mother gave Bert and me each a basket and we walked the two blocks to the railroad tracks. After the 5 o’clock train to Trenton went by we raced each other along the tracks, picking up coal and putting it in our baskets. Whoever raced home to mother first with a full basket of coal won the game. I was so proud of myself, because I won ten games to Bert’s nine.”

Tammy stirred restlessly. “What’s the point, grandma?”

“The point is, Tammy, it wasn’t really a game. “

“How did you figure that out, grandma?” Tammy sounded interested, even though she tried not to show it by stuffing some bubble gum in her mouth, chewing it, and blowing a large bubble.

“Mother told me,” grandma said. “It was Christmas Eve and I remember how excited I was because sometime during the night Santa Claus would slide down the chimney, take plenty of presents out of his bag, and put them under the Christmas tree for me and Bert. Bert and I had already trekked to the woods a few weeks back and chopped down a little pine tree. We dragged it home through the snow and that night after supper mother popped popcorn while father strung strings of cranberries. We all decorated the tree and it looked beautiful.

“Christmas Eve came and Bert and me were fighting about what presents Santa Claus would bring us. Mother turned to stoke the stove and a worried look came over her face. She asked me and Bert to play the railroad track game. I complained, but Bert kicked me real hard. We went out to play the railroad track game. Bert and me scuffled through the snow looking for coal. I remember that my boots had a hole in the toe and every time I scuffed fresh, wet snow covered my toes. When I had told mother I needed new boots she got a worried look on her face and told me we’d go shopping for them after Christmas.”

“Bert was still arguing with me about our presents when it hit me. This wasn’t really the coal box game or the railroad tracks game. Mother really needed the coal that Bert and I picked up for the stove. It wasn’t a game, it was real life. “

“What did you do, mom?” I asked her.

“I did the right thing, of course. I kept arguing with Bert about Christmas presents and raced him extra hard, throwing chunks of coal in my basket.”

I laughed and hugged my mother. “You would do the right thing, mom.”

“I also told Bert how much mother and father depended on us for the coal. In included him in the game. It’s pretty important to include people in the game if you want them to play well.” She looked at me and then she looked at Tammy.

“Now I’m going downstairs to start dinner while you and Tammy unpack.” She tucked the coal box back into Tammy’s backpack and hurried downstairs.

“Tammy, I am sorry. I hope you can forgive me for not including you in the decision or at least telling about it. It’s just that I’m so used to having to deal with things myself that I automatically make decisions that way. I keep forgetting that you turned thirteen in October and you’re old enough to participate now.”

She didn’t look at me. “That’s alright, mom. “

She said the words but they came out curiously flat. She started taking things out of her suitcase and putting blue jeans in her bottom drawer. There was nothing left for me to do but go to my old room and unpack my bags.

Tammy seemed to settle in over the next few weeks before Christmas. She said that Hayes Middle School was okay and even brought Sarah, a new friend, home for dinner one night. She helped me and mom cut a Christmas tree in the same woods that mom and her brother Bert had

cut their Christmas tree so long ago. We trimmed the tree together, with the help of mom's friend Mr. Adams. She stressed the word friend when she told us that she had invited Mr. Adams or Kenneth as she called him, to help us trim our tree.

I was settling in as well. I liked my job and Sam my boss and he liked me too. His father Daniel Carr had established the firm before both Sam and I were born. Sam had been a few years ahead of me in school, so I hadn't known him really well when we were growing up. By the time I reached dating age, he was already in college. Sam's mom and my mom were friends, so I heard about his progress through law school, passing the bar, getting married and going to work in his father's firm after he retired.

Then I lost track of Sam because I was busy graduating from college, marrying Josh, giving birth to Tammy and trying to earn a living for us. I admit, I had had a brief crush on Sam in high school, but he never paid any more attention to me than saying hi once in awhile as we passed each other in the hall. Now he was back in my life and he made it brighter. It's hard to be down on life when a handsome lawyer with red hair and a dusting of freckles across his nose keeps telling you how smart and dedicated you are. I actually went as far as calling the university law school and making an appointment to see an admissions officer after the holidays because he encouraged me to follow my law school dream.

