

Stories of the Season Cont'd

Written by Southwest Orlando Bulletin Staff

Honorable Mention - A Christmas Plan

by Gphelie Johnson, 30

Hidden Beach

We say everything happens for a reason, and I've believed it since that cold Christmas morning in 2008.

I got up early to be on time for a Christmas feast at my sister's house, who lived 300 miles away. The roads were quiet. I was halfway there, when suddenly I realized I had a flat tire. I was alone, freezing, scared and in the middle of nowhere — not knowing how to change a tire. Also, my phone was not charged. I started crying and praying.

"Please, God, don't let me spend Christmas Day alone in the cold."

After 30 minutes, I heard the sound of a car. A tall, handsome man got out and asked if I needed help. He quickly fixed my tire and gave me his phone number in case I had a problem on the road again. Later on, I called to thank him. A few days later, he called me back to ask me to go on a date.

We've been happily married for two years. God definitely had a plan for us on that Christmas Day.

Honorable Mention - A Magical Night

by Cassidy Nordmann, 12

Bay Hill

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Written by Southwest Orlando Bulletin Staff

Everybody looks up to somebody. A young athlete might idolize their favorite basketball or football player. A child aspiring to be a scientist might revere somebody like Einstein or Edison. Everybody has somebody that they want to be like.

If little Sally Jones told you who she looked up to, you might burst into laughter. Sally always wanted to be like Santa Claus. She loves how kind and generous he is. His merry laughter and rosy cheeks filled her dreams. Every year, she sends him a letter asking what he did and things like that, but sadly, not a single one had been replied to. As Sally grew up, she felt a little more discouraged each year. The children at school teased her about her belief in Santa. They snickered at her and shouted things like, "He's not real, stupid!" and "When will you grow up?"

When Sally was 12, she actually started to listen to them. She decided to write one last letter to Santa. In the letter she told him about the horrid kids at school and asked him, Santa, are you real? Are you really out there? Do you really give presents to all the children or are you just a story?

The next day, she sent the letter in the mail and was thinking about it all day, until she flopped down on her bed and enjoyed the bliss of unconsciousness.

Tap, tap, tap. Sally's eyes shot open. The sound was coming from the window next to her bed. She swung her legs around and slipped out of her sheets. She went to the window to see what it was and saw something she definitely didn't expect. A reindeer hovered there as if he were being held up by cords. His antlers were pointed and bright white. A tuft of fur on his head was slicked back with what appeared to be hair gel. Then he did something even more amazing. He spoke.

"Well, hello there, little missy," he said. His voice reminded Sally of Elvis. "I believe you go by the name of Sally Jones."

"Y-y-yes," she stammered. She couldn't believe she was talking to an actual reindeer.

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“The name’s Comet. Why don’t you climb on my back? The boss wants to meet ya.”

Sally did what the reindeer said, feeling excited. As soon as she was settled, Comet trotted around in the air as if he was walking on the ground, and they were off.

It was like riding a horse, except Comet’s movements were smooth, and there were no bumps or jolts. The wind whipped past Sally’s face, causing her straw-colored hair to flutter behind her. She looked down at the city of Orlando. Of course, there was no snow on the ground, but she could see the bright lights of stores full of late-night holiday shoppers. She could see the amusement parks and the homes of the people anxious for Christmas. One home had a giant electronic board that counted down to Christmas Day. Sally watched it as midnight came, and it became three more days instead of four.

Suddenly, Comet began to pick up speed, and the world turned into a flash of light. Sally’s vision returned, and she saw that she was no longer in Orlando. Comet slowly drifted to the ground as Sally studied her surroundings. There was ice and snow everywhere. In front of her was a huge factory-sized log cabin. Puffs of smoke drifted out of the chimney. The place looked warm and inviting.

Comet tilted his head toward the cabin and said, “Come on, kid. You’re going to catch cold out here.”

Sally struggled to keep up with the reindeer’s long strides. Once they reached the cabin door, Comet stuck a hoof out and knocked.

The door creaked open, and there he was. Santa’s huge belly filled the door frame. He wore the traditional red suit and hat. His cheeks were as red as apples, and his eyes twinkled with mirth. A kind smile played across his lips.

“Ahh, dear Miss Sally Jones, I’ve wanted to meet you for a long time now.”

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Sally's mouth dropped open in shock. She finally got the nerve to speak, and whispered, "Then how come you never answered my letters? I had nearly given up hope."

"Sally, what do you think would happen if I started answering letters left and right? Everybody would know everything about me. There would be nothing magic about me anymore. I brought you here to tell you not to give up hope. Stick with what you believe in Sally. You're going to do great things in this world."

