

The Christmas Star

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So many people can recall their first Christmas pageant – re-enacting the nativity scene right in front of the entire church congregation. Everyone vying to be the angel, one of the wise men or the true leads: Mary or Joseph. I was only in second grade, but I knew I wanted a large role. And God would forgive me for having used our plastic Mary & Joseph – you know, the ones that live on the front lawn through all of the Christmas season – for the previous holiday, Halloween. Yes, a simple sheet over both of them and a rope made for amazing ghost hanging from the tree. But here we were standing in front of the woman who had volunteered to direct the motley crew of children through the monumental task.

As she passed out roles to all the children, starting with those whose parents were deacons or gave the most money to the church, I watched as the good parts all dwindled away: past the shepherds, the angels...and even the animals. No, I was assigned to carry the star that would lead the wise men to our savior on his birth.

Though my initial reaction was angst over losing out on a juicy character role, I soon came to realize the magnitude of importance that had been bestowed upon me. The angel may be leading the shepherds to the baby, but I was the one leading the angel on her way! I set out working with my parents on the most amazing star you had ever seen. Rolls of aluminum foil were wrapped around and around a cardboard cutout that was then attached to a broom stick so that my star could ride high in the sky as I walked down that aisle of the church. I would carry that

star down the street to practice the length of the church to make sure my seven-year-old arms wouldn't get tired.

Then came the big dress rehearsal where all the children were called in to rehearse together two nights before the program. That was the moment my world came crashing down. Little did I know there were two other children assigned to carry the star and a bigger, three-pole-star had been created so that each of us had a stick to hang on to. I was crushed. Not because I wasn't alone, but because we would not get to use the star I had created with my parents. They assured me this was better to carry it with two other boys so that we each could burden some of the load. These boys weren't in the pageant to be serious. They were there to play. I was placed on the middle pole and the two of them would let go of their stick, walk along the side of me...sometimes singing, and sometimes not.

This star outweighed my small foil star by pounds and pounds, but I struggled and made sure that star made it to the manger and that those wise men knew where they were going – even if my fellow star boys didn't seem to care if the gifts ever made it to Jesus. You know, it was probably then when I realized that when I grew up I would want to be a director. I wouldn't surprise my cast with last-minute added poles on a star and I would make sure everyone carried their own weight when on stage. I do remember the feeling of pride I had from the church congregation applause as we walked the aisle and a spot light shined brightly on the top of our star. And every time I direct a show as an adult, I think back to that endless role of aluminum foil and wonder what kind of work my actors must be doing to create their own characters at home.