I didn't see the Christmas Eve disaster coming. Tammy blindsided me and I knew she had been planning it for weeks. It wasn't just on purpose, it was premeditated. Mom had invited Kenneth over for Christmas dinner and Sam and his mother and father were coming to dinner as well. Tammy had seemed particularly happy these last few days before Christmas, busily wrapping gifts and singing Christmas carols like she had when she was a little girl. She asked if she could go over to Sarah's house for a few hours on Christmas Eve and I told her she could as long as she came home early enough to spend the rest of Christmas Eve with us. I didn't think anything of it when she said, "It's going to be fun spending Christmas Eve at home."

Tammy and mom and me cut out cookies and baked them most of Christmas Eve day and put the finishing touches on the house. Tammy left about seven o'clock to go over to Sarah's and I reminded her to be home by ten o'clock for the umpteenth time. She smiled and said, "I'll be home by ten, mom."

Kenneth and mom and me and Sam (yes, Sam dropped by because his mom wanted to know if she could bring anything for the dinner tomorrow) drank Christmas eggnog and ate Christmas cookies and talked and laughed. Some carolers came by and we joined them in walking around the neighborhood singing "Deck the Halls With Boughs of Holly," "Jingle Bells" and the rest of the Christmas carols. We got back around 10:00 and I was sure that Tammy would be waiting for me in the armchair by the fireplace.

She wasn't. Kenneth built a fire in the fireplace and he and mom sat watching the flames and holding hands. I paced the floor and Sam paced with me. Finally, I decided to call Sarah to see what was keeping Tammy. Sarah didn't know what I was talking about. She told me that she and Tammy hadn't made any plans for Christmas Eve.

I don't remember hanging up the telephone or crying, but suddenly I was in Sam's arms and was patting me on the back. "We'll find her, Karen, I promise," he said. "Maybe she just wanted a little time to herself."

"Where would she go to have time to herself besides her room?" I sobbed. "And she isn't there." I ran upstairs and opened the door to Tammy's room just to double check with Sam right behind me. I turned on the light and looked around. I even looked under the bed, but no Tammy. The only thing out of place in her room was the coal box. She had left it sitting on the dresser instead of putting it on top of the Christmas tree where mom had asked her to put it.

Tears filled my eyes, but I managed to stumble over to her dresser and slip the coal box in my pocket. Then, I had a revelation, just like mom had had a revelation about the coal box so many years ago. Tammy's words flashed across my vision like a pop up on my computer. "I'll be home by ten, mom," she had said. Was there a hidden meaning to her words?

"Where did she mean by home?" Sam said and suddenly I knew. Tammy would head for the only home she had ever known, the one she hadn't wanted to leave. Tammy had headed back to Detroit. I just had to solve the riddle of how. "I know she wouldn't hitchhike," I told Sam.

"How else would she get there?" Sam asked.

I had another flash of insight. "The coal box. That's why she left it on the dresser. She's going to try to take the train back to Detroit." I sat down hard on Tammy's bed.

"How?" Sam asked.

"She'll take the train," I said.

"How? I think it only goes as far as Trenton, and besides, it hasn't carried passengers for years," Sam said.

"She could get in one of the freight cars and ride in," I said. "Our house in Detroit isn't that far from the railroad tracks."

Sam pulled me to my feet. "Maybe we can catch up with her before the train leaves."

Sam and I didn't even have time to tell mom and Kenneth where we were rushing off to, but mom knew. She hugged me while I was pulling my coat on. "You'll make it in time," she said.

Sam drove since he knows that I hate driving in snow and big fluffy flakes were gliding down like parachutes, looking like white lace doilies against the velvety black sky. A star shone brightly a few blocks ahead of us and it seemed to hover directly over the railroad yard. It steady light shone a pathway across the sky. Only half joking I said, "I feel like one of the wise men following the star of Bethlehem."

He smiled and put his hand over mine and squeezed it.

Even with Sam's skillful driving we slid a little as we pulled into the railroad yard. We got out and hand and hand we walked to the tracks. There was no train in sight, but Tammy was sitting in the rickety old wood shed that stood beside the tracks. I rushed over and hugged her. Dan followed me and put his arm around her. "Are you alright?" he asked her.

She didn't look at me, but she smiled at him. "You figured it out, Sam. You figured out that I wanted to spend Christmas Eve at home, but I don't know where home is."

