

The Messenger

New Richmond High School, 1131 Bethel New Richmond Road, New Richmond, Ohio 45157
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Welcome to *The Messenger*, special December edition!

For this issue, *Messenger* staff members were asked to write an opinion piece centered around a holiday theme and then write a holiday story that could either be real or creative. All of the students this year chose the creative option and their stories and columns are published here; we hope you enjoy them.

We are so grateful for the community's support of our newspaper, especially in a time when print journalism is struggling, and when even *The Messenger* doesn't do much actually in print any more. The paper allows students a voice for their opinions as well as an opportunity to publish their work. As the adviser for *The Messenger*, I am very proud of their writing, as well as their commitment to the paper.

We are lucky to be a part of a community that values student journalism, and we appreciate the support of our advertisers and our readers.

We're also lucky to be a small part of a very generous community.

This year at the high school, we plan to meet or beat the all-time food drive record set last year

(and that's even without John Callebs, aka the King of Cans).

We're also helping close to 50 students at Christmas through Lions Reach Out as well as collecting hundreds of personal care items for the Giving Tree.

PTO members, local churches and community residents have stepped up to adopt needy families for the holiday season, and every staff member in the building has actively supported our community service efforts.

Even better is the fact that this kind of community service extends to every school in the district and the spirit of giving back is more than simply words in the New Richmond community.

Enjoy our special issue and have a wonderful holiday season!

The Messenger staff--

Tristin Baumann, Jade Davidson, Gage Combs, Kaylee Gibbs, Hunter Gilpin, Elise Holdsworth, Sadie LaRocque, Joe Maxwell, Ciera Moore, Brooklyn Parker.

The love of Christmas traditions Holiday memories

Rookie

Brookie



By Brooklyn Parker

Sweet smells drifting from the kitchen, smiles everywhere, Christmas music fills the air; this sums up Christmas for my family.



Christmas is my favorite holiday because of the traditions. Every family has different traditions for the holidays and my family has a bunch of them.

Every year at the beginning of December, my family starts to decorate our house. When we start the decorating process, we put the tree up together and decorate it. While we do this, we play Christmas music, light a fire and drink hot chocolate. Every year either one of my sisters or I put the angel on top of the tree.

When children often think of Christmas, they think big trees, fires going with stockings hanging above them and brightly wrapped presents with big bows on them underneath the tree. I used to think that

but now I think of the fun that comes with putting up the tree and decorating the house with my family. It makes me happy and calm.

Christmas is the time of giving and helping those in need; it's also time to spend time with family and friends.

A few days after we finish my house, my sisters and I go to our grandma's house. There we make cardamon bread; a bread that is sort of braided and covered in icing with green and red chewy candies on it.

Making this bread is a special thing to do. It takes time and care to make the bread in perfect braids. The concentration is soothing, and just having my grandma with me is even more so.

Many people love everything about Christmas. The smells that come from the pine trees and also the smells that come from lighted candles in the kitchen

as tasty baked goods bake are some of my favorite Christmas smells.

Next, we help her put up and decorate her Christmas tree. Helping her decorating her tree is one of the best things to do. Every year she buys every one of her grandchildren an ornament.

The ornaments have to do with something important that happened that year with each grandchild and no ornament is the same.

For many families, including mine, Christmas lasts for many days. On Christmas Eve, my mom, dad, sisters and I go to my dad's side of the family. We're normally there until 10 pm or 10:30 pm. Before my sisters go to bed, we still put out cookies for "Santa" When my sisters go to bed, I help my mom wrap presents for my sisters and for my mom's side of the family.

Christmas morning, my youngest sister, Andrea, wakes me up at 7am to tell me that it's Christmas morning. Than we run down to

my second sister, Hayley, to wake her up.

The rule at our house is that we have to wait until at least 8am to wake up our parents. After we look in our stockings, we eat breakfast my dad makes for us. After breakfast, we open all our presents underneath the tree.

Christmas day we spend playing with whatever we got. At about 5pm we go to my mom's mother's house for Christmas dinner and presents with that side of the family. It's always fun, we all love each other and enjoy spending time together.

Christmas contains many different traditions. Every tradition brings different feelings for someone. My family's traditions bring calm, soothing, and happy feelings to me. This year at Christmas think about the traditions your family



Winter is coming early this year

New Richmond schools already had one snow day

For the first time since 1999, New Richmond schools had a snow day in November. With about 3-5 inches falling overnight, people are wondering what's

going on with Mother Nature out there. Some are saying that it seems like Mother

Nature is having an affair with Jack Frost, bringing an early winter to us all this year. Now most are not very happy that all this snow has fallen so early, but I'm very excited. Being a winter baby myself, I have always loved snow.

Last year, our school missed so many days because of snow that the school considered giving us up to fourteen snow days. The Farmers' Almanac predicts that this

year's winter weather will be a lot more severe and even colder than it was this time last year. Their predictions may make many people consider pack-

ing their bags and moving to sunny Florida, but it makes me even happier to be living in Ohio.

With snow falling already, I'm starting to get into the Christmas spirit, and I don't think it's ever happened this early in the year for me personally. Snow automatically makes me think of Christmas, like it probably does for many people. Since there is snow on the ground this early in the year, who knows how much there will be by the time the 25th of

December rolls around. I'm hoping that more snow falls and that there is going to be another completely white Christmas.

By the time we're in February, I'll probably be one of the people really sick of the snow that seems to be everywhere already. But for now I'm enjoying it as much as I can, mostly because this happens every year and it makes me wish for the summer months. Once summer is over with, I'm craving the sight of freshly fallen snow and so the cycle begins again.

When it starts getting colder out, I get really excited. Autumn has always been my favorite time of the year and my fondness just builds as the weather gets cooler and the year starts to end. I like going outside and playing in the snow, even though I'm almost sixteen and I should be growing out of that. I like that

Moore is More

By Ciera Moore



Get in the holiday spirit and put up a real tree!

Why having a real Christmas tree is better than an artificial one

When it comes to Christmas trees, would you rather have a real one or a fake one? Most families nowadays have a fake Christmas tree. Actually, it's pretty rare to find a family who goes out and gets a real tree. Out of all my friends, my family is one of the only ones that actually goes out to a Christmas tree farm and puts up a real tree for Christmas.



In my opinion, getting a real tree is way more fun than setting up a fake one. My family goes out to this Christmas tree farm owned by an elderly couple and we chop down our own. I personally love having a real tree rather than a fake one because the smell of the pines lingers throughout the whole house and I love it.

Also, it is more festive and fun to have a real tree in your house. Don't get me wrong,

fake trees are fine. In fact, we have a fake tree in my upstairs lounge room. I just think it's more festive to have a real tree.

Approximately 33 million real Christmas trees are sold in North America each year. A good part about getting a real tree for the holiday season is that you can recycle your tree when Christmas is over. In fact, most areas will collect trees during their regular pickup schedules on the two weeks following Christmas.

Many people say that a consequence of having a real Christmas tree is that are destroying the forests. I do know where they are coming from, but you can recycle the tree after the holiday, so you aren't completely wasting the tree.

If you are an environmentally friendly person like me, another good reason why real Christmas trees are better to have than ar-

tificial ones is that they absorb carbon dioxide and other gases, emitting fresh oxygen. Who knew?!

Also, real trees are a renewable, recyclable resource. Artificial trees contain non-biodegradable plastics and metals. For many people, the process of going out, selecting a tree, strapping it to the roof of the car and hauling it home is a family tradition. Unpacking and assembling an artificial tree just doesn't make the same holiday memories.

Every year, when my family and I go out to the Christmas tree farm and search for the best tree, we're looking for something really tall. Our ceiling in our living room is very high so we usually get one around 10 feet tall. Going out and looking for a tree creates so many fun memories, instead of just assembling an artificial one. Every

Hippie Holdsworth

By Elise Holdsworth



tree we get is huge, so it creates a lot of room for ornaments!

One of my favorite Christmas memories from when I was little was decorating the tree. My sisters and I would get so excited when my mom would bring up the big boxes that are filled with ornaments. Even when I was little, I loved having a real tree. I don't really know how to explain it, but it's so much more fun to have a real one.

So even though artificial Christmas trees are a lot easier to assemble and put up, having a real one is way more fun and don't forget, it's environmentally friendly!



