



The Homecoming

Earl Hamner Jr.

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When Clay Spencer fails to arrive home at the expected hour on Christmas Eve of 1933, his family grows concerned. While his seven brothers and sisters and his mother keep vigil the older son, Clay-boy, goes in search of his father. But on his journey through the snowbound Virginia hills, the boy experiences a series of hazardous, touching and hilarious adventures. His life is endangered by an enraged deer, the family's honor is threatened by a well-meaning outsider, and unexpected help is provided by the fearsome county sheriff. An encounter with the neighborhood Negro community church teaches Clay-boy a lesson in race relations and, while taking refuge from a snowstorm, he is overwhelmed by the intoxicating hospitality of two elderly genteel lady bootleggers. Finally, at midnight, when all hope for him has been abandoned, Clay Spencer provides a surprising climax to the story, and in a single moment illuminates the triumph of the human spirit. Rich with life that rings true, filled with nostalgia, laughter and tears, *The Homecoming* is a warm and wonderful classic of American literature.

The Homecoming Details

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Author : Earl Hamner Jr.

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From Reader Review The Homecoming for online ebook

Lesle says

This novel is so heartwarming, makes you smile, cringe and sadden at times throughout.

I cannot imagine living during the depression with such a large family. The father Clay has to leave to find work and the family struggles to make Christmas special anyways. Out of the 8 children there are ones that still believe in Santa and when Clay makes it home on Christmas Eve he tells a tell of Santa that reinforces their belief.

The Homecoming is the basis for the TV show 'The Waltons'. I love watching the show when I was growing up and some of them stick with me. Family above everything else, means everything!

David says

The last 5-6 pages or so were tough going ... some kind of salty discharge from my eyes kept clouding my vision.

Ivan says

From the first time I saw "The Homecoming" on television when I was a small boy I've considered it one of my most favorite Christmas films. Somewhere along the years I realized that the film was based on a book, but I never read it until now. I can't recommend it enough. The sense of family and home and the love of same is present on every page. The story differs from the film - names have changed - Clay-boy is more familiar to most of us as John-boy, and the family name here is Spencer and not Walton. However, the essence of the source material has been captured. It's Christmas and Clay Spencer hasn't arrived home yet and a blizzard is on the way. Oldest son Clay-boy is sent to find his father and bring him home. It's an odyssey. He runs into the sheriff, Ike Godsey and Charlie Sneeds (under arrest for poaching), he attends services at "the black church," and end up at the home of two elderly lady bootleggers who give him "recipe" and a ride home through the snow in a horse drawn sleigh. The book has a happy ending that doesn't seem at all forced or unreasonable and left this reader in tears. Capote's "A Christmas Memory" (and the 1966 TV film with Geraldine Page) remains my very favorite Christmas story, but this runs a very close second.

DJ says

I believe this was the basis for The Waltons TV Show.

Julie says

I think I've found a new Christmas tradition to read The Homecoming every year! This is such a perfect,

heartwarming Christmas story set during The Great Depression. I loved every moment and being swept back to simpler (though more stressful) times. I'm all about slowing down, savoring time with my family, and this book is just the thing I needed calm my anxiety, and keep Christmas in perspective.

Robin says

Never get tired of this story.

Carol says

I loved The Waltons television show and Spencer's Mountain is one of my favorite movies, so when I saw this book on the shelf at the library I just had to read it. And the story did not disappoint. This was a nice quick holiday read. If you've seen the TV show or the movie, no surprises here.

Jeff says

It's Christmas Eve, 1933, on Spencer's mountain and Olivia Spencer along with her eight "thoroughbred" children, anxiously await their father's homecoming. With old man Winter wreaking one of his best, life goes on despite the trials and tribulations of life during the Great Depression, not to mention their apprehension that shakes each of them to the core, especially Olivia.

"The Homecoming" is a heartwarming story about that Christmas Eve day on Spencer Mountain that welcomes us into their daily lives; the chores, the childhood rivalry, the festive preparations including a harrowing encounter with an aggressive buck who's determined but thankfully fails to attack Clay-boy while he's searching for that perfect Christmas tree, the quest for the patriarch Clay, and finally a Christmas miracle at midnight. What the family didn't expect was the real miracle that followed.

