



A Stubborn Sweetness and Other Stories for the Christmas Season

Katherine Paterson

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This compilation includes stories of real-life people such as a shopping mall's night watchman, a lonely widower, a pregnant teenage runaway, a political prisoner in China, a grieving mother, and a privileged American, who have forgotten the true meaning of Christmas because of loss, pain, greed, or circumstances. Through unexpected and uplifting ways, each is reminded of the first Christmas story and the vision of hope and peace it offers the world. They realize that even in the darkness, the light and song of Christmas can be seen and heard.

Originally written to be read during the Christmas Eve services at Paterson's church, this collection of holiday stories is perfect for individuals, families, and churches to read and share during the season.

Eight of the stories were originally published in the book *A Midnight Clear* and four were published in *Angles and Other Strangers*. There is one new story: "On the Night of His Birth."

A Stubborn Sweetness and Other Stories for the Christmas Season Details

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From Reader Review A Stubborn Sweetness and Other Stories for the Christmas Season for online ebook

Dianne says

Warm and enchanting, each of these short stories are full of the spirit, love and joy of the Christmas season. From the young child who offers his friendship to an older woman and teaches her the true joy of the season to the story of a lonely widower who finds joy, each story will touch your heart in a special way. Read a story a day, feel the warmth over and over.

A Stubborn Sweetness and Other Stories for the Christmas Season by the Award-Winning author, Katherine Paterson makes a perfect gift for yourself or someone you know who will love these special thoughts of the season!

I received a review copy from Westminster John Knox Press in exchange for my honest review.

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Ruth says

An encouraging collection of short stories.

Eustacia Tan says

Sometimes, perhaps during Christmas, you get so busy you can't read more than a little bit at one go. I find short stories to be very appropriate during times like these. I can finish one story at one time, and not feel the urge to continue reading (that strongly).

A Stubborn Sweetness is a collection of short stories about Christmas. It covers a diverse range of characters and people, which is why I really loved it. For example, one story was set in Communist China, in a reformatory camp. Another was set in World War II Japan, where Christianity was seen as representative of the Americans and hence, an enemy. The inclusion of these two stories surprised me, and the diversity they added was very welcome.

The stories themselves are varied too. Some are light-hearted, some are poignant and some will bring you

extremely close to tears. All of them end with hope, although a few of them aren't what you typically imagine as "Christmas Happy Endings" - where all the sick get well, family rifts are healed and well, Scrooge becomes generous.

Since Katherine Paterson is the author of *Bridge to Terabithia*, a story that brings me to tears every time I read it, I'm pretty sure that this book will tug at your heartstrings too. So perhaps you will need more time reading this book - after all, when you close the story, you may need some time to reset yourself back to the pace of your busy life.

Disclaimer: I got a free copy of this book from the publishers via NetGalley in exchange for a free and honest review.

This review was first posted to Inside the mind of a Bibliophile

Beth says

Katherine Paterson was one of my favorite authors growing up, so when I saw this short story collection being offered for free on Kindle, I grabbed it immediately. I love Christmas-themed short stories because they just feel perfect for this time of year.

I admit, I was pleasantly surprised by these stories. These are no cookie-cutter stories, but rather offer a variety of settings and diverse characters. Mary tells the story of her child's birth; a prisoner in Communist China dares to defy her captors by reading the Bible; a wealthy woman, poor in spirit, is befriended by a young boy. Some of the stories are more lighthearted, while others are very poignant and moving. There is a great mix in this collection. Often I would sit down to read only one story, and end up reading two or three. They were short, but so well-written. Like any collection, I preferred some over others, but overall, this was a wonderful set of stories.

Dee says

Sweet, feel good Christmas stories - exactly what I'd expected!

Lauren Muller says

I enjoyed reading these stories in the weeks leading up to Christmas this year. Nothing earth shattering here, but the stories are generally sweet and inspirational ... perfect for reading at the end of a stressful December day of holiday prep, errands, etc.

Shaeley Santiago says

This collection of Christmas stories is great for reflecting more on the meaning of the season. Two of my favorite stories were "Star Lady" because of the contrast between the young boy and the recently-retired

woman and "Angels and Other Strangers" where again a young boy's actions put things into perspective for adults. In true Paterson fashion, there is also a story set in China during the Cultural Revolution.

Gabrielle says

Just bad.

Trish says

Lovely collection of short stories (and inspirational without being overly preachy)

Hope says

I did not love all these stories. It is extremely difficult, after all, to write a "new" story about Christmas AND almost impossible to write one that is not sentimental nonsense. Paterson does an admirable job of trying! Some of these would be great read-alouds at a family gathering. A couple are laugh-out-loud funny. The last one (title story) is definitely the best.

