

HYDE PARK

Got something to share with fellow Democrats?
Now's the time and here's the place!

Submit contributions to wayne@looking4light.com.

Occasional Virtual Soap Box

December 3, 2021

This issue of *Hyde Park* will be a bit shorter than usual. It's not that I don't have time for research and writing. I do. It's just that I want to keep everything positive and upbeat, and I'm having a very hard time feeling that way.

Part of the problem is personal. I've suffered from clinical depression for most of my life, starting long before I was given a proper diagnosis and learned there was a name for what I was experiencing. But the real difficulty is seeing what's happening to our nation.

In the words of the song at the end of *Monty Python's Life of Brian*:

Life's a piece of shit
When you look at it.

But, though it might look at first like a chunk of feces, this world we're facing does have plenty of

positives we can grasp onto. One of those is the warmth of love for family and friends we experience in celebrating the season of winter solstice. I for one I am doing my best to embrace the spirit of the song's chorus, and I hope you'll join me in doing so:

Always look at the bright side of life.



Wayne's blog: <https://looking4light.com/scarab/>.

Back issues of *Hyde Park* can be found there.

Note

The content of this newsletter has not been approved by the Volusia County D.E.C. Each item is the responsibility of its author. Questions and comments are welcome. Direct them to wayne@looking4light.com.

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Feature

Christmas, Santa, God(s), and such

Wayne Dickson

Jewel and I had been away from the *DeLand* for several years while I was finishing graduate school. When we returned, we enrolled our daughter Katrina in *Saint Barnabas*, a private school run by a local *Episcopal* church. We moved her to *Woodward Avenue Elementary School* after a couple of years, because we believe in public and racially integrated education. While Katrina was at *Saint Barnabas*, however, I had a good time yanking their chain from time to time.

One of those occasions occurred when the principal sent home a letter telling parents not to allow their children to believe in *Santa Claus*. The logic? Children would start out believing in *Santa*, and then after a few years they would cease to believe. Likewise, they would start out believing in *God*, and after a few years they would cease to believe in *God*. Yeah. Right!

I wrote back to her, insisting that *God* is in fact exactly like *Santa*. The *Santa* children believe in is based on a work of art, a 19th century painting by a cartoonist named Thomas Nast. He's an old man with a beard, and he wears a funky red wool outfit trimmed with white fur. Later they learn that he's not a flesh and blood man but rather a spirit – a spirit of generosity, forgiveness, love, neighborliness, *etc.*



It's the same with *God*. The *God* children believe in is based on a work of art, a fresco on the *Sistine Chapel* ceiling painted during the early 16th century by a man named Michelangelo. He's an old man with a beard, and he wears a funky pink nightgown. Later they learn that he's not a flesh and blood man but rather a spirit – a spirit of generosity, forgiveness, love, kindness, *etc.* That is, if they learn to think of *God* the same way Jesus did.



The other day I read an article by a woman who was complaining that there was too much *Christianity* in *Christmas*. Her reasoning was as wacky as that of the principal at *Saint Barnabas*. Everyone knows that *Christmas* is much less about *Christ* than it is about commerce.

I just saw an article in the *News- Journal* proclaiming that *Volusia County* businesses are expecting a banner year this 2021 *Christmas* season! (No surprise. *Republicans* give the country recessions and depression. *Democrats* repair the damage and restore the economy's strength, right?) I'm pleased for our local businesses, and I'm not going to allow their commercial success detract one smidgeon from my enjoyment of the holiday.



Proclaiming that she was not a Grinch, the woman who wrote the article explained that, though she is *Jewish*, she too enjoys decorating a *Christmas* tree each year. (When I was growing up, my *Jewish* friends referred to

them as “*Hanukkah* bushes.”) The truth is that *Christmas* trees derive from *Northern European pagan* tradition. The *Christian* groups who first settled in *New England* refused to have anything to do with them. They were introduced to *Victorian England* by the *Northern European Prince Albert*, who was *German*. The first *Christmas* tree to be raised in the *Vatican City* was introduced by *Pope John-Paul*, who had been born and reared in *Poland*.



Jesus wasn't born on December 25. That date was chosen for celebration arbitrarily, in no small part because it was the birthday of the god *Mithras*, who was very popular in the *Roman* military. Like many *Christians*, members of his cult also believed in death and resurrection.



And that really is the point—to celebrate the winter solstice, the death of the old year and the birth of the new. The time when days stop getting shorter and begin getting longer once more. The time for birth and rebirth.

So whatever your religion—or lack thereof—don't be an unimaginative principal or a grump

or a Grinch or a Scrooge. Celebrate the time when days start getting longer, and light returns to the world. Celebrate your family, your friends, your co-workers, your neighbors, your fellow companions on this blue marble of ours as we wander together through the emptiness of space.



Strange world we inhabit! This is the Vatican's very first Christmas tree, raised in 1982 by order of the Polish Pope John-Paul II. The piazza was designed by Bernini, the basilica begun by Michelangelo and completed by della Porta, all Italians. The obelisk was built by ancient pagan Egyptians, later plundered by Christians. American Wayne Dickson was privileged to spend three months sharing an apartment about a half-mile from here with his daughter Katrina (she of the Saint Barnabas story). American Jewel Dickson and I spent Christmas and New Year's Day a few blocks from here during the most recent Jubilee.

Buon Natale e Buone Feste to all!

