



SPECIAL EDITION
DO NOT OPEN TIL CHRISTMAS



Pieter D. **BREITNER** Toluca Lake CA
pieterb@mac.com
pieterb@pacbell.net

Once again Peter comes through with a piece that has meaning for our time. I will thank Peter for breaking the code of the "Spam Filter" on my eMail Account and suggest that if you want to listen to the MP3 of the following story you can go to the NPR Website and download a version... or stream offline.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5028755>

John Henry Faulk's Christmas Story



09 December 2005

The gifted storyteller and former radio broadcaster John Henry Faulk recorded his Christmas story in 1974 for the program Voices in the Wind.

Faulk was born to Methodist parents on August 21, 1913. The fourth of five children, he attended the University of Texas. For his master's thesis, he researched ten sermons in African-American churches and gained insight into the inequity of civil rights for people of color. He later taught English at the University and served as a medic in the Marines during World War II.

Before the John Henry Faulk Show debuted in 1951 on WCBS Radio, Faulk hosted numerous radio programs in New York and New Jersey.

He was blacklisted in 1957, but with support from Edward R. Murrow, won a libel suit against the corporation that branded him a Communist. Faulk's book, *Fear on Trial*, published in 1963, and chronicles this experience.

Later in his career, Faulk appeared on *Hee-Haw*, wrote and produced the one-man plays *Deep in the Heart* and *Pear Orchard, Texas*, and made an unsuccessful bid for a congressional seat in 1983.

In 1990, John Henry Faulk died of cancer in his hometown of Austin. The downtown branch of the public library there now bears his name.



A T ranscript of John Henry Faulk's Christmas S tory

The day after Christmas a number of years ago, I was driving down a country road in Texas. And it was a bitter cold, cold morning. And walking ahead of me on the gravel road was a little bare-footed boy with non-descript ragged overalls and a makeshift sleeved sweater tied around his little ears. I stopped and picked him up. Looked like he was about 12 years old and his little feet were blue with the cold. He was carrying an orange.

And he got in and had the brightest blue eyes one ever saw. And he turned a bright smile on my face and says, "I'm-a going down the road about two miles to my cousins. I want to show him my orange old Santa Claus brought me." But I wasn't going to mention Christmas to him because I figured he came from a family -- the kind that don't have Christmas. But he brought it up himself. He said, "Did old Santa Claus come to see you, Mister?" And I said, "Yes. We had a real nice Christmas at our house and I hope you had the same".

He paused for a moment, looked at me. And then with all the sincerity in the world said, "Mister, we had the wonderfulest Christmas in the United States down to our place. Lordy, it was the first one we ever had had there. See, we never do have them out there much. Don't notice when Christmastime comes. We heard about it, but never did have one 'cause -- well, you know, it's just papa says that old Santa Claus -- papa hoorahs a lot and said old Santa Claus was scared to bring his reindeer down into our section of the county because folks down there so hard up that they liable to catch one of his reindeer and butcher him for meat. But just several days before Christmas, a lady come out from town and she told all the families through there, our family, too, that they was -- old Santa Claus was come in town to leave some things for us and if papa'd go in town, he could get some Christmastime for all of us. And papa hooked up the mule and wagon. He went in town. But he told us children, said, "Now don't ya'll get all worked up and excited because there might not be nothing to this yarn that lady told."

And--but, shucks, she hadn't got out of sight up the lane there till we was done a-watching for him to come back. We couldn't get our minds on nothing else, you know. And mama, she'd come to the door once in a while and say; "Now ya'll quit that looking up the lane because papa told you there might not be nothing." And -- but long about the middle of the afternoon, well, we heard the team a-jangling harness a-coming and we ran out in the front yard, and Ernie, my little brother, called out and said, "Yonder come papa." And here come them mules just in a big trot, you know, and papa standing upright in the bed of that wagon holding two big old chickens, all the feathers picked off. And he was just yelling, "Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas." And the team stopped right in front of the gate. And all us children just went a-swarming out there like a flock of chichis, you know, and just a-crawling over that wagon and a-looking in.

And, Mister, I wish you could have seen what was in that wagon. Its bags of stripety candy and apples and oranges and sacks of flour and some real coffee, you know, and just all tinselly and pretty and we couldn't say nothing. Just kind of held our breath and looked at it, you know. And papa standing there just waving them two chickens, a-yelling, "Merry Christmas to you. Merry Christmas to you," and a-laughing that big old grin on his face. And mama, she come a-hurrying out with the baby in her arms, you know. And when she looked in that wagon, she just stopped, and then papa, he dropped them two chickens and reached and caught the baby out of her arms, you know, and held him up and said, "Merry Christmas to you, Santa Claus." And baby, little old Alvie Lee, he just laughed like he knowed it was Christmas, too, you know. And mama, she started telling us the name of all of them nuts. They wasn't just peanuts. They was -- she had names for all of them. She -- mama knows a heap of things like that. She'd seen that stuff before, you know? And we was all of us, just a-chattering and a-going on at the same time, us young'uns, a-looking in there.