Karen Korb says

About The Book: "A Stubborn Sweetness and Other Stories for the Christmas Season is a collection of modern-day short stories by Katherine Paterson, award-winning author of *Bridge to Terabithia* and *The Great Gilly Hopkins*- both loved by children and adults for over twenty years. This compilation includes stories of real-life people such as a shopping mall's night watchman, a lonely widower, a pregnant teenage runaway, a political prisoner in China, a grieving mother, and a privileged American, who have forgotten the true meaning of Christmas because of loss, pain, greed or circumstances. Through unexpected and uplifting ways, each is reminded of the first Christmas story and the vision of hope and peace it offers the world. They realize that even in the darkness, the light and song of Christmas can be seen and heard. This heart-warming gift book, filled with stories of real people finding hope, courage, and faith amidst life's circumstances, radiates the spirit of the season and reminds each of us what Christmas truly means. Originally written to be read during her church's Christmas Eve service, this collection of holiday stories is perfect for individuals, families, and churches to read and share during the season. [The song of Christmas] is not louder. It is swallowed up quickly in the cry of anger or the clack of greed. No, the song is not louder, but it persists. It comes, as it had come to me beside my [dying] father's bed, a melody of the most stubborn sweetness, for which we are never prepared. And we turn away from it again and again and again. 'But oh, my child,' I said to the empty night, `even though the song is not louder, it is stronger. And someday it will find you--out there alone in the darkness.'" - From the story *A Stubborn Sweetness*

About The Author: Katherine Paterson has twice won both the Newbery Medal and the National Book Award. She received the 1998 Hans Christian Andersen Medal as well as the 2006 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for the body of her work. An active promoter of reading and literacy, she lives with her husband, John, in Barre, Vermont. They have four children and seven grandchildren. Visit Katherine

Paterson on her web site at www.terabithia.com

My Thoughts About The Book: This collection of short Christmas season stories is a book that could be read year round even though it is about Christmas. I am usually not a huge fan of collections because in them you find you really like some and others not so much. This collection was no exception. There were several stories I could not wait to finish and others I did not want to end. "On The Night of His Birth; Mary's Story" and "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night" were two I really enjoyed. If you love reading Christmas themed stories then you will enjoy this one. There is a little something for everyone, just pick a story and enjoy it. **Disclosure of Material Connection:** I received a digital copy of these books from Westminister and John Knight Press and Net Galley Publicity Group. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Tish says

For the most part, these are just what you'd expect: short stories about people realizing the true spirit of Christmas. A few of them rose to a 4-star level for me and there were a few characters I really liked.

I probably shouldn't even rate collections of short stories as that is not one of my favorite formats, but if you like short stories you will probably like this more than I did.

Note: I received a free e-galley of this book from the publisher via NetGalley.

Nicola Mansfield says

Paterson's husband is a minister and these are stories she wrote to be read on Christmas Eve in her Church over the years. They have all been previously published in various collections, but are all gathered together here in one place for the first time. These are sweet, gentle stories that pull at the heart-strings, some a little too hard. Paterson is a wonderful writer so I found all the stories readable, many of them were just too soppy and sugar-coated for my tastes. Almost, but not all, do make mention of Christ and these are generally decidedly Christian stories. Though there are a couple with just a general Christmas theme. The stories averaged out to 3.5* but the book in general is more of a 3 for me. People who will get the most out of the book, enjoy it most, will be those who attend a church with a minister/pastor who has a wife and small family.

After browsing through the stories again now, regardless of how I rated them when I read them, the ones that stay with me are: Merit Badges, Broken Windows and my Name is Joseph.

1. Exultate Jubilate (1995) - A typical Christmas grump of a Dad who decides not to attend Church with the family this year and while home alone a mysterious stranger arrives. The stranger invites himself in and they end up with Mozart's Kyrie on the stereo and the Dad has a change of heart about the spirit of Christmas. A tender story. (3/5)

2. Star Lady (1995) - A story about bringing the love and joy of God to the old and poor no matter how poor you are yourself. Is a nice story with a heartfelt message but gets rather mixed up with the second message

the author is trying to tell. The second message is that irreverent happy clappy churches are much more "fun" than traditional churches which revere and worship the trinity with adoration. The old lady and I are quite happy with our choir singing "Alleluia"s thank you very much. (2.5/5)

3. In the Desert, a Highway (1995) - Lovely story. Set on the cusp of the Cultural Revolution in China, an old man saves a woman's life and she says she will do anything for him. He comes to her that night confessing to be a Christian and so she begins to read his Bible to the illiterate man. This is an act punishable by death if they were ever caught. Eventually they end up in a re-education camp and the Sacred Word brings them each peace in different way. Touching! (4/5)

4. On the Night of His Birth: Mary's Story (1985) - Just a few pages long, a lovely story to read on Christmas. Mary is awake and musing on her new born babe and the circumstances in which she finds herself. (4/5)