Feature

Christmas movies: part one

Wayne Dickson

Over the past few weeks my wife and I have been watching lots of *Christmas* movies. (Jewel used to have a rule that she would watch no *Christmas* movie before *Thanksgiving*, but she's begun to slip a bit on that.) These movies are mostly pretty shallow and often downright silly, but they do at least provide a way of escaping from the day's news. Being a writer, I couldn't help beginning to think about the sort of template the movies tend to follow.

Among the standard resources for freelance writers are annual publications like *Writer's Market*. These publications provide guidance to what acquisition editors at various magazines and publishing houses are looking for. The same sort of guidance is also available for freelance screenwriters.



Two of the lightweight channels we watch are *Lifetime* and *Hallmark*. It wasn't long before

I began to wonder about the sort of advice *Writer's Market*-type annuals would provide for potential screenwriters for such channels. My list of features is still a "work in progress," so I thought I'd invite those of you who watch such movies to join in the fun. Make your own list, and compare it with what I've come up with so far.



The time is contemporary (though flashbacks are common), and the setting is a large town/small city. I suspect that *Hallmark* has built such a place on their back lot. It includes a main street, multipurpose shops, spots for dining, and a gathering area featuring a community *Christmas* tree and a gazebo of some sort. There's a place for buying or cutting one's own individual tree, and there's often a small skating rink. The houses are mostly the kind that were built before *World War II*. There's *always* snow on the ground and often falling as well.

In respect to characters, *Hallmark* tends to be pretty much plain vanilla, with occasionally one or two Black characters playing secondary roles. In contrast, *Lifetime* is more diverse, frequently mixing characters of various races, ethnicities, and even sexual preferences. Both channels often have three generations of one or more families involved.



The romantic interests aren't too young, usually in their late 20s or 30s. They are often widows, widowers, or divorced, and there's usually at least one child involved. At least one of the leads will arrive in town from outside, often from a big city. The reason is a job assignment, a family reunion, or the need to help a parent or a grandparent. It's common for the leads to have known one another in high school.

There's always a project involved, something like an assignment deadline, a contest, a festival or pageant. The project provides a pretext for the leads to meet and begin working together. Standard activities include buying/harvesting

a tree, decorating it, baking, drinking hot chocolate, caroling, examining memorabilia, lighting the community tree, opening presents, etc.

The focus tends to be on the female lead, who must meet a deadline and make one or more crucial choices, usually including where to live and often including choosing between two men. If a child or children are involved, they will have strong preferences as to which choice(s) the lead will make, adding to her stress.

Family history will be a factor, and there'll be an antagonist to focus and intensify the conflict. There will necessarily be an interrupted kiss, and at that point one of the leads is almost sure to say, "I should..." at the point of separation. There's often at least one major misunderstanding. Needless to say, all will be resolved, the lovers will finally get their kiss, and everyone will live happily ever after.

Think about it, folks. Let me know what I omitted, should have omitted, or got wrong.



Feature

Christmas movies: part two

Wayne Dickson

Most individuals and/or families have their favorite holiday movies, I suspect. These are a few of ours.



First on my list has to be the 1951 adaptation of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, starring Alastair Sim. That was several years before we got our very first television set. When the movie was broadcast, my mother loved it. She always referred to it as "Old Scrooge!" It'll always be my favorite, no doubt because it's connected in my heart with memories of my mother. Jewel and I watched it a few weeks ago.

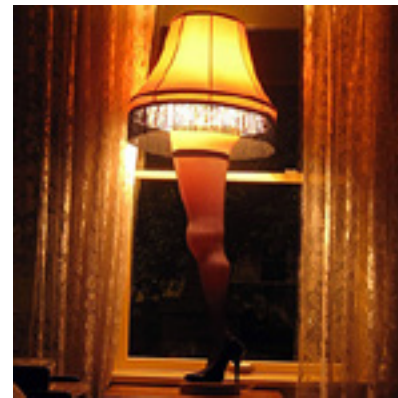
Last night we watched a later version, starring Patrick Stewart. I'm not crazy about the ghosts in that version, but Stewart's wonderful voice is enough to more than make up for the flaw. I also like the George C. Scott version.

Another favorite from the 1950s is *White Christmas*. The male leads are Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye, the females Rosemary Clooney and Vera-Ellen. I remember that Rosemary Clooney was one of my Uncle Gene's favorites, and I too like her voice. My main problem with that movie is Vera-Ellen. (Sorry about the silly hyphen, but that's the way she's always credited.) She's a terrific dancer, but so anorexically thin that I'm revolted.

I'd have to be even meaner than "Old Scrooge" and Mr. Potter combined to omit Jimmy Stewart's *It's a Wonderful Life*. We haven't watched it yet this year, but we will! Have to make sure that Clarence the bungling angel gets his wings.



I always loved Gene Shepherd's stories; I remember getting a BB gun for *Christmas*; and our son-in-law Jim loves *A Christmas Story*. I have a smaller version of the "Major Award" leg-lamp. Whenever we're together at *Christmas* with our family from *Atlanta*, we eat *Chinese* food for dinner on *Christmas*. The next day we prepare more traditional fare. We haven't done it yet this year, but *A Christmas Story* is definitely on our must-watch list.



Yes, there are more. But I'm getting sleepy and tired. Next time you hear from me, it'll be *January*.