He hugged her. "Your mom figured it out. You knew she would, didn't you Tammy? I came along to help your mom because I care about you both very much. You know that too don't you?"

This time she looked at me and the starlight was bright enough for me to see tears glistening in her eyes. I reached in my pocket and handed her the coal box. We drove the two blocks home through the snow covered streets. Mom and Kenneth were standing in the doorway watching and waiting for us. As soon as Sam had stopped the car, Tammy had the door open. She ran past mom and Kenneth.

We got into the living room just in time to see Tammy put the coal box on top of the Christmas tree. "This isn't a game, it's real life, mom," she said, smiling at us all.

Behind the Scenes with Christmas Songs



Do You Hear What I Hear? A Christmas Carol and a Prayer for Peace



by Kathy Warnes

Noel and Gloria Regney wrote Do You Hear What I hear? a timeless Christmas prayer for peace during the Cuban Missile Crisis in the Cold War

In October 1962, musician Noel Regney walked through the streets of Manhattan, the weight of despair in his heart reflected on the unsmiling faces of the people that he passed on the street. A war of words and maneuvers called the Cold War held the world in an icy grip, with the United States and the Soviet Union the principal combatants.

During these last two weeks in October 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union were heating the Cold War to the nuclear boiling point in a confrontation over the Soviet Union installing missiles capable of striking most of the continental United States in Cuba, just 90 miles away. History labeled this confrontation the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Noel Regney Feels the Weight of Despair and the Lightness of Hope

Said the night wind to the little lamb,/Do you see what I see/Way up in the sky little lamb,/Do you see what I see/A star, a star, dancing in the night/With a tail as big as a kite,/With a tail as big as a kite.

Noel Regney felt terrified for his family, his country, and for the survival of the human race. He had fought in World War II and had experienced the fear and terror of war and death first hand.

Now he worried that the secure life he had built for himself and his family in the United States teetered on nuclear brinkmanship.

He tried to think about something else. Christmas, the time of peace on earth and good will, hovered just a few months away and a record producer had asked him to write a Christmas song. He later recalled that he thought he would never write a Christmas song because Christmas had become so commercial.

Then on his way home, Noel saw two mothers taking their babies for a walk in their strollers. He watched the two babies looking at each other and smiling and his mood lifted from despair to hope. Noel's mind turned to poetry and babies and lambs. By the time he arrived home, he had composed the lyrics of *Do You Hear What I Hear?* in his head.

Noel and Gloria Shayne Regney Compose *Do You Hear What I Hear?* Together

Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy, /“Do you hear what I hear? / Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy, /Do you hear what I hear? /a song, a song, high above the tree/with a voice as big as the sea.

As soon as Noel Regney arrived home, he jotted down the lyrics that he had written in his head and he asked his wife Gloria to write the music to match his words. The Regneys usually collaborated using the exact opposite method – Gloria would write the words and Noel would write the music. This time they switched roles.

Gloria Regney later said, “Noel wrote a beautiful song and I wrote the music. We couldn't sing it through; it broke us up. We cried. Our little song broke us up. You must realize there was a threat of nuclear war at the time.”

Noel Regney Experienced War First Hand

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty king, /“Do you know what I know? /In your palace warm, mighty king, /Do you know what I know? /A Child, a Child shivers in the cold—/Let us bring him silver and gold.”

Noel Regney seemed destined for a brilliant music career in his native France. He studied at Strasbourg Conservatory and at the Conservatoire National de Paris. Then Hitler's Nazi troops invaded France and the Germans forcibly drafted Noel Regney into the Army. While in the German Army, Noel joined the French underground. He collected information and warned French resistance fighters of upcoming attacks from the Germans and he still wore the German Army uniform while he carried out his missions.

One mission in particular haunted Noel Regney. The French underground assigned him to lead a group of German soldiers into a trap so that French fighters could catch them in a crossfire. The memory of dead German soldiers falling to the ground haunted Noel. The French fighters suffered only minor injuries, and although Noel, too, was shot he sustained minor injuries. Shortly after the raid, Noel deserted the German army and lived with the French underground

until the war ended.

After the war ended, Noel worked as the musical director of the Indochinese Service of Radio France from 1948 to 1950.. After that he became musical director at Lido, a popular Paris nightclub. In 1951, Noel Regney left France for a world tour as musical director for the French singer Lucienne Boyer.

