



## An Angel's Story

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The story of a family as told through the eyes of a Christmas Angel.

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I came to live with this family in 1988, when they moved across the country, leaving family and friends behind in search of a new beginning and a better life. I was already here in California, waiting for a new home and family to watch over. They arrived here on New Year's Day into a motel where they lived for six weeks while their new house became ready for them. To become familiar with where they lived, they ventured out in the local area, trying new stores and shops. They found me in a little shop, where I sat on a table of leftover Christmas decorations at 75% off. The two girls of the family spied me among the decorations and grabbed me gently carrying me to their dad. "Can we get this for a Christmas tree next time we decorate? Can we dad?" The girls pleaded happily. Dad looked at the girls smiling at him and shook his head saying, "You can buy this angel, but we need to keep it secret from mom as a surprise for next Christmas. Can you do that?" The girls nodded their heads giggling, handed me to dad and scooted away to explore more of the store. Dad hid me among other things in the small basket he carried. Mom roamed the store chasing after the girls while dad paid for the things they wanted and needed. He quickly hid me in the bottom of a large bag and placed it in the trunk of the rental car. When dad unpacked the car, he hid me in the trunk to hide me from mom's curious eyes. I stayed in the trunk until the family's belongings and cars came from the moving company. Dad carefully hid me in the family car he drove every day. Riding with dad every day I got to know him and what he did for work and play. Finally, the day came, when the family moved into their brand new home. When the Christmas decorations moved from the moving van to the garage, dad slipped me in with them. I finally had a permanent home. I sat in my box wrapped in tissue paper to protect me, eagerly waiting for Christmas to come. I wanted to see my new home and the loving family that adopted me. In late November, the family went to a farm where they cut down a fresh Douglas fir, as their first Christmas tree in their new house. They set the tree standing in the garage while its branches filled out. The pine smell invaded the area and intoxicated me with Christmas spirit. I was ready. Bring on the tree. It was my new home for the holidays. I was so excited. A few days after the tree came home, it took an honored place in the living room near the big window so everyone could see it. Dad stood back and made sure the tree stood straight and tall. He got the stepladder and proceeded to string all the lights on the tree. He had over 200 lights to add to this nine-foot tree. He wrapped them around the tree starting from the top working his way down. He plugged the lights in and they glowed and sparkled making the tree shimmer in their light. He adjusted the lights to fill in the bare spots. When he was happy, he turned to mom and the girls saying the rest is all yours. The girls and mom hung the ornaments, which covered three generations of the

family and several years of school projects. The tree stood proud and tall covered with family history and cherished memories for all to see and remember. The last thing, mom and the girls added to the tree, was strings of garland and homemade strings of popcorn and cranberries, which became food for the birds after Christmas. The odors of Christmas spread from the tree throughout the house. It was so wonderful and the tree looked almost done. Mom stood back and admired the girls and her handiwork. She noticed that there was nothing on the top of the tree. She turned and looked at dad and the two giggling girls. She smiled and said, "OK, what are you up to now? Come on I know there is some mischief afoot here." "What makes you say that?" Dad replied as the girls started laughing. "I have some bad news for you. During the move our normal treetop broke. I did not see it until we unpacked the decorations." "That will never do." Mom cried softly. "We need a treetop. We have to go out and get one today." Dad turned to the girls and slowly whispered, "It's time now." The girls ran to the garage, gently picked up my box with me in it and carried me to her father. He carefully opened the box, moved aside the tissue paper and picked me out of my nest. He lifted me up, smoothed my skirt and my hair and unwound the wire to the light in my hand and the lights under my skirt. He gently held me to mom who examined me closely. Tears filled her eyes as she looked from me to dad and the girls. "It is beautiful." She whispered choking from her tears. "The girls picked her out when we first arrived here and she waited until today to revel herself to you." Dad softly and lovingly replied. "She will look lovely on the treetop watching over this family every Christmas. She is our newest tradition." He moved the stepladder back to the tree and put me on the treetop looking down on the girls and mom. I was so happy to be out and see the smiling faces. My only complaint was, I hated having a tree branch shoved under my skirt every year but it was something I would endure seeing those smiling faces every year. It has been 25 years since my first Christmas and I have seen and heard a lot. I endured a curious dog. The dog liked the tree indoors because it was a new place to lift his leg. Every year he sprayed the lower branches of the tree to the surprise and ire of mom and dad. I sat atop the tree looking down taking in the fun chasing the dog after he sprayed. One Christmas day four years after he arrived, he died in his sleep. When dad came down to check on the presents and let the dog out, the dog laid in front of the tree not moving. Dad quickly dressed, wrapped the dog in an old towel, grabbed a shovel and in a soft part of the backyard dug a quick grave. The children came down and asked where the dog was. Dad took the girls, sat them in his lap and explained that he was old and God took him to heaven with the other animals. The girls nodded in understanding and hugged dad for a little while in grief. Three cats invaded the home after that. They did not spray the trees, but played with the lower hanging ornaments and tried to climb the tree. The family bought plastic ornaments and hung them on the lower branches to save the precious glass ones. This worked well, until the cats got older and jumped at the shinier glass globes. The family never won that battle, but the cats grew tired of jumping and got lazy. Many were the day I wanted to jump off the treetop and punish the cats, but I am an angel and love all things. One year I watched mom sneak downstairs and look for her presents. Dad always brought home his gifts wrapped and ready to put under the tree. Mom hated that because the anticipation of Christmas was too great. One year dad and the girls decided to break mom of her bad habit. They found a small box filled it with tissue paper a

few nails and broken glass. To make it more authentic, they took some sample perfume packets, tore them open and placed them in the box too. They wrapped the box, put a big bow on it and placed it prominently in front of the other gifts. Mom saw the gift and got very curious. Curiosity ate at her until she could not resist shaking the package. As she shook the package, the perfume samples bled onto the tissue paper and the broken glass and nails made it seem like she broke something. She carefully put the box down after smelling the leaked perfume. On Christmas morning, mom got that present as her last. She sat there looking guilty not wanting to open it. She gulped her tea, postponing the opening of her gift for as long as possible. She opened her gift slowly. Before she finished, she burst out in tears. She confessed that she shook the package earlier. The result was that whatever was inside broke. Dad and the girls remained stone faced and urged her to open the gift. With shaking hands, broken heart and tears flowing, she continued. When she saw the box, a look of confusion crossed her face. The box smelled like expensive perfume and had stains on it, but it was ordinary cardboard. She opened the box and discovered the nails, broken glass and empty sample perfume packets. She smiled sheepishly and from that Christmas on, she never shook a box for her under the tree. I watched over this family for 25 years now. I saw the girls grow to young women and watched them date and marry. I saw their daughters come into this house and play in front of the now artificial tree with 500 lights. I saw the girls move out and mom and dad spend Christmas alone. I no longer get to sit atop a tree in dad's apartment, but hold a place of honor among the pictures of the girls in his life. My lights still burn bright and beckon everyone to come and join the celebration at Christmas. I hope to continue this until dad passes me to one of his daughters. Until then, I plan to watch over him as I did over the family for so many years. There are many more Christmas stories I could tell, but right now, it is time for me to return to my tissue paper bed in the box to sleep until next Christmas.