

WE NEED A LITTLE CHRISTMAS





Merry Christmas 2011



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Chapter 1

"What are you looking at?" Came the voice at the counter.

Turning with a grin on my face, I wandered back down the length of the counter. I reached for the pot of coffee on the warmer and headed toward the voice. Pouring a refresher cup of coffee in his cup I answered.

"Just the kids and ole Saint Nick." I replied.

A soft chuckle filled my brain at the story and another grin crossed my face. The businessman noticed and leaned in.

"Must be more to it than that." He said smiling. "You ain't stopped grinning every time you think about it. What's the story?"

"Aw. It would take a bit to tell." I replied.

"Got nowhere to go for a bit. I'll have a piece of that pie to make it worth your while." He retorted.

"Might need more than one piece to tell it all." I smiled back.

"Start the story, and we'll see if another piece is worth it." He replied.

The businessman loosened his tie, took a sip of coffee and bit into the pie. He looked up at the taste.

"Darn good pie." He said diving for another piece.

I reached for the whipped cream under the counter and spritzed some on before he finished it all off.

"The pie is part of the story." I said. "But if you want to hear it. I'll tell it. Let's see. How do I begin?"

"Begins with the Mayor." Jimmy said as he sat down at the counter next to the businessman.

I reached under the counter, pulled out a cup and saucer and placed it before Jimmy.

"You telling that story again?" Jimmy said jokingly.

"Stranger asked and bought a pie to hear it. Sounds fair to tell it." I said as I reached behind me, grabbed the pot and poured Jimmy a hot brew.

"Bought one of Emma's pies?" Jimmy asked.

"Yep, the pumpkin one." I replied.

"Better tell the story good then to equal the price. Emma's pies are worth way more than your chatter. Give me a piece of the chocolate and I'll settle in to make sure you told it right." Jimmy





grinned.

Jimmy was right. Emma's pies were a treasure, made my business go up ten percent just having them. Might have gone up twenty if I didn't eat so many of them myself. They just were perfect. The crust was so light and fluffy. But the filling. Oh, Lord, the filling. It melted in your mouth with a burst of flavors that had your taste buds begging for more.

"So tell the story. I heard you had a good Mayor. What's he got to do with it?" The businessman asked as I sat Jimmy's pie down next to the coffee.

"This Mayor is a good one. Best I can recollect. Had him just shy of a year and he has done more for this little burg than the four before him. No. The story don't begin with this Mayor. It begins with the one before him." I replied.

I pulled out another cup and saucer and poured some hot coffee for myself. I leaned forward and began to tell the tale.

My memories held it all. It had been almost a year ago. Times were tough. Still are, but they don't seem so bad right now. I own the diner on the corner of third and main, across from the city park. Business had fallen off so bad; I was the only employee left. Ran the counter, cooked the meals and bussed the tables and I still had time to mop the floors and get home early. The place was small and the building was old. The food was quick, good and heavy on calories and grease. It was no place for dieters. We catered to working people that had to eat fast, fill their bellies and get back out to do the job.

Like any diner the moment you walked in you faced one long counter with a series of stools with rotating tops lined up along it ready for service. Between the counter and the back wall was an



aisle. The wall had a workspace that was filled with tools of the trade, not least of which was a large coffee maker and two pots of steaming coffee. A rectangular hole in the wall allowed food to pass from the kitchen to the counter. At the far end of the aisle, embedded in the outside wall was

a small window that looked out on the park.

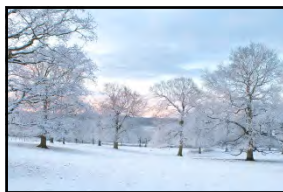
I remember looking on the park and seeing Henry in tattered clothes as he sat on the bench. The old Mayor, Wally Plot, walked by





him on his way to lunch at my place. He looked down with disdain at the figure, shook his head, and moved even more quickly to my place. He came in sat down and immediately began haranguing about the “bums in the park”.

Wally was always good about that. He cared about this city and worked to clean it up. When times got tough, Wally wasn't Mayor yet. He really was nothing but one of us average citizens. Wally and we were all scared. Friends seemed to be losing their homes daily, more and more needed help and handouts just to survive. Two of my best friends lost their homes and had to move away just to find work enough to eat. Good honest folk were reduced to nothing more than beggars and we wanted to do what we could to avoid that fate. We looked to the Mayor and council for guidance and help, but they offered nothing. They were just as lost and scared as the rest of us.



Wally was the first to demand action. Said we had to get rid of the extras and hunker down to save ourselves. We had to protect ourselves and prepare for the worst. Then when the worst came we would survive. When it was over we could rebuild stronger and better.

Well it was a plan, the only plan. And it seemed right. How could we afford to pay for frivolous extras when we couldn't even afford to stay in our own homes? So with a large majority Wally was swept into office and became Mayor. He was true to his word to. He cut city taxes so we could have more to pay for our houses and he cut services so he could afford to cut taxes. He cut taxes even more to attract new businesses and cut more services to pay for that tax cut.

