



Tales of Texas

NEWSLETTER



Merry Christmas

This is our first Christmas edition.

We are all reminded that Christmas can be a troubled time for many people. This month's story is about a man and his "rock bottom" experience.

The photo (taken by author) in the masthead is the Mexican flag that flew over Texas in the early 1830's. The photos on p 3 are of the author and his wife and family (at least some of them). The photos on p 4 are captioned and taken by the author. Other photos are licensed by Microsoft to be used in newsletters made with MS Word (like this one).

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Rock Bottom at Christmastime

Everyone loves a good Christmas story. Christmas is a hopeful time, and it puts our blessings on full display for the world to see. It's also a time that accentuates the difficulties that so often come our way. I am ever mindful of good people who go through painful circumstances during the season. This month's Christmas edition features a fellow whose life hit rock bottom like we all do at some point.

A Decent Guy

On the surface, he appeared to be a decent guy. He relished the company of close friends that often accompanies popularity. People regarded him as successful and were drawn to him wherever he went. After much thought, he realized he was in love. He tied the knot, marrying the beautiful girl of his dreams. When he brought his new bride home, everything unraveled. She left him, returning to her parents' embrace. He made every effort to win her back, but she refused to entertain such a notion.

His friends at work could not ignore the whiskey on his breath. His clothes were ruffled and mismatched. His bloodshot eyes revealed a broken heart and its common companion, an empty bottle.

People were talking. Why did his wife leave him so soon after the wedding? Was he a perversion of something unthinkable? He became the butt of cruel jokes and innuendoes. What stung even more were the taunts directed at the woman he cherished.



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As he drifted through his office, he stumbled around like a puppet with tangled strings. The amber colored eddies and backwashes tossed him to and fro. He couldn't complete the simplest assignments. Peering through the alcoholic haze, he spied the last vestige of dignity. He realized that he had become a mere echo of his former self. Adhering to his sense of honor, he took the only course of action available to him. He resigned and left in disgrace.

He wandered the country as a vagabond on a quest for something new. He got into trouble with the law. He assaulted a man in front of numerous witnesses. A criminal court found him guilty of the crime and fined him \$500. There were times he could have afforded such a fine, but those days were over. An old Army buddy stepped in and mercifully paid the fine or he would have spiraled downward ever faster.



He was a big man. He stood head and shoulders above any other man in a room. His size and bearing commanded respect in the past. Now they called him "Big Drunk."

He decided to go westward. He remembered a kind woman from his past. He would reconnect with her. They established a small store together in Oklahoma, but he quickly drew weary of the venture. Her father was a local official and he granted them a divorce and dissolved the common law arrangement. The relationship was doomed to failure as he still loved his first wife. Sparing a good woman a life of despair, he pulled up stakes again.

It was December. In those days, there were no great interstate freeways with bridges that crossed the rivers of the country. A kind friend gifted him a horse, a luxury he couldn't afford, and he embarked on a journey across the Red. The water level was low in December and when he crossed into Texas, he breathed just a bit freer. Perhaps it was his imagination, but maybe not. He rode south and came to a cabin. He knocked on the cabin door and a resourceful frontier wife opened it explaining that her husband was hunting. She offered the passerby a meal and directions to his destination, Nacogdoches. According to her, it would be a ride of about 180 miles, and he would see two or three cabins between the Red and Nacogdoches. He thanked her and rode south through the thick underbrush, scrubby oaks, and pines.



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Merry Christmas from
Becky & Daryl

From Our Family
To Yours



Upon reaching Nacogdoches, he reunited with a friend from his eventful past. His old friend was a Jew and knew a little bit about wandering in the wilderness of life. He provided him with a hearty meal and stocked his saddlebags. He believed in him and helped him. He believed he could walk through the fires of the wilderness and come out victorious on the other side. There would be no whispers in this Nacogdoches home. There were giants in the land, but none bigger than the great “I Am.” His Jewish friend supplied him with the necessary provisions to cross the wilderness.

With full saddlebags, he rode another 180 miles through thickets, brush, rivers, and creeks until he got to the Brazos River. There was a ferry man there who took him across the river to a little settlement named San Felipe. It was there he met men and women who much like himself, were starting over. Some had hit rock bottom. Some were on the run. All had dreams. He instantly liked these people of San Felipe. It was like a new Promised Land. It was Christmastime, 1832.

San Felipe buzzed with excitement. Maybe it wasn't as busy as the financial district of Lower Manhattan, but something was there. Yes, the inn had a dirt floor to sleep on, but the fireplace produced a warm atmosphere equal to any hotel in Philadelphia.

He started to take Spanish lessons so he could fit in. He learned a Spanish word. *Esperar*. It means to *hope*, but it also means to *wait*. In his new homeland, he grasped the concept that hope couldn't exist without the element of waiting. It was a journey, a process, and he understood that there would be no overnight successes.

From the dirt and wood plank floors of San Felipe's log shanties, our vagabond's dreams sprang to life. He had something in his heart that wasn't there before. Hope. He knew his dreams would take years to fulfill, but he had friends for the journey. As Christmas of 1832 approached, it carried a sense of hope. His heart remained scarred, his finances depleted, and his reputation tarnished, yet the flicker of hope endured.



My grandson, Lincoln, at
Independence Baptist Church



San Felipe de Austin,
Texas

Vagabonds meander through the holiday season in pursuit of something they've lost along the way. For some, retracing their steps may offer a glimmer of hope in this quest. Others find themselves distanced from their loved ones, be it through geographical separation or the finality of death. The bitter complexities of divorce can cast a shadow on the season, while health issues, whether physical or mental, can batter the body like a relentless storm. Christmas isn't a magic wand. It's far greater than that. Merlin and Harry Potter have nothing comparable in their arsenal of magic spells and potions.

Our vagabond's life is not so different than many of ours. Rock bottom is rock bottom. We've all been there. Being a friend to someone in distress *is* a Christmas miracle. Some residents of San Felipe took it upon themselves to connect with the wanderer. Among others, their names were Austin, Travis, and Bowie. Little did they know, the Christmas of 1832 would breathe new life into their rejuvenated friend, Sam Houston, and give birth to a new country.

The shepherds of ancient Israel saw the miracle of Christmas with their own eyes. Their ears heard the angel voices. Their knees hit the ground. The Power of God in awesome glory thundered across the Judean hills with the Good News. The shepherds, however, would wait thirty-three years for Christmas to work its magic in the form of the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning.

Merry Christmas to all. Spread the Good News. Sow hope in the fields of despair. Give joy to those in the throes of sadness. Finally, love one another as He loved us.