Brace yourselves, winter has come

This is why weather needs to chill out

As Christmas draws nearer, so does winter. The fun snow on the ground that gives delays, the black ice that makes cars spin, and the ice everywhere that makes me slip and fall going to my car. Ah yes, winter is here... When will it be spring again?

There is a reason I write these columns around Christmas, and no, not because I want to whine to you about different situations with family or because I need the grade. It is because the weather stinks. Yes, the first snowfall is great and we get out of school for a day, but I can't go anywhere because the roads are covered with slush, black ice, or just straight up ice. We all get tired of the weather at some point, but when Jack Frost de-

cides to target my road (I live on a back road) I get a little irritated that I can't

physical abuse from driveways or tailspins into trees. It's the rude-



even make it to the library because Jack Frost thought it'd be funny if I slip on my driveway and feel like my leg popped out. It's not and I don't like getting hurt from that tenth of an inch of ice.

There is more to the winter weather than

ness of some people who like to participate in the capitalistic madness that is Christmas. Not only that, but why is it that the stores around me run out of hot chocolate? I understand people like it, I mean, I love it, but don't buy six boxes of it and expect me not to say something to you as you walk out the store. Anyway, I don't go out much because of people and their antics, especially Black Friday. I believe that day should be renamed the Hunger Games. People maim each other and their prize for winning is a \$20 crock pot.

The weather has never been nice to me during the times of giving. Either



Stuff n' Thangs
By Hunter Gilpin

my door is frozen shut, the snow falls in my mailbox, or I get ice everywhere. Walking in a Winter Wonderland? No, more like walking on my toes so I don't slip and fall face first. So when I also want to do my daily jog, I can't do it without just sliding down my road. So the ice is horrible, then the snow comes over the ice. You don't know where the ice is and you go full sprint out into your yard. Bad decisions have been made at that point. I'm not saying it hasn't happened to me, which it has, but it hurts a lot.

The winter winds are howling, the coldness sinking in, the people in their houses because winter stinks. Snow Days are good, until there are too many so it will take up some of my summer. Uhh! When will it end? Hopefully tomorrow; I want some hot chocolate now and let's hope the overly anxious grocery shoppers left me some.



There's nothing better than the holiday season

So eat your heart out

There are a lot of good things about Christmas, like spending time with your family who lives out of town, giving and receiving presents, and you can't forget about the food.

There's nothing better than the holiday season, in my opinion, and probably everyone else's.

Seeing family that you don't get to hang out with that often is always a great time and that's what makes me look forward to the holidays even more. Family is such an important part of every person's life and it is always a fun time to hang out with them around the holidays. I don't know about you, but when my huge family gets together we are obnoxious and insane, but I honestly couldn't have more fun with anyone else.

One of my favorite memories from spend-

ing Christmas with my family is when my grandpa dressed up as Santa himself last year. Now my grandpa is a rather small man, and the exact definition of a redneck. Seeing him put on a full Santa get up, beard and all, definitely made my whole Christmas break that much better.

Everyone obviously loves receiving presents but it always seems to feel so much better watching someone enjoy a present you gave him or her. Most people give back, whether it be actually buying or making someone a gift or giving in other ways, such as volunteering at a food pantry or donating to a charity. As messed up as our world can be, a lot of families and people give back during the holiday season.

There aren't a lot of things that are better than some good home

cooked food. People who eat out on Thanksgiving and Christmas just aren't living life right. The only thing that's better than going to your grandparent's house with your aunts, uncles and crazy cousins and just sitting and eating yourself into a coma is waking up from that coma at eleven that night and finding the leftover food.

There's one more thing that the holiday season isn't complete without: Black Friday. The night after Thanksgiving, all of the crazy couponing moms and any other person that enjoys running on two hours of sleep gets up at the crack of dawn and runs around insanely packed stores for some "great" sales. Now I don't know about you, but there isn't anything else in this entire world that sounds more fun than that. If taking elbows to the nose and having your

Kaylee's Commentary

By Kaylee Gibbs



feet stepped on at least twenty times isn't your cup of tea, the online Black Friday sales can also get pretty hectic. If you don't hit that button at the exact second, your precious 42" TV is gone forever and on someone else's wall.

At the end of the day, you can't give back enough and there's nothing to be more thankful for than family, so always make a little time for your crazy grandparents and aunts this holiday season, stay safe and eat everything you can.



The spirit of giving hasn't died

This generation is living proof of that

It's no stretch of the imagination for anyone these days to look at the world and see the way that everything has been commercialized into something to sell or make money off. You might say that with the way Christmas is

cause in the past I had not typically bought presents for anyone outside my immediate family. But this year was different. I took plenty of time to figure what to get each person, making

and focus not just on what other people are getting them for Christmas.

A quote from Mother Teresa herself sums up perfectly the way I feel about the whole idea of the spirit of giving at Christmas time. "I must be willing to give whatever it takes to do good to others. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise, there is no true love in me, and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me."

What I have surmised from the past few years, as I've seen myself and people around me mature and grow up and become the people they are today, was brought full circle

I must be willing to give whatever it takes to do good to others. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise, there is no true love in me, and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me.
--Mother Teresa

now, the spirit of giving is more or less dead. I might've agreed with you not too long ago, but I've slowly realized that I, and many others around me, are living proof that the spirit of giving has not died.

This Christmas in particular, I had a strange urge to buy presents for all of my friends and people I know really well. This was odd for me be-

sure I got them a present that they would really like, and then got it with no second thought or hesitation.

Several people I know have told me that they're getting presents for me, and I have heard so many people talking about getting presents for other people. It truly makes me happy to hear that people still focus on getting other people gifts,



by someone who posed a curious idea to me. "It's funny how when you're a kid you just want presents, but when you get older you like giving them more." It was an interesting way of looking at it. "Maybe," I responded, "it's that the older you get, the more you know how much it means to someone when they're given a present."



It's all about the cookies...

Homemade beats store-bought any day of the week

Have you ever noticed the slight (or drastic) difference between store bought Christmas cookies and treats and homemade ones? In my opinion, homemade is always better.

I don't know what it is, whether it's knowing that it was made with love or simply the fact that it was made by someone you actually know.

Store bought cookies are just gross in my mind. For one, you never know who made them or whether, once you buy them and open them, if they are going to be stale or just plain nasty.

Not only do homemade cookies give you the satisfaction of being made with love, but there is also the factor of spending time with family. On those boxes of store bought cookies, what do you always see? Cute little all American families baking those treats that you buy together.

But, is there ever re-

ally any baking involved with those store bought products? Any quality family time spent together? No! Of course not! I mean, unless you count the time that is spent together sitting on the couch stuffing your face with those treats.. But does that even count?

Although I don't usually enjoy sweets, around the holidays, it's one of the things I look forward to most. Just seeing all the homemade sweets made by the people I love just makes me so happy. The holidays are full of the reds and greens and spirit. Yes, the cookies from the store fit the "look" of Christmas, but I would rather have a cookie that is made by my little brother that looks like the worst Christmas tree on the face of this earth than one that is a masterpiece but tastes like dirt.

Christmas cookies are supposed to bring cheer and I feel like homemade cookies are just

more appealing. They may not look the best, but they remind me of home and family. They seem almost sweeter and even better in that sense.

I think some of my favorite holiday memories came from baking with my family. Whether it's sugar cookies, snickerdoodles, or even muffins, it's all good memories. When I was little, me and my great grandma would make these really cute cookies with the little cookies cutters.

After all of that, my favorite part was decorating them. Whether it was like Santa or little reindeer, it was some of my best experiences.

Davidson's Decree

By: Jade Davidson



All in all, I think that homemade cookies not only taste better, but bring great memories to families everywhere.

If I had to give advice to people all around the world, it would be to just take the time out of your holiday; spend that time making cookies with your family, Take the family time and make memories that will last a lifetime.



What is the true reason for Christmas?

Never forget that Christmas is because of religion



Christmas, a time of celebration, gifts, snow, and families coming together. The Christmas season is unlike other seasons because of the snow, spending more time with family, and gift giving. The snow seems to be coming earlier each year and makes it feel like Christmas is coming faster.

Even with everything else making the season wonderful, the true reason for the holiday is because of the birth of baby Jesus.

Being Catholic, I believe that Christmas is a holiday because of Jesus. I grew up going to church and learning religion, so I never forget the true meaning of Christmas. With all the other aspects of the holiday being involved many people

forget the true meaning of Christmas.

