



Christmas Reflections

by Alan Harris

Christmas Reflections

Literary Offerings for the Holiday Season

by Alan Harris

2002 Edition

This book is downloadable in Adobe Acrobat PDF format at:

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Contents

(Alphabetically)

Christmas Awakening.....	7
Christmas Haiku.....	11
A Christmas Light.....	2
Every Christmas.....	4
Frequently Asked Questions About Christmas	12
Here at the Close of Christmas Day.....	9
Listening to Christmas	1
Santa's Interior Monologue.....	3
The Scrooge Before Christmas	13
Shopping Cheap	5
Within Our Keep	8
Wounded Holidays.....	10
Yuletide's Deepest Bell	6
About Alan Harris	14



Listening to Christmas

Have you ever heard snow?
Not the howling wind of a blizzard,
not the crackling of snow underfoot,
but the actual falling of snow?

We heard it one night in Wisconsin
quite unexpectedly
while walking up a hill
toward our cabin in the woods,
a soft whisper between footsteps.
We stopped, switched off our flashlights,
and just listened.
All around us in the darkness
we heard the gentle fall
of snow on snow.
No wind, no sound
but the snow.

Have you ever heard Christmas?
Not the traffic noises in the city,
not the bells and hymns and carols,
beautiful as they are,
not even the laughter of your children
as they open their presents—
but Christmas itself?

Have you been by yourself
and just sat and listened to the silence within,
patiently, without letting the mind
race to the next Christmas chore?
Perhaps if you have,
you felt the pulse of all humanity
beating in your own heart.



Perhaps you noticed
an outflowing of love
for all your brothers and sisters
on the earth,
a soft sense of Oneness
with all that lives.

In the silence of a snowy night,
listen intently, holding your breath,
and you may hear snow on snow.

Serene, alone,
undisturbed by thought,
listen to the silence in your heart,
and you may hear Christmas.

A Christmas Light

At Christmas some will doubt—
they'd rather see first-hand
the legendary holy child
than hear fine stories told.

Some legends place a star
above the manger scene
to be a beacon guide
to men who had wise gifts—

but if a body of heaven
were wanted to remind folks
nowadays of this child
who was gifted and gave,

why not the unassuming moon,
whose quiet beaming gives
us all an inner warmth
akin to Yuletide happiness?

Humbly shines this second light,
relaying solar guiding rays
to people lost within a night
who wish to find a path.

Who hasn't sometimes wished
to thank the moon for glowing
above a ride back home
from church on Christmas Eve?

The lowly moon a Christmas light?
How daily seem its rays to us—
no special star sent from afar
that never will be seen again.

If peace and softness were
required, the moon has both.
If mystery were needed,
where could more be found?



Perhaps someone is in the moon,
as nursery rhymes suggest—
let's grant this may be true,
and this man or woman is you.

The moon inside you is
your inner manger birth,
and you inside the moon
shine gifts upon the earth.



Santa's Interior Monologue

Boy, it's dark.
Sure is cold.
Housetop—whoa, boys!
Got the bag.
Suck it in.
Down the chimney.
There's the tree.
Gifts out of bag.
Stockings are here.
Stuff 'em.
Eat the cookies.
Drink the milk.
Wink.
Suck it in.
Up the chimney.
Ready, boys—away!
Sure is cold.
Boy, it's dark.

(Repeat a billion times.)



Every Christmas

Every Christmas never dawned but
as pulses beating in a caring heart.


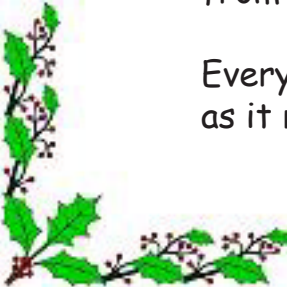
Every star was never less than holy
leading the wise to kings newborn.

Every mother always gave to earth
a child who never declined her love.

Every child was nearer than breath
before its birth made glad all stars.

Every angel never less than gave a
blessing to all babies new on earth.

Every true gift was never not given
from open hands into grateful need.



Every unseen world is now unsilent
as it rings with timely songs of joy.

Shopping Cheap

Empty-feeling in this full-discount store,
I notice others trancing by, glaze-eyed,
behind their clinking lop-wheeled carts.
Lured, are they, by the hook of free?
Hypnotized by the hype of cheap?
I wander hapless and mapless
through thingful, clerkless aisles
and chafe inside at where things aren't.

PA speakers storewide
announce who-cares specials,
demand urgent price checks,
summon somebodies to the front,
then resume happy snippets
of schlock Santa tunes.