Originally published in 1970 by Earl Hamner, Jr., CBS realized its potential and produced and aired the movie in 1971, not only with subtle changes to character's names but launching a franchise that America would come to know and love as the "The Waltons." If you've never seen the movie or the book, I recommend both, especially during the holidays! "The Homecoming" will fill your heart with love and the spirit of the season!

~mad says

I've read this book before and love anything "Walton's Mountain/Spencer's Mountain" written by the original John Boy!

I have been looking all over my house for this book for like the last FIVE Christmas's and just stumbled across it this month!
YAY ME!

I recommend highly!

Kristine says

The Homecoming (Buccaneer Books, 1970) is a homespun family tale set under the "cold Virginia sky" of Spencer's Mountain. Written by Earl Hamner, Jr., The Homecoming became the made-for-TV movie that launched The Waltons. It's a December staple around our house. But how close is the movie, The Homecoming: A Christmas Story (1971), to the book?

Starring Richard Thomas as John Boy and Patricia Neal as Olivia, the movie's storyline is quite close to the book. However, some of the names of the characters differ:

In the movie it's Clay-Boy, Matt, Becky, Shirley, Mark, Luke, John, and Pattie-Cake Spencer instead of John-Boy, Jason, Mary Ellen, Erin, Ben, Jim-Bob, and Elizabeth Walton. It's Misses Etta and Emma Staples sisters instead of the eccentric Mamie and Emily Baldwins.

The usuals in the book also appear in the film, sometimes in slightly altered form: Ike Godsey isn't a store keeper in the book, but rather a restauranter, chef, bartender, bouncer and pool hall owner (p. 76, 71). As in the movie, we also meet Sheriff Ep Bridges, preacher Hawthorne Dooley, the "backwoods Robin Hood" - Charlie Sneed, and even Chance the cow.

We meet a few characters in the book not appearing in the movie, such as Birdshot Sprouse, "a tall, obliging, not-too-bright boy" (p. 60) who tells the Spencer (Walton) children about the "city lady" with a Missionary Box of Christmas gifts "down at the post office" (p. 62).

All in all, the movie follows the book closely, at times lifting dialogue and plot right out of the book, verbatim:

- "I wish my daddy could fly" says little Pattie Cake ("Elizabeth") on p.13
- Olivia's Christmas cactus (p. 11, 12)
- Clay boy's complaint, "I'm an old mother duck" (p. 16)
- "Son, you're goen to be sorry you did that" snarls Becky (Mary Ellen) on p. 19
- Olivia stirring her applesauce cake and singing/humming O Little Town of Bethlehem (p. 21)
- Bickering kids (p.p. 19-22, 48-50)
- "We don't accept charity in this family" declares Livy, p. 63
- "I wonder how news got all the way to the North Pole that you wanted to be a writer" observes Daddy Walton in both book (p. 121) and movie to young Clay Boy (John Boy).

Here's how the basic plot reads in the book:

While awaiting their Daddy's arrival on a cold Christmas Eve in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia during the Depression, matriarch Olivia Spencer sends 15 y.o. Clay-Boy out in search of his father. The clan patriarch, Clay Spencer, is a somewhat different man from the John Walton later portrayed by Ralph Waite:

"Clay Spencer was a hard man to measure up to. Like all Spencer men he was a crack shot, a good provider for his family, an honest 'look-em-in-the-eye' man, an enthusiastic drinker, a prodigious dancer, a fixer of things, a builder, a singer of note, a teller of bawdy stories, a kissing, hugging, loving man whose laughter would shake the house, and who was not ashamed to cry." (p. 25)

There's no mention of a bus going off the road as in the movie. Clay Sr. is simply, inexplicably late. Olivia

and her brood of eight - along with Grandpa Homer and Grandma Ida are newsless as to Clay's dilatory arrival and can do nothing but wait. Later, Olivia sends out young Clay Boy to search for Clay, Sr.

While looking for his father, Clay Boy runs into Sheriff Bridges at Ike Godsey's pool hall. The Sheriff has arrested Charlie Sneed for "hunten out of season" (p. 78) - not for relieving local merchants of their foodstuffs, as in the movie. The verbal exchange between Charlie and the swaggering Sheriff Bridges (p. 79-80) is almost word-for-word from the book (p. 78-80).

