

## December 20, 2017

In the Interim . . .

As I stood watching this year's Christmas parade, I recalled the Christmas when my husband and I were living in Clover, SC, and the city council there had decided to redo the sidewalks. All the sidewalks had been dug up to be replaced with brick areas with trees, flower beds, and lampposts. It was going to be beautiful. Only, as projects usually go, there were delays. So for three months there had been no sidewalks and no place to park. To get anywhere, like from Victoria's Cafe to the Shamrock Florist, you had to maneuver through a maze of muddy holes with planks across them.

The city council, weary from criticism and determined to keep up support for the town merchants during the crucial Christmas season, announced that the parade would go on as usual, 6:00 PM, the first Monday night in December. Somehow it never occurred to them that it would be dark at 6:00 PM and that there were no street lights. The new, specially-designed lampposts were ordered but had not yet arrived.

The night of the parade, I rushed back to town from work. I did not want to miss it because my husband was riding on the last float, in a red suit. I drove home and walked the block to Main Street, camera in hand. It seemed unusually dark that night, and when I got to Main Street I could hear people, but I could not see them. Finally, I figured out they were standing down in the holes where the sidewalks used to be. They were about two to three feet below the road, waiting in the darkness for the parade. I jumped down and joined them.

J.S. Edmunds—the town celebrity who had been to Nashville to record and was also an elder at the Presbyterian Church—was the parade master of ceremonies that night. J.S. was up in the window of the second floor of the Main Street Grill with a microphone, a flashlight, and a sheet of paper outlining the parade. His job was to narrate the parade as it went by.

Only it never occurred to anyone that J.S. would not be able to see down the street in the dark either. So instead of announcing an entry, J.S. had to call out to the float or group as they passed by, asking them who they were. They would shout back, and he would announce them.

It went something like this: "Here comes a float. It looks like it has little girls on it in Brownie uniforms. Is that the Brownie troop from the Methodist Church?" "Yes, J.S. That's us."

We would hear a vehicle and see its headlights approaching, and J.S. would say, "I

think that's one of the city council members. Is that you, Ann?" From the dark would come a voice, "Yes, darling, it's me, Ann." The one entry that did not have to be identified was the mayor. We recognized him from the sound of his Harley.

On it went, as the outlines of vehicles or horses passed by, and we strained to see. The Boy Scout troop from the Presbyterian Church, being always prepared, had brought flashlights. Only they were holding them under their chins, giving their faces a ghostly glow. Most of the entries were just the vague outlines of floats, cars, horses, or bicycles. It was an interesting Christmas parade. The first one I had ever seen that could not be seen.

That is, until the float from the independent community church came down the street. In the dark we could see the outline of a stable and people standing in robes. There were some with shepherd crooks and some with crowns and treasure chests. We could see the outline of a man and a woman standing at the front, heads bowed. And in one hand each person held a flashlight. Only the flashlights were not being held under faces. No, they were all pointed together, shining on a doll, a baby lying in a manger. Reminding us that the Light has come into the darkness and darkness has not nor can it ever overcome it.

This Christmas, wherever you are standing, may the Light of Christ shine into your life.

Wanda Neely