But business didn't come and people kept losing homes.



Those that could sell were selling for less and moving out. Wally decided to cut more services and soon the police and fire departments were being run by the county instead of the city. It took more time to get help, but it saved more taxes. Funny thing though, it also cut twenty more people out of a job, and took regular customers away from my business.

Those twenty people sold their homes and moved out of town also. Downtown was becoming a ghost town. And it was getting





a little raggedy from the lack of care.

Wally's answer was to get rid of all the bums. He got ordinances passed that made that job easier and he kept after the county sheriff to move the riffraff out of town. His walk across the park and encounter with Henry reminded him of the work that was yet to be done. Being the only customer in the place that day, I got an earful of what he had to go through to get the sheriff to send a cruiser to do the job. The mayor left after a light lunch and I picked up the remains and the two bits he left for a tip. My back was turned when Henry walked in. I didn't notice him until he spoke up.

"Seems a might depressing for this time of year." Henry said.

A bit startled I turned around and saw the bum from the park sitting at the counter. He had a crumpled bill and four bits at the edge of his fingers as he pushed the money towards me.

"A cup of coffee, please?" He asked.

"Coffee's only a dollar." I said as I picked up a cup and saucer.

"It's OK. Keep the change." He said as he picked up the cup and moved the hot coffee to his lips.

The "bum" had given me more tip for a cup of coffee than the Mayor had given for a whole meal. Who was this guy? What was his angle? I was suspicious.

"Times are tough. Depressing is what you get." I replied as I pocketed the tip.

He put his cup down and extended his hand.

"Henry, my name is Henry. I'm pleased to meet you." He said.

A little taken aback, but with nothing better to do, I remembered my manners and shook his hand.

"Frank, name's Frank." I said as I shook.

"Tough times are always gonna come. How you deal with them is what makes the difference." Henry said.

"Well this town decided to hunker down and wait it out." I replied.

"Sounds like one plan. But I'd rather make the decisions than have them made for me." Henry replied.

He finished his coffee and moved on out the door. I had to agree. I would like to make my own decisions as well.





Chapter 2

"Story's good so far. Not much on action though." The businessman chortled as he drained the coffee out of the cup.

"Just warming up." Said Jimmy.

"I'll bite. But you gotta give me a piece of the chocolate first." Said the businessman.

"I'll get it Frank." Said a voice from behind the door to the kitchen.

The door opened and a waitress came in from out back. She had a pie in her hand and placed it down in front of the businessman.

"Telling that story again." She asked.

"Can't get him to shut up, once he starts." Jimmy laughed

"Well let him carry on. I got about ten minutes before I need to get the place ready." She said as she moved next to Frank and placed a coke on the counter before her.

"If you don't mind." Frank said impatiently.

The waitress waved her hand and Frank began again.



Well it turns out Henry did live in our little burg. Had lived there for almost five years. Moved in just before the troubles and had had a job until about two years ago up in the city. He commuted back and forth until his layoff and had been looking for a job ever since. He and his wife Emma, had been struggling since the layoffs like everyone else.

"Wait a minute. Is this the same Emma that makes the pies?" The businessman asked.

"Very same. Now hush. This is your story. Let him tell it." The waitress admonished.

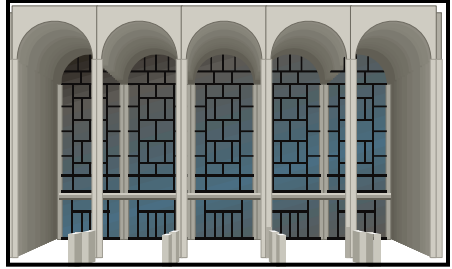
As I was saying Henry and Emma had been residents here for about five years. Nobody really knew them because they commuted back and forth to the city for jobs. Henry lost his job first, followed by Emma. They had been struggling for two years. Unemployment checks had run out and so had the savings. But here they were strug-





gling through, never giving up.

I saw Henry at the next council meeting. It was just before Thanksgiving and more budget cuts were on the table. The budget cuts this time were focused on the annual Christmas display and town participation. Basically they were getting rid of Christmas. There was general discontent, but by then what could we do? We had to cut our costs and this we couldn't afford. Not with all the taxes we had lost from all those folks that left town.



Public comment time came up before the vote. Everybody sat in their seat and nobody spoke against cutting out Christmas. We all knew better than to stand against the Mayor. On more than one occasion he had branded dissenters as selfish or even anti-American. No one wanted to garner his wrath again. All but one kept their peace. When no one spoke against the cuts Henry rose from the back of the room.

He walked up to the microphone set before the council and simply said. "No."

The whole room held its breath as it waited for the drama to play out. Sure enough the Mayor spoke first.

