

Christmas Miracles

By Anne Houle

Reading the wonderful picture book *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski, made me think. It is a story of a master woodcarver who keeps to himself, never smiles or laughs because of a secret hidden in a drawer he never opens.

Everyone has personal problems in varying degrees. Most of us keep those problems to ourselves, not willing to let the world know of our unhappiness, our stress, our loss. Internalizing brings forth negative emotions like fear and anger. People see that and you become known as the grumpy doctor, the nasty teacher or the sad librarian. It's really not who you are.

Feelings are enhanced around this time of year as it is associated with family, friends and memories. For those who are experiencing the traumatic loss of a loved one, financial hardship or loneliness, the joy of the season remains beyond reach. As with Jonathan Toomey, who lost his wife and child years before, we shut ourselves off from the rest of the world to wallow in our unhappiness.

Christmas is about love and compassion, lending a hand of support to those in need financially, spiritually, physically or emotionally. Too often we don't bother to get to know someone well enough to learn of their problems. We see the exterior, not the interior.

I challenge everyone to get to know someone a little better; that neighbour you smile at, the person who sits beside you in church whose hand you shake but to whom you never speak. It is only through the friendship of a little boy and his widowed mother that Jonathan Toomey's sad heart finds joy.

We need a little more joy in our lives. We need to reach out to the Jonathan Toomeys in the world. If we just get to know each other a bit more, perhaps a Christmas Miracle or two will happen here in Stouffville.

Anne Houle is co-ordinator of children and youth services at Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library



By Luke Anderson
Stouffville Free Press

From Where I'm Sitting

Delivering a knockout punch

If you've ever driven past the house on the southwest corner of Orchard Park Boulevard and Main Street and noticed two big black boards running from the top step to the walkway, you've likely wondered what the heck those things are for. Nope, it's not an art installation.

The house belongs to my parents, Chris and Bill. They've lived there for almost 32 years; I grew up in that house and lived there for 19 years. When my means of personal transportation changed from legs to wheels my parents were faced with the problem of figuring out a way to make a near century-old dwelling free of abrupt elevation changes. For a building with its first floor a good four feet above street level one of the first ideas was to build an addition off the back of the original house. The plan was to equip the addition with an elevator that would bridge the gap. Around this time my parents, doctors and therapists were thinking that the addition would become my new home. I couldn't ask for better parents but at that time I had lived on my own for almost six years, I lost sleep over the thought of moving back in with them. Things worked out well in the end, I found a great place that would accommodate all of my needs in the city.

So the question is, what are those two big black boards? Well, instead of building an addition with an elevator for me to live in permanently, my parents decided to finish the basement so I could come and stay with them for short periods. It's not ideal because it means I have to travel with my manual chair which we use to lift me up and down the stairs. It's a little nerve-racking but it works and I've stayed over for the last three Christmases, and the two big black boards act as a ramp to get into the house. So, like the raised flag on the side of a mailbox indicating new mail, if you ever see those ramps deployed you'll know that I'm in town.

Not too long ago the drawbridge was lowered at the Anderson household. Mom prepared quite the feast as the four of us hadn't enjoyed a meal together at the house since my sister Logan got back from

her year-long trip to the west coast. My parents have done a lot of work to the house since I lived there but it still has the same feel; they've still got that dining room table where I practised writing the alphabet. It's still got the same quirky sounds, the hot-water registers with their spontaneous groans and that creaky floorboard.

I visited another house the last time I was in town. My good old friend Chris Lightfoot was celebrating his 30th birthday so I swung by the Lightfoot house on the northwest corner of Albert and Second Street. Like my parents' place, the Lightfoots' house is an old one, only a good 50 years older, and like my parents' place the first floor is not on the same level as the ground.

You may already be acquainted with the Lightfoot residence. For years its basement was the practice venue for Chris and his younger brother Todd's band. If you've strolled through the neighbourhood within a few houses or so you've no doubt heard Chris on the electric guitar and Todd rocking the drums. I remember my first visit to Chris's house, I think I was in Grade 5. I tagged along with some older friends from down the street. All the guys wanted to try out Chris's new boxing gear; he had two full sets and had set up the garage attic to resemble a boxing ring.

I thought he was a pretty cool kid even before really getting to know him; he was the first one with a Michael Jackson jacket with all the zippers and stuff. In the ring that day I landed a few punches but it didn't take long before I was on the ground with a fat lip, down for the count; knocked out or not, I thought Chris was cool and I wanted to be his friend.

With the help of a ramp that Chris and his dad had thrown together I joined the rest of the crew inside. The bash at Chris's was a little tamer than some in the past; this time we gathered around a shrimp ring.

Enjoy all of your get-togethers with friends and family this month – eat, drink and be merry. If someone decides to perform the second action in excessive amounts at your gathering, have them give you their keys. If that doesn't work I believe the Lightfoots have a pair of boxing gloves for sale.

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Lions Launch Christmas Basket Project

By Kate Gilderdale
Stouffville Free Press



Once again the Stouffville Lions Club is helping to make Christmas a little merrier for needy area families.

The club will accept donations of gifts and toys during business hours at the following locations: the town offices, 37 Sandiford Dr., 4th floor; TD Canada Trust, 3887 Main St.; Stouffville Fire Hall, Main St.; Scotia Bank, 3613 Main St.; and the Lebovic Leisure Centre. Donations of non-perishable food items will be forwarded to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank.

Last year, the club helped out 24 families. Confidential referrals can be made by calling Joe Coté at 905-640-2294 or Peter Willen at 905-642-3110.

The local club will be selling Christmas trees outside Sobeys starting Dec. 1 and is hosting the annual Christmas lights contest and seniors' Christmas lights tour. Club members will also be helping out at the Mayor's First Night Celebration at Memorial Park Dec. 31.

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