



Christmas Road

Verwayne Greenhoe

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This is a greatly abbreviated form of a book I had intended to have ready for Christmas of 2014 but as happens oh so many times, Life happened and for many reasons, the book never got finished. It will be done later in 2015, I promise!

Things have been so less than good that I was actually quite depressed over the chain of events that made up 2014. With Christmas of '14 almost upon us, I went back into my "Christmas story" folder and found these two stories. There are several more but these two made me feel the best and right now, I most certainly wanted to feel my best.

These two stories are true. The first one was just a pleasant childhood memory that recalled better days and memories but the second one is just as true as the first. As you read the "A Christmas Miracle - Keep Your Eyes Open!," the second story, you'll better understand why I stress that this story is true, just as it was written. It asks for your faith in miracles and maybe, just maybe, your faith in a kind and loving God.

When I originally wrote the story and passed it around, I included the names of people and places but the world we live in today is not the world I grew in. People who read it wanted to talk with those involved... which might be a nice thing but not everyone is nice any more. I changed the location ever so much and left out the names because, in the end, it didn't really matter who they were and where it happened but it did indeed happen.

I originally posted this on FaceBook and it went totally nuts. People loved it but as always, there were some skeptics. I checked my email and found two notes that rolled in within a couple minutes of each other. I think the difference in thought processes explains the emotional crisis the world is having today.

The first email questions my integrity of this tale, telling that they notice that "these things only seem to happen to you." I

suppose it couldn't be they don't happen to him because his blinders are on so tight. I was taught as a child to look for the good in people before looking for the bad. Life is full of ordinary heroes if you but "open your eyes."

The second email was from a close lady friend who thanked me for the Christmas story that caused her to remember the reason for the season. She ends with these words: "You were the catalyst to this event because your heart is like that. I knew your Father and know that he was like that so it doesn't surprise me that you are just like him. God bless you."

I suppose that if more parents taught their children to look for the good instead of automatically searching for the bad we would be better off. My two children have similar soft hearts. If you are lucky enough to know them, you know both would give you the literal shirt from their backs. My children are a testimony of the wisdom of my Father. Twenty years gone but his spirit lives on through them and beyond.

To finish with a line from a well known Christmas story, God bless us, every one. Merry Christmas.

Verwayne
December 2014

PS: Shameless plug. I have a book, "Things My Father Taught Me - Lessons In Life" available on Amazon as a paperback and a Kindle download and I am just days away from having another book written about my 2014 crisis ready to go as a Kindle version before Christmas and my good friends at Book Locker (booklocker.com) will have the paperback out by the end of 2014. It is titled, "The Struggle Within" and deals with depression and suicide. Check them out please!
Thank you!

PSS: Thanks to my "Burbank Buddy" Skip Press for his encouragement in my writing endeavors. Check him out at skippress.com

The Gift

I have always loved Christmas and the spirit that used to accompany it. I'm told I need to forget what I used to do and 'get with the times' and move on but at this point in my life, I think I'm happier remembering what used to be. You move along into the aggravations, the angry outbursts you see at stores, and the scattering of families and I'll do my best to gracefully acknowledge I am becoming senile.

I remember the traditional chopping down of the family Christmas tree like it was yesterday. My Father had thousands of Jack Pines scattered across our farm land so we never had to travel far to get one. We just got on the wagon and Dad would drive the old Farmall BN back to where most of the Jack Pines grew and we would pick one for the house. Usually the youngest of our family would get to choose between two different trees and inevitably the one with the big ol' curvature of the spine would be taken but it didn't matter. It was a tradition and a fun one at that.

One of the other traditions we had was trying to ensure that Dad didn't guess what he was getting for Christmas. He always knew and as a young child, it was almost aggravating that he always knew, but it gave me the safe feeling that Dad always knew what was best. There have been many times in my life that I wish I could feel that safe again.

It was on one of these tree hunting adventures that the one time we had the Old Man stumped on his gift that the cover had been blown by my maternal Grandfather. I have to do a bit of explaining because now days, this wouldn't make much sense but back in the early 1960's, this gift was essential to daily living on the farm.

We cut our own firewood from various trees on the farm that Dad thought needed to go. He had a couple old Remington chainsaws to get them on the ground but once they were properly sliced and diced, it was the mighty 'Michigan axe' that

turned them into sticks small enough to burn in the old Franklin pot bellied stove.

In this one particular fall, we... I should say "I" did some serious damage to the trusty axe we had when I made an errant swing and splintered the handle. Dad bought several new handles but nary a one worked for much more than a couple days. I can't remember why they wouldn't stay in working condition but I knew that if the Old Man couldn't fix it, it couldn't be fixed.

Most of the summer of 1963, I spent much of my time working my little bait business. My home town was populated by lakes and streams by the hundreds and fishermen went through tens of thousands of worms, crickets, and grubs every week. It was a shortage of worms and crickets at a local bait shop that caused my Father and Grandfather to help me start my own bait business.