"No. What do you mean, no?" The Mayor asked.

"I mean, no. My vote is no. We need a little Christmas. We need the hope. So my vote is no." Said Henry.

The Mayor started up to explain that Henry didn't have a vote. He wasn't a member of council. But Henry interrupted him.

"I said no. I'm not here to listen to you. You're here to listen to me. My vote is no." Spoke Henry and he turned and left the room. The Mayor all flustered at the exchange was held speechless. It took him a minute to regain himself and by then Henry was gone.

"Well what happened to the vote?" Asked the businessman.

"Voted to end Christmas." Said the waitress as she took another sip of coke.

"This your story or mine." Frank asked.

"Go on and tell it." She replied. "I'll get some coffee for Bill."





Another man entered the diner and slipped onto a stool.

"Telling the story?" Bill asked.

"Yep. He is telling the story." Said a voice from the kitchen.

"Marty, you getting ready back there?" The waitress asked as she gave Bill the coffee.

"Yep. Be up and ready in a minute, Jane." Marty replied.

"Excuse me. Are we ready to begin?" Frank asked exasperated.

They all grinned and nodded their heads.

Well the vote did go against Henry. Christmas by all accounts in this town had ended. But what was worse is Henry had made an enemy of the Mayor. He had been embarrassed at the meeting and nobody did that to the Mayor. The Mayor had made it his goal to see that this upstart knew his place in this town.

Didn't seem to faze Henry though. He came in here right before Thanksgiving. Still wore the raggedy ole clothing. Sat right where you are sitting and passed a crumpled up dollar and change to me and asked for coffee.

"Little depressing around here, considering Christmas is coming." Henry said.

"Didn't you hear? Voted to end Christmas in this town." I said as I poured the coffee.

"Can't end Christmas with a vote. Besides we need a little Christmas don't you think?"

"Yes, we do. Really I think we do. Ending Christmas is only going to hurt the business in this little burg. We got it tough enough fighting the big box 10 miles over on the Interstate. Not having anything downtown this season to draw people here will hurt us bad. But, Henry, times are bad. We can't afford it." I said.

"Frank, you have it a bit wrong. We, all of us together, can afford it. I can't afford it by myself. But if we share the burden, we can afford it." Henry replied.

"Maybe, but why fight it? Just taking on trouble." I said.

"Frank, when trouble comes, and it does, people look for a solution. When bad trouble comes, people are scared and





they look for a savior. In my experience too often crisis junkies and drama queens use this moment to gain influence and prominence. They play on the fears of others to move themselves into positions of power and authority. And they keep playing on these fears to keep it. Even if it means they kill the very thing they swore they were saving.

To save ourselves, we have to fight back against the fear and anger. We need hope to survive, Frank. We always need hope. Christmas, regardless of your religion, is hope, Frank. This town needs hope. It needs a little Christmas.” Henry replied.

“Tall order for one man.” I said.

“Well could use some help.” Henry replied and placed a small cord of colored Christmas lights on the counter.

“They aren’t new, but they light. Mind putting them in the window there?” Henry asked.

Gotta admit I hesitated. But they were just a strand of Christmas lights and he wanted them placed in the window facing the park.

“So did you put them up?” The businessman asked?

“He sure did, and you can see ‘em now if you want.” Jane smiled as she plugged in the Christmas lights.

The lights came on. They were all twinkling around the frame of the window.



“Ok. I’m in for another pie. Make it pecan.” Said the businessman.

Jane fetched the pie and re-filled the coffee.

“Molly’s coming from the dress shop.” Jane said as the door opened.

A nicely dressed woman moved into the diner.

“He telling the story?” She asked as she made her way to the

stools.

“Willin’ listener.” I said and pointed to the businessman.

“Well better set me up with the apple and some ice cream if I’m going to have to sit through this.” Molly replied.

Jane set Molly up and they all moved in closer for the telling of the story.





Chapter 3

Well I put the lights up and had them lit on the day after Thanksgiving. Most businesses call this day Black Friday because of all the business. We called it Black Friday because business never came. Nobody was shopping in our little town and it was only weeks before Christmas. The little strand of lights in my window was the only way you would know it was the Christmas season. But around ten AM Henry showed up at the park.

Now the park was empty. Empty ain't the real word for it. I don't really know what you'd call it. Abandoned, desolate? Even the crows wouldn't land to peck. The trees were all barren of leaves. The ones that usually hang on and die on the branches were gone with the last wind. I was sure they left from embarrassment. Anyhow, the park was empty. But there was Henry and he was pulling one of them little shopping cart things. You know the one with two wheels that old lady's seem to drag behind them to bring home the groceries.

Henry stops just across from my window, sees the lights and gives me a wave. I wave back and sit and watch. Henry reached into in cart and pulls out one of those portable tents. It's blue vinyl with aluminum poles. Nice kind, one you can stand up in, vinyl flooring. Anyhow Henry sets it up with the entrance just back from the sidewalk. He goes inside and in a few minutes comes out in a Santa suit.



