

Praise for A Christmas Gift for Esther

"I commend Barry Stallings's heartening Christmas story of common townsperson Esther. The lessons learned married with good-heartedness from start to finish have a becoming ring to them for any season of the year!"

> Jaime Shayne Blount Radio Broadcaster, Life Changing Radio Derry, New Hampshire

"Barry brings a heartwarming story from a rural Midwest community in Indiana to life in *A Christmas Gift for Esther*. This sweet family story will bring a smile to your face at Christmas or anytime of the year. The story of Esther's life change will inspire and motivate people to examine their own hearts and strive to be the person God wants us to be. A terrific holiday treasure!"

Carl Barnhill
Creative Director/Owner Twelve: Thirty Media
Lexington, South Carolina

"Esther is a short read with a big impact. A Christmas gift reminding us of past, present and the future with God's grace and His forgiving power."

Terry Johnson Chairman/General Manager WHFL-TV43 Goldsboro, North Carolina



"A Christmas Gift for Esther is a fresh look at the timeless need for each of us to extend grace, not judgement to those around us, as we rarely fully know what is happening in the lives of others."

Rich Gerberding National Director, Christian Movie Central Chillicothe, Illinois

"A Christmas Gift for Esther is a tale that reminds us that the greatest gift we can receive is Love, especially when it comes wrapped in Time. Everyone knows a Miss Esther. Thank you, Pastor Stallings, for entreating us not to let one minute be lost to bitterness."

Juli Tapken Actress, Singer/Songwriter Nashville, Tennessee

"A Christmas Gift for Esther by Barry Stallings is comfort for the soul. The story is ultimately a redemptive one, and its lessons can be absorbed by kids and adults alike. In a short narrative, Barry strikingly reminds us that, no matter how hard our hearts become, God's grace is there to restore our joy in Him. Dive into this heart-warming read-aloud for families and be transformed by the surpassing love of Jesus Christ."

Greg Sukert Co-Founder, Anchored North Irvine, California







BARRY STALLINGS

illustrated by CANDACE BLAKE



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A Christmas Gift for Esther

By Barry Stallings Illustrated By Candace Blake

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In memory of my mom. She loved the spirit of Christmas with all her heart!



Sankie Glenn Stallings
December 19, 1944–May 20, 2019

Foreword

Hello, reader. Welcome! I have never written a foreword before, nor have I ever been asked. But when Pastor Barry asked me if I would, how could I say no? I'll be honest. I thought forewords were for "Alistair Cook" smoking pipe types, in their fancy dinner jacket, sitting in a fancy chair in a poshly decorated room. So, when Pastor Barry asked me to write it, I was flattered! I didn't smoke (let alone a pipe), nor do I own a dinner jacket, but I guess I was qualified because here it is!

*Just a note... I call him Pastor Barry, like it is his first and last name because he IS a pastor, and he IS also my friend. It makes me happy to have a friend in that position not that I think I am going to get front row seats with the good Lord. It just—I don't know—it comforts me and it makes me smile. And if I can get front row seats when my time comes... then that is just the cherry on top!

When another artist asks you to read something he has written or see a painting or another form of art that he has produced it's very personal and special. It is like presenting your baby to the world. When Pastor Barry asked me to read his warm and delightful short story, *A Christmas Gift for Esther*, I was touched. It made me think about how I had met Pastor Barry Stallings and all the events a few years ago that led up to this moment.

Around 2014–2015, my husband, Del Baron and I worked as Co-Executives and produced an exciting, multi-award winning, faith-based film about drag racing and redemption called *Adrenaline*. Starring in this movie were John Schneider (*Dukes of Hazzard*, *The Have and Have Nots*), Michael Rosander, Charlene Amoia (*How I Met Your Mother*), and, yes, I was in it too, as the spunky sports reporter, Diane Godwin. (When you produce an Indie film, you wear many hats.) It has won many awards and has gone all over the world making people feel the warmth of Christ and showing that Christian films can be cool.

Before it went all over the world, we were trying to get places and churches to show it for a donation or love offering. Pastor Barry was one of the first churches that answered the call. They worked it out to split

the donations to help the church with a fundraiser, as I recall. I did not go that night. Del and the director, Joseph Quinn Simpkins, went. So I got to hear all about this very nice pastor who put it all together, the crowd that came out, and the popcorn! It was a success, and my husband came home happy.

Shortly after that I had been working on another Christian film called, Badge of Faith, co-starring with Andy Lauer (Caroline in the City). It's based on a true story of a police officer left for dead by the drug dealers he was trying to stop. It is an amazing story and an awesome cast! I got to play a real cop, Officer Susan Kotes. I am so blessed to be a part of it. Pastor Barry had arranged for this movie to be shown to his community in the beautiful Paramount Theater in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Some of the cast and crew came out, and we did a Q&A. That night our gracious host introduced me to his gorgeous wife Olivia and their two beautiful daughters, Karen and Katie. We all became friends that night.