And all of a sudden, we heard papa call out, "Merry Christmas to you, Sam Jackson." And we stopped and looked. And here comes Sam Jackson a-leading that old cripple-legged mule of his up the lane. And papa said, "Sam Jackson, did you get in town to get some Christmas this year?" Sam Jackson, you know, he sharecrops over there across the creek from our place. And he shook his head and said, "Well, no, sir, Mister. Well, I didn't go in town. I heard about that, but I didn't know it was for colored folks, too. I thought it was just for you white families." All of a sudden, none of us children were saying nothing. Papa, he looked down at mama and mama looked up at him and they didn't say nothing, like they don't a heap of times, but they know what the other one's a-thinking. They're like that, you know. And all of a sudden, papa, he broke out in a big grin again. He said, "Dad-blame-it, Sam Jackson, it's a sure a good thing you come by here. Lord have mercy, I liked to forgot. Old Santa Claus would have me in court if he heard about this. The last thing he asked me if I lived out here near you. Said he hadn't seen you around and said he wanted me to bring part of this out here to you and your family, your woman and your children."

Well, sir, Sam Jackson, he broke out in a big grin. Papa says, "I'll tell you what to do. You get your wife and children and you come down here tomorrow morning. It's going to be Christmastime all day long. Come early and stay late." Sam Jackson said, "You reckon?" And mama called out to him and said, "Yes, and you tell your wife to be sure and bring some pots and pans because we're going to have a heap of cookin' to do and I ain't sure I've got enough to take care of all of it." Well, sir, old Sam Jackson, he started off a-leading that mule up the lane in a full trot, you know, and he was a-heading home to get the word to his folks and his children, you know.

And next morning, it just -- you remember how it was yesterday morning, just rosy red and looked like Christmastime. It was cold, but you didn't notice the cold, you know, when the sun just come up, just all rosy red. And us young'uns were all out of bed before daylight seemed like, just running in the kitchen and smelling and looking. And it was all there sure enough. And here come Sam Jackson and his team and his wife and his five young'uns in there. And they's all lookin' over the edge. And we run out and yelled, "Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas." And papa said, "Christmas gift to you, Sam Jackson. Ya'll come on in." And they come in and mama and Sister Jackson, they got in the kitchen and they started a-cooking things up. And us young'uns started playing Christmastime. And it's a lot of fun, you know. We'd just play Christmas Gift with one another and run around and around the house and just roll in the dirt, you know,

and then we started playing Go Up To The Kitchen Door And Smell. And we'd run up and smell inside that kitchen door where mama and Sister Jackson was a-cooking at, and then we'd just die laughing and roll in the dirt, you know, and go chasing around and playing Christmas Gift.

And we played Christmastime till we just wore ourselves out. And papa and Sam Jackson--they put a table up and put some sheets over it, some boards up over some sawhorses. And everybody had a place, even the baby. And mama and Sister Jackson said, "Well, now it's ready to come on in. We're going to have Christmas dinner." And I sit right next to Willy Jackson, you know, and he just rolled his eyes at me and I'd roll mine at him. And we'd just die laughing, you know, and there was an apple and an orange and some stripety candy at everybody's place. And that was just dessert, see. That wasn't the real Christmas dinner. Mama and them had done cooked that up. And they just had it spread up and down the table.

And so papa and Sam Jackson, they'd been sitting on the front porch and they come in. Papa, he sit at one end of the table, Sam Jackson sit at the other. And it was just a beautiful table like you never had seen. And I didn't know nothing could ever look like that and smell that good, you know. And Sam Jackson, you know, he's real black and he had on that white clean shirt of his and then them overalls. Everything had been washed and was real clean. Papa, he said, "Brother Jackson, I believe you're a deacon in the church. I ain't much of a church man myself, but I believe you're a deacon. Maybe you'd be willing to give grace." Well, Sam Jackson, he stood up there and his hands is real big and he kind of held onto the side of the table, you know. But he didn't bow his head like a heap of folks do when they're saying the blessing. He just looked up and smiled. And he said, "Lord, I hope you having as nice a Christmas up there with your angels as we're having down here because it sure is Christmastime down here. And I just wanted to say Merry Christmas to you, Lord.

Like I say, Mister, I believe that was the wonderfulest Christmas in the United States of America."