The gift giving and receiving, snow, and spending time with family make the holiday more interesting and sometimes hectic, which is why it's important to never lose sight of the true reason for Christmas.

I love the other aspects of the holiday but never forget that it is about the birth of baby Jesus. I get to spend more time with my family around the holiday that I don't normally get to spend time with normally. My grandparents are devoutly Catholic and think that Christmas is all about the religion. The religious aspect of the holiday is important to most of my family.

Like many families, we put up a nativity

each year for the holiday season to make the house more in the spirit. With the nativity scene that is put up comes more religious connection. We also put up Christmas trees. People have always asked what the point in the trees is and if it even has a religious connection, which it does. The Christmas tree is often explained as a Christianization of pagan tradition.

For my family, it is a tradition to go to church on Christmas, no matter where we are. We go to Christmas mass every year as a family. I have gone to a midnight mass once and it made me feel more connected in my religion than I normally would. I enjoy going to Christmas

Sassy Sadie



By: Sadie LaRocque

mass with my family, no matter how much I don't want to go.

With all the excitement of Christmas, from the snow to the gifts, the real reason for the holiday will never change. All the other aspects of the holiday coming in to play and making it wonderful but sometimes chaotic, never forget the true meaning of Christmas.



Christmas mysteries solved Santa's mind tells everything

By Brooklyn Parker

Have you ever wondered why Santa Claus is always so kind and loves Christmas? Or why Santa's sleigh can fly? How about why Rudolph's nose glows? Well, hop onto the sleigh and I'll tell you a story.

Once, hundreds of years ago, a child was born; born to a very happy Mr. and Mrs. Claus. They were a normal family. They lived in a three story house with two dog's, one cat, three fish, ten hedgehogs ,and three iguanas. Big animal lovers, every Sunday and Saturday they volunteered at the zoo.

Mr.Claus was a lawyer and Mrs.Claus was a kindergarten teacher. They believed in helping everyone be happy, especially during the holidays.

Christmas was a very important holiday to the Claus family. They would decorate their house with wonderful lights and trees. There were ornaments hand made by the little dwarf men and women from the dwarf home across town and oh, the lovely smells that were coming from their house all season long.....

"Hurry everyone we're going to be late!" sweetly yelled Mrs.Claus. "Come on,

boys, it's moving day, it's time to cool down a bit." laughed jolly Mr.Claus. Down the stairs ran all the dwarves and young Kris Claus.

He was so excited to be moving to the North Pole. His dad had gotten a new job as a toy deliverer to children all around the world. All the dwarves were going to make toys for a living and his mother was going to bake cookies and help sew clothing for his family and friends.

His father told him, "Son, one day this will be your job. You will deliver all the toys made here one day every year to every child in the world."

This statement completely bewildered Kris. How in the world would he deliver thousands of toys to thousands of children all around the entire world?

As time passed in the North Pole, Kris heard people call his father Santa, and the dwarves were now called elves. Their ears were becoming pointy and they laughed a lot more. His father was gaining weight. He was growing a long white beard, had rosy cheeks and a cherry red nose.

One day, just before

Kris' 20th birthday, his father came to him to tell him. "Son, today is the day you take over the family business."

"Today?...Why today?" exclaimed Kris.

"Well son, I'm old and tired of working. I want to spend time with your mother," explained his father. "I want you to become Santa Claus."

Kris had no idea what was going on as his father led him to the stable. He had never been in there; he was never allowed.

As he walked in there, he saw a giant red sleigh with a single pouch in the back of it. and around it were eight reindeer.

"Wow...what is all of this?" asked Kris.

"This, son, is the family secret. You see, my father and his father and his father's father and so on have always been Santa Claus. We deliver thousands of toys to every child in the world every Christmas Eve. In return, we get the joy of all the children and also we get lots of cookies," said his father with a jolly laugh and a wink.

A few minutes after



his father said that, Kris saw something red gleaming from the back of the stable.

"What is that?" asked Kris

"That is Rudolph, he is our new head reindeer. He is very special and he has been given a gift from the same fairy which gave our sleigh the power to fly, the ability to hold thousands of toys, elves the power to make thousands of toys and the children the power to believe. Well, it also gave Rudolph the power to make his nose glow when he is in a dark spot," explained Kris' father.

This was a huge responsibility, but Kris was up to it. Throughout the years, Rudolph and his shining nose became his closest friend. Without Kris and Rudolph, Christmas would never be the same....

Randolph comes to the rescue this year!

Rudolph's second cousin fills in for him

By Ciera Moore

It was the night before Christmas, and throughout Santa's reindeer barn all that could be heard was the disgusting retching of a very famous reindeer. Poor Rudolph had been struck with an unfortunate case of the stomach flu. The red aura that usually surrounded his stall because of his fluorescent nose, had been replaced with a sickly green one.

Blitzen strode over to his friend's sleeping place and knocked his front hoof against the door.

"How're ya doin' in there buddy?"

There was a heavy sigh that emitted from the stall as Rudolph hoisted himself up from the hay. He opened the door and looked at his friend, his usually glittering eyes were dull and tired.

"Not so good,

Blitzen...," he whispered as his cheeks puffed up and he turned to vomit.

A few of the other reindeer walked over to where Blitzen stood,

"Will he be able to lead us tonight?"

Prancer asked with concern.

"Don't think he will,"

replied

Blitzen.

"Do you think..?"

"Should we..?"

"We have to."

"I'll summon Randolph," sighed a reluctant Blitzen.

Rudolph's crazy second cousin was making his way across the frozen, icy tundra of the North Pole.

He had gotten a sum-

moning

earlier

that night

and was

clumsily

running

to the re-

indeer

barn, his

bright or-

ange nose

letting the

others

know of

his unfor-

tunate ar-

rival.

"Ugh, he's here,"

groaned Cupid as he

spotted the glowing orb

that was bobbing up and

down as Randolph ran

and continuously fell.

"I cannot believe we

had to resort to asking that imbecile to help us this Christmas," Dasher complained.

"Well he's the only other reindeer we know that has a glowing nose," refuted Blitzen.

Randolph entered the barn and was immediately hooked up to Santa's sleigh. Nobody had time to waste with his pointless banter that he was already rattling off to deaf ears.

"Did you know...," Randolph was cut off and ushered out by the elves to the takeoff point.

"No time to waste! Ready for take off, sir," yelled an elf.

Santa himself walked to the back of the sleigh, throwing the large sack of toys into it. He walked along the row of reindeer and gave each of them a small pep talk and a hearty

"I think that we all owe you an apology, Randolph. We haven't been treating you very gratefully since you got here..."
Santa Claus



‘Ho, ho, ho!’ But when he got to the front and expected to see Rudolph, he stopped short.

“H o , ho..ohhh...Randolph is here...,” said an uncomfortable and not so jolly Saint Nick.

He patted the goofy reindeer’s head and hurried back to the sleigh, hopping in and starting his chant.

“Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer and Vixen! On, Comet! On, Cupid! On, Donner and Blitzen...and Randolph.”

Now things immediately went wrong. Randolph clumsily started running across the snowy ground, his fawn-like legs shaking in the cold. As he ascended into the air, his nose started to black out. The light that emitted from him was quickly fading and the other reindeer were panicking. There was a chorus of voices telling Randolph to stop mess-

ing around and lead them correctly.

“I got this,” Randolph yelled back to the others, having to swerve to avoid a large pine tree that appeared out of the snow falling heavily in the Pole.

For the next ten minutes, the other reindeer and their owner were terrified for their lives. It seemed t h a t R a n d o l p h had lost the ability to control his nose and stay levitated for very long. The line of animals and the sleigh they were connected to were continuously being jerked left, right, up, and down.

“Time for a break,” called out a queasy Santa as he pulled the reins to lower the sleigh.

When they safely reached solid ground Santa made his way to the

front of the line for the second time that night.

“It seems that our friend Randolph here has lost his Christmas spirit,” observed Santa.



“No, sir-,” Randolph was cut off.

“I think that we all owe you an apology , Randolph. W e h a v e n ’ t been treating you very gratefully since you got here...I

know you’ve noticed this, and I hope our apologies will bring back your happy-go-lucky mood and the Christmas spirit that’s inside you,” explained the jolly old man.

As the rest of the reindeer gave him their honest apologies, his mood visibly brightened. His

dull, blinking nose became a brightly glowing neon orb. He unconsciously started to float off the snowy ground and there was a festive glow to him.