Noel Regney Moves to Manhattan and Marries a Musician

Said the king to the people everywhere,/“Listen to what I say!/Pray for peace, people, everywhere,/Listen to what I say!/The Child, The Child sleeping in the night/He will bring us goodness and light,/He will bring us goodness and light.”

In 1952, Noel Regney immigrated to the United States and moved to Manhattan. As well as writing serious musical compositions he composed, arranged and conducted music for many early TV shows and wrote commercial jingles for radio.

One day he walked into the dining room of a Manhattan hotel and saw a beautiful woman playing popular music on the piano. He introduced himself and in a month he and Gloria Shayne were married. Their daughter Gabrielle Regney describes her mother as “an extraordinary pianist and composer who has perfect pitch.”

Noel Regney and Gloria Shayne Regney composed music together and separately. The songs they composed together include Rain, Rain, Go Away, recorded by Bobby Vinton, but Do You Hear What Hear? is their Christmas classic masterpiece.

Some of Gloria’s popular songs include Goodbye Cruel World, and The Men in My Little Girl’s Life, and Almost There. In 1963 Noel composed Dominique, made world famous by the Singing Nun and in 1971, he wrote Slovenly Peter, a concert suite derived from a German folktale. In 1974, he wrote a five part cantata called I Believe in Life. Gloria and Noel divorced in 1973. Noel Regney died in 2002 and Gloria Shayne Regney Baker died in 2008.

Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Robert Goulet, Susan Boyle, and Andy Williams are just a few of the artists that have recorded the more than 120 versions of Do You Hear What I Hear? in musical styles from jazz to reggae. Bing Crosby’s version in 1963 sold more than a million copies.

According to his obituary, Noel Regney favored the Robert Goulet version of the song.

“I am amazed that people can think they know the song- and not know it is a prayer for peace, but we are so bombarded by sound and our attention spans are so short that we now listen only to catchy beginnings,” he said in a 1985 interview.

“Listen to what I say, pray for peace people everywhere.”

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Alfred Burt and Wihla Hutson's Carols Are a Musical Christmas Card to the World Every Year



by Kathy Warnes

“Caroling, caroling, now we go,
 Christmas bells are ringing.
 Caroling, caroling, through the snow,
 Christmas bells are ringing,
 Joyous voices sweet and clear,
 Sing the sad of heart to cheer.
 Ding, dong, ding, dong!
 Christmas bells are ringing.”

Reverend Bates Burt Started a Family Christmas Card Custom

Reverend Bates Burt began the custom of sending carols in his Christmas cards when he moved to Pontiac, Michigan, with his family to become pastor of the Episcopal Church in 1922. He wrote both the lyrics and music to his carols. Born April 22, 1920, in Marquette, Michigan, the Burt's son Alfred was two when the Burts moved to Pontiac.

His parents gave Alfred a cornet when he turned ten, because had a shown an interest in music. Eventually, he learned to play several instruments including the piano, but he spent most of his

life playing the cornet and trumpet in bands and orchestras. Alfred studied music at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and he graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree in 1942.

Reverend Burt asked Alfred to write the music for the 1942 carol, "Christmas Cometh Caroling." From that point on, Alfred wrote the music for the family Christmas cards.

During World War II, Alfred served as a United States Army officer stationed at San Angelo, Texas, and played with the Army Air Force Band. Reverend Burt in Michigan sent him the lyrics for the 1943 and 1944 carols and Alfred wrote the music for them.

The 1947 Christmas card marked the end of the collaboration between Reverend Bates Burt and Alfred Burt, because Reverend Burt died of a heart attack early in 1948. Alfred and his wife Anne Burt continued the family Christmas card tradition in his honor.

Anne Burt Asks Wihla Hutson to Help with Writing the Christmas Carols

Alfred Burt joined the Alvino Rey Orchestra in California in 1949, while his wife Anne remained in Michigan where their daughter Diane Bates Burt was born on March 8, 1950. Anne and Alfred asked an old family friend Wihla Hutson, organist at Reverend Bates Burt's Pontiac Episcopal Church to write the Christmas poems for their cards while Alfred wrote the music to them.

