

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
 Arlington Street Church
 Christmas Eve, 2015

Come Love to this World Tonight
for Queen Cheryl

Come darkness, come light
 Come new star, shining bright
 Come love to this world tonight
Alleluia!

Come broken, come whole
 Come wounded in your soul
 Come anyway that you know
Alleluia!

Come doubting, come sure
 Come fearful to this door
 Come see what love is for
Alleluia!¹

That's singer and songwriter Mary Chapin Carpenter. This is Charles Edward Hall:

“[Twenty-nine] years ago,” he writes, “when I was a young man in New York City, ... I wanted so badly to be a Broadway actor.... Every morning, I woke up at 5:00 ... and lined up at the actor’s union near Times Square with a thousand other people, in hopes of landing an audition for three or four available parts. That was my job, every day, for three years – even at Christmas.

“And then I was chosen for a part. A great part. I was chosen for one of the greatest parts in the history of Christmas: Ebenezer Scrooge. And it was in a big, wonderful show called the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*.

“I also had to play one scene as Santa Claus – the worst possible part,

¹ Mary Chapin Carpenter, from *Come Darkness, Come Light*

I thought, because Santa was so ... good. So boring! But that was okay. I was so happy, I ran all the way back to my ... tiny room ... and yelled to no one in particular, ... ‘I made it! I’m somebody! I’m Ebenezer Scrooge!’

“... I worked on my Scrooge. I scoffed. I raged. I felt fear when the ghosts came, and anger, and relief, and sadness, and regret. Near the end of the show, when Scrooge begs the Ghost of Christmas Future for another chance, I got down on my knees, and ... cried real tears.... [We all want] that second chance....

“But nobody cared. Don’t get me wrong! Critics loved the show, and the audience cheered, but nobody ever wanted to come backstage to meet Ebenezer Scrooge. No; they wanted to talk to Santa Claus.

“... People knew Santa.... And they loved him.

“I’m not [just] talking about ... children. [People] would gasp when they saw me.... Strangers would smile. One time, ... when I walked into the studio, ... a [full grown adult] broke down in tears.... ‘I can’t believe I’m talking to Santa Claus...’

“Another time, a friend asked if her son-in-law could meet me. He’d been wounded in Iraq.... He had a huge scar on the side of his head. His wife had to hold him steady as he struggled through the door. But when he saw me, [that] soldier took three huge steps and, without a word, hugged me so tight and for so long.... That time, I was the one who cried.

“I thought, He knows I’m not the real Santa, right? [And then it began to dawn on me] that maybe, in those moments, I really was Santa....

“I know, I know. That sounds crazy, right? But it’s true. Scrooge was written out of the *Christmas Spectacular* after only four years, but I’ve been Santa Claus for almost three decades and more than 4,000 performances, and spending that much time as someone changes you. When you love a person, you can become that person, and see the world the way [they] see it....

“It ... happened one cold winter day when I was out on the street in my normal clothes, just Charlie Hall, and saw an older woman slip and fall on some ice. Before I knew [it], I’d helped her up and offered to take her

wherever she wanted to go.... It [also] happened to me during a show when the stage curtain malfunctioned, and I had to improvise for an audience of 6,000 people. Suddenly, I found myself sitting with one little girl, ... talking with her about her life, and asking her not just what was on her list, but what she truly wanted for Christmas.

“As I was taking off my beard one night, I said to my stage manger, ‘I wish I could wear this Santa suit all the time. If I did, ... I’d be a better person every day.’

“... [That’s] stuck with me.... Santa Claus is the best part of me. He’s not just the role I play; he’s my role model.... Santa opened my heart to ... a childlike wonder. He showed me goodness, and joy....

“[Twenty-nine] years ago, ... I wanted to be Scrooge because Scrooge was interesting. Ebenezer Scrooge, I thought, would make me a better actor. Instead, Santa Claus made me a better man.”²

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Christine Basney was struggling to raise four kids; going to college; and working in a small country store in Marine City, Michigan. On Christmas Eve in 2002, a man came in and bought a lottery ticket. He scratched it, and Christine shared his excitement when he came up a hundred dollar winner. “He asked me if we had two fifty dollar bills in the

² Charles Edward Hall, “I Went from Scrooge to Santa: A Magical Tale of Transformation,” *Readers’ Digest*, December, 2014

³ Mary Chapin Carpenter, from *Come Darkness, Come Light*

lotto till,” she says. “I paid out his winnings ... and he handed it back – fifty dollars to [my coworker], and fifty dollars to [me]. He insisted we take it, ... wished us both a Merry Christmas,” and disappeared into the night.