“Thank you all! I am ready to finish this job,” exclaimed Randolph.

“Let’s not waste any time, then! There’s only a few more hours left to deliver all these presents,” said Santa as he jumped back into the sleigh and they took off.

That year, Christmas was saved by an unlikely hero. Rudolph’s clumsy and usually ignored second cousin helped safely deliver all the presents to the children of the world. After he showed Santa how well he could complete the job, he was offered a permanent position on the team. He appreciatively accepted this job and the rest is history.



Santa's elves are not very jolly

The Christmas spirit is gone

By Elise Holdsworth

When you think of Santa's shop, you probably think of jolly little elves running around making presents for the good little boys and girls. Well you're **W R O N G**. Lately, Santa's elves have been arguing not being very jolly for the holiday season.

"I don't know what to do," Santa sighed. "They're not happy anymore and they don't seem to be having a fun time when they're working for me. Maybe they're just getting bored."

Santa thought and thought about what he could do to get the elves more festive but he couldn't think of anything. Christmas is in less than a month, he needs to think fast!

"Well, maybe you should talk to them and see why they aren't so jolly any more," Mrs. Claus said. "There has to be a reason."

Santa thought about it and eventually made a decision.

"You're right, honey. I'm going to go talk to all of them," he said.

So Santa made his way through his big workshop all the way down to the room where all the elves were working. Since there were so many elves, he had to use a microphone to talk to them. When he walked into the shop, none of the elves were smiling. Usually there was holiday music playing to lighten the mood, but not today. None of them were talking, they were just assembling toys and not saying a word.

"Hello elves," Santa said through the microphone. "Gather around, I need to talk to you guys."

All the elves dropped what they were doing and gathered around Santa.

"Mrs. Claus and I have been talking, and we think it's time for a

change around here. You haven't been in the Christmas mood and I would like to know why so I can make you happy," he said.

None of the elves said anything.

"Oh, come on, guys! There has to be something bothering you. What's wrong? Someone tell me," Santa said sadly.

Still, none of the elves said a word.

"There has to be a reason you aren't in the Christmas spirit! It's the best time of the year! Time for happiness and joy. Why aren't you happy?" he asked again.

"We're bored, Santa," a little voice said from the crowd of elves.

All the elves made room so that Santa could see who was talking.

"Hello, Icy," Santa said when he saw who was talking. "So, you guys are bored?"

All the elves looked at each other.

"It's the same routine every year, Santa." Icy explained. "We love Christmas and we love making toys for all the boys and girls, but it gets a little boring when that's

all we're doing every day. It feels like the Christmas spirit is gone. Everyone is bored. Rudolph's nose won't even light up any more! The holiday spirit is gone!" Icy said.

The room filled with mumbles of all the elves.

"Yeah Santa!" another elf shouted. "We need change!"

Santa stood there, thinking of what he could do. The room began to get louder.

Alright elves, calm down." Santa spoke into the microphone. "I'll think of something to do. I'm sorry, everyone, I didn't know you were so unhappy. But don't worry! I'll fix this," he said and turned off the microphone.

All the elves got back to work and Santa went to his office to talk to Mrs. Claus.

"They're bored, sweetie. They said the Christmas spirit is gone. We need to do something about this." He slumped over as he sat down.

"Well, you know what makes everyone happy during the holidays! Decorations and lights everywhere!" Mrs. Claus



said.

"That's actually a good idea. Do you think you could decorate their workshop for them?" Santa smiled. "You're a much better decorator than me."

Mrs. Claus laughed.

"Of course I'll decorate it. I'll go gather up some workers to help me. We'll have it done by tonight!"

Santa went down to talk to the reindeer.

"Hi guys," Santa said when he approached the reindeer.

"Hi Santa," Rudolph said.

"Mrs. Claus and I wanted to tell everyone that we're going to be doing things a little differently around here this Christmas," he said. "I know you aren't in the holiday spirit this year. The elves told me. But don't worry, we'll make everyone happy again!"

Rudolph and all the other reindeer smiled with joy.

"What are you doing to make this differently?" Dasher the reindeer asked.

"Mrs. Claus is up with some elves decorating their workshop now. Also, I have decided to throw a holiday party tomorrow to make things a little more festive around here." Santa explained. All the reindeer cheered and Rudolph's nose lit up.

"That sounds like fun!"

the reindeer said.

After that, Santa went back up to the workshop.

"It looks wonderful!" Santa said in amazement. Mrs. Claus put lights up everywhere throughout the whole workshop. There was Christmas music playing in the background and stockings hung up for each and every elf.

"I'm not even half-way done yet!" Mrs. Claus said. "I thought the elves deserved to get presents too, so I put up stockings for each one. There were hundreds of stockings hanging up all around the walls with the elves' names on them,"

"This is amazing. Let's decorate the rest of the town!" Santa said.

Mrs. Claus looked a little confused. "The whole town? That would take forever, honey."

"I don't care. The town needs to be decorated anyway. For crying out loud, this town is where the elves make presents for Santa to deliver on Christmas, and it's not even decorated for Christmas!" Santa

cried. "We need to make this place a little more jolly."

Mrs. Claus agreed and gathered more elves to help them. For the rest of the night, Santa, and Mrs. Claus and a group of elves went out and decorated the whole town. They finished right before the sun came up.

"This is beautiful," Mrs. Claus said.

"Thank you so much, elves. You did a great job!" Santa said.

The elves cheered.

"Let's go get things set up for the party tonight," Santa said to Mrs. Claus.

The elves went back to the workshop and Santa and Mrs. Claus worked on getting the party ready. For the rest of the afternoon, Mrs. Claus baked and baked and baked. She baked hundreds of gingerbread cookies, and loads of different desserts for all the people in the town. Santa decorated some more of the big dining room and he set the table.

"Looks like everything

is ready for the party," Mrs. Claus said as she placed the last batch of cookies on the table. "I think they're going to love this."

Santa smiled and looked at everything. "I think they will, too,"

A little later, the whole town started to arrive to the party.

"This party is great, Santa. It really makes the town more festive," Rudolph said.

"I hope you like it. You all deserve a day off to have some fun time," Santa grinned.

The rest of the night all the reindeer and all the elves danced and ate until they couldn't dance or eat any more.

"Thanks, Santa," said Kandy Kane the elf. "This party really put all of us into a more jolly mood. This Christmas is going to be great,"

Santa smiled. "Glad you had fun!"

Mrs. Claus and Santa spent the rest of the day cleaning up the party. When they were finished, they made some hot coco and sat down by the cozy fire.

"We did good, honey," Mrs. Claus said she sipped her cocoa

"We sure did," Santa said. "This is going to be a wonderful Christmas!"



A Christmas party at the North Pole

The elves almost ruined the holiday for everyone

By: Sadie LaRocque

One year, a week before Christmas, the elves decided to throw a big party. This party created problems when it came to Christmas time.

“Let’s throw a big party!” Kyle the elf said.

The other elves thought it was a great idea. Kyle got the red and green balloons for the party and blew them up. Some of the elves went to get other stuff for the party; cake, food, decorations.

Some of the elves got everything set up for the party and invited everyone else over. They had all the balloons filling up the house at the North Pole.

“I can’t believe we’re really having a party right before Christmas. This is awesome!” Mike said.

The elves were partying all night and not getting ready for Christmas. They were having so much fun that they completely forgot about helping Santa get ready to go deliver the gifts. They were thinking about having another party next year, too, until Santa came in.

When Santa came in during the party, all the elves freaked out.

“Why are you not get-

ting ready for Christmas?” Santa asked.

The elves said they had it covered already, but they really didn’t. They lost sight of how little time they had left to get ready for the holiday. The elves got so caught up in the party that they completely forgot about getting ready for Christmas and it became a problem when it came time to pack Santa’s sleigh.

The head elf, Max, started freaking out about not being ready. “We should have been getting ready for Christmas and not partying. Kyle, your idea has caused so many problems, we need your help now,” Max said.

The elves were rushing to get ready for Christmas, with the help of Santa.

Hoping to be able to pull it off before they had to deliver gifts, all of the elves split up to go get everything they needed. Each elf went to a different place to get the stuff on the list that children all over the world wanted. They had to get all their stuff for Santa in a time crunch, but they had some of it already. They were panicking and trying to get everything,

but having some of the gifts already helped reduce the panic.