Sally perked up after hearing those last words. She walked a step or two closer to Santa, and he caught her in a gigantic hug. He smelled of milk and peppermint.

He slipped her a box covered in colorful wrapping paper and said, "Take this and always remember this night, Sally Jones."

Sally turned around to face Comet, who bowed down to allow her to climb on his back. She did so, and watched as Santa Claus slowly became a waving red dot. They picked up speed, and the flashing light came again. Comet brought her to the bedroom window, and she clambered off his back.

The reindeer leaned over and murmured, "You're one lucky kid," before disappearing into the night.

Sally plopped down on her bed and unwrapped the present Santa had given her. It was a snow globe that had a replica of Santa's giant log cabin in it. She smiled and fell asleep with renewed hope and joy.

When Sally got older, she became a successful business woman. She could have easily been living in a mansion, but instead, she gave much of her money to charity. Every day, she shook the snow globe Santa had given her and remembered that magical night.

And on Christmas Eve, Santa would fly by her window and say, "Never forget, Sally, never forget."

Honorable Mention - Arnold's Most Memorable Christmas

by Adam Stern, 11
Southwest Orlando

Arnold Snowie lived in a tiny one-bedroom apartment in a small town in Baltimore. His mom was decorating for Christmas and asked Arnold to go to the basement to get the box of ornaments for their droopy, lifeless, pine Christmas tree. This is how Arnold's most memorable Christmas began.

As Arnold dragged himself down the stairs to find the box of ornaments for his mother, his imagination began to take over his thoughts. The basement was cold, dark and musty. Arnold saw a shimmery glow in the back right corner. He knew he had to find out what the light was. As he opened the old ripped box that read Mario, Arnold froze and began to tingle from the tips of his boney toes to the tip of his shaggy head. He could not believe his eyes — a Galaxy Super Mario animated figure stood before his eyes as clear as day. Arnold blinked and blinked again, but Mario did not disappear. Mario extended his hand to Arnold and told him to grab on tight. The next thing Arnold remembered was colors and sounds all around him. Could it be that Arnold had left the cold, dark basement and entered Mario's world?

Mario explained he was packed up and discarded in the basement for eternity, never to be played with again. Mario was so excited to see Arnold. At this moment, Arnold became very sad, because he knew he could not take him home for many reasons.

First, he would have to ask Mario's previous owner if it was OK. Second, he did not have a gaming system to play Galaxy Mario. Most importantly, he had to ask his mother if he could get a gaming system for Christmas. Arnold knew his mom would say no, because they could not afford it. All of a sudden, Arnold heard his mother calling him. Quickly, Arnold snapped out of his

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trance and placed the Galaxy Mario game back into the dusty torn box, shut it tight and reached over for the box of ornaments. Minutes later, he opened his apartment door and handed the ornaments to his mother. His mother had a strange look on her face as she looked at Arnold. She asked him if he was OK, because he was white as a ghost.

Arnold stuttered and said, "Nothing, nothing, nothing is wrong; I am just fine."

Silently, he and his mother decorated their tree together. They did not have much time, because Arnold's mother had to be at work by 9 p.m. She worked at Target, and Black Friday was starting at midnight sharp. Arnold had already looked at the Target ad and was hoping and praying Santa was going to bring him a brand-new Xbox 360. His mother told him that there were a lot of boys and girls who needed an Xbox 360 more than he did.

Mario could hear Arnold's conversation with his mother through the thin walls of the apartment building. Mario decided to contact Adam and ask him to help Arnold. Adam had just returned home from serving in Iraq. He had grown out of his gaming system and was responsible for packing up Galaxy Mario in the basement.

Adam decided to go shopping at Target that evening. Arnold and his dad arrived at Target at 9 p.m. to stand in line and waited for the store to open at midnight. Arnold's mom already was inside working. Adam happened to be the customer waiting in front of Arnold and his father. Arnold had never met a real soldier. He was very intrigued with Adam's uniform and interesting stories about his adventures in Iraq. They talked for the entire three hours while waiting for Target to open. At the stroke of midnight, Arnold and his dad went one way into Target, and Adam went the other way. Adam winked as they entered the store. Arnold just smiled back at him. Adam was a lucky shopper that evening, because he got the last Xbox 360 on the shelf.

Christmas morning in Baltimore was icy cold and snowy. Arnold rushed to the tree to find one present from Santa. Quickly, he opened his gift to find it was not an Xbox 360 but a new winter coat. After dinner that evening, the doorbell rang. All of a sudden, Arnold heard someone say "Ho ho, ho." Santa was standing in his doorway. Santa handed Arnold a big present wrapped in shiny, red wrapping paper.

