

Christmas

by [Kirby Olson](#) (December 2019)



Fairy and Christmas Ornaments, Andy Warhol, 1953

I looked in *Eckert's* for toys. I got the kid a roll of Scotch tape, some Band-Aids, and a sword of light. I hoped they included batteries. I hoped it wouldn't make any noise. It wasn't clear from the advertising, but the lady behind the counter assured me that they did contain batteries. I got two

different colors so we could stage mock-battles.

Underneath all the buying and selling of toys and odds and ends was Christmas. What meaning did Christ give to the world? I could think of the red and green of Christmas trees. I could think of beautifully wrapped gifts, and Santa Claus and sleigh bells, but it was about the pleasure of giving on what often amounted to an inhospitable day. In this darkest of days that we should paradoxically feel the greatest of joys had to do with the coming of ethical norms, and it had nothing to do with materialism but everything to do with ideals.

I drove home the back route up the Catskill Turnpike and noticed that now all the trees had lost their leaves. I turned up the heater and listened to an Indian opera on the NPR station from Ithaca. I was bored by opera, especially Indian opera, but I thought if I just listened over and over to such music eventually it would become meaningful, but only church music and blues-based Christian acid rock got through to me, as that was where home was to me.

When I got home, Mari said to call Dali. I called, and he said Herculeana had collapsed.

"Oh, Norm, what should I do?" Dali asked.

"Do you know the serenity prayer, Dali?" There was a pause. "It goes: God grant me the serenity to do something about the things that I can do something about, and not to worry about the things I can't do anything about, and the wisdom to know the difference."

"Well, what use is that?" Dali barked in excellent English.

I wanted to pass the phone to Mari. I tried to think of what Mari would say.

“Dali,” I said. “Forget the legal case. Just be with Herculeana.”

“In a crisis Hinduism isn’t much help,” Dali admitted. “I lean a bit Wiccan. I want to have tea leaves read.”

“We’ll leave the light on for you at the Lutheran church.”

It seemed odd that Dali spoke with a southern American accent and in reasonably good sentences.

I got off the phone to tell Mari about Herculeana. Mari didn’t answer. I wanted to tell her what I had overheard in the basement when I had eavesdropped. How the Dallitsons had said a strange Rumpelstiltskin poem about the baby. Many things seemed amiss. I shook Mari’s foot. She didn’t respond. I turned on the light. She was green as the Statue of Liberty. Her mouth wide open.

I called an ambulance. Falstaff and I drove the back route across Rathbun Road to come out at Pindar’s Corners at 70 miles per hour in the snow. I flew down the hills of ice and up the vales darkened by overhanging Evergreens and got to Cooperstown Hospital in less than forty minutes.

“I thought you were going to kill someone,” Falstaff said, his face and knuckles white. “Awesome!”

We arrived at the Hospital before the ambulance.

When the back door of the ambulance opened, Mari was holding a screaming infant.

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