Max made an announcement to the other elves so there would be some order in getting ready for Christmas.

“Let’s all meet back here in two hours and see what we have left to get! Split up and get as much as you can, he said.

All of the elves split up and went to get the stuff they needed. Two hours later, everyone met back at the house on the North Pole.

“Okay everyone, we have most of what we need to give the children all over the world for Christmas,” Max said. “Can you and Carl go get some boxes, bags, and wrapping paper for us,” he said to Mike.

“Sure. We’ll be back in a jiff,” Mike said. He then found Carl and they took off to get what Max asked them to.

The elves and Santa were frantic, running all around the North Pole trying to get everyone together and get the gifts wrapped to go deliver to the children. Mike and Carl got back in just under an hour and the elves started a production line to wrap the gifts, put names on them, and get them in



Santa’s red bag to put in the sleigh.

The elves had lots of gifts to get wrapped and ready for Christmas and little time to do it, but they all worked together and were able to pull it together with one day to spare.

Santa went to deliver his gifts on Christmas Eve with the reindeer. Every child all over the world got their gifts on time for Christmas while the elves got to recover from the party and gift buying.

“Good job, elves, I’ve got to give you credit,” Santa said, “You managed to get all the gifts for everyone and wrap them with time to spare.”

Santa wasn’t very happy about the party in the beginning, but they managed to pull it together. They were in a rush to get everything ready but they did it and made Santa proud. The elves learned their lessons about throwing parties right before Christmas.

“Next time, let’s have our party after Christmas, that way we don’t have to worry about messing up Christmas,” Mike said.



The Greatest Christmas Present EVER

Young child receives the best gift on Christmas morning

by Tristin Baumann

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a child named Ciera. She was a girl of 10 years. All she ever wanted for Christmas was a life-size Hogwarts express train on her very own personal Platform 9 and three-quarters. Every year for the past five years Ciera wrote a letter to Santa asking for it. But every year, despite all the great presents she received, she was always a bit disappointed when she didn't get what she truly wanted.

This year was the same as any other. Ciera sent a letter like always to Santa, hoping against all odds that this year would be the year.

It was a snowy, Christmas Eve, and Ciera was dreaming dreams of that Hogwarts train that she wanted so badly. Then she heard a thump downstairs and awoke with a start. She carefully and quietly got out of bed. Ciera crept out of her room and tip toed down the stairs. When she reached the bottom she peeked around the corner. Santa was there for an instant and then vanished into the brick fireplace wall. And then just like magic,

the fireplace was gone, and in it's place bricks filled the spot where it used to sit.

Ciera quietly walked towards the spot where the fireplace used to be, not quite



understanding how in the world it had disappeared. Why had Santa taken her fireplace? It didn't really make any sense.

But then Ciera got a thought in her head. An idea. She stepped once again towards the brick wall until she could almost touch it. She counted in her head 1... 2... 3... Now! And with all her courage she ran at the wall full speed and then....

She came out on the other side. She could not believe what was happening right now. She was standing on Platform 9 3/4, and right there in front of her was the Hogwarts express, with puffs of smoke coming out of the engine at the front. She walked up to one of the

passenger cars and climbed aboard. Just as she got aboard, the train started moving.

On the table was a box, and inside she found her very own wand.

And off she went to Hogwarts, where for the entire night, which seemed to last forever, Ciera had all kinds of fun. She met Harry and Ron and Hermione, and went and had adventures all over the castle, exploring all the secret rooms and passageways until finally the sun was about to rise on Christmas morning, and then...

Ciera woke up. She was laying on the floor of her living room. The Christmas tree still sparkling, and the early light of dawn just peeking in over the horizon and into her house.

She was so confused. Had it all been a dream? Did she run into the wall and knock herself out? It sure seemed like it. So Ciera went back upstairs to go wake her parents so she could open presents. But as she walked past her room, she heard a strange sound. When she went into her room to investigate, she saw that sitting there on the desk in her room was a box. She approached it, holding her breath, and opened the box. Inside was the wand, and a note that read:

Ciera,

I hope you had a wonderful time at our school, and I hope this wand treats you well. You technically aren't supposed to use it outside of the school, but we'll make an exception for you. Just wave the wand at your fireplace whenever you want to come back to us for a visit. Happy Christmas!

Albus Dumbledore
(or is it Santa Claus?)



The "Wooden Friends Project"

Santa is helping kids gain friends in the North Pole

By: Jade Davidson



You know those kids that don't really talk to anyone and it doesn't seem like they have any friends? Last Christmas, those kids' dreams came true when Santa helped them get friends.



Last Christmas, up at the North Pole, Santa noticed that there was one thing that many kids on the nice list asked for, a friend. So, he decided to give those kids their wish. He had the elves make wooden friends that came alive. Millions of these "wooden friends" were made for Santa to give to children all around the world.

"I just felt so bad for all the good little boys and girls that deserve to have friends but didn't have any," said Santa. "Everybody deserves to have a friend that cares about them."

All the elves agreed that this was definitely one of the best projects that they had ever done for Santa in all the years

that they had worked in the North Pole.

"I was so happy when I found out about the wooden friend project," stated Bubs the elf. "I also grew up kind of lonely without a lot of friends."

The night of Christmas Eve, all the wooden friends were loaded up into Santa's sleigh to be delivered to the children.

That night, all of the toys were successfully delivered to the children and sat waiting under the tree until morning. When the lonely children of the world

woke up to see their wooden friends, the amount of love that was felt was overwhelming.

"It was just an amazing feeling knowing that my husband did such good work for those children along with all the elves on the toy making crew," stated Mrs. Claus.

One story in particular was the story of Isabelle Martino and Robbie Waltz. Robbie was one of the what you would call one of the "popular" kindergarteners. Isabelle was shyer than some of the other kids. They were polar opposites, almost from two different worlds. Robbie, and other kids, had also always been kind of mean to Isabelle because of her shyness.

A couple of weeks later when all the kids

returned to school from winter break, the wooden friends came with them. At first, the other kids around school didn't really notice the wooden friends and treated the lonely kids just like they always had, like they were invisible.

Then, one day, one of the boys on the elementary playground noticed

another little girl that never talked, talking to someone. He walked over to see who exactly she was talking to, and that's when he saw the wooden friend.

At first the boy laughed, but then he started to cry. "I still don't know why he was crying," said Isabelle, the girl from the playground.

"I was crying be-





cause I myself wanted a wooden friend of my own,” stated Robbie, the boy. “I also started to realize how mean I always was to Isabelle throughout school.”

As he looked back on his actions, he realized that Isabelle never really did anything to him to make him be mean to her. She had actually always been really nice to him.

At that moment, Robbie befriended Isabelle and they became exceptionally close.

“It was so weird having an actual friend at school,” said Isabelle.

Throughout that month, Robbie started to introduce Isabelle to some of his friends and they also began to become friends with her as well. She had play dates with her new friends almost every day. She still brought her wooden friend to school, but when she went on play dates, she would leave it at home. She didn’t want to be with the friend all the time now that she had real friends of her own.

One day, Isabelle came home from school and her wooden friend wasn’t there. She searched the whole house, but it was nowhere to be found.

She went back up to her room and began to cry when she noticed a small note on her desk. She walked up to read it and it began to sparkle.

“It was truly one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen,” stated Isabelle. “I opened the note and I felt the most amazing feeling of love I have ever felt.”

She began to read the note and noticed it was from her wooden friend. It said:

“My dearest Isabelle, I have the most amazing time with you over the past months, but at last, my time with you has come to an end. I have done

my job and you now have wonderful, loyal friends of your own. I have returned to the North Pole to help another little girl or boy next Christmas. I

will never forget you or t h e joyous time t h a t

w e spent together. I will miss you with all of my heart. But, who knows, maybe we will see each other again. Maybe, just maybe. Okay, I have to go now, I love you, Isabelle.

~ Your Wooden Friend.”

The note was sealed with love from the wooden friend’s heart for only Isabelle.

After she read the note, she stored it away in one of her desk drawers.

“I have never felt so much joy, love and sadness all at the same time,” stated Isabelle.

Isabelle and Robbie are still close to this day and hope to be for a long

time.

Many other cases just like Isabelle’s occurred around the world for children of all ages and races. Every time the child made friends, their wooden friend would do just as Isabelle’s had, return to the North Pole.