Now, I've seen Santa suits and this thing was raggedy, not your high class regular outfits. But it fit and it came complete with padding, beard and wig. Henry placed a hand lettered sign that said "Santa is In" at the entrance to the tent. Then he went to the road and waved at every car that came by and darned if they didn't wave back. Some honked; others just waved and went by. But everyone that came by was happy to see the old guy in town. Then something I never expected happened. A car pulled up and stopped.

A mom got out of one side and moved around to the other. She opened the car door and pulled out a little blond haired girl. The child was all bundled up in a pink coat and earmuffs. She had on mittens that seemed a bit too big, but she was all excited and shy. Her





mom put her down on the ground and she ran straight to Santa. He scooped her up and took her into the tent. Her mom followed.

Now I don't know what she asked for, or what Henry, I mean Santa, said. But the child came out all beaming and her mother was tearing up just a bit. Her mom leaned over and gave Santa a kiss on the cheek. Then something even more amazing happened. Instead of getting back in her car and heading to the big box. She took her child's hand and headed to Jim's merchandiser. I can tell you I was a bit taken aback. With not much to do, I continued to watch and it wasn't too awful long that another car pulled alongside the first and more little ones piled out. They all went in and saw Santa and when they were done they went across the square to another town merchant.

Now for many this wasn't a great rush, but the way things had been, it was quite a bit of business in this town. I continued to watch as best I could. Everyone wasn't stopping to see Santa, but it continued to be a steady flow. We had four or five cars at a time most of the day, even had a line of two or three kids around noon. Couldn't really tell you much more what happened that day because after shopping most of the folks stopped by for hot chocolate, coffee and a few sandwiches before they moved on. Best day I had had in a while, I'll tell you.



"What'd the Mayor think?" The businessman asked.

"Wasn't in town. Had gone to visit folks. Wasn't due back for a week. No cops around, because he disbanded the police force to save money. Sheriff didn't care if we didn't care. He had better things to do." Frank said.

"That all that happened?" The businessman asked.

"No. Henry came back the next day and so did something else." Frank said.

Henry came dragging that old shopping cart back to the park on Saturday and reached in to get his tent up. When he turned around Jimmy was standing there. I was watchin' from my perch and there was Jimmy helping Henry put up the tent. Made sure it was good and





set. Then he fetches a set of small picket fence panels and makes a small yard in front of the tent. Jimmy places a barber pole at the small entrance they made and on top of the pole sits a sign saying "Santa's In". Jimmy finishes up while Henry goes in the tent and gets ready. Santa comes back out and shakes Jimmy's hand. Jimmy pats Santa on the back and goes back to doing his business. Whatever that is?



Anyhow it don't seem to take a minute and another car pulls up and more kids jump out. Back in the tent they go and just like yesterday instead of speeding away the mom and pop stop for a moment and spend a little time in town. Just like the day before more people are coming and seeing Santa and more are shopping in town.

Then Emma comes into the diner. Never saw her before. But there she is. She has a thermos with her, one that holds about a quart of hot coffee. I know its Emma, because she calls me by my name and introduces herself. She says Henry told her about me and how I helped. She wanted to know if she could buy a thermos full of coffee for her Henry, because it was so cold out there. She thought it might help him keep warm.

Now I gotta admit curiosity was getting the better of me. I wanted a peek inside that tent and I wanted to see what ole Saint Nick was doing. So I offered to go take the thermos myself if she didn't mind watching the counter for a few minutes. Didn't figure it would hurt as we usually didn't have any business at that time. Emma agreed and I filled up the thermos and walked across the road to see Santa.

Now I wasn't sure what to expect mind you. Just a man in a ratty old suit doing best he could to make a couple of kids happy. But even though I didn't expect much, I sure didn't expect what I saw. I waited outside as two kids and a mom were taking their time with the old guy. When they left the mom had a tear in her eye and turned and gave Santa a smack on the cheek. The kids were skipping and all excited. As they left Santa turned his back to the entrance and didn't see me enter. I moved just behind him and tapped him on the shoulder. As Santa turned around I saw the tear that had fallen on his cheek.

Now I know Henry was in that suit, but I'm here to tell you that





Santa was in the room and Santa was crying. I placed my hand on his shoulders and Santa began speaking. He told me of kids, small kids, whose families couldn't afford a tree. He told me of mothers that had to put chicken on the platter instead of turkey and fake it for Thanksgiving dinner. He told me of father's missing and times so bad and so desperate that a free visit to Santa might be the best part of the whole Christmas season. And here he was. They could come and see him, no toys around to pressure mom and dad to buy them. No push for sales. Just a little bit of Christmas in a very dark world. Santa shook a little as I poured a cup of hot coffee. He drank it up and thanked me.



