

‘Twas the Week Before Christmas
by Andy Bachmann

Today I’ve a tale to tell here to you
And about Christmas spirit, I know a thing or two
So listen in close to this story today
About a grumpy old man who wished he could wish Christmas away.

Twas the week before Christmas,
and nothing was done.
No cookies were baked,
no stockings were hung

No Christmas cards were written,
No Holiday cheer
Would grace the front lawn of Mr. Winthrop This year.

His holiday spirit had long since moved on
Since his boys became men, and had since moved along
And he was divorced from his wife almost twenty years now
Besides, she’d taken all the decorations with her, anyhow.

He was sort of like the Grinch, with his heart oh so small
And he was like Ebenezer, the scrooigest of all,
But deep in his heart there was still a soft place
But you never could tell from the scowl on his face.

He was the man the neighborhood would avoid,
Because they knew no matter what they would do, he’d be annoyed;
Whether it’s footballs on the lawn or dogs on the grass
There’s a reason the kids called him Mr. Sassafra.

But the problem with him still remains to be seen
Because the man in our story didn’t REALIZE he was mean!
He didn’t know his perception from the folks on the street
Because never took time to go meet and greet.

He minded his own business, and didn’t think to fret
About the sickly old widow, or the neighbors lost pet
He didn’t know who was sick, or what babies were born
He didn’t ask who got married, or for whom people mourn.

He didn’t bother with Halloween or Christmas decorations
He didn’t give a hoot about seasonal celebrations
Not that having some lights or a decorated tree
Would alter the outcome of what is, or was to be
He liked what he did, and he knew who he was,
And he didn’t change a bit, until the week ‘Twas...

Because, between you and me, I knew that this was the year
That old Mr. Winthrop would find his old Christmas cheer.

How did I know this? Well I'm glad that you asked
Because up at the Pole there's a list, and a sack
And into the sack we put presents galore
But Santa also brings blessings, which mean quite a bit more.

Sure Timmy will be happy with his brand new shiny bike
But his mother will receive a hope-filled, new lease on life.
Sure Molly will be thrilled with her new iPod and iPhone
But her father will realize that he doesn't have to go through life alone.

Yes, the blessings we bring are bountiful each year,
And the ones that mean the most are the ones you don't usually hear
Old Saint Nick ain't a Saint because he's afraid to jump into the fray
He's the man in the Red suit who freely gives hope away.

For, Surely by now everyone here must know
That Christmas ain't about the presents and the bows
Christmas time is about so much more
It's about hope, and peace and joy like never before.

Christmas is about compassion, and giving your neighbor a hand
And about spreading good news of God's grace throughout the land
After all, the Christ Child was born on the longest night,
So that the people who walked in darkness would see a great light!

But back to the story that I came here to tell
About old Mr. Winthrop and the day that he fell
From his self inflicted isolation and his routine laden world
Into a brand new mindset, with his faith flag unfurled.

You see, his life, I'm afraid, had become a routine
He lived day to day, with nary a change to be seen
But on one fateful day as these stories often begin
Something occurred in his life that would alter him within.

His morning routine always went just so
at 6:15 get up, clean up, then go
to the 43rd Street deli, over here on 13th,
Grab the paper, and remember to put in his teeth

Find a booth by the window round the corner in the rear
So he wouldn't have to deal with all that chatter in his ears.
He always asked what's the special of the day
But rarely from his regular routine he would stray.

If it was strawberry pancakes, or French toast surprise,
He'd almost get a little twinkle in his eyes,
But he'd cough a harrumph, and order the same old thing-
Eggs scrambled, rye toast, one coffee, two creams.

But on this fateful day, on December 18th,
Something happened to Mr. Winthrop that changed him beneath
His crusty old exterior, something changed deep within
That forced him to turn his scowl to a grin.

It was a day like every other, but as he ate breakfast and read
He felt a little twinkle in the back of his head
Like someone was looking at him from a far
So he glanced at the tables, the booths and the bar.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, just the regular folks
Were eating their breakfast, making chit chat, cracking jokes
And as he looked around nobody glanced over his way
So he shrugged a harrumph and went on with his day.