Clay-Boy gets a ride to the turn off of the First Abyssinian Baptist Church from Sheriff Bridges (not borrowing Sneed's car), and has to trudge to the church on foot in the dark due to road conditions. In the dark and snow, Clay Boy is guided to the church by the sound of singing *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* (p. 85) and is invited in by black preacher Hawthorne Dooley. At the close of the Christmas Eve service, Dooley offers Clay Boy "a ride on General" - his horse - to the Staples' home in search of Clay, Sr. (p. 93).

After being regaled with a rehearsal of the charms of Ashley Longworth (p. 102, 103) and Enrico Caruso on the Staples' Victrola (p. 104), Clay Boy accepts a horse-drawn sleigh ride home from Misses Etta and Emma (p. 107-108). The sisters make Clay Boy a gift of "a Mason jar of recipe" (p. 110), not eggnog as in the movie. Arriving home, Clay Boy presents the jar to his mother who declares she'll use it "to make frosting for my applesauce cake" (p. 110). The recipe for both cake and frosting appears in the back of the book.

Daddy Walton finally arrives home after 1:00 a.m. on Christmas Day. After the children open the gifts their Daddy has brought, little Pattie cake observes, "You didn't get nothen, Daddy." (p. 121) Gently Clay lifted the little girl in his arms and looked around the room at his family. "Sweetheart," he said, "I've got Christmas every day of my life in you kids and your mama." He turned to Olivia. "Did you ever see such thoroughbreds?"

Engaging and endearing, you can finish the book in an afternoon. Especially good with a steaming mug of hot chocolate and marshmallows, curled up in front of a fireplace.

Matt says

An annual reading tradition for me.

No holiday season is complete in my household without remembering the story of *THE HOMECOMING*. When, on Christmas Eve, Clay Spencer has not returned home from his forty mile trek for the holidays, the entire Spencer household is on edge. Olivia pines for her husband's safe return, but cannot put life on hold as she waits. With a brood of eight, she turns to Clay-Boy, her eldest, to take up the role of 'man of the house' at the tender age of fifteen. As the story progresses, Clay-Boy is not only playing the role of man, but also must engage in a trek to locate his father and bring him home for the holidays. As Christmas Eve turns to night, the Spencers engage in their own family traditions, meagre as they may be in the midst of the Depression. It is not Santa for whom they wait this Christmas of 1933, but Clay and his safe homecoming to spend time with those he cherishes most. Sure to become an annual tradition for holiday reading lists, Hamner Jr. entertains and depicts the era so effectively.

I grew up watching THE HOMECOMING as part of the annual Christmas preparation. The book was on hand, but I never took the time to read it until a few years ago. Doing so, I came to realise how special this story is and the tradition is one I will continue. I wish not to stand on a soapbox, but the holidays are about love and support, not the material things. Hamner Jr. makes that known throughout this novel, as well as in SPENCER'S MOUNTAIN. Do take some time to read them and enjoy all they have to offer.

Kudos, Mr. Hamner Jr., for instilling in me the annual reminder that love trumps all. Merriest of Christmases to all!

Like/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

Jim says

This book started out for me like one of John-Boy's stories ... full of promise, a little stiff and very self aware.

All of us older folks remember The Waltons and I was comparing the descriptions of family members to their TV counterparts and trying to match them up - until I realized there was an extra kid in here!

The story unfolds slowly, considering the brevity of the book but it really is worth the time.

The old ladies who sell their papa's recipe, the worry over a father who may or may not arrive in time for Christmas, the little girl who cries over a cracked doll... all these little moments adding up to a sweet, finely drawn tale.

I enjoyed the look into Clay-Boy's mind, the description of a nighttime sleigh ride and a Christmas Eve visit to a black church where he realizes with great sadness that there are whole societies within his own that he does not know and may never be a part of.

The ending is predictable but so is the one in A Christmas Carol and I read that one every year! I think I will make a new tradition of reading this one as well.

Sheri says

I love this book and movie I read it every holiday season

Charlsa says

I had never read this book even though it's been on my shelf for 20 years. I finally picked it up because one of the popsugar prompt for 2018 is to read a book by an author whose first or last name is the same as yours. I loved this little book. It's comforting and hopeful and full of joy and love. It puts me in the mood for Christmas.

Katy says

A really short novella based on the Spencers of Virginia and one Christmas when Pa was coming homeroom a job in another town. However, John-Boy goes out to find Pa, only to be lost.

These stores are the basis for the old TV favorite, "Walton's Mountain." It took me so long to read because I kept leaving it in places where I was NOT!