Wihla Hutson and Alfred Burt seemed fated to be collaborators. She was born in East Gary, Indiana, in 1901 and her family moved to Detroit, Michigan, in 1913. She was educated in the public schools, but she had a private tutor for piano and organ and studied at the Detroit Conservatory of Music. She graduated from the College of the City of Detroit which is now Wayne State University.

In 1929, when she was 28 years old, Wihla became the organist at All Saints Church in Pontiac, Michigan, the church where Reverend Bates Burt was pastor. Pontiac is about 25 miles from Detroit, so when the weather turned bad or during the holidays, Wihla would stay at the rectory. She became like a member of the Burt family.

The Christmas Card List Grows

In 1949, after the death of Reverend Bates Burt, Wihla Hutson eagerly agreed to become part of the Burt Christmas Carol Card tradition by writing the words to the card carols. The Christmas card list grew over the years as the circle of Burt friends grew and soon the list had expanded from 50 to 450 people.

Anne Burt recalled that she would periodically drop the names of some people from the list because of the cost of sending out so many cards, but they wouldn't stay dropped. She said that people would either call or write her and say that the post office must have lost their card. She would put their name back on the list.

The Reverend Bates Burt and Alfred Burt Carols

“Christmas Cometh Caroling” (1942)

“Jesu Parvule” (1943)

“What Are the Signs” (1944)

“Ah, Bleak and Chill the Wintry Wind” (1945) “All on A Christmas Morning” (1946)

“Nigh Bethlehem” (1947)

“Christ in the Stranger’s Guise” (1948)- Reverend John Burt, Alfred’s brother, provided the tune.

Life and Friendship Stories in Carols

“Sleep Baby Mine” (1949)

Expecting the Burt’s first child, Anne Burt asked Wihla Hutson to write a lyric that could also be a lullaby. Wihla wrote “Sleep, Baby Mine,” and the Burts used the first eight bars of the carol in March 1950 to announce the birth of their daughter Diane Bates Burt.

“This Is Christmas” (also known as “Bright, Bright, the Holly Berries”) (1950)

“Some Children See Him” (1951)

“Come, Dear Children” (1952)

This carol reflects Al and Anne’s happiness as they settled into their first home in the San Fernando Valley of California. Anne carried their second child and musicians all over California wanted to use Al’s talents as an arranger and trumpeter.

Alfred Burt finished writing the music for the 1952 carol, “Come, Dear Children,” during the rehearsal of the Blue Reys, the vocal group with Rey’s orchestra. He asked them to sing it so he could make sure the harmonies worked and the Blue Reys liked the carol so much that they asked Alfred if they could sing it at the annual King Family Christmas party.

“O, Hearken Ye” (1953)

James Conkling, husband of Donna King Conkling, and president of Columbia Records organized a choir of Hollywood singers to perform Alfred Burt’s carols. Many of them were recorded in 1953 in the North Hollywood Mormon Church with Burt present.

In 1953, doctors diagnosed Al Burt who was described as a “heavy smoker” with incurable lung cancer. Shortly after getting the news about her husband’s cancer, Anne Burt lost her baby. For their 1953 carol, the Burts chose the triumphant “O Hearken Ye.”

“Caroling Caroling” (1954)

“We’ll Dress the House” (1954)

“The Star Carol” (1954)

This carol was the last of the four carols Alfred Burt hurried to finish before he died and the final Alfred Burt Christmas card. In an interview, Anne Burt said that Al realized that death was near and “The Star Carol” reflects his state of mind at the time. It is so beautiful and pure.” He completed the Star Carol on February 5, 1954 and died on February 6, 1954.

Wihla Huston Continues to Write Carols

After Alfred Burt died, Wihla Hutson began to write her own Christmas carols and compose the music for them. In 1982, 18 of her carols were printed and the choir from Reverend Bates Burt’s old Pontiac parish in performed some of them. For many years she was organist and choir director of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Southfield. She died March 24, 2002 in Southfield, Michigan, just a few days short of her 101st birthday.

Alfred Burt and Wihla Hutson’s Carols Live On

Twelve of Alfred Burt’s carols were released in time for Christmas 1954 in an album called The Christmas Mood. The Voices of Jimmy Joyce brought out the first recording of all 15 of the Burt carols in 1964 in an album called This is Christmas: A Complete Collection of the Alfred S. Burt Carols. Artists from Nat King Cole to Andy Williams to James Taylor have recorded the Burt-Hutson carols.