"He thanked me. Could you believe that? He thanked me for a cup of coffee. Brought hope to kids, moms and dads and made a better place out of an old tent and he thanked me." Frank said.

Everyone seemed to pause a moment at Frank's reflection.

"It is good coffee, Frank." Jane said as she patted him on the back and broke the silence.

Everyone chuckled at the comment and broke the tension.

"Well it is good coffee. But why'd you help, Jimmy?" The businessman asked.

"Seemed the thing to do." Replied Jimmy and took another drink.

"There is more to the story isn't there?" The businessman asked.

"Yep. There is if you care to hear it." Frank replied.

More people were coming in to the diner to get food. But all were eating quietly listening to the story. Jane was moving about getting orders as Marty kept the kitchen humming.

"I'll cover till you tell it all." Jane said as she moved around the room.

"I care to." The businessman replied.





Chapter 4

Well the little bit of North Pole started to grow. Henry came back on Sunday after church had let out and was dragging that old cart behind him. Every night he took the tent down and every day he put it back up. Jimmy had come by in the evening to help clean up and was there to set up the next day. But this day there was something a little bit more. Old man Johnson owned a farm up the road and had heard about the Santa. So he brought a tiny mule, some rabbits and an old goat down from the farm. He and Jimmy set up a place next to the tent where they fenced them in and if Santa didn't bring the kids to town that petting zoo sure did.

Before an hour had passed the park was full of kids lined up to see Santa and look at the odd collection of animals. It was cold but kids will play anywhere and soon enough the laughter of kids began to fill the park. It just seemed a little sunnier and Christmas seemed not too far away.

Jenny from the high school came by to bring her cousin and saw all the kids walking around to see Santa. Wasn't long before she got on one of those newfangled phones the kids all carry and a carload of girls came by with elf costumes on. Nobody asked where they got the clothes, but it was rumored that the high school drama department was short a few costumes for about four weeks. There the girls were herding the kids into lines, watching after the animals, singing with the kids and generally making everybody happy. No cost, no reason, nobody asked them to, they just came. You can say what you want about the youngsters these days, but ours are raised right.

Emma came in for the coffee just before Santa saw his first kid. She asked if I had a piece of pie. Well, I was out. To be honest I didn't carry that many due to the lack of customers, but with the added business Santa had brought in I just plain ran out. Emma just smiled and





said thank you and headed on out with the coffee. About two hours later she comes back and hands me a pie. Just in time too, I'll tell ya, cause I had a call for a couple of pieces just as she walked through the door. She sets the pie down, cuts it into pieces and has it on a plate before I even had a chance to complain. Well the customers love it.

"First of Emma's pies?" The businessman asks
"Very first and not the last." Frank replies.

Anyway Santa is seeing kids, animals are getting petted, kids are singing and the cash registers in downtown are starting to fill up. Molly here decides it's time to clean up Kris Kringle and meets Henry that Sunday night just as he, old man Johnson and Jimmy are putting up the tent and animals. She has a Santa suit all trimmed out, made to fit and as fine and shiny as a new penny. She can wave it off all she wants, but it was a beaut' and as fine as any Santa would need. It had warm padding and plush fur. It was a perfect fit for an outdoor Santa. Henry thanks her, gives her a hug and places it over his shoulder as he drags that old cart back home for the evening.



Next day Henry comes back, this time already dressed up in that fine suit. Jenny and the girls are waiting for him. Jimmy is there with the fence panels and old man Johnson has the animals and of all things a reindeer. Where he got the reindeer I will never know. But, together, it takes all of about ten minutes and Santa is set up again. Kids are already lining up, before we even get the tent in place. Just as Santa is beginning to see his first child, Ahmed from the corner Quickie Mart steps up and hands a large red bag to the old man. Santa looks inside and smiles, pats Ahmed on the back and steps into his tent. Soon enough kids are coming out with candy canes in their mouths.

Emma comes in with a couple of pies and we reach agreement on price so I can get some more. I mean these pies are selling well. As she leaves she asks if I noticed the Christmas lights going up on the storefronts. Hadn't really noticed, but when I stick my head out the





window, there they are, seems like the whole downtown is putting up Christmas lights. That night as it gets dark, they come on and Christmas really arrives. It was beautiful.

Everything seems to be going well. Businesses are selling merchandise and I have more customers than I had in months. I even hire

Jane to help so I can get the orders out. Then the Mayor comes home.



Now the Mayor has a distinct dislike for Henry. He hasn't forgotten the incident at the council meeting. The Mayor is also wary of change and things going well. Henry

would say that good things' happening weakens the power and position of drama queens and conspiracy theorists. So they are especially concerned when people are happy. Understanding this might make a bit of sense about what happened the following couple of days.

