



Information just received
after this letter
was written...

\$10,740
was given to ALM
on Friday (11-20)
through the
ExtraGive Program.

THANK YOU
to all who
participated!

NEWS JUST IN



December 2020

Abundant Living Ministries

Encouraging Christian Living since 1978

***Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth, peace to men on whom His favor rests! (Luke 2:14)***

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to **save** the world through Him! (John 3:16-17)*

What a tremendous and reassuring blessing to know that we are **saved** for all eternity, because of Jesus! Thank you, God, that You gave Your most precious Son, born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, but born of God. He became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth! (John 1:13,14)

Sharon and I thoroughly enjoy this time of year... starting with Thanksgiving and culminating with our celebration of Jesus' birth. We rejoice in His birth; learn from His life; are filled with gratitude for His sacrificial death; and anticipate His return! In our daily ministry through ALM, we confidently point toward Jesus who instructs, equips, and empowers for victorious, holy living here on earth... all in preparation for eternity with Him!

About 25 years ago, Sharon wrote a heartwarming Christmas story for our children. It became an annual tradition for our family and soon we began including her stories in ALM's December newsletters. Again this year, you will find her story *Something Much Better*, based on a story she heard her own dad tell many times.

In response to requests and comments, VOLUME 2 of Sharon's *Christmas Tales* was just released; Volume 1 was introduced a year ago and enthusiastically received. You may enjoy giving a copy of either or both volumes to friends as a Christmas gift. Your purchase provides additional financial support to ALM.

Rejoicing in HIS coming!

John (for Sharon and the rest here at ALM)

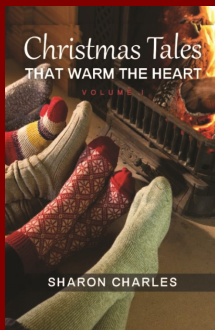
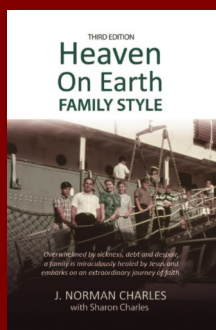
P.S. At this year's end, THANK YOU for your prayer and financial support. We are grateful to you!

If you want the tax receipt for your gift to be dated in 2020, please make sure that your check is dated AND envelope postmarked by 12/31/2020. This is an IRS requirement.

ALM Books Available

PRICES:	ALM	Amazon
Heaven on Earth:	\$11.00	\$12.99
Christmas Tales Vol. 1:	\$11.00	\$12.99
Christmas Tales Vol. 2:	\$12.00	\$13.99

*ALM's price includes the PA Sales Tax.
S&H will be added to ALM's prices.
Amazon will add 6% PA Sales Tax.
S&H with Amazon may be free for
Amazon Prime members.*



JUST RELEASED
Volume 2
266 pages



Something Much Better



The good old days... a time many years ago when life was simpler. Cars were just becoming plentiful. Airplanes were newly-invented and literally just getting off the ground. And having a telephone was a real luxury. There were no TV'S, computers, DVD's, or cell phones. It was a safer era when a stranger wasn't someone to run from or fear but a person who could be smiled at and trusted. He was just a friend waiting to be met.

My father turned out to be that kind of stranger.

He was a young man at the time. It was December 23rd and he hopped into his brand new Model T Ford. He was going Christmas shopping! In those days, most people waited to do their shopping until just a day or two before the holiday. Stores stayed open very late Christmas Eve so many folks did all their gift-buying that night. There were no malls or outlet centers... only lovely old shops on the Main Street of the city. So people had to deal with wintry weather when they headed out to make their purchases. They bundled up... the whole bit... heavy coats, wool hats, scarves, gloves and sturdy snow boots.

My Dad must have looked like an over-stuffed teddy bear in all his winter wraps. He was comfortably warm as he chugged along in his beloved automobile. Most cars didn't have heaters but at least the roof protected passengers from falling snow or rain. He was feeling very eager to get his shopping finished so he could go home for the night, put his feet up and relax.

He parked the car along one of the busy streets. Crowded parking lots and multi-level garages didn't even



exist. Snow was falling lightly on already-snow-covered sidewalks and shoppers were scurrying by, their arms loaded with packages. Under her big black bonnet,

the Salvation Army lady was jingling her brass bell by the little box at the corner. Many folks paused, dropped in a couple of coins and hurried off again as she called after them, "Thank you very much! God bless you!"