Alfred Burt’s daughter, Diane, leads “The Caroling Company, in performing her father’s carols and composer Abbie Betinis, Alfred Burt’s grandniece, revived the family tradition of sending Christmas cards with an original carol in 2001. She also introduces the yearly carol cards on Minnesota Public Radio.

“We’ll dress the house with holly bright and sprigs of mistletoe

We’ll trim the Christmas tree tonight and set the lights aglow

We’ll wrap our gifts with ribbons gay and give them out on Christmas Day

By everything we do and say, our gladness we will show.”

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Katherine K. Davis – The Little Drummer Boy “Almost Wrote Itself”



Wellesley College, Wellesley.

Wellesley College - Wikimedia Commons

by Kathy Warnes

Katherine K. Davis wrote the Little Drummer Boy in 1941, and since then he has drummed his timeless message into the hearts of people everywhere.

There are different versions of the story of Katherine Kennicott Davis’s creation of the Little Drummer Boy. One version of the story says that Katherine freely translated a Czech carol called The Carol of the Drum, in 1941.

Another version of the story has it that she arranged the Little Drummer Boy with Harry Simone, Jack Halloran, and Henry Onorati and another version of the story says that she wrote the song herself while “trying to take a nap.”

The bibliography of her musical career indicates that Katherine K. Davis wrote and arranged The Little Drummer Boy in 1941, but she produced a lifetime of music before she wrote the Little Drummer Boy.

Katherine Kennicott Davis Composed Her First Musical Composition at Age 15

“Come, they told me/pa rum pum pum pum/A new born King to see/pa rum pum pum pum/ Our finest gifts we bring/pa rum pum pum pum/To lay before the King/pa rum pum pum pum/rum pum pum pum/rum pum pum pum/So to honor Him/pa rum pum pum pum/When we come.”

Katherine Kennicott Davis was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, on June 25, 1892, and she

graduated from St. Joseph High School in 1910. When she was just 15, Katherine wrote her first musical composition called “Shadow March.” She studied music at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, and she won the Billings Prize for composition there in 1914. After she graduated, Katherine stayed on at Wellesley and taught music theory and piano as an assistant in the Music Department. She also studied at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and traveled to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger.

After she returned from Paris, Katherine Kennicott Davis taught music at the Concord Academy in Concord, Massachusetts, and at the Shady Hill School for Girls in Philadelphia. She wrote many of her more than 600 compositions for the choirs at her school. She was a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers and Stetson University in DeLand, Florida awarded her an honorary doctorate.

Katherine Kennicott Writes “Let All Things Now Living”

Katherine told colleagues that in the 1920 she had found the traditional Welsh folk tune, the Ash Grove in the Book of National Songs. She wrote the harmonization and a descant for the tune and published them in 1939, with her text under the name of John Cowley, one of her pseudonyms.

She called her new song Let All Things Now Living, and it became a favorite Thanksgiving hymn of many church choirs and congregations.

Katherine Kennicott Davis Writes The Little Drummer Boy

“Little Baby pa rum pump pum pum/ I am a poor boy too pa rum pump pum pum/ I have no gift to bring pa rum pump pum pum/That’s fit to give our King pa rum pump pump pum, pa rum rum pump pum pum pum pum pum/ Shall I play for you pa rum pump pump pum/ On my drum.”

The Little Drummer Boy is the story of a poor boy who couldn’t afford a gift for the newborn Christ Child, so he played his drum at the manger with Mary’s approval. The baby smiled, delighted with the Little Drummer Boy’s skillful playing.

The story of the Little Drummer Boy resembles a twelfth century legend that Anatole France retold as *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* or *Our Lady’s Juggler*. The French legend said that a juggler juggled in front of a statue of Mary and the statue, depending on the version of the story, either smiled at him or threw him a rose. In 1902, Jules Massenet adapted the story into an opera and in 1984, the television film *The Juggler of Notre Dame* the statue both smiled at the juggler and threw him a rose.

In 1955, shortly before they retired, the Trapp Family singers recorded the Carol of the Drum. This song resembles the Little Drummer Boy both in music and lyrics. The only difference is the line “The ox and lamb kept time.” In *The Carol of the Drum*, the line is the “The ox and ass kept time.”