The Mayor came home in the evening just as dark fell. I like to say he slunk back home under the cover of darkness, but Santa says that isn't fair. Even so, he came through town. His town and it was all lit up, people were shopping and kids were laughing. Santa was in the park and the young people were participating in the community. A transformation that should be embraced, but Wally got angry. He shot home and called his friends, city council and asked what had been going on. One and all pointed to Henry. That was enough for him. He meant to confront this menace the next day and put an end to this obvious flaunting of city ordinance. So he did.

"You mean he put an end to it?" The business man asked.

"No he means to say he confronted him." Jimmy laughed.

"Jane, get Jimmy that pumpkin pie so he keeps his mouth busy." Frank retorted.

"Thanks, Frank." Jimmy said.

"A piece of pecan for me." The businessman said. "So what happened when he confronted him?"

"He said, no." Frank said.

"Just, no." The businessman asked incredulously.

"Yep, just no." Frank replied.



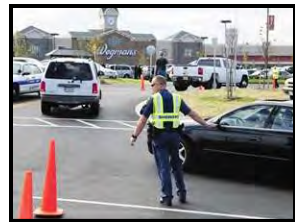
Chapter 5

As Henry would say, he wasn't into arguing with fools. So he just said no. It infuriated the Mayor. He was livid. Jimmy, old man Johnson, Jenny and the girls, were there and they about split a gut trying to keep from laughing. Santa turned from the Mayor and walked into his tent taking the first kid in line by the hand.

So the Mayor gets on the phone and calls the Sheriff's department. The Sheriff gets on the phone himself and asks the Mayor if he really wants the Sheriff's office to come down and arrest Santa at Christmas in front of the kids. By now the Mayor is so livid he yells into the phone and tells him to get down there and do their job. Well the Sheriff is no fool. He ain't gonna arrest Santa at Christmas. He don't wanna be on Santa's naughty list, but he has to respond to any calls so he sends a deputy to see if there is any trouble.

The deputy gets to town to look around and does see some trouble. Santa and all the excitement are backing up traffic and causing a hazard for the kids and merchants. So he gets out of his car and begins directing traffic. He calls dispatch on his shoulder radio and lets them know what he is doing so they can report to the Sheriff and send some help. Soon the Sheriff's department has two deputy's helping Santa, which sends the Mayor into a rage.

The Mayor storms down to the park to stop all this insanity just as the television crew shows up.



"The television crew shows up?" The businessman asks.

"Yep. They heard about a crowd around Santa on the police radio and went to see what was happening. Christmas time you know. Anything Santa is big news." Molly replied as she sipped her coffee.

"Well lights are glaring. People are watching. The reporter is asking questions and in pops the Mayor." Frank grins.

"The Mayor in no uncertain terms distinguishes himself in front of the cameras in the most ungracious of terms." Molly says.

"He made an ass of himself." Jane grinned.

Well the Mayor did make a scene and it didn't exactly help the



image of the town. By the time he was done, children were crying, mother's screaming and the reporter was hyperventilating at the excitement. What a story!

Henry looked around and moved out of the glare of the spotlights. He let the Mayor have his moment. Henry waved a hand at Jimmy and the old farmer to let them know where he was going and walked over to the diner. There he met Emma dropping off a few more pies and they both decide to sit on the stools and wait to see what would happen. Emma reached over to Santa and he took her hand. A large sigh escaped from his lips. It was a sad sight to see. I dropped off a cup of hot coffee and placed a piece of pie before him. He just sat and shuddered a deep soulful shake. It seemed as if the whole world's sorrow had eaten at his heart.

It wasn't long before the reporter found out where he went and moved across the street. They wanted to confront the renegade Santa that flaunted the law and taught the smallest children to become future lawbreakers. Those were the Mayor's words. Well she came in the door camera light's glaring and microphone hot for a story. Henry turned around and the reporter came face to face with Santa. She hesitated at the sight, and Santa asked her to share a piece of pie. The simple action took her by surprise and she accepted.

I placed a warm piece of pumpkin pie in front of her and a cup of hot chocolate as a chaser. Emma moved out of the picture and Santa waited for her to take a bite of pie. With her mouth full, Santa began to talk.



"A child came to see me, a little girl. She was dragging her little brother with her. Their mom was with them. She came up to me and plopped herself right on my lap. I laughed at how nonplussed she was. She leaned in and told me that her brother was scared and she needed to let him know that I was the good guy. I was the one that brought presents to their house. She told me not to scare her brother. I told her I wouldn't but wanted to know what she wanted for Christmas.

With a little shake of her head, in front of her mother, she told me in so much a grownup fashion that she didn't need anything. She knew things were bad and she wanted the kids that didn't have any-





thing to get her presents. She was just glad I stopped by, she was really worried after I forgot them last year that I had gotten mad at them. She leaned over and gave me a kiss on the cheek and reminded me to be careful with her little brother.