As Santa looks down on the Earth this Christmas, he hopes to have the same effects with the wooden friends as he did last year and for years to come.

“The spectacular result that came from the wooden friends is even better than I had ever imagined,” said Santa. “I would like to continue this forever as long as I live.”

Since last year, all of the wooden friends have returned to the North Pole for repairs and are to be redistributed to new children this year.

“Working on these toys is just as satisfying as it was last year,” stated the head elf of production.

The Messenger staff wishes Santa and his crew a safe and successful Christmas this year.



A Christmas story

Two toys try to get to the North Pole

By Gage Combs

In a toy shop down the street from the grocery store there was a teddy bear named Fred who loved it when Christmas time came along and would wonder why people wouldn't purchase him for a child's Christmas gift.

"What's wrong with me?" he said.

When the shop opened for Black Friday, people were coming by the dozens and when they came upon the stuffed animal shelf, Fred was never picked for a present, but all of the other stuffed animal toys were purchased.

"Why won't anybody buy me?" he thought. "Did I do something wrong?" Fred felt that no one cared for him and that he shouldn't have even been made.

As time went on, Fred was still hoping for someone to purchase him. With two weeks till Christmas, Fred was the only stuffed animal on the shelf, so the manager put him on the clearance cart with toys that no one would buy and the toys were 50% off. When Fred awoke, he didn't know where he was or what happened to him.

"Where am I? what happened?"

A toy clown that was colored in black and white

appeared. "You're not on the island of misfit toys, if that's what you think, stranger!" he joked. "You're in the clearance cart where toys that don't get sold go to be sold for a cheaper price," he said.

"I'm here because customers buying toy clowns only like the colorful ones, not clowns that are black and white," he said sadly.

"Wow, I'm sorry to hear that" said Fred.

"Yeah, it's hard to accept when things don't go your way," the clown said. "By the way, my name's Chuckles the clown, Chucky for short, and what's your name?"

"My name is Fred," he said.

"Nice to meet you Fred. Are you alright, because you look sad?" Chucky said.

"What do you mean that I look sad?" said Fred.

"Your mouth is frowning and teddy bears aren't supposed to be frowning so turn that frown upside down," Chucky said.

"Wow, I never knew that my mouth was frowning, I'm so embarrassed," Fred said. "That's probably why nobody would buy me as a gift," he added.

"That's probably the reason. A black and white toy clown wouldn't even be made at Santa's workshop at

the North Pole because how is a clown funny if he doesn't have style and color?" Chucky said.

"Wait. Who's Santa? And what's the North Pole?" Fred said.

"Santa Claus is a man who flies around the whole world to give gifts to the kids who are good and the North Pole is the place where Santa's elves make all of the gifts for the children," Chucky said.

"Do you think that Santa could make us Christmas gifts for children?" Fred said.

"What do you mean?"

Chucky said.

"If Santa had elves that can make gifts, do you think that he could fix toys?" Fred said.

"Maybe, but I don't know how we're going to ask Santa that," Chucky said.

"You're right, but how would we ask Santa if he can fix us?" Fred said.

Both thought for while to figure out something to say.

"Well, I heard that children who want gifts from Santa send him a letter in the mail with a list of the gifts they want," Chucky said.



“I don’t think that will work out because we don’t have paper or a pencil,” Fred said.

“Well instead of writing, we could just go to the North Pole ourselves and ask Santa to fix us,” Chucky said.

“That’s a good idea, but how are we going to get there. We can’t drive because we don’t have a driver’s license, we can’t walk because the North Pole is too far, and we can’t fly because we don’t have plane tickets and we can’t sail because we don’t know where any docks or ports are,” Fred said.

“You are right, Fred. If we can’t get to the North Pole, we’ll never get fixed,” Chucky said.

When both finished talking, a mailman appeared at the clearance cart in this store.

“My name is Mac the mailman,” he said.

“Nice to meet you, Mac, my name is Fred,” said the teddy bear.

“And my name is Chuckles the clown but you can call me Chucky instead,” added the clown.

“Why is a toy Teddy bear and a toy clown still in this store when it’s Christmas time?” Mac said.

“Nobody likes a Teddy bear with an upside down mouth that looks like I’m frowning,” Fred said.

“And no one would ever buy a black and white clown

for Christmas,” Chucky said.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that, but I think I can help you out,” Mac said.

“How?” Fred said.

“I’m a mailman and I mail the letters that children write to Santa so he can know what each child wants for Christmas,” said Mac.

“That sounds like a good idea,” Fred said.

“I agree,” Chuckles added. So Mac purchased Fred and Chuckles and mailed them to Santa with a letter saying: “Dear Santa Claus, please fix these two toys so that a child could enjoy playing with them.” Sincerely, your mailman and friend, Mac.

When Santa got the letter with the two toys inside, Fred and Chuckles told him about their problem.

“Well, it looks like you two toys need some repairs made,” Santa said.

“Yes, both of us would appreciate it if you fix both of us,” Fred said.

“Well, let’s get started on giving you two a merry Christmas,” Santa said.

After he repaired Fred and Chucky by making Chuckles change from a black and white clown to a colorful clown and Fred from a frowning teddy bear to a smiling teddy bear, the two toys were stunned to see the improvements that were

made to them.

“Wow! I’m going to make people smile and laugh when they see a colorful clown,” Chucky said.

“I can’t wait until I get to make a child feel safe when he’s afraid to go to sleep or to cheer him up,” Fred said.

“Ok, boys, I know two children who want toys like you on my nice list,” Santa said.

“Alright, I guess you want us on your sleigh tonight?” Chucky said.

“That’s right! Ho, ho, ho!” Santa said.

When both of them got on Santa’s sleigh, they said their farewells to each other. They knew they were going to great homes, but it was still kind of sad for both of them to say goodbye.

“Goodbye Chuckles, it was good to see you,” Fred said.

“Same here, I’m glad that I made a friend myself before I became a child’s friend,” Chucky said.

When both of them were dropped at their destinations, they couldn’t wait to be opened.

On Christmas morning, the children that received Fred and Chucky were excited and happy to play with them. Fred and Chuckles couldn’t ask for a better Christmas like the one they had this year, getting the best gift of all, friendship.

Friendship got them to the North Pole by working together and friendship can help each of us to achieve our goals in life. “Two heads are better than one.”



The Crest of the Winter Begins

Part one of a four part trilogy

Prologue

The wind was chill once the palace doors opened to the king who sat on his throne so regally. A strange man walked inside, not intimidated at all, in a very expensive gold and black coat. He walked passed the guards, straight to the high king's throne.

"And who are you?" the Noble King said in his gruff, stern voice.

The stranger smirked from under his hood.. "Only an unimportant drifter to you." He let out a small chuckle. "I come from Terris Hybernis from over the Cora. I- we have a plan after you accept peace with our Regnum Frigidi. I bring a parry from the Rex Deinde Hyeme, your sworn nemesis I take it? He wants you to inherit this staff, which--"

"What is this?" as the king motioned his guards to be ready looking at the dark blue staff. "I will listen to your plea, but... If this doesn't appeal to me, I will not let you return to your beloved Winter Lands."

The king smiled as the foreigner stuttered. "T-This staff, holds a great power. One far beyond your abilities as High King, Yrroth. You aren't as high and powerful as you think. If you trust me, I shall demonstrate."

The king slacked back. This foreigner insulted him? In his own palace? But he was cu-

rious; surely this drifter was bluffing about immense power far beyond his control.

"Behold, Yrroth, this might be the last time you see your Regnum." The foreigner snickered as he waved the staff in a rhythmic pattern. Blue lights swirled, the hall became cooler... and the King was gone.

"Halt! Foreigner! You're under-" the guard noticed his feet as he looked down. There was ice growing from the ground up his leg. He was frozen to the spot along with all the others in the hall.

"Oh, don't worry, you peasants, your King is fine. I'll just be taking him to a great solitude to the north. You'll see him again... or not. I'll be needing him for a certain ritual. Curious? Well the ritual, better yet the action, is called Nazgul Mones" The foreigner waved his staff once more for the ice to completely cover everyone in the hall. Then he disappeared, never to be seen for another 1000 years.

Chapter I

The snow was thick as the lone merchant traveled back over the Cora. He has traveled this path many times in the past, but tonight it felt different. Not just the snow, that happened every ten years. It was the thickness of the snow and the severity of the cold. He just found the path again

when the winds began to howl a fearsome howl.