Henry Onorati Arranges His Version of The Carol of the Drum

Mary nodded/pa rum pum pum pum/The ox and lamb kept time/pa rum pum pum pum/I played my drum for Him/pa rum pum pum pum/

In 1957, Henry Onorati re-arranged The Carol of the Drum for the Jack Halloran Singers to record on Dot Records, but Dot didn't release the record in time for Christmas. In 1958, Henry Onorati introduced his friend Harry Simeone to the Carol of the Drum. Harry Simeone was a conductor and arranger from Newark, New Jersey, who had worked on several Bing Crosby movies and worked as conductor for a television show called The Firestone Hour from 1952-1959.

Harry Simeone re-arranged the song and re-titled it The Little Drummer Boy. He recorded it with the Harry Simeone Chorale on the album Sing We Now of Christmas. Harry Simeone and Henry Onorati were given joint credit with Katherine K. Davis for the song even though they had only arranged it. This was Harry Simeone's first album with a chorus and it was released at Christmas time every year from 1958-1962. It became a holiday classic.

The Little Drummer Boy Becomes a Beloved Holiday Carol

“I played my best for Him/pa rum pum pum pum/rum pum pum/ pum/rum pum pum pum”

Since the 1950s, The Little Drummer Boy has appeared in over 200 versions in seven languages in all kinds of music genres. In 1964 Marlene Dietrich recorded a German version of the Little Drummer Boy. The Beverly Sisters and Michael Flanders recorded hit versions of The Little Drummer Boy in 1959, and in 1972, the Pipes and Drums and Military Band of the Royal Scots Guards had a hit version of the carol.

Bing Crosby and David Bowie recorded the most popular version of the Little Drummer Boy as a duet with Peace On Earth for Bing Crosby's Television Christmas special in 1977. The duet version was written after David Bowie admitted he hated the song that he was scheduled to sing. Bing Crosby performed The Little Drummer Boy while David Bowie sang the new song Peace on Earth. The duet eventually became a classic.

In 2008, BBC disc jockey Terry Wogan and singer Aled Jones recorded a new version of the Peace on Earth/Little Drummer Boy duet for a charity album released to help Children In Need. Issued as a single, it climbed to a UK Top hit for them.

Katherine Kennicott Davis Writes a Lifetime of Music

“Then he smiled at me pa rum pum pum pum/Me and my drum.”

Katherine Kennicott Davis continued writing music until she fell ill in the winter of 1979-1980. On April 20, 1980, she died at the age of 87 in Littleton, Massachusetts. Her musical legacy included operas, choruses, children's operettas, cantatas, piano and organ pieces and songs like Let All Things Now Living, and The Little Drummer Boy. She left all of the royalties and

proceeds from her musical compositions to Wellesley College's Music Program.

Katherine K. Davis once quipped that The Little Drummer Boy “had been done to death on radio and TV,” but musicians all over the world continue to sing and record her song.

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Silent Night Had Simple Beginnings and a Lasting Impact on the World



Austrian Alps - Wikimedia Commons

By Kathy Warnes

Joseph Mohr's beginnings were as spare and simple as his Christmas carol Silent Night, one of the first known Christmas carols. On December 11, 1792, a poor unmarried knitter named Anna Schoiber gave birth to a son and she named him Joseph. Joseph's father, Franz Joseph Mohr chose his army position as one of the archbishop's musketeers instead of his family, leaving Anna and his son to survive as best they could. Besides his mother, the adults in Joseph Mohr's formative years included his grandmother, his god father Franz Joseph Wohlmuth, and cathedral choirmaster Johann Nepomuk Hiernle. Hierule sent Joseph to the respected Kremsmunster School and he served as a musician for the Cathedral while he was a student.

Because of his illegitimacy, Joseph had to obtain special permission from the Pope to enter the priesthood. He overcame this obstacle and in 1815, he was ordained a priest. By 1816, Father Mohr was assigned to a pilgrimage church in Mariapfarr, Austria. His grandfather lived nearby and possibly Joseph wrote the original six stanzas of Silent Night while walking through the peaceful, starlit countryside on the way to visit his grandfather. He was transferred to Oberndorf in 1817 to be the assistant priest at St. Nicolas Cathedral. That same year he had become acquainted with church verger Franz Gruber while in Salzburg hospital recuperating from an illness. Franz Gruber became his church organist at Oberndorf.

