

## The Scrooge before Christmas

Yes, there is a Scrooge. He haunts the hearts of those who wish that Santa's \$10.00 white beard were real--who wish that his "Ho, ho, ho" meant more than the \$6.00 an hour he is paid to utter it. Scrooge-inhabited people desperately long for a "Ho, ho, ho" from deep within a genuine person's heart.

We seem to want people, all people, to be genuine, yet most people have personality owies that deflect them away from thoroughly genuine behavior. Christmas would ideally be a time when all of those owies would get better, but through some quirk of human nature, they usually get worse. The showy get showier, the stingy get stingier, the drinking get drunker, the overeating get overweight, and the busy get busier.

Considering the above, "Christmas" would seem a mockery when we consider that two-thirds of the word is "Christ". Perhaps those of Scroogish persuasion would prefer to spell it "Christmess".

Scroogish people are not the only ones who clamor for change. Certain religious types are annually haranguing each other about the True Meaning of Christmas. These frustrated (and sometimes ultraholy) people don't usually identify at all with Scrooge, but they, too, hate the tinsel, the tawdriness, and (other people's) hypocrisy. They want everyone to concentrate on the Christ child, the angels, the star, and other symbols which provided comfortable myths and icons to live by during their childhood. They tend to cling to these warm, fuzzy concepts the more tightly as they find themselves struggling with the bottomless mysteries of relationships, emotions, illnesses, and the Big Unmentionable. These bewildered adults cry out for something more stable, something safer, something holier, and something that makes sense when life doesn't.

Scroogeness could be defined as a thin layer of rage masking a desperate search for sincerity beneath. The Scrooge in our hearts knows the difference between the Jesus and the junk. Scrooge is the skeptic who dares to call tinsel tinsel, the seemingly cruel man who eschews sentimentality. Scrooge dares to drill down deeper than the reindeer manure, down into his past hurts and heartaches, down to the deepest gnarled roots that tap into his tortured soul. No, he does not like Christmas, nor does he especially like himself, but in digging deeply, he discovers a little child in there who can scarcely breathe. He sees that the "Bah" in "Bah, humbug" has all along been a crying out for breath and life and truth and goodness. Humbug has been smothering this little child for most of its life.

Long live the Scrooge within us, for deep within this Scrooge is the holy child who began life in a stable full of smelly stuff, and in whose innocent heart shimmers a true light which will dissolve the false lights and shams.

The Christ, then, may be said to inhabit Scrooge and you and me. Even though our whole land be filled with tinsel, Scrooge and you and I may discover that tinsel is an improvement over the smelly stuff in the stable. Through this child's eyes we may even see a light which we might call, for lack of a better word, a star.