Ah! A rare tagged homo employus—
I'll catch him and be out of here.
"Where are the picture frames?" I ask
his back before he can escape.

He gives robotic directions to Aisle 5,
cinched with a "Can't miss 'em."

Remember when store clerks
would ask if they could help you,
and lead you to your product,
then stick around to make sure
it was really what you needed?

Remember customers? Service?

Within this barn of bargains
harried service-counter girls refund
to waiting lines for slipshod quality,
murmuring memorized apologies
to jaded ears, then "Step up, please."

Remember quality? Cordiality?

Absent is any quality counter
to make up for poor service
at the service counter.

Employees hired here
for ho-hum per hour
evade frazzled shoppers who,
from all different wealths,
squander the numbered
heartbeats of their lives
to search for bargains
planted cleverly near
high-margin impulse racks.

Remember joy? Hilarity?

Blindly, the free market (an
oxymoron to the credit-card poor)
ratchets money up to our
finely-computered investors
who downwardly squeeze
more work for equal pay
out of fewer desperates who
hate the jobs they have
which earn the scratch they need
to take out bigger loans.

Remember philanthropy? Altruism?

No picture frames found in Aisle 5.
Did miss 'em.

Aimless now in Aisle 7,
I stop my cart to ask within:
How might people market goods
with love instead of greed?
Is selfishness the ultimate?

As if an angel had the mike,
the PA system broadcasts
"Follow the blue light...",
crackles, and goes silent.

Yuletide's Deepest Bell

A scratch-scratch-scratch
of Christmas card writing is
wiggling world kitchen tables.

Tight holiday harmonies
from the stereos fill up
festooned family rooms.

Annual gladness is
picking up speed
as the ringers ring,
the shoppers shop,
the bustlers bustle,
and the hawkers hawk.

Bells remind the weary
of pulsings in their hearts,
transforming drone to tone.

Such yearly yuletide waves
are too magical to be real,
too real to be magical,
too just-right to be
too anything at all.

Yes, talkers overtalk,
laughers overlaugh,
givers overgive,
and eaters overeat, but
a subtle force is working
to knit separated threads
into scarves of good will.

Folks feel an ancient peace
and join at the heart in joy
when the Deepest Bell rings
"One.... One.... One...."



Christmas Awakening

From the mantel, stockings
packed with Christmas
tinyness and sweets
dimly hang at 3 a.m.

Cold wind outside
shakes and snaps the house.
The dog is asleep on the couch.

This artificial tree, lights off, points
second-floorward with wrapped
bounty beautifully beneath it,
testimony that goods are good
and glitter is better.

The dog sighs and turns over.

From underneath,
the furnace exhales warmly
upon tree ornaments
livingly aquiver.

All else is motionless,
and less,
except for the dog
now snoring on the couch.



What if this—
right here, this instant—
is Christmas?

What if this quiet room
is flooded with the future?

What if an unseen star
is shining here,
lighting the way
to a new beginning?

What room, I wonder,
is this? Do we have here
a manger?

The dog sleeps deeply.
The room is ready.
One waits.

Within Our Keep



What is this stillness in the stable?
What glow is here within our hearts?
Who lies so small between us?

Far more seems given us in this bed
than infant pounds and length—
how weigh, how measure possibilities?

Although just now our baby sleeps,
his waking eyes reveal an inner light—
some holy mystery within our keep.

We bow.
We love.
We are silent.

Here at the Close of Christmas Day

Tonight the season
breathes easier again—
the ribbons are cut,
the paper's been ripped.

We silenced last night
with candles and song,
and today we enjoyed
the meal of the year,

allowing for Uncle Carl's jokes,
Cousin Peter's pomposity,
and righteous kitchen clatter
before the family feast began.

The season's reason?
I don't ask why,
nor does why
ask me—

I just roll with days
of way too much
and nights of less
than nothingness

like a child held safe
in the all-year arms
of Mother Everything,
whose love is all there is.

I used to fear, then fall
from these arms of love,
but where was there to fall
except Here?



If Here can be taken away,
we are doomed—but so far,
Here seems all there's ever been
and perhaps will ever be.

This living room now smells
of candle smoke and new perfumes
as Christmas magic leaks away
into midnight, we still we.

Wounded Holidays

*Dedicated to the Compassionate Friends
and all who are grieving the loss of a child*

Young, they left our homes.
In a moment, long or quick,
they were gone.

Dewdrops turned into teardrops,
the shining sea too small
to hold our grief.