“Today,” continues Christine Basney, “[I’m] a registered nurse in St. Clair, Michigan. Earlier this year, at the beginning of the first of three twelve-hour shifts, I walked into a patient’s room to introduce myself. As soon as I saw him, my eyes [filled] with tears. It was the lottery man! He even remembered me. [His name is Richard Heath.]

“I told him how that Christmas ... had been the roughest ever for me, [until he walked into the store that night] ... Fifty dollars went a long way [then. I’m so grateful to be able to take care of him, now.]”⁴

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One last, true story: When Karis Farish was nine years old, her father bought an RV. It was his “prized possession.” Karis’s husband, Micah, is telling the story. Over three summers, he took his family “all over the country.... They went ... on a four-week American tour; they saw all the fun stuff like the Grand Canyon.... Most of Karis’s great childhood memories were with [that] camper.”

When Karis was twelve, her father, Tom Craig, an Arkansas State Police Captain, was killed in the line of duty. The RV was given away, then sold. It was a lot of loss.

⁴ Christine Basney, China Township, Michigan, “Random Acts of Kindness From Our Readers,” *AARP Bulletin/Real Possibilities*, p. 36, October, 2014

⁵ Mary Chapin Carpenter, from *Come Darkness, Come Light*

Earlier this month, Micah asked Karis to walk out their front door in Springdale, Arkansas, as he covered her eyes. “I had no idea that he was doing anything,” she said. “I was in complete shock.... Honestly, there are no ... words.... I haven’t seen it since I was twelve.”

Parked in their street was the RV.

Micah had spent two months tracking down the camper, determined to give it back to her, but unable to ask his wife any details without revealing the surprise. A break came when, digging through some old paperwork, his mother-in-law discovered the VIN. Micah found that it had been registered in California this past summer. He started Googling the name of the person on the registration, and then reached out to them on Facebook.

Patti Clarkson and Kathy Eiler had bought the RV on Craigslist and brought it home to Laguna Beach. “It was in pretty bad shape,” Patti says. “We thought, Okay, we’re going to commit to this thing, and we’re going to fix it up. We actually took it to Burning Man. We put a lot of time and love and energy into it.”

After a week of reaching out to Kathy and Patti, Micah finally got a response. At first, they were a bit skeptical, but they did some research of their own, and their hearts opened. Kathy said, “This guy’s legit. Let’s do this.”

Karis’ story really hit home with her. “I know what [it’s] like to have those memories and spend time camping with my family. It was so meaningful to me.... I lost my father when I was 13,” she says, “and it was over the holidays.... [He] was about the same age as Karis’ dad....

“[So] we had to do it. We had to let the camper go home. “

Micah flew out to California. All the original paperwork from the purchase of the camper was still in a drawer, with Karis’ father’s signature at the bottom.

Karis says, “It’s the best Christmas gift I’ve ever gotten. It could never be topped.... I’m really excited to do for [our] kids what my dad for me.” And as for the Farishes’ relationship with Patti Clarkson and Kathy Eiler,

Micah says, “It’s pretty special.... I feel like we’re connected to them forever now.” Kathy agrees. “It’s just the coolest thing. Everything lined up. I ... felt like it was just meant to be. I’m hoping that, one day, our families can go camping together.”⁶

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Beloved spiritual companions,
 May we choose Santa over Scrooge
 and be Santa, after all.
What do you truly want for Christmas?
 May we share our winnings, and pay it forward;
 We might just get the chance to pay it back.
 May we surprise each other with love.
 Sometimes, when we open our hearts, everything lines up.

Jesus said,

A new commandment
 I give unto you,
 That you love one another;
 as I have loved you,
 that you also love one another.⁷

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⁶ abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/man-surprises-wife-late-fathers-beloved-camper-15/story?id=35829036

⁷ John 13:34

⁸ Mary Chapin Carpenter, from *Come Darkness, Come Light*