But as he mopped up the last of his eggs with his toast,
He looked up to find the Restaurant host
Grinning down at him, with a smile that seemed to grow
The host said, 'Your bill has been paid. You are free to go.'

What?
What?

It took him a while for the news to sink in.
And he pulled out his wallet, and looked within
There was a crisp One Hundred dollar bill in there.
And he protested, "surely they meant to pay someone else's fare".

"No no," said the host, "this person meant you."
And old Mr. Winthrop didn't know what to do
He sat and he stammered, and then looked around
Wondering how or if this Christmas Angel could be found.

I wish you could have seen the look on his face
As the reality sunk in that he was kissed by God's grace
And a sweet Christmas Angel, whose identity was unknown
Somehow found a way to give the seasons spirit a home.

Suddenly, back through time and his memories he flew
And recalled a memory of something his father would do
Every year, during Advent, his father would delight
In secretly paying people's tabs for the night.

He remembered the way his father would tossle his hair
And grin his insatiable grin, and take care
To whisper into the ear of his only beloved son
“Now, for me, the season of Christmas has begun”

He recalled how his father would take great care to show
That it’s not what you give, it’s what you know
Deep down in your heart that the meaning of this time
Is to welcome, into your heart and your soul and your mind

The spirit of hope, the light yet unseen
The gift of the Christ child, and the love that he brings.

As the memories faded, he felt tightness in his throat
For this kindness and grace was a feeling so remote
That he could barely remember how wonderful it could feel
When the love of the Christmas season was made real.

“Well...Thank you” he said, with a tremble to his lip
And he dug in his pocket, and left a generous tip,
And as he walked through the restaurant on the way to the door
He wondered who would do such a thing, and what for?

He hadn’t gone out of his way in years
To make others feel welcome, to bring someone to tears
Through a simple act of kindness, or a generous gift
But he felt a smile in his eyes, and his spirit start to lift.

“My, I feel better than I think I’ve ever felt before”
And with a spring in his step, he burst out the door
And immediately he said, “now what can I do
To make others feel special, to spread the Christmas spirit, too!”

“I’ve got cookies to bake, and cards to write, too
I’ve got stockings to hang, and the front lawn to do!
I think I’ll go visit that widow, and invite my son’s down
For a good old-fashioned Christmas here, in Gainesvilletown.

For the kids on the street, I’ll put up a basketball net
And introduce myself to those neighbors I haven’t met yet
Heck, I’ll host a neighborhood block party Holiday celebration
For tis the season for joyous jubilation!

And later, with trembling hand he called his sons, one by one
And to each one he said, ‘Forgive me for what I’ve done.
I’ve neglected the spirit of Christmas in my heart
And I would love it more than anything if this year I could take part
In your holiday celebrations. I promise good cheer,

And I'm asking...I'm begging... would you please come here?"

And wouldn't you know it, each son then agreed
Because, in truth, in each one was a deep seeded need
That each of them felt a desire to come around
Their father, who was lost, now had been found.

As I'd mentioned, into Santa's bag we place more blessings than gifts
Because, during this holiday season, some people need a lift
Just a boost of a reminder, just the hint of a care
That no matter who you are, and that no matter where,
You are welcome into God's ever-loving embrace
You are welcome at the manger, to see the divine child's sweet face

And feel God's hope and love growing in you
No matter who you are or what you do.

Yes, the spirit of Christmas is alive here today
And if the spirit has graced you then you've got something to say
But when the smoke here has cleared, and I'm back on my shelf
Please, do me a favor, and remember this old Elf

Because, for me, Christmas doesn't take place just one time a year
It lives on, and loves on, it brings hope and good cheer
Every time that you go to your neighbor and reach out
Every time you remember 'You'd better not pout'

I'll bet Mr. Winthrop will have the best Christmas of his life,
And between you and me I know that widow is going to become his new wife

I don't recommend his cookies,
and you should probably still stay off of his grass,
But I'm happy to report that the kids on the street no longer call him, 'Mr. Sassafra.''

We Elves are happy to spread Christmas through
But it means so much more when it comes from one of you
So whoever that 43rd street angel out there was,
Thank you for creating a little holiday buzz.