Thomas Christmas
By Bill Williamson

The alarm sounded and I shot up in bed. It sounded like a radio station that was not on station. ‘That’s it! That’s exactly what it is. Oh, 5:00 A.M. and time to get up again! But, wait, it’s Christmas eve!’ There is no need to get up so early today. I’ll just turn that noisy thing off and go back to sleep for a while.

But, once I was up, I groped around the cabin thinking, ‘I’ll never be able to do that!’ When I awoke at that time of day that was pretty much it. I might as well stay up. So, I put on my robe that had hung since unpacking two days ago. How long had it been since I had put it on? Months!

I shuffled over to the Swedish built Scandia wood stove and checked it for heat. Yep, it was still warm to the touch. Upon inspection I found two pieces of wood still burning slowly, increasing in brightness from the air of the open door. With the damper open, I stepped out onto the covered porch to retrieve another piece of wood. The wind had driven fresh snow across the narrow porch causing me to search out each step carefully to avoid getting my suede leather moccasins wet.

With the fire freshly stoked, I sat in the old blue-green swivel rocker next to the stove. The new warmth coming from the crackling fire felt good as I leaned back and closed my eyes. I was there for more than an hour, resting and thinking about all that the Lord had been doing in my life. My thoughts kept going to this place in the foothills of the Colorado Rockies. Here I am so far away from any family or friends, except these new friends of the Ponderosa.

The property was well named, ‘Ponderosa.’ Ponderosa Pine trees were thick in this region of Colorado. And the setting, high in the mountains, thirty miles from the nearest town, was remote and so very peaceful.

My morning chores were few because I had been up late last night putting the final touches on this new cabin home of mine. Opening the blinds to let the daylight in, I noticed a Blue Jay flitter into a Ponderosa Pine a few yards away. Then the smaller movement of a puffy little sparrow caught my attention in the scrubby fir next to the cabin. Snow was still falling, creating a fluffy, silvery blanket everywhere. It’s a fine day, a good day for Christmas eve. The smoke of my revived fire drifted quietly toward the Lee’s, and Johnston’s, two of only three full size houses on the property. They are still dark with no sign of life. They were sleeping in today.

Steam rises from the cup of hot Russian Tea just an arms length away as I remember back over my day. The tea was also a part of the Thomas Christmas. But, let’s not get too far ahead in the story here.

I let my thoughts meander back to the smoke lazily drifting through the trees this morning. Snow covered everything. The far hillside scattered with Pines, and the openings down near the creek. All lying still and cold in the morning air. I glanced over at the computer on the small desk
by the kitchen counter that separated the dining area from the cooking area.

‘I wonder if any e-mail came in last night?’ I said to myself.

I pulled out the comfortable old desk chair that still rolled easily when encouraged so, sat down and turned the computer on. Only one message, Pastor Ed was writing to see what I’m up to these days. One hour later I finished the newsy e I had prepared in reply to his.

Once showered, I carried the vacuum cleaner to my previously occupied room to make the last cleaning of the carpet there. I was happy to be moved from the small storage room that I had converted to a bedroom. It was comfortable enough, but it was still a store room, and the bathroom was located one hundred yards away, a long way in the dark of the night with snow on the ground. I remember thinking how nice it would be to have one of the few cabins on the 150 acres belonging to this property. And now, I have the nicest one of them all.

With cleaning completed, I waded through the snow that now had accumulated about four or five inches deep. My boot tracks made brand-new trails in the snow. A special privilege, I always thought.

I entered the lodge to find it cold and quiet, quite contrary to the noise and warmth of a week ago when some of the Discipleship Training School, (DTS), students were still here. The lodge was large with a kitchen, and a dining area to seat a hundred or more people, that doubled as a class room during training sessions. There were several offices included around the dining area.

I found my way into the school office and opened the file drawer to where the applications for the January DTS were kept. Randi had suggested that I review the folders of the few applicants to get acquainted with the students.

As I thumbed through them, one by one, remembering the excitement as I too had filled out an application for DTS more than eleven years ago. I read the comments on the cover made by staff who had carefully prayed for Father’s guidance for that particular student, comments of anticipation and eagerness to see God’s hand in these lives. I could see the precious lives represented here by a few pages of paper with typed and hand written words on them. Some explaining why they long to seek after God, and see him work in them.