She pulled him up to me and I got down on one knee to look him in the eye. I stared at him and he stared at me. I pulled out a candy cane and handed it to him. He reached out and took it and put it in his mouth. His eyes were as big as saucers and his smile stretched across his face. The little girl, with the haughtiness reserved for big sisters looked down at him, hands on her hips and reminded him that she had told him I was the good guy. She leaned in and kissed her little brother on the cheek. Then turned him around and stood with him in front of Santa. His mother had her cell phone camera ready.



Her mother asked me, she felt she had to ask me, to take a picture of me with the kids. Seems the mall Santa gets \$15.00 for each picture. I just smiled and told her to take as many as she wanted, no charge. She cried a little as she took shot after shot. The little brother had sticky all over his face and his sister found her candy cane in my hand as she left."

Santa paused for a moment as more and more people crowded into the diner. He reminded them that there was good pie and coffee to be had and continued talking.

"A small boy, too old to really believe in Santa Claus walked in by himself. He was hesitant, uncertain. But he was also desperate. He walked back and forth in front of me nervous like and told me I couldn't be real. But I had to be real. He needed me to be real. His little sister needed a dolly. Any dolly would do. He didn't want to make it too hard on me. He just wanted her to have a dolly. No reason given. Told me how bad last year had been. I had nothing but candy canes. I gave him a handful and told him I would see what I could do."

"I have a few hundred more tales to tell if you want them. All





the kids want for Christmas is Christmas. They are looking for it wherever they can find it. At a time when it is so desperately needed this town voted to end their support for the holiday. They said they needed to save the money. They put a price on hope and caring and said the price was too high.”

The camera kept on rolling as the reporter regained her composure. She finally asked a sensible question.

“Are you coming back tomorrow? The Mayor said he will have you arrested if you do.” She spoke.

“I will be back tomorrow and the next day. It is a public park and this is Christmas. The Mayor will do what he will do. It is not my call.” Santa replied.

“Now if you will excuse me. I have reindeer and a tent to gather.” Santa said.

With a twinkle in his eye, yes, I said it, with a twinkle in his eye, Santa walked out the diner and back across to the tent. Jimmy and the old man were almost done cleaning up the mess. Santa and the elves joined in to finish up and they all left the park.



Chapter 6

“What happened next? Did he go back? Did he get arrested?” The businessman asked.

“Well, as you can imagine the word got out. The reporter and station put both sides on the late night news and the full interviews on their website. By morning the Internet was burning up. One side was talking about protecting the kids, another was talking about obeying the law, and another wanted to know what religion had to say about this. Most supported Santa, but everyone was looking to see what would happen. It seemed Christmas depended on it.” Frank said.

“Really? You think people thought Christmas depended on the outcome?” The businessman asked.

“Seemed that way to all of us, anyhow.” Jimmy said as everyone in the room nodded in agreement.

“Well all the kooks were out posting diatribes on the Internet, but the people posting weren’t up to the power of Jenny and her elves. These girls know how to use that darn social networking like they know how to shop. No offense, Molly.” Frank said.

“None taken, they do know how to shop.” Molly grinned.

By morning, just before ten o’clock, when Henry begins to set up his tent, the park was packed. There were five sheriff’s cars, three television networks and hundreds of them school kids at the center of it all. Jenny had gotten the football team to ring around the area Henry would set up his tent to make sure he had space. The girls were dressed as elves in the center singing Christmas songs.

The Mayor was in his office at the City Hall looking for a fight. He wasn’t going to be upstaged by any half wit and he wasn’t going to have the law in this city flouted. He was going to protect these people even if they didn’t want protected.

At the stroke of ten Henry came around the corner, dressed in his Santa suit dragging that old cart behind him. The crowd erupted in cheers. He hesitated just a bit then looked back. Emma, dressed as Mrs. Claus was coming up be-





hind him, a big chocolate cream pie perched on her hands. The crowd roared its approval.

Then just like always, here came Jimmy. He had on a red coat, green shirt, and red suspenders along with a red pointy hat with a fuzzy white ball hanging at the end. He was carrying his picket fence panels. Ole man Johnson came around the corner pulling his trailer full of animals with his raggedy ole truck. On the sides of the truck were Christmas decorations of every kind and a sign saying "Santa Express". The crowd parted as the Henry, Emma, Jimmy and ole Johnson pulled up to the park.

Jenny and her elves clapped and cheered and a whole team of young 'uns came out of the crowd and helped Santa set his place up. It didn't take too long and as soon as it was up the Sheriff's deputies surrounded the tent and Santa. They didn't let anybody in and they didn't let anybody out. They just waited. Little kids were lining the street ready to see Santa. Parents had brought them and themselves to show their support. But nothing was happening. Everyone was waiting. The tension filled the air and finally the Mayor stepped out of his office and strode across the park towards the crowd, looked like he had planned on making an entrance for effect.

