

The Gift of Christmas



NELLIE P. STROWBRIDGE

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The Gift of Christmas

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The Gift of Christmas

NELLIE P. STROWBRIDGE



FLANKER PRESS LTD.
ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND
2006

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Strowbridge, Nellie P., 1947-
The gift of Christmas / Nellie P. Strowbridge.

ISBN 1-894463-94-3

1. Christmas. I. Title.

GT4985.S79 2006

394.2663

C2006-905200-X

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PRINTED IN CANADA

FLANKER PRESS
ST. JOHN'S, NL, CANADA
TOLL FREE: 1-866-739-4420
WWW.FLANKERPRESS.COM

First Canadian edition printed September 2006

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



GOVERNMENT OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND
LABRADOR

We acknowledge the financial support of: the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP); the Canada Council for the Arts which last year invested \$20.0 million in writing and publishing throughout Canada; the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation.

To Clarence, who has given me gifts of faith, hope, love, and generosity of spirit during the thirty-five years of our marriage. Also to my parents, George Clayton Kennedy (1923–2006) and Lillian Maud Upshall, who gave Christmas from a puncheon full of love.

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At any other time of the year, we end a phone conversation with goodbye and cut a connection. At Christmastime we end a conversation with Merry Christmas and make a connection.

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Making And Keeping Memories

When we go home to the past, Christmas becomes the warm rock in the bed of a long, chilly winter; when we come home to the present, Christmas creates a patchwork quilt of many Christmases.

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The Yuletide Card



Few people bless the fellow who created the first Christmas card. Some even wish he'd been hanged with his yuletide greeting. The very late M.C.T. Dobson, the Christmas card instigator, lies peacefully unaware of rumblings in the heads of dissenters. In all fairness to him, he sent only the first card. Sir Henry Cole, in cahoots with J.C. Horsley, produced the first commercial card in 1846. Temperance groups denounced the card showing a family group whose centre members were having a cup of cheer. Nevertheless, Tucks, the art printers, began printing the card in the 1870s.

Christmas enveloping goes back three years before Christmas cards. In 1840, Richard Doyle sent his message to his friends in a hand-decorated folder. Soon Christmas messages were being sent for a penny. Perhaps that's where "A penny for your thoughts" came from.

Nevertheless, there will always be someone to complain about the cost of Christmas cards. One old renegade, who is probably cut from the same genetic cloth as Ebby Scrooge,

grumbles: “I minds the time the dang things took two cents to mail.”

Mary Dorman Lardie, Hallmark Cards’s first official staff writer, penned her favourite Christmas message during the Depression. She wrote: “Although it’s just a ten-cent card / Please don’t put up a holler / I know you’re worth a dollar card / But I ain’t got a dollar.”

In 1977, Hallmark created a card depicting “Three Little Angels.” It became America’s bestselling Christmas card, netting twenty-three million dollars. The card shows three angels wearing halos, with their hands together in prayer. Michelle Keller, a spokeswoman for Hallmark, credited its cuteness and religious sentiment for its popularity.

During post-Confederation, dollar(s) cards came into vogue. They were like today’s cards: big, small, colourful, well-versed, inspirational, secular, humorous, upbeat, and off-beat. Some were puffed-up and perfumed. There were cards with lace bells, satin wreaths, red velvet bows, and rhinestoned trees that twinkled like stars. One type of card had Santa, with an angel’s hair beard, wiggling against the sponge gluing him to the card. When I was a 1960s teenager, I sacrificed a stuffed card to my curiosity. I emptied its anemic powder and used it as face powder for a Mary, Queen of Scots look.

These days, Christmas cards appear in our mailboxes during the first week in December: cards artistically created, and poetically written, and ordinary cards with beautiful verses,

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and beautiful cards with mediocre verses. They come less garished than they did when I was growing up. But they sometimes come, opening to the music of a Christmas carol.

When cards begin to arrive, I string three red cords across the mantel above the fireplace in hopes that they will soon be full. By Christmas Eve, cards are overlapping each other. The cards take us on a journey to Bethlehem and to the humble and mystical presence of the Christ Child born to stable-bound Mary and Joseph, to the shepherds and their heavenly sightings, and from there to the kings from the East bearing gifts.

Religious scenes shift to cards showing the nostalgic age of horse-drawn carriages bearing gentlemen in high hats and ladies in billowing Scarlet O'Hara finery. There are peaked, red-roofed houses in settings of pure-spun snow on some cards, and on others a lit or unlit fireplace with stockings hung. On another card is Old Saint Nick, an identified flying object coming to paint the season red.

Diverse Christmas cards greet individuals who come together for a brief connection during this holy and secular season. Sometimes a Hanukkah card gets slipped in among Christmas cards, reminding Christians of their Jewish heritage.

When I was growing up, Christmas cards spanned the geographical distance that separated my family from relatives and friends. A faraway look would come into my mother's eyes as she remembered Selma, an old buddy of hers, when they were both "in service" in St. John's during the war years.

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