Dad rushed along too. First to the china shop to buy a pretty, hand-painted plate for his mother, then on to the department store to pick out a nice warm muffler (scarf) for his brother. Finally a stop at the market square to get fresh fruit baskets for his sisters' families. His father had died years ago, back in England. How he would have loved this new country and the wonderful family Christmas celebrations. Dad missed his father terribly but was glad the rest of the family could be together for the holiday. He pictured the decorated tree at home in the parlor. It was dazzlingly beautiful... new twinkling lights and delicate glass ornaments, and those silvery icicles which he had added himself. Oh, he could hardly wait to get home and sit awhile in front of that tree!

Toting the numerous bags filled with his precious purchases, he headed back towards his car. By this time snow was falling faster and the streets seemed much more crowded with people. He strode back across the market, bumping into shoppers. He saw the freshly-dressed turkeys hanging at the farmers' stands. Mmmm! He could almost taste his mother's delicious Christmas Day feast! He noticed a few Christmas trees still leaning against a fence. Most people had their tree by now but there were always those few procrastinators who would wait until the last minute.

He reached his car and loaded the packages safely in the back seat. Then he brushed the snow from the windshield and slid into the driver's seat. Brrr! It was really getting cold. A couple of groans of the starter and the engine roared to life. That was certainly something to be happy about on such a frigid, wintry night!

He pulled carefully out into the street... didn't want another automobile sliding into his precious Model T on

these slippery, snow-covered roads. "Guess I should take it slow," he advised himself.

As he was inching along, he saw *them*... two of the poorest little urchins he'd ever seen! The boy couldn't have been more than eight and the girl looked about five. Their coats were ragged and stained. They had no hats at all! The girl's brown braids were sprinkled with snowflakes and looked like two frozen twigs hanging from her head. Her hands were stuffed into half-torn pockets. She probably had no mittens. She was slipping and sliding in smooth-soled, worn-out, over-sized shoes as she tried to keep up with her brother. He also had no boots or mittens but he couldn't stuff his hands in his pockets because they were tightly grasping the base of the sorriest-looking Christmas tree you ever did see! In fact, at first glance my father thought the boy was dragging a long tree trunk. But when he looked again he realized there were a few measly branches sticking out here and there with some stubborn needles still clinging to them.

"Where in the world did those children get a tree like that?" Dad muttered to himself. "Why, it would be better used for firewood than a Christmas tree! I can't imagine anyone wanting that thing in their living room." And then he got an idea!

Pulling over to the curb just ahead of where the children were struggling along, he jumped out and went around to the sidewalk to meet them as they trudged forward with their precious load.

He could see them more clearly now. The boy had freckles all over his face and his red-brown hair was thick and wavy. He was huffing and puffing. It was no easy task to lug even this spindly tree along in the snow. But he had a determined look. The little girl appeared half-frozen yet her jaw was set firmly too, intent on keeping up with her brother.

"Probably immigrant children," Dad concluded as he watched them approaching. Only nine years earlier he had been one of those children, struggling to help his family survive in a new country. His heart went out to them.

"Hey there children! Merry Christmas!" he greeted them as they reached the spot where he stood.

They looked up startled, stopping right in front of him. The boy shaded his eyes from the falling snowflakes and looked cheerfully at my Dad. "Merry Christmas to you too, Sir!" No mistaking, it was an Irish accent.

"Yeth, Merry Cwithmuth, Mithter!" his little sister added through chattering teeth.

"I see you have a... a Christmas tree there!" Dad hesitated a bit on the word *Christmas*... it hardly looked fit for a celebration.

"Yes, Sir!" the boy answered proudly. "We bought it ourselves!"

"If you don't mind my asking, where did young folks like yourselves get enough money to buy a Christmas tree?"

It was the little girl who piped up. "We earned it ourselvth... shov'llin thnow and deliv'rin packageth for our neighbor!"

"It doesn't look like much, I know," the boy added, "but it was all we could afford and Mother and Daddy will be really surprised."

My father looked gently down at the children and smiled. "And who are your parents?"

"Patrick and Mary O'Shane... and I'm Patrick Junior and this is Celia." The young man patted his sister good-naturedly.

"Well, Patrick and Celia O'Shane, I'd like to make you an offer," Dad stated in a friendly but business-like way. "I have at my house right now a big bushy Scotch pine tree. It is leaning against the rail on my back porch. It just so happens that my boss gave it to me yesterday, thinking that I didn't have a Christmas tree. However, I already have a lovely one all decorated in our parlor. I've been wondering what to do with that extra tree."



Patrick's and Celia's eyes grew big as saucers as they guessed what he was about to say.