This is unnatural. The merchant thought as he trudged through the shield of snow blocking his path. The Cora must be upset with someone to a great deal.

Not so far off the town of Saltus was experiencing an unusual weather pattern. The people were indoors, as instructed by the town's major, to be safe from the cold. Two lone soldiers sat outside the town's tavern discussing the cold.

"It hasn't been like this for centuries, something must've happened up there," the first soldier mumbled.

"Cheer up Vladimir. At least we aren't guarding the walls. I feel sorry for them folks, can't see a darn thing here let alone on the wall," the second one said.

"Verloth... you and your optimistic thoughts. It still sucks here and you know that," the first said.

"Attention!" The General came around the corner of the tavern to find two attentive troops. "You two are being relocated to the Cora Outpost. You then will meet another squadron. That will be your new one. This will take into effect immediately." The General saluted and walked off.

"Verloth... never open your mouth again while we are stationed together," Vladimir

said sternly.

"Ouch, you're harsh," Verloth said sarcastically.

"So King, I've kept you alive for 999 years and 364 days. Are you grateful?" The hooded stranger asked.

The Old King shook his head. "Why would I be grateful for anything you did? You trapped me here and you have no use for me. Let me go! I demand equa-mmmhmmhmm," The stranger sealed his mouth with ice from the staff.

"Uhhg! You talk too much. Technology has advanced King. No more iron or steel blades, no more horse drawn chariots, and your precious Regnum is no more. But I still need you, that hasn't changed. Tomorrow is the Hiems Solacium of the millennium and you are the main event to a party of the Gods. Course, the Gods aren't so kind to me, considering I stole this staff from them. So you are my trade in for my crime because I'm a heartless selfish monster," the stranger let out a horrid laugh that made the King cringe.

"Hey! Look! The new guys. Mighty clean and broke they are. Whatcha got in that bag tall one?" The ad libs from the mountain soldiers were getting on Verloth's nerves. Just ignore them, they are just a bunch of uncivilized swines. That didn't work because

now they were throwing snowballs at him.

“Knock it off!” Verloth yelled.

That is when the rock came and hit him square in the jaw. Verloth could remember an endless sky with no ground for its atmosphere and then... black.

Chapter II

“Fools, picking on me and throwing rocks? Seriously, those guys need a Captain up here.” Verloth was talking to himself as he lay in the infirmary. Then he remembered... that was the Captain that threw the rock.

He threw his head back to spot a girl looking at him from above, and she was smiling. He then brought his head back up only to meet her forehead on his, in an unpleasant manner.

“Ouch! You meanie!” the girl got up and rubbed her head.

“I didn’t mean to! You were directly above my head and you also startled me!” Verloth sighed, she was a girl of 12 after all. “Sorry I hit your head with mine.”

“Accepted. You really need to care for kids, soldier,” she said with a smile.

“You’re the one spying on me when I was out cold!” This is going to be a fun time especially if I have to watch her, Verloth thought to himself.

“Well, you were here and I was here so I watched you for the past three days,” she explained with a glow in her eyes.

“Oh, just three days... wait... I WAS OUT FOR THREE FULL DAYS!?”

“You sure do like to sleep, mister.” She giggled.

Three days? I was supposed to go on guard duty next to the cave with Vladimir, then confront the Captain. Can this get any worse?

It did. “Verloth! You ever gonna wake up or are you dead?” One of the harassing soldiers came in the tent.

“You, hide now.” Verloth whispered to the girl.

“Ok, but why?”

“Just do it.”

The soldier came in just as the girl hid. “Hey! Your alive! Just wanna say sorry about the rock. Capt’n didn’t know it was there in the snow.”

“It nearly knocked my jaw off. I accept your apology. Now, can you get out, please? I need some rest. My jaw is still sore and I have a headache,” Verloth said through his teeth. And it’s not just you that is giving me the headache, he thought to himself.

“Ok, but the General stopped by and said you better be on duty tomorrow or you’ll be cleaning the latrine all day.” He walked out bursting with laughter.

Verloth made sure he was well on his way before he called the girl out. “So, how old are you?”

“Oh... well I lost count but I’m between 986 or 987 years old.”

“You have a creative mind. So you’re about 12, right?” Verloth laughed.

“No, I’m about 987 years old! Honest! My father was the High King, Yrroth and I am from Ven Regnum you know, the Old Spring Kingdom.” the ‘young’ girl said.

Verloth was in shock. The

King disappeared after the Winter Stranger took him from his hall.

“How did you even survive, let alone keep your look of when it happened?” Verloth was still in shock of this.

“I don’t know myself. Perhaps magic.” She looked up at Verloth with her childish, twinkling eyes.

“You’re full of it,” Verloth laid back on his bed and sighed, “Why am I stuck with an imaginative child?”

“You were hit with a rock in the jaw, and I walked in and saw you, so I stayed here for all three days. Anything else?”

“Why are you so short?” Verloth laughed.

“Am not! You are an immature soldier, Verloth,” she scolded.

“You’re fun, but I do need to get some rest so go to your home or something,” Verloth said, rubbing his head, “Sitting at the peak of the Cora makes me light headed too. I guess I’ll get used to it soon enough.”

“Ok, Mr. Verloth. I’ll stay at the top floor then!” The little girl skipped away.

Verloth collapsed back into his pillow. How did I get myself into this mess? He thought to himself.

Chapter III

A few weeks later, Verloth was back into his duties with the rest of his newly built squad. Since he was out, things have changed on the mountain top. There were more guard towers, walls, guns, supplies, men, and control. Verloth was happy with it, but he was assigned the back west tower, the one with the most expanse of land, with

Vladimir.

“So the first thing I get when coming back is a reunion with my best friend and a guard position that we have to watch everything. At least one good thing came out of this,” Verloth complained.

“Like you said before, cheer up. At least we aren’t cleaning the latrines,” Vladimir mocked.

Verloth didn’t say anything. He just stared out into the distance and noticed a darker blue shade of ice on the side of a mountain.

“Hey, hey, look over there Vlad,” Verloth pointed at the ice.

“Hmm? Oh I see it. There’s a cave under that ice, and the ice isn’t natural,” Vladimir said.

“A bit peculiar don’t you think? Hey tell Captain we’re checking it out.”

As soon as Vladimir came back, Verloth and him went out the gate that lead to the entrance of the cave. From there, they could look inside. There was a light emerging from the end of the tunnel as they approached. Then they heard voices.

“Hey,” Verloth whispered, “I thought this cave was off-limits.”

“It is. There shouldn’t be anyone here. You’re an officer, tell them off,” Vlad suggested.

Verloth sighed and got up, walked past the corner of the cave wall and was frozen in a block of ice on the spot.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Christmas, the most wonderful time of the year

A story of one elf's fantastic Christmas

By Kaylee Gibbs

There are a lot of things to love about the holiday season, like spending time with family, eating more than you usually should, and you can't forget about the presents. Presents are anyone's favorite part of any holiday especially Christmas, and there is a certain way presents are made and picked out for each child.

Getting the presents ready for Christmas is an all year process for the elves starting very early in the morning and ending late at night for 365 days. From going through the naughty and nice list to assembling each and every toy, being an elf can be very stressful.

Now I am going to tell you a story about a certain elf who worked a little too much and ending up having a very bad Christmas.

Clyde was a very happy and helpful elf always doing as Santa

said and often working overtime just to pick up the slack of some of his elf friends. Clyde was married to Holly and they were one of the happiest couples on the North Pole.

Holly always thought Clyde worked a little too much and never agreed with him picking up his no-good friends' slack, but that never stopped him from working 50+ hours a week.

"Bill wants me to pick up a few hours for him so

I'll be home a little later than usual," said Clyde

Frustrated, Holly replied, "You already work late enough, Clyde. What has Bill ever done for you?"

"If one of your friends asked you to work a little extra for them, you would with no questions asked. I'll see you tonight" Clyde said.

For future reference, kids, you never leave your significant other mad no matter what im-

portant things you have to do- not even work.

Clyde went to work not really thinking much of the conversation he had with Holly and did his usual work. He worked an extra long day and let out his frustration when making all of the toys. After working an additional three hours for Bill, he clocked out for the day and started to head home. Both Clyde and Holly had forgotten about the little argument by the time Clyde got home that night.

