

A Story from Father Christmas

By Trail End Guilds President David Peterson; from *Trail End Notes*, November 2013

During his time at Trail End, Father Christmas has made an impact on our visitors – and they have left their mark on him. Here is one of his favorite stories, as told to Trail End Guilds President David Peterson:



Father Christmas, 2013 (TESHS Collection)

“One visit during my first year at Trail End left me believing once again in the magic of Christmas. That year, I observed an older gentleman talking to a group of children I assumed were his grandchildren. The youngsters shared their holiday wishes with me and departed, shaking and ringing their sleigh bells. This gentleman and I were left alone in the ballroom. He approached me and it quickly became apparent he was lost and confused. I stuck up a conversation with him, and asked him to share his holiday wish with me, hoping to help him. He candidly wished for a year of good mental health! He then told me of his struggles as a military veteran battling post-traumatic stress disorder. As he shared his story, he was visibly shaking and showing signs of distress before my eyes.

“To help relieve an escalating situation, I offered him a sleigh bell, a gift usually reserved for young people. Before I gave it to him, I asked that he receive it with one condition: every time he felt his mental health deteriorate, he was to think of this bell, give it a shake, and think about positive mental health. He took the bell with a child-like joy, holding it with both hands and staring intently at the shining bell. He looked once more at me, and then turned and walked away clutching his sleigh bell with two hands.

“But his story does not end there. Later, as volunteers cleared up after the evening’s open house, I made my way down to the foyer and stood by one of the beautifully decorated trees. A volunteer who had been serving figgy pudding and apple cider walked out of the kitchen. She

asked me – and I quote – “What in the h--- have you been doing up there?” She was serious and ready to chew me out, Father Christmas or no. I was stunned!

“She then cracked a sly grin and explained that a man had come into the kitchen holding a sleigh bell in both hands, staring intently at it. As good hosts, they warmly offered him some figgy pudding and apple cider. He refused the refreshments and began telling them his story, filling in details he had omitted upstairs with me. He said he had suffered tremendous difficulties after returning from his deployment. He told tales that put all his listeners in tears of sympathy.

“After ten minutes of unraveling his tale, he stopped talking. Then, a grin lit his face as he looked around the room. He said, “But it’s all okay because Father Christmas gave me this!” He held out the bell and gave it a shake. He was beaming and a huge smile filled his face as he continued. “Father Christmas told me that when I’m having a bad day, all I have to do is give it a shake and I will have good mental health.”

“Our kitchen volunteer noted more tears filled the eyes of those in the room, but this time they were tears of hope and happiness for this gentleman. He has struggled, but he left with renewed hope for a more normal life.

“I share this tale with you, not in hopes that a sleigh bell can bring you a miracle, but to remind us all that hope is spread, sometimes when you least expect it, through simple acts of kindness.”



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