Santa looked at Arnold and said, "Merry Christmas, Arnold."

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Arnold was stunned. He grabbed the present and ripped it open. It was a brand-new Xbox 360. Santa leaned over and whispered into Arnold's ear that Mario was waiting for him in the basement. Arnold smiled, and Santa winked. Santa was really his friend, Adam, who he had met at Target on Black Friday. Arnold and Adam played Galaxy Mario for hours as they ate the rest of Santa's cookies together. Arnold believed this was his most memorable Christmas ever.

Honorable Mention - The Christmas Concert
by Grace Scheeringa, 9
Keene's Pointe

It was only about an hour before the Christmas concert rehearsal, and I still couldn't get my little sister, Emily, to come out of her room. Of course, I might not want her at the concert anyway, since it was my concert, not hers. But, I knew she couldn't stay at our house alone, so I decided to try one more time before I got Mother. I ran across the hall to Emily's room.

"Emily," I called.

"Read the sign!" she yelled back. Emily always had a sign on her bedroom door. Sometimes it said things like: Go Away!

And sometimes it explained more of what she was doing in there or why she was in there. Today, her sign said: Please knock on the door. Emily.

I did, and sure enough, she opened the door.

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Written by Southwest Orlando Bulletin Staff

“Hi, Kayla,” she said, pulling me in the door.

Emily’s room was always cheery, with its light green walls and a light pink dry-erase easel. But today it was even more cheery. There were green and red hearts, trees, presents, stars, angels, wise men, a stable, Mary and Joseph, a baby Jesus, and a Santa Claus all taped to her walls. Emily pushed me onto her hot-pink sofa and sat down next to me.

“What should I wear to church?” Emily asked.

“It’s not church,” I told her. “It’s my Christmas concert rehearsal.”

“Oh,” Emily said, sounding a bit surprised.

“And, of course, I’ll help you.” We went into her closet, and I helped her pick out a red-and-gold dress. She slipped the dress over her head and ran into my room.

“Now, I get to pick your outfit,” she told me.

I wanted to argue with her, but it was only fair. I had picked her outfit. We ran to my closet, and together we decided on a red dress with a big green bow on the front. It had seven smaller sparkly green bows to put in my hair.

I had just finished clipping them into my hair when mother called, “Kayla, Emily. Come and get your shoes on. The car is almost here.”

We dashed down the stairs.

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“Coming, Mother,” we said.

I slipped on a pair of shimmering green shoes. Emily slid her feet into black heels with red bows. We ran outside. Mother was already waiting for us.

“What took you so long?” she asked.

“Emily wouldn’t let me wear my concert dress,” I complained.

“You never told me that,” Emily protested.

“I don’t think you have time to change, Kayla,” Mother told me.

After a few minutes, Father pulled into the driveway in a shiny black limousine. I could see four cups of hot chocolate sitting on a small box. Father rolled down the window.

“Come on in,” he said.

“Hello, Father,” I said.

“Hi, Kayla,” he replied.

“Who wants some hot chocolate?” he asked.

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Written by Southwest Orlando Bulletin Staff

“Me!” Emily and I shouted at the same time.

He gave us steaming cups that smelled of chocolate.

“Where are the marshmallows? I want marshmallows. Give me some MARSHMALLOWS!” Emily demanded.

“They’re behind you, Emily,” Father said.

Emily snatched the bag and dumped 45 marshmallows into her cup. Then, she threw the bag into the air. All the marshmallows flew out of it, and two of them landed in my cup.

“You can clean up in here when we get to our destination,” Mother said.

When we got to the auditorium where I was going to rehearse, Mother stayed with Emily while Father and I went inside. I warmed up my voice while Emily and Mother walked inside. I was excited, because my friends were going to see me perform.

But then, when I thought all was well, the disaster of the day happened. While I was singing Silent Night, Emily leaped on to the stage and started singing with me. When I noticed that one extra voice, I was so shocked. I dashed out of the room and burst into tears. After sobbing for 10 minutes, I looked up. I heard a voice. It sounded like a gentle breeze. As she continued to sing the concert songs, I realized that Emily had the most beautiful voice ever.

Then, I had a great idea.

“Emily, you have the most beautiful voice,” I exclaimed. “Will you do the concert with me?”

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“Do you really mean it? Yes!” she squealed.

I told Mother and Father about my idea. “I think that is a wonderful idea,” Mother said.

On the night of the concert, we sang together and got lots of applause. A man even handed us flowers. It was truly an amazing night.

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