"Give us our children back," we pled
as we noticed their plateless places
at the table.

Regret made a river through our days,
tempering laughter,
pervading sudden silences.

Bodies they had through us, with us—
bodies housing minds and souls—
no longer.

The holiday season's return
makes throb now the wounds
we felt at their parting,

wounds which may heal
in time, we hope,
into strength—

but not yet, in this season
of snowflakes that sting and cookies
that somehow taste of vinegar.

"If only," goes our carol.
If only they could return to us—
but no.



If only
we could speak with them—
but no.

If only we could love them
so intensely that they could
feel our presence right now—

but yes, yes to this one,
a thousand yesses—
they can.

How can they not feel our love,
being core in core with us,
heart in heart?

We give love this season to them and
to each other as plundered parents
and wounded healers.

With love flowing, something in our lives—
a magnificent, mysterious Something—
guides us like a star.

Christmas Haiku

Ice on pine needles—
can it hear the Christmas bells?
Can anything not?



Spider in the drain—
Christmas whoops in the parlor—
silent, dark, the drain.

Scrub Christmas tree, bare--
rooms echo—furniture gone—
mother and child laugh.

Sleigh ride all finished—
the mare, eating Christmas oats,
hears house noise, and snorts.



Flashing Christmas lights
entrance three speechless patients
slouched in parked wheelchairs.

Tree's all taken down—
year's end—where is Christmas now?
Deep within each pulse.

Frequently Asked Questions about Christmas



Q: If Santa doesn't have to age, then why has he become old?

A: He only appears to be old. He's an undercover kid.

Q: How can a sleigh possibly fly through the air?

A: If you were being pulled by eight flying reindeer, wouldn't you fly too?

Q: Why do we wish people a "Merry Christmas" instead of a "Happy Christmas"?

A: The two are about the same, but with "Merry Christmas" an extra twinkle is seen in the eyes.

Q: Why is a Christmas tree that has been chopped down called a "live Christmas tree"?

A: It's dead but doesn't know it, and yet it's having the time of its life.

Q: Why do we wrap our Christmas gifts with paper?

A: Because we like to see surprise and joy (real or kindly faked) in the recipients.

Q: How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?

A: Nowadays only four angels can dance there. Formerly there was no limit, but OSHA passed the Angel Safety Law recently, which also requires that the pin must be inspected twice each year for structural defects.

Q: How many gifts can Santa Claus's bag hold?

A: One less than infinity. Why one less? Because there's a limit to everything.

Q: How could a star that is high in the sky lead the Wise Men to a tiny manger on the ground?

A: Wisely, toward the end of their journey they asked directions from someone on the road. Had they not been so wise, they might have missed the manger by several hundred miles. (That person on the road has never been identified.)

Q: Is there really a Mrs. Santa Claus?

A: The best way to know for sure is to ask Santa Claus next time you see him.

Q: Why do we hear so many bells at Christmas time?

A: Because so many people ring them.

Q: Why do so many people ring bells at Christmas time?

A: For the poor, for the joy, and because a bell can say what words can't say.

Q: What can't words say?

A: The moment you wake up on Christmas morning, listen carefully. You may hear then what words can't say.

The Scrooge Before Christmas

YES, THERE IS A SCROOGE. He haunts the hearts of those who wish that Santa's \$10.00 white beard were real--who wish that his "Ho, ho, ho" meant more than the \$6.00 an hour he is paid to utter it. Scrooge-inhabited people desperately long for a "Ho, ho, ho" from deep within a genuine person's heart.

We seem to want people, all people, to be genuine, yet most people have personality owies that deflect them away from thoroughly genuine behavior. Christmas would ideally be a time when all of those owies would get better, but through some quirk of human nature, they usually get worse. The showy get showier, the stingy get stingier, the drinking get drunker, the over-eating get overweight, and the busy get busier.

Considering the above, "Christmas" would seem a mockery when we consider that two-thirds of the word is "Christ". Perhaps those of Scroogish persuasion would prefer to spell it "Christmess".

Scroogish people are not the only ones who clamor for change. Certain religious types are annually haranguing each other about the True Meaning of Christmas. These frustrated (and sometimes ultra-holy) people don't usually identify at all with Scrooge, but they, too, hate the tinsel, the tawdriness, and (other people's) hypocrisy. They want everyone to concentrate on the Christ child, the angels, the star, and other symbols which provided comfortable myths and icons to live by during their childhood. They tend to cling to these warm, fuzzy concepts the more tightly as they find themselves struggling with the bottomless mysteries of relationships, emotions, illnesses, and the Big Unmentionable. These bewildered adults cry out for something

more stable, something safer, something holier, and something that makes sense when life doesn't.