The next day was the Saturday before Christmas and Clyde and Holly were better than ever. Working on weekends in the North Pole was never a thing but this year, there seemed to be a Christmas rush, and now the elves are making up for it bigtime. Clyde decided to again help his friends out and picked up Sunday, which was perfectly fine with him but breaking the news to Holly was what he was dreading.

"Holly, we have to talk" he said sitting down next to her on the couch.

Holly instantly looked worried and asked,

"What's wrong?"

She looked worried and he decided to just come out and say it, saying "I picked up Sunday with the guys. I don't want you to be mad and you know we all need as much help as we can to get everything ready for Monday."

She sat there for a minute before saying with tears in her eyes, "This has been going on for far too long. I thought things had changed since you last worked for Bill, but I guess not. If that's how you want to spend your last free day before our busiest week that's fine."

They both went on with their night not talking much and the next day Clyde (stupidly) went off to work with his friends, and not wanting to wake Holly up, didn't end up saying goodbye. That Sunday was one of the busiest days Clyde had seen at the North Pole. Everyone was running around frantically, running into each other, dropping toys; it was chaos. After a very long and tiring day at the office, all Clyde wanted to do was come home to Holly, talk



about his day and catch up on his sleep but when he arrived home he couldn't find his wife anywhere. He checked the laundry room, the bathroom, but Holly was no where to be found. Finally, after calling her phone four times with no answer, he decided to call her best friend, Kandy, knowing she could tell him where Holly was.

When Kandy answered, Clyde frantically asked "Hey, Kandy, it's Clyde. Do you happen to know where Holly is?"

"The last time I talked to her she was going out to the store to get groceries for when you came home from work. Is she not home by now?" she replied.

Clyde, now very worried, said, "I haven't talked to her all day and she wasn't here when I came home. Is there anywhere else you can think of where she could possibly be?"

"Well, it's pretty late so I would say if she is

out anywhere she should be on her way home by now. She's probably out getting you a nice dinner. She'll be back sometime, so don't worry Clyde. Call me when she shows up." Kandy said.

"I'm sure I'm getting worked up over nothing, thanks Kandy. I'll tell you the second I see her." Clyde responded and then hung up the phone.

Most people go to bed unusually early on Christmas Eve for obvious reasons, but not Clyde. Until the wee hours of the morning, he stayed up pacing the house and going over their last conversation. "Where could she be at this hour?" he thought over and over again. Finally he decided to get some rest so he could go out and find his wife first thing in the morning.

The next day was Christmas, everyone else's favorite day of the year, including Clyde but this year was a little different. Not having Holly by his side was really starting to

get to him, so he set out early in the morning to find his true love. First, he went to Santa's cabin thinking maybe she had to help him get ready to deliver all of the presents.

After talking to Mr and Mrs Claus, Clyde realized Holly had been nowhere near the cabin at all. Next, Clyde went to the little coffee shop where he first met Holly when she was working there a few years prior. Clyde asked everyone in the shop about seeing his beloved anywhere and no one had seen anything.

Running out of places to check, Clyde decided to go home to brainstorm other places he could look and he and wouldn't stop until he found her. The lights were usually all turned off before anyone in the house left each day, including today, but somehow the kitchen light was on when Clyde pulled up to his house. Not knowing what to think, Clyde walked up to the front door and attempted to unlock it only to realize it was already unlocked.

"Had someone found the spare key and gone in?" he thought to himself.

Not knowing what to expect on the other side of the door, Clyde took a deep breath and

walked in. To his surprise, the smell of Christmas dinner hit him like a ton of bricks and so did seeing his wife in the kitchen mashing some potatoes.

"Where have you been, Holly?!" Clyde screamed louder than he wanted to.

"I went out last night to get fixings to make you a big Christmas dinner and I did some thinking as well, Clyde," she said, setting her bowl down. "I know how good of a man you are and I know you love helping others, even your goofy lazy friends, and I should be grateful for that. I should've never been mad at you for wanting to get everything back on track for today, I'm sorry, Clyde."

"Give me a big helping of those mashed potatoes and we'll call it even," Clyde said hugging his wife, thankful that she was home safe and sound.

The holiday season is a time to spend with your family, friends and loved ones. Sometimes it is very easy to take advantage of people and it happens to everyone, so take some time out of your Christmas to spend time with and thank your family.



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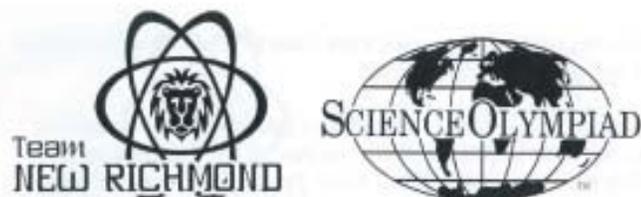
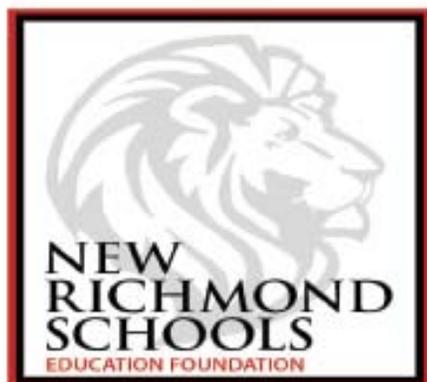




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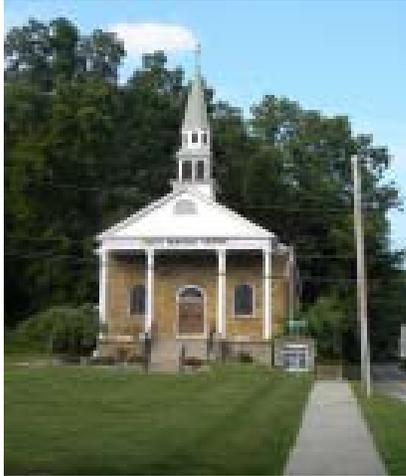
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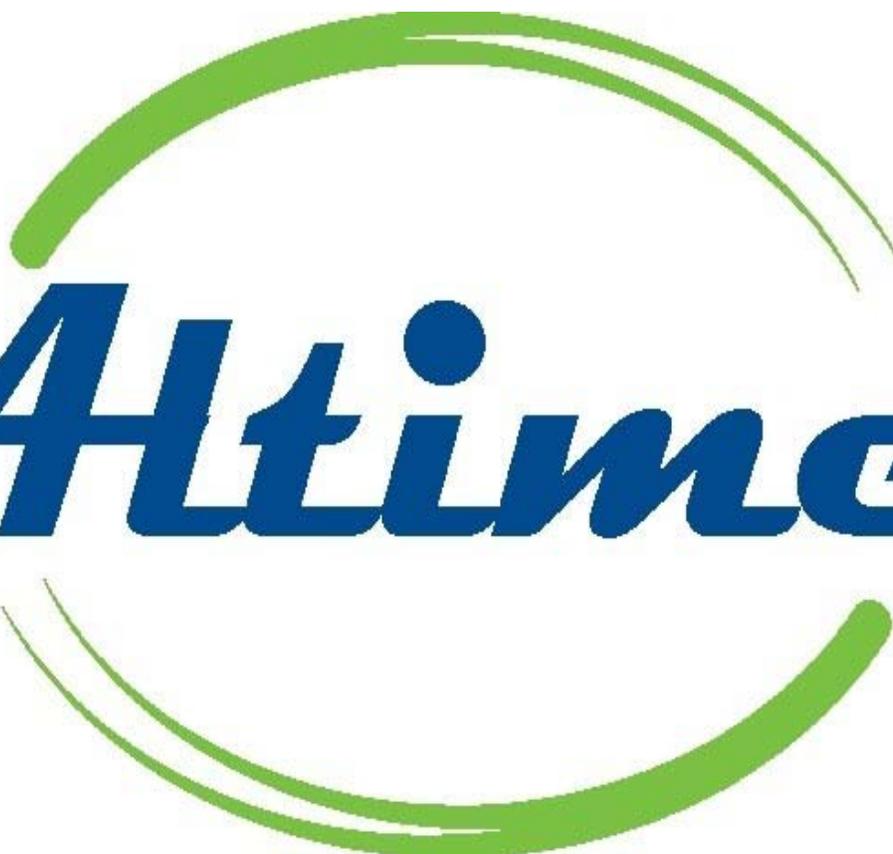
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