5. Angels and Other Strangers (1979) - A white woman stuck in a snow storm on Christmas Eve is helped by a black man. She is afraid of him, thinking he may have bad motives but her little boy thinks he is an angel. (3/5)

6. Merit Badges (1995) - A girl scout gets "bushwhacked" into visiting a senior at a nursing home during the Christmas season. She ends up liking her old lady but the two of them run into a problem when the rules say that minors are not allowed to visit unchaperoned. A very sweet story about the meaning of joy. (4/5)

7. Guests (1979) - Same simple, lovely quality story as most of the others here. A pastor in WWII Japan is alone, his secret congregation has diminished to none, his wife and children killed by allied bombs. Then that next Christmas he celebrates the service alone and halfway through a little Korean girl (Koreans were brought over as slave workers by the Japanese) sneaks in and he introduces her to the King. (3/5)

8. Watchman, Tell Us of the Night (1995) - A night security watchman out of the habit of prayer because of the downward trend of his circumstances prays for a miracle while working Christmas Eve. He learns first hand that Christmas really is about Jesus. Another sweet story. (3/5)

9. Why the Chimes Almost Rang (19??) - A little girl tries to make something really special happen on Christmas Eve at Church but knows nothing like that is bound to happen for real when she stumbles upon a homeless woman and her little boy stealing food from the food closet for the needy. Quite moving and my favourite in the collection so far. (5/5)

10. Broken Windows (1979) - This one is a cut above the others in being more than just sweet it manages to have a sincere message. An aging pastor is having a hard time writing his Christmas Eve sermon which he wants to base Psalm 51:17 "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart, These, O God, You will not despise." He ends up meeting a very poor mother and children and having a revelation about the words of the creed "he descended into hell". Well written. (5/5)

11. My Name Is Joseph (1995) - A tribal member from high in the hills tells his story from boyhood in the mountains of Central America in a village with a Catholic Priest. Joseph (Jose)'s life story takes him many places with many feelings towards God and faith until eventually his life is comparable to the Holy Family's as a network of nuns and priests smuggles his family and pregnant wife through Mexico across the US border. A reminder of the Christ child's birth. Eloquent. (5/5)

12. Woodrow Kennington Works Practically a Miracle (1979) - Another nice quaint story. A five year old is

hard put out when a new baby comes home. The older brother, twelve, is very accepting but sets out to help the young sister adjust. She goes from one extreme of being bad-tempered to overly religious until their first Christmas Eve with the baby, when she learns the love of family. (4/5)

13. No Room in the Inn (1995) - I just keep saying the stories are lovely at this point and this one is as well. Country folks in a diner during a storm just before Christmas are worried about Armenians suffering through an earthquake they've just heard about on the news but they are so caught up in their own selves they miss the people most in need right upon their own doorstep. (4/5)

14. The Handmaid of the Lord (1995) - I can't say I liked this one. Some people may find it sweet and charming but I'm more cynical. A little girl feels badly done to this whole year that her new baby brother is born, she's minister's daughter, 3rd of 4 children and doesn't have a good New Testament name like the others. She's upset at God, moans and whines, and wants a big part in the pageant. Doesn't get it of course, then something happens and she has to fill in and she's filled with righteousness at the end. Blah! (2/5)

15. A Stubborn Sweetness (1995) - A soppy story story of an embittered dying father and his alienated son both finding their way back to God. Meh. (2.5/5)

Laura says

There are about fifteen short stories that make up this unique Christmas collection. My two star doesn't mean that I hated it, it's just that the majority of it was just "ok" for me. There were a few stories that I actually really liked, but the majority of the others were just ok for me. (I think I'm in a reading slump and it has effected my enjoyment.) Anyway, there were maybe two cuss words used, too, which sort of shocked me because the author said these were stories she wrote and her husband read them from the pulpit at Christmas time. Maybe those were ones that were just published?

My final thoughts on this collection is this: these really are unique and culturally diverse stories that many will enjoy the creative writing style that was penned. I truly loved the first story, it was my absolute favorite.

Linda says

I was immediately drawn to this book because of its author, Katherine Paterson, a award winning children's author who writes books that stick with you. This book of short stories, written over a period of years as a story to read at Christmas Eve church services is relatively short. As I often find with short stories, some of the stories I really liked and some not so much. That is the joy of short stories, you can read them one at a time and if you like one you move quickly ahead expecting the same from the next one. If you don't like one, you expect that you'll like the next one better! Although all of the stories are built around Christmas in some sense they are quite different from each other ranging from stories set in communist China to small town America. Some seem a little dated (the one set during the Cultural Revolution in China made me wonder how long since I had read a story with that setting but it turned out to be one of my favorites). So many of us get too busy during the holiday season; this book gives you a chance to take a little time out and savor the reasons we celebrate Christmas.
