



The Greatest Gift: A Christmas Tale

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A beautiful gift edition of the heartwarming story that became the Christmas classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*.

For almost seventy years, people the world over have fallen in love with Frank Capra's classic Christmas movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. But few of those fans know that Capra's film was based on a short story by author Philip Van Doren Stern, which came to Stern in a dream one night.

Unable at first to find a publisher for his evocative tale about a man named George Pratt who ponders suicide until he receives an opportunity to see what the world would be like without him, Stern ultimately published the story in a small pamphlet and sent it out as his 1943 Christmas card. One of those 200 cards found its way into the hands of Frank Capra, who shared it with Jimmy Stewart, and the film that resulted became the holiday tradition we cherish today.

Now fans of *It's a Wonderful Life*, or anyone who loves the spirit of Christmas, can own the story that started it all in an elegant, illustrated edition that's perfect for holiday giving. It includes an Afterword by Stern's daughter, Marguerite Stern Robinson, that tells the story of how her father's Christmas card became the movie beloved by generations of people around the world.

The Greatest Gift: A Christmas Tale Details

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Author : Philip Van Doren Stern

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From Reader Review The Greatest Gift: A Christmas Tale for online ebook

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

4 stars for this 1943 short story, and an extra half-star for its having inspired one of my favorite Christmas movies of all time, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the great movie directed by Frank Capra and starring Jimmy Stewart.

"Other men are leading exciting lives, but I – well, I'm just a small-town bank clerk. I never did anything really useful or interesting, and it looks as if I never will. I might just as well be dead. Sometimes I wish I were. In fact, I wish I'd never been born!"

George Pratt is staring into the dark waters of the river on Christmas Eve, depressed about his failure of a life, when he's met by an older man who mysteriously grants his wish. The man sends George off with a sales bag full of brushes (like the old Fuller Brush door-to-door salesmen) to see what his town and family are like now that George has never been born.

If you're familiar with the movie, it's kind of a bare-bones version of that, but a lot of the story - and the heart and spirit of it - are here in this 75 year old story. It's worth reading! Free online here at Tor.com.

Merry Christmas to all!

Bonus material:

Per Tor.com:

When he found himself unable to find a publisher for his story, author Philip Van Doren Stern printed up copies of the "The Greatest Gift" and gave them out as Christmas cards in 1943.

Eventually, the story came to the attention of director Frank Capra, who explained later, "It was the story I had been looking for all my life! A good man, ambitious. But so busy helping others, life seems to pass him by...Through the eyes of a guardian angel he sees the world as it would have been had he not been born."

The movie *It's a Wonderful Life* was initially not a success, despite its star and director. It was quickly forgotten, so much so that the movie's copyright wasn't renewed in the 70s (under the old copyright laws renewal was required after 28 years), so it was considered to be in the public domain for many years. That led to its being shown on TV so often - because FREE!! - that this all-but-forgotten movie became extremely popular. When that happened, the movie's studio owner started enforcing the copyright of the movie's music and the underlying story - this story here, which the studio bought the copyright for. So basically they backdoored the copyright protection. Here's an article on it: <https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2013/...>

Carol She's So Novel?? says

4.5★

I read this here <https://www.tor.com/2008/12/25/the-great-american-story/>... Just be aware that there are a lot of typos in this edition.

Also I must be one of the few in the English speaking world who hasn't seen *It's a Wonderful Life*. Maybe if we still had Sky TV...

This was such a sweet, heartwarming story with a moral of counting your blessings. It appears at first read to be quite a simple tale, but it takes quite a few turns, before ending up in a really good place.

I may never have seen the movie but I'm sure I'll reread this story again & again.

Ken says

Best known for its movie adaptation 'It's a Wonderful Life', this really touching tale really highlights the importance of friendship and family.

As George Bailey contemplates suicide, he's visited by a guardian angel Clarence. Clarence reveals to George how many lives he has touched in the town of Bedford Falls.

The perfect quick read for the festive period, it really is a wonderful story!

classic reverie says

I love Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* and was happy to read the very short story that started it all. The short story and the movie have differences but the basic story line and the meaning ring true. It was interesting to read the story and see the difference, which any fan of the movie would truly enjoy. The Afterword by Philip Capra's daughter is interesting regarding the conception of the story and how it came to Capra. The book is really good but the movie takes it up another level. This is the first time IMO, the movie out does the book but the book was a much needed ingredient in the movie and without this basic story, there would be no George Bailey. Looking at the story as if the movie had not been made, it was a great little read with a big heart to it!