"But Sir, we spent all our money on *this* tree. We can't buy another one," Patrick replied respectfully.

"Oh, I'm not planning to sell my tree," Dad went on. "It was given to me, so I want to give it to someone who would enjoy it." He paused for a moment and eyed the children. Would they be willing to give up the tree they were grasping so tightly for a tree they had never seen and which was offered to them by a total stranger?

"Children, if you will throw away this tree and come with me, we'll get my tree and take it to your house. It's yours if you want it!"

Dad always told me later that he expected the children to hesitate and maybe even decline his offer, so he was amazed at their immediate response.

Without even the slightest hesitation Patrick blurted, "Where shall I throw this one, Sir?"

Dad smiled at the boy's eagerness. "Look, just over

there by that building there's a pile of trash; just toss it there. Someone will be glad to use it for firewood."

Slipping and sliding, Patrick dragged the tree over to the pile. Then he turned around, took two running steps and slid the rest of the way back on the snow. He laughed as he reached my father and took Celia's hand. She looked up at my Dad and grinned through her shivers, showing two missing front teeth.

"Okay O'Shanes, let's go!" They all piled eagerly into the Model T and, in no time at all, were back at Dad's house loading the gorgeous tree onto the top of the car. Dad even threw in a box of Christmas cookies he had received at work plus the half-full box of silvery icicles the children could use to decorate the splendid pine. The children were speechless. Their faces shone with happiness and excitement.

Patrick stood on the wide running board so he could help hold the tree as the three of them wound back through the city streets to the O'Shane home.

My father helped the children carry their treasure up the long flight of steps to their tiny second-floor apartment.

"I'll leave you now children, so you can go in and surprise your parents," he whispered as they reached the shabby door of their flat. "Merry Christmas to you all!"

For the rest of his life he would always remember the expressions of joy and gratitude on Patrick's and Celia's faces as they whispered back, "*And a very Merry Christmas to you too, Sir! Thank you so much!*"

As he made his way home that cold night, his heart felt warm, the way it always does when a kindness is shown. And when he finally settled down on the old rocker in the parlor, he gazed at his own brightly-decorated tree. His thoughts replayed the events of the evening. He shook his head when he considered just how much those dear children needed to trust him in order to throw away their prized tree in exchange for the yet-unseen one he offered to them.

Suddenly he knew that, in the events of that snowy night, God had planned a lesson *for him*. For years he had clung to his sinful ways. If he was objective, he had to admit to himself that his life was pretty empty and meaningless. He knew the Lord Jesus had come to him over and over and held out the offer of eternal life, forgiveness of sins, abundant joy and purpose. He could have it all, if he would just turn his back on his old ways and receive Jesus' free gift. But he had stubbornly refused. Time and time again he had refused. He saw himself now as so very poor and foolish!

"Where shall I throw it, Lord?" he whispered. "I don't want this weight of sin anymore. I want *You!* For-

give me for holding onto that which is so worthless in light of eternity. I receive Your gift!"

A silent tear fell on his hand. He reached over and picked up the old leather Bible from the shelf. He wanted to read the Christmas story. Somehow he knew it would seem wonderfully different tonight.

"Patrick and Celia O'Shane," he muttered under his breath, "You thought I gave you an incredible gift this Christmas... but," and he grinned, "bless you both... you gave me something... *so much better!*"

Author's Note: My father told this story often as I was growing up and I love to tell it now to my own children and grandchildren. Like the two trusting children, my dad threw away the old to receive something so much better. His life was never the same.

In the hustle and bustle of our hectic lives, how good it is to slow down and reflect on the greatness of God's free gift to us. How pitiful is *the stuff* we treasure, compared to the riches He is waiting to give us. How foolish to carry the weight of worry and fear when He is ready to give us hope and joy and peace instead. How sad to struggle under the guilt of sin, when He holds out to us the glorious freedom of forgiveness!

As we open our gifts Christmas morning and smile with delight over toys and electronic games and new clothes and all sorts of fancy presents, may we all pause to remember that all these things are little better than an old spindly Christmas tree. Jesus has *something so much better* to offer us all!



Written by
Sharon Charles

Open Arms

Childbirth Class

Five Consecutive Thursdays

Jan. 7 - Feb. 4, 2021 7:00 pm

Covering the important information offered in a hospital course, *Open Arms* adds a distinctively-Christian perspective. You will enjoy meeting other expectant couples as you gain practical help in preparing for a great labor and delivery. There is no cost for this course.

Register by contacting the ALM office.

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