

# Bark o' the Banshee

by Pat Robinson



## Salvation

I knew I would have a tough time walking buy the red pots this year. I did. The pretty blonde coed from Franklin Pierce College smiled and rang her bell. Taller than most of the men, she looked the essence of healthy and easily dressed in well made clothes from L.L.Bean and companies, et al. I automatically reached and found an empty pocket. I shrugged and she bid me a good evening.

Our church was holding a panel discussion about homelessness in Peterborough. The five organizations involved also included someone from the Salvation Army. I had to go and ask.

The meeting was very well attended. About 70 people including at least 4 members of the press were there. Each group's speaker was given time to talk, questions would be after they all had spoken. The audience asked some noteworthy questions furthering the discussion about the needs for some and the willingness of others.

Refreshments followed and I made my way around the room, saying hello, offering suggestions, slowly working my way over to the lovely lady that had spoken so vividly about the young mother and 16 month old living in a car. She had held back a little lump as she spoke to the room of people with warm homes to go to when they left. During her talk to the captive group, she had mentioned our member's day and time for bell ringing at the A&P.

She also pointed out that if checks are made out directly to local use, the local needs get the money. Now I know, having worked in a homeless shelter for families many many times, the Salvation Army helps when no others will, or can, I guess. So again, that problem, walking by that red pot makes me think about the past and the future and how all things relate or try to avoid doing so. So I walked right up and I asked her. Not in a mean way, in fact I used a sort of disclaimer. I told her I was 'the press', who I was writing for, and that this was nothing personal. She held my hand in that friendly comforting way and nodded her head approvingly.

"If an openly gay person, someone you know is gay, comes to you for help, would you turn them away?"

"No."

"An openly gay couple?"

"No."

"No?"

"No, I would not turn anyone away. We don't care here who, or what anyone is or isn't. If someone needs help, we provide as I described in my talk." The lady now laughed and told me that the Peterborough group does not get the money dropped in the other pots like the one the blonde collected at. All that money goes to the big organization. Only the monies collected from the pot at the Ames store, and only checks made out to Salvation Army/Local Use go to the direct needs of the Monadnock area. I feel so much better now knowing that this grassroots group of concerned individuals is right here holding down the fort.

Homeless people are usually very visible on the MBTA during winter months. Boston is very cold by Christmastime. This year is the exception for everything I guess. The record warmth had bulbs growing at the estate in Hancock, N.H. My daylillies were poking up through the top of the dead leaves of 2001. Roses still had not quite given up. And there was no visible ills in Boston on Dec.13th. We headed down to Alewife Station and parked, heading into the city on the Red Line. The warm air hit us as we came up to the street from Park Street Station. And oddly, so did the emptiness of the sidewalks; usually jammed and packed as holiday shoppers move from store to store and sale to sale. The trees have their lights, the store fronts facing the Common try to entice the passers-by, and we head for the box office afraid to be late.

Jacob Wirth's was able to seat us for hot chocolate immediately. The wait for service was short and pleasant. We marveled at the essence of the victuals served here for some 140 years. We complained among ourselves that the hot chocolate was not hot.

Sugar Plum Fairies, the Ice Queen, Clara's dream of a Nutcracker come to life filled our ears and eyes with a classic tale of mice, magic, and merriment. The half of the patrons sitting in the cheap seats headed down to the unsold much better ones. Those in the expensive seats pretended not to notice. I have never seen a Boston theater so empty with a hit show undisputed. This place is usually thunderous with laughter and applause for the seemingly effortless leaps, turns, tosses and catches of the dancers.

The ballet is not a late show and still the streets are not busy. The Boston motorcycle officer directed the traffic to a stop and announced to all, to cross. As is custom in Beantown, pedestrians cross any which way and expect to remain whole and standing. Tonight, this is not an issue.

I called to him to have a Merry Christmas. His teeth shine white as he smiled and responded in like kind.

The new year is a good number: 2002. Front to back, back to front, same number. I don't usually play the numbers game. I didn't find the irony of 9-11. I do however, like this one, it's a "good number" the bookies will say. I think this one is MY number. I sure hope so. I have already said good-bye to the bad ones. Till next year, adieu.

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