I learned to make and bait worm beds that regular earth worms want to stay in that nice loose soil and thus be readily available when I needed them. I had about twenty plus beds that I could rotate about and thus assure myself of being able to pull out a thousand or more very fresh earthworms in very short order.

I also raised rabbits and for reasons that escape me yet, red worms thrive in rabbit manure. I would take the manure and straw from my rabbit cages and I made the same bed types so I could harvest red worms just as easy as I did earthworms. Give me 90 minutes and I could have a thousand or more of each type of worm packaged by the hundred, ready for sale.

Another couple huge sale items were crickets and grubs and again, my Father showed me how to make cricket traps that made cricket harvest even easier than gathering worms. People would save me cottage cheese and 'oleo' containers to have some crickets already dished out and counted and most fishermen began to bring me back their containers and business was booming.

And the grubs? Well, I quickly learned that these guys wanted cow manure grubs and they knew the difference in earth grubs and cow manure grubs. As luck would have it, we had more than a few cows and where you have cows, you had ready made homes for cow manure grubs. You just had to wash your hands now and then but it was worth it. I could easily make \$40 to \$75 a weekend selling my 'live stock.'

Anyway, to get back to the axe... Since I had had a good summer and made a lot of money and I was the one responsible for breaking the axe, I had asked my Grandfather to buy a super nice double bladed Michigan axe for my Dad's Christmas gift. I made him promise to keep it a secret as I really wanted to get him something that he didn't know about until Christmas day.

As we were getting ready to make the annual Christmas tree run, Dad rounded up his tools that included a big old hacksaw type tool and his poor decrepit axe. As I saw my Grandfather walking over to examine the axe, I knew my secret would be no more. He picked up the axe, looked it over and said to my Dad, "Why are you using this thing? Why don't you get the new one we got you out of the corn shed?"

I was really hurt for a few minutes as my Grandfather led my Dad to a secluded section of the corn shed and pulled out my gift for him and made a big deal about how much better it was going to be for cutting down the Christmas tree. My Father was all grins and such and I felt a bit better knowing that I had gotten him something that he really liked but still, he hadn't known about it a week before Christmas, long after he had 'prognosticated' the gifts everyone else had bought. Or so I thought.

It was about two days after Christmas that Dad and I were going somewhere in our 1961 GMC pickup that Dad told me he had stumbled across the axe the day before my Grandfather had spoiled it for me. He had been bagging up some corn to have made into grain for the cattle and needed

some extra burlap bags and found it stashed under a few dozen bags.

He said he had spoken to my Grandfather about something else and mentioned finding the axe and my Grandfather told him that he had bought it for me using my 'worm money.' Dad was a jokester and a story teller but he also appreciated an attempt to atone for breaking his good axe. In that spirit, he had never said anything about it and said he had planned to be 'super surprised' when it was given to him on Christmas day.

I was ten that Christmas and I can recall my eyes welling up in gratitude, just as they are now in remembrance. Dad had this little 'sign of love' he used on me and all of the rest of the kids and the grandkids. He reached out with cat like quickness and smacked my upper thigh, making it tingle for a good half hour. "I really liked it Doc, it was just what I wanted and needed. Thanks son." That slap on the thigh made me realize I'd never 'get one over' on him but despite of what ever went wrong, he would always love me. That was far more important than getting a gift that he didn't know about in advance.

Traditions come and traditions go, kind of like the changing of the leaves every year. The world around us is changing and I can't stop that so forgive me if I close my eyes and slip back into a nostalgic long, long ago time and smile to myself for oh so brief a time.

A Christmas Miracle - Keep Your Eyes Open!

For the third time in four years, our family had suffered the loss of a family member within ten days of Christmas. This particular Christmas, my brother Roger had died in his home in western South Carolina. Because I work for myself and the rest of my family had full time jobs, I was asked to drive from my home in Florida and bring him back to Michigan to be with his family.

After picking up my brother in South Carolina after twelve hours of driving, it began to rain and became very foggy for miles on end, causing me a lot of stress and fatigue. By the time I finally got into Kentucky, I was getting very sleepy. It was about 4 AM but I wanted to keep pushing onward. There may have been a time I wanted to drift off but I was really fighting to keep moving.

Shortly after crossing into Kentucky, I found myself needing to at least rest for a few and I began looking for a rest area. My eyes were very heavy and I was afraid I might not find one in time. It was about then I began to hear this voice that I knew all too well whispering to me. "Keep your eyes open Doc." Only one person ever called me 'Doc' and that was my Dad. Every time my mind wanted to shut down, I heard him tell me, "keep your eyes open Doc." It was as if he was in the car with me.