Scroogeness could be defined as a thin layer of rage masking a desperate search for sincerity beneath. The Scrooge in our hearts knows the difference be-

tween the Jesus and the junk. Scrooge is the skeptic who dares to call tinsel tinsel, the seemingly cruel man who eschews sentimentality. Scrooge dares to drill down deeper than the reindeer manure, down into his past hurts and heartaches, down to the deepest gnarled roots that tap into his tortured soul. No, he does not like Christmas, nor does he especially like himself, but in digging deeply, he discovers a little child in there who can scarcely breathe. He sees that the "Bah" in "Bah, humbug" has all along been a crying out for breath and life and truth and goodness. Humbug has been smothering this little child for most of its life.

Long live the Scrooge within us, for deep within this Scrooge is the holy child who began life in a stable full of smelly stuff, and in whose innocent heart shimmers a true light which will dissolve the false lights and shams.

The Christ, then, may be said to inhabit Scrooge and you and me. Even though our whole land be filled with tinsel, Scrooge and you and I may discover that tinsel is an improvement over the smelly stuff in the stable. And through this child's eyes we may even see a light which we might call, for lack of a better word, a star.



About Alan Harris



Born on June 20, 1943, Alan Harris was raised in Earlville, Illinois, a small farming community of about 1,400. His father, Keith E. Harris, was a World War II B-17 pilot who thereafter farmed the family acreage east of Earlville while also taking time out on weekdays to drive a school bus. Alan's mother, Margie Harris, served as a diligent housewife and mother of four children, and after they had all reached school age, was Head Librarian of the Earlville Public Library for many years.

Although Alan studied plenty of poems (often half-heartedly) in the local elementary and high school system, it wasn't until he majored in English at Illinois State University (minoring in trumpet and piano) that he began experiencing strange inner stirrings that resulted in some serious poems. His college poems seemed to spring from a new unknown place and seemed rather odd, yet were satisfying to write. Several were published in annual issues (1964-1966) of ISU's literary magazine, *The Triangle*.

Alan and his wife Linda were married in 1966. Throughout the next 35 years, Alan continued to write new poems which seemed to need readers. Every year or two between 1980 and 1995 he would assemble that interval's crop of poems and self-publish a volume to give to family and friends.

In October of 1995, having acquired some HTML skills, Alan published on the World Wide Web all of his poetry books as *Collected Poems*. Within a year he added four more site sections: *Thinker's Daily Ponderable* (original aphorisms), *Stories and Essays*, *Christmas Reflections*, and *Garden of Grasses*. The latter section, originally co-edited with Lucille Younger and now co-edited with Mary Lambert, is an on-line literary collection for work contributed by other authors.

In 1998 Alan's literary collection took on its current Web address of www.alharris.com and in 2000 was given the title *An Everywhere Oasis*. After buying a digital camera and taking it to the forest, Alan published several photographic essays and poems which are now available in the site's *Gallery*. Also offered are 76 audio poetry readings, with 20 poems being read by actor and friend Paul Meier and the others being read by Alan. New "Web-only" poetry books added since 1995 (free downloads in PDF format) are: *Writing All Over the World's Wall*, *Heartclips*, *Knocking on the Sky*, *Flies on the Ceiling*, *Just Below Now*, *Carpet Flights*, and a new 2002 work-in-progress entitled *Fireflies Don't Bite*.

Launched in December, 1999 with co-editor Mary Lambert, a new anthology entitled *Heartplace* began (and continues) to accept and publish work from contributing authors. In 1998 Alan's son Brian composed and performed *Bunga Rucka* (a recording of which is offered on the Web site), which is a musical rendition of Alan's chant poem of the same title.

Alan has earned his living in a variety of occupations—high school English teacher, junior high band director, piano tuner—all of these before settling into a long career of computer-related work. He retired in 1998 after 22 years' service at Commonwealth Edison in Chicago, initially as a computer programmer, then a systems analyst, and later a computer training coordinator. For his final three years at ComEd he developed Web sites for its corporate Intranet and the Internet. Linda retired in 1999 after working for 20 years at an insurance company, but rejoined the work force in 2000 as a transcriptionist at a large medical clinic. Since retiring, Alan has been doing freelance Web design for individuals, non-profit organizations, and other non-commercial interests, as well as continuing his creative writing. Alan and Linda relocated to Tucson, Arizona in March, 2003 to live near the younger two generations of their family.