On December 24, 1818, Joseph Mohr found himself making another countryside journey to the home of Franz Gruber, a musician and schoolteacher who lived in an apartment over the schoolhouse in nearby Arnsdorf. He showed his friend his poem and asked him to add a melody and guitar accompaniment so it could be sung at Midnight Mass.

Some versions of his story say that Father Mohr needed a special carol because mice had eaten the organ bellows and the organ wouldn't work. Other versions of the story say that the assistant pastor loved guitar music and wanted a new carol for Christmas.

Whatever the motivation for the new carol, on December 24, 1818, Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber with the choir behind them, stood in front of the main altar in St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf and sang “Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!” for the first time. The Stille Nacht manuscript dated around 1820 is for guitar accompaniment and is probably closest to the version that Fr. Mohr and Franz Gruber sang at Midnight Mass in 1818.

The parishioners liked the carol and slowly it spread to other churches in other regions. Karl Mauracher, master organ builder and repairman, traveled to Oberndorf to work on the organ several times and while doing his work at St. Nicholas he got a copy of Stille Nacht and took it home with him. The simple carol began its globe traveling journey labeled as a “Tyrolean Folk Song.”

Two families of traveling folk singers from the Ziller Valley incorporated Stille Nacht into their repertoire. According to the Leipziger Tageblatt, the Strassers sang Stille Nacht in a concert in Leipzig in December 1832. During this time, several musical notes were changed and the carol evolved into the modern melody.

An Austrian historical plaque says that the Ranier Family sang Stille Nacht in front of an audience including Emperor Franz I and Tsar Alexander I. In 1839, the Rainers performed Stille Nacht for the first time in America at the Alexander Hamilton Monument outside of Trinity Church in New York City.

By the 1840s, Joseph Bletzacher, the Court Opera singer from Hannover reported that Silent Night was already well known in Lower Saxony. He said that “the Royal Cathedral Choir in Berlin popularized Silent Night and it became the favorite Christmas carol of King Frederick William IV of Prussia. He used to have the Cathedral Choir sing Silent Night for him during the Christmas season of each year.”

By the time Silent Night had become famous in Europe, Father Joseph Mohr had died, but he had not received credit for composing the words of the carol. In 1848, Father Mohr died of pulmonary disease in Wagrain where he had served as pastor of St. Johann’s and donated all of his earnings for eldercare and education. The townspeople built a memorial Joseph Mohr School located a dozen yards from his grave. In a report to the bishop, the overseer of St. Johann’s, described Father Mohr as “a reliable friend of mankind, toward the poor, a gentle, helping father.”

Silent Night continued to grow in stature and fame. A myth that Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven had written the music began and persisted into the twentieth century. Franz Gruber wrote to the music authorities in Berlin informing them that he had composed the music to Stille Nacht, and that Father Joseph Mohr had written the words to the carol.

In 1995, a manuscript was discovered that researchers dated to around 1820. Written in Mohr’s handwriting, it revealed that he had composed the words to Silent Night in 1816 when he was pastor at a pilgrim church in Mariapfarr, Austria. It shows that Gruber composed the music in 1818. This is the earliest existing manuscript and the only one in Mohr’s handwriting. Franz

Gruber continued to write music and serve as choirmaster until he died in 1863 at the age of 76.

German immigrants brought Silent Night with them to America and sang Silent Night both in German and English, as part of their tradition. It began to be included in many church hymn books. Many publications and hymnbook printings later, on Christmas Eve of 1918, Franz Gruber's grandson played Silent Night on guitar.

For centuries musicians and historians believed that Father Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber had worked together to write just one song, but in 2006 archivists working in the Salzburg Diocesan Archives found a song called Te Deum. Joseph Mohr wrote the words and Franz Gruber composed the melody. The Waggenl Museum in Wagrain features Te Deum in an audio exhibit.

But Silent Night is still their most popular creation. Today Silent Night, the song with humble beginnings, is one of the most beloved of all Christmas carols and is sung around the world in multiple languages. Even John Denver and the Muppets perform a special rendition of Silent Night. Despite the transitions of time and the translations of languages, Father Mohr's message of love and peace is a quiet grace note in the clamor of Christmas time in the modern world.

