



O Holy Night

A Merry Christmas to You!

As I drove home from Thanksgiving this year I played an audiobook of the unabridged version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* in the background. Dickens has been a part of my holidays since I was a small child and my brothers listened to the story on crackly old records. I've seen countless stage versions of *A Christmas Carol* (and been in the cast of two myself), and I've watched numerous movie adaptations. The old story never fails to touch me, though, and the holidays just wouldn't be the same without Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, and all the ghosts.

This fall I completed my thirty-fifth year on the staff of Bishop Garrigan High School. When I applied for a mid-year opening all those years ago, I certainly didn't imagine that one job would become my life's career. Things worked out pretty well, though. The school is celebrating its diamond anniversary this year, and I've been here more than half those years. I've taught around 2,000 students, and most of them have gone on to very productive careers themselves.

There were a number of changes this past year at Garrigan. For me the biggest was probably that my good friend and co-worker Mary McCall retired after spending nearly as long on the staff as I have. Mary and I worked closely together in speech, and even at other times of the year I saw more of her than anyone else on the staff. While I really miss having her at school, I know retirement was the best choice for her, and I certainly wish her well.

Another of my friends on the faculty, Annette Vaske, was honored with the Bishop's Excellence in Education Award this fall, and I was pleased to head over to Sioux City to see her receive that honor. I received that same award eight years ago, and I must say Annette is far more deserving of it than I am. I certainly congratulate her on the achievement.

I continue to teach math (Geometry, Advanced Algebra & Trigonometry, Analysis, Calculus, and Statistics) as well as a web design class. Six preps and teaching eight periods plus an evening section definitely keep me busy, but I don't know what I'd do otherwise. My students this year have been quite well behaved. They're a range of abilities, but most have been doing well.

I also work with quiz bowl, group and individual speech, and the math team. We went to Florida for national quiz bowl this summer and tied our best showing ever—winning four games, making playoffs, and losing to the overall national champions. This year's quiz bowl team has already won two regional tournaments and qualified for yet another trip to nationals. Last spring we also took first place in an online math competition (which has unfortunately since been discontinued), and we had more all-staters in speech. In addition to those activities, I'm in charge of our weekly "Bear Facts" radio show, which has now aired over 1000 episodes. I continue to work as the P.A. announcer at our home football games, and I announced a few baseball games as well. I also serve on a couple of school committees and continue to maintain the student website, bggoldenbears.org.

I always enjoy following our school activities. Our girls basketball team made it to state last winter, and our football team finished their fourth consecutive undefeated regular season and advanced to the state quarterfinals. We had a wonderful musical this fall, and as always I enjoyed following our baseball team last summer. This winter our boys basketball team should be particularly good, and I'm looking forward to seeing them play.

I taught another class over the TV system at Iowa Lakes Community College last spring, and it appears I'll be doing that after New Year's as well. They've changed a lot of things at the college, and it's honestly more of a chore to teach there than it used to be. I like the extra money, though, and they seem to like having me as an adjunct instructor.

Away from school I continue to be very active at the Frist Congregational United Church of Christ. I've been on the board there for years, and I continue to serve to serve as a lector most Sundays. I also maintain the church website, www.algonaucc.org, and I edit the sermon broadcasts we make for the local radio station.

There were a number of times this year when I realized I'm not as young as I used to be. I had some stiffness in my wrist in the spring, and this fall I had severe back pain, the source of which I couldn't pin down. I finally got physical therapy (a combination of ultrasound, electrical stimulation, and exercises), and finally that seems to be on the mend. Hopefully it will stay that way.

Both my brothers and I have continued to spend time cleaning out my sister's empty house. Thanks to her neighbor, the property actually looks halfway decent—honestly much nicer than it did when she lived there. Going through Margaret's stuff I came across a number of old travelogues and penpal letters our mother had written, and I spent quite a bit of time this summer transcribing them into digital form so they could live on in the 21st Century. It was fun to relive our family trip to Alaska when I was in high school, and it was fascinating to read her perspective on the many hospitalizations my mother had when I was in college.

Travel is always my favorite thing to do. I made three trips this summer. I took the quiz bowl kids down to Orlando, where in addition to competing we also went to the Kennedy Space Center and Universal Studios Florida. Then I made a quick trip down to Texas to see my brother Steve.

By far my biggest trip this year was in August, when I took Amtrak's California Zephyr out west. I stopped in Salt Lake City, where I saw the Mormon country and also rented a car and visited Golden Spike National Monument where the transcontinental railroad was completed. Then I headed out to Sacramento. I saw California's capital (and smelled heavy smoke from the wildfires nearby), and I also made a side trip to Silicon Valley to see the Computer History Museum, one of the most fascinating places I've been. On the way back I stopped in the Glenwood Springs/Aspen area and also in Denver. It was both fun and relaxing, and almost everything about the trip was enjoyable.

I'm planning one more getaway in 2018 as well. I should be flying up to Canada to spend Christmas and a few days after that in Ottawa. I've been almost everywhere in "the true north, strong and free", but I've never been to the national capital. Almost everything is planned and prepaid, so now I'm just crossing my fingers that the weather cooperates and that our President's threats to close America's borders don't actually come true.

By far the biggest news in the rest of the family comes from my nephew Timothy (Paul and Nancy's son) and his wife Jessica. They surprised everyone including themselves this fall with a new baby, Olivia Lea Burrow. They had tried to have a child earlier, but had been told they couldn't, and it was well into the pregnancy when Jessica realized she was expecting. I saw Olivia at Thanksgiving. She seems like a happy, healthy baby, and I'm certainly pleased to welcome her to the family.

Paul is still a Methodist minister, and he'll probably continue in that career for about two more years. This year a fourth church was added to his circuit. He and an assistant are responsible for both English and Spanish congregations in Perry and for English services in Rippey (where Paul lives), Fairview, and Minburn.

John again did summer work trapping insects for the Department of Agriculture. He seems to enjoy that work, and he's likely to continue it as long as the government funds the program. His wife Janet continues to work for an insurance executive in Dubuque.

I was pleased to be able to see my Aunt Alaire last summer while I was down in Iowa City to take a class, and also—completely by accident—to see my cousin Hal on the same trip. Alaire is now the most senior of the residents at the senior housing complex in Coralville. Her year has had some down points (like a car accident this fall), but she's still doing remarkably well. From what I hear Harvey and Max are also doing well, as are the other Miller relatives.

I've not seen any of the relatives on the Burrow side this year. That's probably a good thing, given that too often funerals are the reason for get-togethers. I understand my Aunt Macky was in the hospital earlier this year, and I certainly hope she's improving. Hopefully with my brother Steve back in Iowa next year we'll be able to get together with both sides of the family.

That pretty much sums up 2018. It's been a pretty decent year, and I hope it was good for all of you as well. May the holidays be pleasant for you, and may the coming year be everything you want it to be.

... And so, as Tiny Tim observed,

**GOD·BLESS·US,
EVERY·ONE!**

David M. Burrow