In the midst of the folders I came to Bubba’s. A handsome young man by his picture, he was much like the others. A similar story! But, as I read half way through his own words of why he wanted to be here, my eyes swelled with tears ready to cascade over my cheeks. ‘What is it Lord?’ I began praying in the spirit, almost uncontrollable. ‘I thank you, Lord, you are praying for this young man through me.’ What a blessing it will be to serve on this DTS staff. ‘I’ve not done it before Lord, what will you show me?’

I finished reading all the folders, noticing my feet had grown cold sitting so long in the unheated office. I walked back to my homey little cabin, put another piece of wood on the fire and called, Edie. ‘Where will the mail be, Edie, at the office or at your house’ I asked?

She replied, ‘it’s here but I’ll take it up to the lodge.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘I’ll come over there and get it.’

Then Edie added, ‘would you like to come over for dinner tomorrow? You can see a sample of a Thomas Christmas.’

I said, ‘yes, I would. Thanks!’

I received two letters, one from a niece in Washington, and one from a friend in Oregon. ‘Little mail for the three days before Christmas,’ I thought.

Back in the warmth of the cabin again, I fluffed the large floor pillow Daugherty’s had left behind as they had left for California, and laid down on the couch. Soon it was forty minutes later, and in the still quiet of this Colorado mountain Christmas eve I had slept soundly. I continued half
in, and half out, of sleep for another ten minutes, listening to the occasional crackle of the fire as tiny pockets of gases would build up within the wood and then explode to their freedom.

As my mind drifted deeper toward sleep, I heard a sound like a motor. ‘Where was that? What was that?’ Then I realized it was a vehicle!’

I leapt from the couch and peered out the small living room window. There was Randi’s Toyota Land Rover. I could see all the children, Mary, David, Deborah, and Josiah, all crawling out of the back. Randi and Edie sat in the Toyota as the four children made their way through the snow to the porch. I opened the door and greeted them. Mary was telling the younger ones, who were carrying a foil covered plate and a small decorated jar both neatly tied with a bow, to say Merry Christmas. The young ones were being bashful and were slow to respond to Mary’s prompting. I asked them in, but Mary responded that they would just see me at dinner tomorrow. I thanked them, and waved at Randi and Edie as they pulled down the snow-covered drive.

The tag on the nicely wrapped plate said, ‘From the kitchen of the Thomas’. I peeked inside and saw an assortment of candies and homemade cookies. And a tag on a jar said, ‘Russian Tea! From the kitchen of the Thomas’, 2-3 teaspoons’ to one cup hot water.’ The jar was covered with a pleasant green plaid cloth beneath the canning ring. I glanced out the window as the Thomas’ drove away, suspecting they were on their way to another’s house to give away some more Thomas Christmas.

I thought about how the Thomas’ had spent much time and energy making tea, candy, and a variety of decorative cookies to share with those of us who were out here so many miles from a real community. Was this the beginning of a Thomas Christmas? It warmed me to think I was on another’s list of people to bless this season of celebrating our Saviours birth. I eagerly await tomorrow’s insight of the rest of the Thomas Christmas.

The morning came and after I stoked the fire with fresh wood from the porch, I swept the windblown snow off the porch and wood. I loved the smell of the pine burning in the stove and spilling smoke over the cabin roof and into the creek bed beyond the Thomas house.

Time was slow in passing as I glanced at the clock. But soon I was pushing new snow ahead of my boots as I walked the hundred yards to their house.

The house was lit up and cozy warm with the smell of Christmas in the air. All of the usual fare and pies to boot. The Thomas children were a buzz about their assigned chores that would make this day so special.

Soon we gathered at the table, grasped hands and lifted our hearts and words to Jesus. It was his day, and we were thankful for all he had done for us again this year. Food began appearing in front of me from both ends of the table. It was clear that the Thomas family was happy to have me with them this year.

I pushed my chair back and thought about what had just happened. The table that had been set so precisely with all the Christmas do, and the dinner prayer, were both far behind us. There were an array of empty plates with remnants of a fine dinner left on them.

I walked back to my cabin, poked at the fire a bit watching the sparks jump and dance as if startled at my action, and stretched out across the bed.

It had been a fine Christmas day. Happy Birthday, Jesus. And thank you.

‘Thank you too, every one in the Thomas family.’