Lux Radio Theater version

<https://www.oldtimeradiodownloads.com...>

Radwa says

"You had the greatest gift of all conferred upon you-the gift of life, of being part of this world and

taking a part in it. Yet you denied that gift."

"I thought I'd lost you. Oh, Mary, I thought I'd lost you!"

The same idea of "It's a wonderful Life" but the events are a little bit different.

A wonderful story ..

Recommended to anyone.

Jeannette Nikolova says

I'm delighted beyond words right now! **It's a Wonderful Life** is one of my favourite old movies and I had no idea it was based on a short story.

This is a truly magical tale, which I'm so glad to believe. There is something so lovely and endearing in it. It may not be Christmas yet, but I don't see how having the Christmas spirit in you all year long is a bad thing. In fact, I hope to stumble upon such precious jewels more often.

...well, I really want to re-watch the movie now.

Tiffany says

Wonderful short story that inspired the movie It's A Wonderful Life.

Sarah says

The basis of the Capra classic *It's a Wonderful Life*. The story was published in a magazine and is too short for the character development and world-building that the movie is so good at, and the supernatural element is much more pronounced and better-explained in the movie. The story is still well worth your time, and barely takes any to read.

Gabriela says

This was so cute! I read 4 different Christmas books this December and somehow this super short story was the best of them! It had everything I wanted from a Christmas story and it left me with a smile on my face. It was lovely :)

Alina Maria Ciobanu says

A beautiful story with a beautiful message, the inspiration for the beautiful Christmas movie "It's a wonderful life"

SpookySoto says

Rating: I loved it ?

This is a wonderful, uplifting and beautiful christmas story.

The classic movie *It's a wonderful life* is based on it. The movie expands on George's backstory and his disappointment in life, his depression and despair. The movie makes the strange man an angel, Clarence, who is trying to get his wings. In the story we don't know who he is or even what his name is.

To me the movie is pretty boring, long and slow paced, and the best part, when George gets to see a world where he wasn't born, takes place in the last hour or 45 minutes. This short story only tells us about this incident, and that's why is so interesting, beautiful and powerful.

Is concise, to the point, magical, light, uplifting and heartwarming.

I recommend it.

Update: First re-read dic 2018, I still loved it. I think I'll make it a tradition to read it every christmas.

Jennifer says

This is a reprint of the Christmas story that inspired the movie, 'It's a Wonderful Life.' When the author's story was rejected multiple times, he chose to print up about 200 copies himself and sent them out as Christmas cards. One of those copies ended up in the hands of Frank Capra, and the rest is history. The following is taken from the afterward, included in the book.

Of the process of developing the movie that would become a beloved Christmas classic, Jimmy Stewart said, of his meeting with Capra, "The two main ideas were: one, no one is born to be a failure; and two, no one is poor who has friends."

Capra wrote, "'It's a Wonderful Life' sums up my philosophy of film making. First, to exalt the WORTH of the individual. Second, to champion MAN--plead his causes, protest any degradation of his dignity, spirit, or divinity. And third, to dramatize the viability of the individual--as in the theme of the film itself. . . There is a radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see, and to see we have only to look. I beseech you to look."

If only we had more film makers like Capra today. . .

Dahiana says

Que lindo!

... "You had the greatest gift of all conferred upon you, the gift of life, of being a part of this world and taking a part in it. Yet you denied that gift".

Muy apropiado para este día. Que lindo!

Alejandro says

A priceless importance due the film that inspired

NO MAN IS A FAILURE WHO HAS FRIENDS

It's not rare if you haven't read this short story or even know about it. But certainly it could be quite rare if you haven't watched, at least once, the film that inspired.

The Greatest Gift, by Phillip Van Doren Stern, is the inspiration for the masterpiece directed by Frank Capra and performed by James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, Thomas Mitchell and Henry Travers. I am talking about...

...It's a Wonderful Life...

...the timeless classic which is now a tradition (especially in United States) to be watched on TV on each Christmas' Eve. And certainly since I was a kid, I watched each time that I was able to do it, and now as adult and since several years ago that I got the DVD and later the Blu-ray, now I do it as my own personal tradition too, on each Christmas' Eve's night, I watched the film *It's a Wonderful Life*.