I found an exit an in southern Kentucky that was very well lit up so I pulled off and soon saw a small "Mom and Pop" coffee shop. I wanted to get some coffee and let my eyes rest a few minutes. As I got out of the car, I heard his voice again. "Keep your eyes open Doc." As I said, I was tired. It was rather busy in there for the time of day and I had to wait for a table.

Also in the wait area was a middle aged lady with two young boys that were maybe five and four. They were obviously tired and restless. I heard one ask if he could get something to eat and his Mom softly told him, "not now baby." It was a loving

tone so I thought they were waiting on someone to meet them.

I finally got a small table and got my coffee and two slices of toast. As I sat there, I heard my Father whisper to me again. "Open your eyes Doc." I shook it off as fatigue and finished my toast. The waitress came around I ordered one more round of toast and a refill on my coffee. Once again I heard him whisper to me, more forcefully this time, "OPEN YOUR EYES DOC!" It was rather unnerving so I decided to find a rest room and wash my face with cold water.

As I passed the lady again, the oldest boy was crying. "I'm hungry Momma and I wanna go home." There was something in his voice that made my heart hurt. She whispered to him softly that she had explained to him that she didn't have any money and that he knew why they couldn't go home. I don't think she realized I was behind her.

I excused myself to her for over hearing her conversation and asked if I could buy them something to eat. At first she refused but soon consented as the boys both began to cry. I told it was no burden at all and I would consider it an early Christmas gift for them as well as myself if I could buy them breakfast. I took them to my table and found my waitress. I told that ever they wanted, I would pay for it. She pulled me aside and then told me they had been there on and off since Friday afternoon. It was now Monday morning.

When asked what they wanted to eat, both boys started to rattle off a long list of eggs, toast, bacon, and milk. Mom tried to slow them down but I told her just let them eat. It took several minutes of talking but she finally ordered an omelet, bacon, and milk. As they ate, one of the boys asked if they could go home after they were finished and she told him, "you know we can't." I once again pardoned myself for asking but asked any way. "Why not?"

A few tears later, she explained that the man in her life had left them and she didn't have enough money to pay all her bills and that her electricity had been shut off Friday. She was

very embarrassed but I assured her I had had my back up against the wall so tight that I thought I was part of the wallpaper myself a time or two. I asked if she had family near by or if she had some where to go. She didn't.

Whenever I travel, I always pay for my gas and food by credit card but I also usually had \$60 - \$100 hidden in my vehicle... just in case. I excused myself while they ate and retrieved \$95 from the truck. I went back in and sat down with them. The boys wanted more milk and even as Mom protested, the waitress brought them more. She started to apologize but I cut her off. "They are little boys and they only understand that they are hungry." She was struggling to hold back her tears of thankfulness and embarrassment.

I have been there myself. I can't imagine a pain that hurts a Mom as much as the inability to feed her children. "Things will work themselves out. They always do." She took my hand as she tried to hold back her sobs. I took the money I had and slipped it into her hand. Again she protested that she couldn't take my money because she had no way to pay me back. I told her the look of happiness on the face of her sons was payment plenty. She began to openly sob and I was doing my best not to join her.

I went back out to my truck to get a couple small gifts I had brought to give to my four year old grandson in Michigan for Christmas and when I turned around, two men were standing behind me, wanting to know what was happening. I explained her situation and they nodded their heads that something had to be done. One of them told me, "keep them entertained a few minutes while I make a couple calls."

I went in and sat down with them again. Mom was getting herself together again and I actually glimpsed a smile as I gave each boy a wrapped gift, telling them, "Merry Christmas!" Now you know little boys can't hold a wrapped gift very long and they quickly tore the paper off and they soon were playing with the little trucks I had brought.

About this time, the two men returned and sat down with us. One of them looked at the boys and said, "Ma'am, your friend here tells you have run into a streak of bad luck. I made some calls and I have a man I know that runs a modest motel up the way a mile or so and he has agreed to put you up there for four days at no charge to you. I've known him a long time and he is a good man with a big heart. He understands how these things happen."

She started crying again, thanking him. The boys were bewildered because Momma was crying but the man explained Mom wasn't sad... she was happy. The other man began to talk to her. "We went around to the truckers in here and the guys in their trucks outside and gathered you up some cash to help you out. I think it totals about \$725, give or take a couple bucks. We hope this will help you out of your problems."

Between tears and sobs, she said she had prayed God would show her how she would take care of her boys. "I prayed for an angel and He sent me an army of angels. I don't know how to thank all of you!" Before long, they were ushered to their warm new motel beds and I went out to pay my breakfast bill. The manager smiled and told me it had been covered already with the message that "angels eat free here."

I went to my truck and cried for a good ten minutes. I haven't been moved like in a while. So I leave you this Christmas Eve night with two messages. Have a wonderful Christmas... and always keep your eyes open.