

'Tis a Christmas story to remember

By NEILL G. RUSSELL

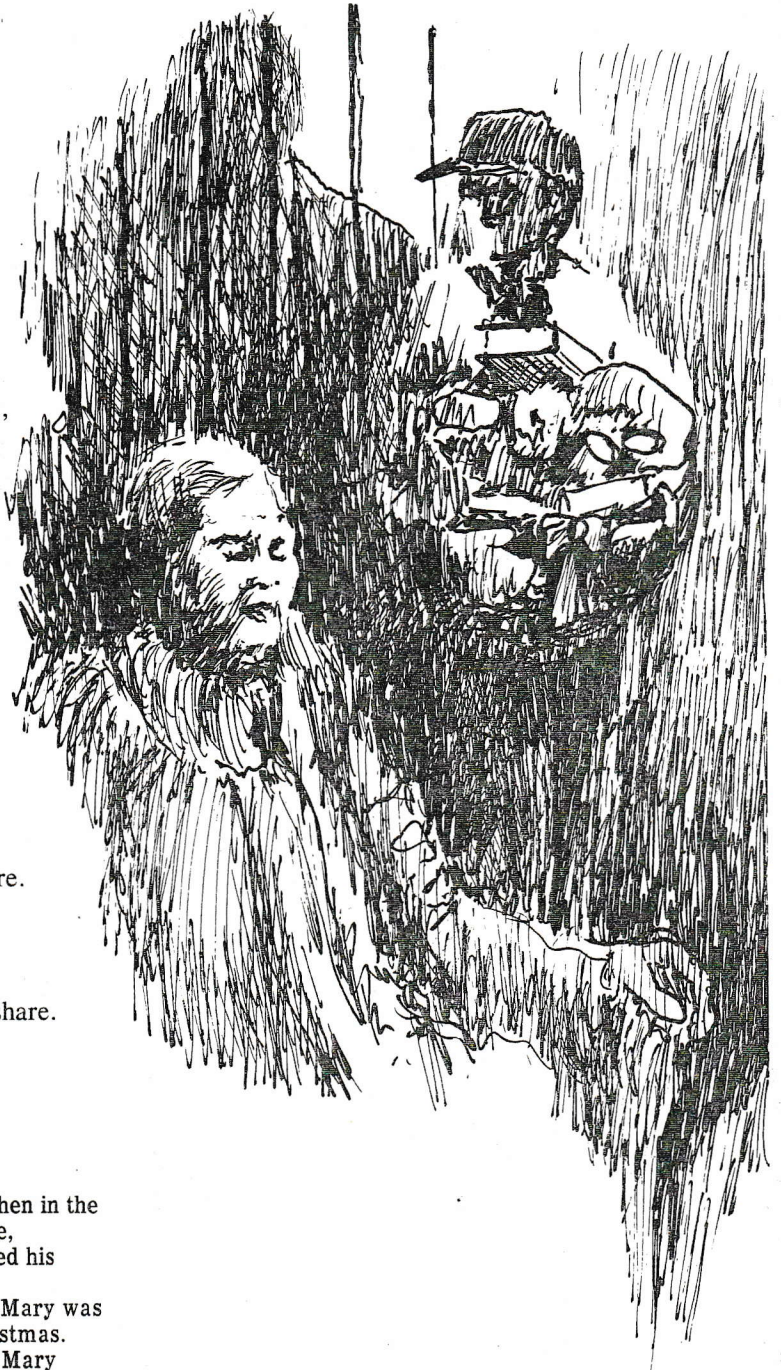
'T was a week before Christmas, the year was 1988.
I was delivering church baskets down Kent Island Route 8.
Each basket was stuffed with enough food for a feast,

In accordance to scriptures, to give unto the least.
Along with the food we placed a Bible inside,
We then loaded our baskets and took off on our ride.
The conditions I found were so hard to believe,
That this island of ours has so many in need!
After delivering all morning, one basket remained,
I opened the card to find this person's name.
Ms. Mary Reilly on Batts Neck Road,
Hers was the last Christmas basket I had to unload.
Of all the stops, was the hardest to find,
No names marked the boxes along the road they did line.
I pulled off to the shoulder, across from a church,
In a community of old trailers, I began now to search.
The first trailer I came to, I knocked on the door,
A voice shouted, "Who is it?" I said my chore.
The reply said, "Aunt Mary, she lives around back,"
"You just go around, that's where she'd be at."
Sure enough, around back, completely hidden from view,
Stood a small wooden structure, with a tar-papered roof.
The boards of the porch were mostly rotted by time,
What waited inside, I had no idea what I'd find.
So I knocked on the door and a sweet voice said, "Yes?"
I said "Christmas basket for Mary Reilly," and she said
"Thank you, Jesus, come on in, God bless, God bless!"
I opened the door and what did I see,
A small crippled lady praising God for sending me.
A tear came to my eye, as I gazed at her plight,
A body racked by arthritis, her whole world in sight.
No modern conveniences could be seen in the room,
Except an old radio with all numbers removed.
Her bed stood in the corner, behind the front door,
Her kitchen and bathroom were to the right, five feet more.
As I stood at the threshold of this house of one room,
I could sense in my spirit untold wealth here, not gloom.
For within this sweet lady, confined to a chair,
She, without worldly possessions, did have one thing to share.
For the next fifteen minutes, she gave me much more,
Than that one Christmas basket, I left on her floor.
The only possession to her that sufficed,
Was the true gift of Christmas, Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The world took everything Aunt Mary Reilly owned, when in the spring of 1990, a young neighbor boy, high on crack cocaine, viciously stabbed her to death in her home when she refused his demands for money to purchase drugs.

The one thing that the world could not take from Aunt Mary was the very thing the world has rejected Christmas after Christmas. Today, the world cries out for the peace and joy that Aunt Mary possessed. For Aunt Mary, myself, and millions like us, it was wrapped 2,000 years ago and placed in a manger.

Editor's note: Although *The Capital* does not usually publish poetry, we decided to make an exception for this holiday poem. Neill G. Russell is a teacher and coach at Annapolis High School.



JENNIFER HEYD WHARTON