And it's because the love and respect that I have for the film that it wasn't easy to rate this short story. I really, really, REALLY, wished to be able to give it a full 5-stars rating,...

BUT...

...it was an odd reading experience, very much like when I decided to read *The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank, since some people whom only watched the mere rating (also a 3-stars rating), may think that I didn't like the story or even worse that I have no respect for what the book represented...

...And that would be as far from truth as able possible,...

...since I do have a lot of respect to the general message, the literature's importance and the social impact of the story (in BOTH cases).

However, as I commented in my appreciation about the reading value of *The Diary of a Young Girl*, where I pointed out that it was a personal diary, written by a teenager, without caring about any coherency, or even having a proper ending (due understandable reasons) but still hardly a good example of a typical book in the genre of a memoir.

In the case, of *The Greatest Gift*, is a short story that it was originally printed on xmas cards to the friends of the author (since he didn't get to publish it), so you already have the main character, George Pratt (in the short story the last name was Pratt instead of the film version's Bailey) in the climax scene and you basically you get a simplified version of the general message but the things are already changed and it's through the comments of the main character that you have to understand how as before, and why it seems to be changed from the point of view of the main character.

So, I have to admit that since I have watched A **LOT** of time the classic film, so I am “contaminated” of being used to that form of getting the story, but still I am truly believe that if you want to impact the audience, you first have to get them to know and to like how it's the “real life” of the characters and then, to make the change, so you can be as impacted as is the main character.

So, taking in account that it's a short story, showing very little details, never explaining why George Pratt was so desperate to try to do what was going to do, since he tells that he thought that he never do a relevant thing in life, but I do think that must be some kind of detonating event, to force him to do something unspeakable, but no, there isn't in the written short story, so hardly you can sympathize with the main character (something that it's quite taking care of, in the film) and finally, telling the changes in reverse order (already living the changed reality, and only commenting how was the “real life”) you can't really being impacted by it.

However, the general message is there, and one can appreciate the importance of the existence of this book, since without it, we would never had the film *It's a Wonderful Life* and that could certainly leave an irreplaceable hole in humanity's history.

A special compliment to the excellent job of Scott McKowen, who did the illustration on this edition and it was a wonderful artwork.

EACH MAN'S LIFE TOUCHES SO MANY OTHER LIVES

People who have watched the film, they will recognize my chosen titles for the sections of this reviews as quotes from the film, that they are only in the film, the written short story doesn't have these truly remarkable quotes giving a testimony of the priceless work done on the screenplay adapting the original short story into a full long story presented in the classic movie.

The general message in both versions is simple. If you don't do your part in life, no one else will do it. Many times, people use to say that anyone is replaceable, **BUT** one thing is to replace someone and totally another to be the same person. Even is the smallest things, in decisions that you may think aren't impacting on anyone, they are crucial to have their lives as they use to know them. A single change, and those lives can be totally different.

A detail found on both versions, short story and film, and that you may think that it's not important or impossible that a person can influence, it's that George (Pratt or Bailey) is in his climax moment, there is snowing, but once the angel does his thing, the snow stops.

It was snowing in that town thanks that George lived there.

Yes, I know, you may think that I lose it, but this is just like the “Butterfly Effect”, where if a diminutive butterfly flaps its wings in Japan, it will rain in New York.

So, yes, I can believe that certain town will have a white Christmas with a gentle snowfall if, IF the right person lives there.

Life is the greatest gift that God gave us.

Never to doubt that each of you have an important purpose and impact while living in this plane of existence.

And even more important, never rejecting the gift of life or corrupt it due doing the bad decisions.

Merry Christmas to you all and blessings to you and all your families.

Jessaka says

“I want to live again. I want to live again. I want to live again. Please God, let me live again.”

Heartwarming and inspirational.

As a collector of Christmas books, I am so glad that I found this one as it was the inspiration for the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life."

I didn't realize until reading the "Afterword" that he had thought of this story while shaving one morning and then spent a couple of years polishing it up before presenting it to magazines that would not published it. Since he couldn't get it published, he placed it in 200 Christmas cards that were then sent to family and friends. He has even sent the card and story to his friend, Shirley Collier, who called him a few months later wanting him to turn it into a film. The rest is history.

If you haven't read the book or seen the movie, this year is a good a time.

Update: I read the book again this year, just as many people watch the movie over and over again.