Now to say the Mayor's gait was arrogant would be an understatement. He was sure of himself and sure the town would see how he was protecting them. In the end, he knew, they would know he was right. He strode right up to the tent, walked past the deputies and



brought himself up directly in front of Santa. His haughty air and self righteous attitude would have made the Grinch blush. He looked Santa right in the eye and in his most officious tone, told him he was trespassing and ordered him to leave. The crowd stood in absolute silence as Santa looked Wally Plot up and down like some pitiful thing. Then he just paused, stared him in the eye and said, no.

Wally exploded. He began yelling and screaming at Santa. He started to call Henry everything in the book, when it finally happened.





"What happened? What finally happened?" The businessman asked.

"Why Christmas showed up. What do you think would happen? Christmas finally arrived in this little burg. Hope came roaring in with the simple actions of a few of our town merchants." Frank grinned.



"It was you first, Frank." Molly grinned.

"I thought I was gonna die when you stepped out of the crowd." Jimmy said.

"What are you talking about?" The businessman asked.

Well the explosion of words that came close to becoming profane just did it for me. I stepped forward and told Wally that was enough. It was time for him to go home. Jimmy, Molly, Ahmed, and every businessman in and around the park stood between Wally and Santa and looked the Mayor directly in the eye. We all nodded our heads and stood there waiting. Wally was stunned. He didn't know what to do. He started to speak and sputter when Mrs. Claus came from around the tent.

She walked up to the Mayor and quietly told him that they had had just about enough of him. Then the Mayor's face fell into her pie.

"Wait. The Mayor's face fell into the chocolate pie?" The businessman chuckled.

"That is how I saw it." Jimmy replied.

"I was there, looked like he fairly jumped in it." Molly replied.

"The sheriff himself was there and he was sure the Mayor fell into the pie. Of course the Mayor saw it differently and started to protest. Said something about Emma throwing it in his face." Frank grinned.

"What did the television crews record?" The businessman asked.

"Couldn't find out. Seems every one of those guys lost the footage." Frank replied.





Well with pie on his face the Sheriff thought it was a good idea to take him to the local hospital to check him out. So he directed the deputies to place the Mayor in one of the cruisers and escort him to the hospital. He left a few deputies to help with the crowd and Santa walked out to the line and swooped up one of the prettiest little black haired girls. He took her and her mom and dad inside to find out what she wanted for Christmas.





Epilogue

"That's quite a story. Well worth the four pieces of pie. What happened to the Mayor? How did the rest of the Christmas go?" The businessman grinned.

"Like every Christmas should, with hope and laughter." Said a jolly old elf as he entered the diner.

"Hey, Santa. How's it going today?" Asked Frank.

"Just fine. You still telling that story?" Santa asked.

"Man bought four pieces of pie to hear it." Frank grinned.

"Well at least he got something for the bother. You better quit talking and get ready for the dinner rush don't ya think?" Santa smiled.

"You worry bout them reindeer and kids. I'll worry about the diner." Frank chuckled.

"So what did happen to the Mayor and Christmas?" The businessman asked.

"Well, the publicity brought more people than ever to the town. All the businesses did real good. Santa stayed at the Park every day. The Sheriff told him to just leave the animals and tent up and they would look after it. Very soon those still working for the town came over and put the town lights up. The local service club donated one of those wooden sheds to replace the old tent and Santa had a real toy shop to see the kids in.

Jenny and the girls stayed until the last kid was seen on Christmas Eve and enjoyed a couple of discounts for their service from the local stores. The Mayor stayed to himself mostly and when the position went up for election the beginning of the next year the Mayor lost in a landslide to Henry." Frank replied.

"Best part was people began to believe again. They began to have hope. They stopped looking for a savior and began believing in themselves again. Suddenly it seemed we could do anything. What didn't kill us made us stronger. It made the town stronger." Santa said.

"Can't end Christmas with a vote, Santa?" The businessman asked.





"Can't end Christmas with a vote." Santa replied.

Jimmy got up to leave and then turned towards the businessman.

"We told you our story. What's yours?" Jimmy asked.

"Nothing much. Came down to talk to the Mayor about moving a business to town. Was looking for a nice place with good people that can take on a challenge." The businessman replied.

"Well we can show you the Mayor." Jimmy said and moved towards Santa.

"No need. I think I already know where the Mayor is." The businessman smiled as he looked directly at Santa.

"Think you can give the Mayor a message for me, Santa?" The businessman asked.

"Not a problem." Santa replied.

"Tell him I believe this is the town I was looking for. I always believed in Christmas and want to be in a town that believes in it too. Tell him we'll get together after Christmas and plan where to put our plant in this little town." The businessman said as he put on his hat and headed towards the door.

"I'll be sure to tell him." Santa smiled.

"Oh, and Santa, tell Emma I'm looking forward to more pie when I get back. Merry Christmas, all." The businessman said as he went out the door.

"Merry Christmas to all." Santa said as the man drove out of sight.





*Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year!*

*Don't forget to leave
out the cookies for Santa!*