Over the years, Pastor Barry has interviewed me for his TV show *Together Again* on WHFL-TV43. I even got to interview him as a guest host! I know he can do a mean Elvis impersonation and he is a big movie buff! A funny story of mine was after our interview to promote my latest show at the time, *Providence*, Barry, Katie (his daughter), and I went to lunch. We were having such a great time talking about movies. Barry then quoted, "May the force be with you!" The waitress thought he was talking to her and said, "Thank you." We laughed so hard. We didn't have the guts to tell her he wasn't saying that to her!

When I interviewed Barry as the guest host, I learned so much about him as a person. He is a good ol' southern boy you live next door to, not just a pastor. He gave me a glimpse of how tough it was growing up. I enjoy his wonderful sense of humor and his dreams of flying (piloting an airplane, that is).

He has been a wonderful supporter of my work and a friend of the film industry! I adore his family and his incredibly talented daughters. I am blessed to know the Stallings family. Pastor Barry, I wish you so much joy and success with *A Christmas Gift for Esther*. It made me see a personal side of my mother and how she could be when her heart was bitter from

loss, but how God can make the most frozen of hearts melt. Thanks for praying for me and my family wherever we may be.

Thank you for giving me the courage to write this foreword Pastor Barry and for calling me "Shug." That makes me giggle!

Irene Santiago Actress/Film Producer Wilmington, North Carolina

Irene Santiago has been blessed with a powerful training background in film, theater, television and in the voice over industry. Originally from Kearns, Utah, some of her popular credits include Disney's High School Musical 1, One Tree Hill, Iron Man, Secrets and Lies, Assassinaut and the multi-award winning film, Providence. She has several voice over and commercial credits domestic and worldwide. In 2017, her acting efforts were recognized when she was awarded Best Supporting Actress and Audience Favorite, for the Christian film Providence. Working alongside her husband, producer Del Baron, on the independent Christian film Adrenaline, she acted and co-executive produced adding something new to her list of credits.

She and her husband, Del, live in Wilmington, NC with their two children and their very chubby kitty, Phoebe.

You can reach Irene Santiago at: irenesantiagoactress.weebly.com. She is represented by: Gerra Avery, Avery Sisters Entertainment; www.sisterent.com; (800) 986-5133.





A Christmas Gift for Esther

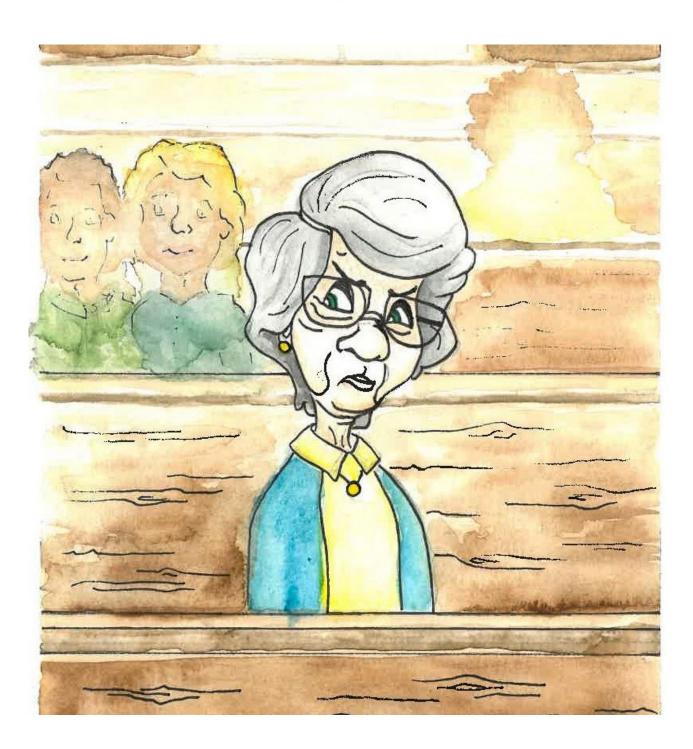
Our story begins in a church in a rural community in the rolling hills of Indiana. This church, which ran about 150 in attendance on average, was an active one. It was the Christmas season, and the folks of the small community of Pinetown celebrated each year with an annual Christmas parade. Decorating the town, which included a memorial Christmas tree that was lit each year to remember those who have passed on during the past year, was also an annual tradition.

At the Pinetown Community Church the choir had been preparing for its Christmas cantata that would be presented on the Sunday before Christmas, which was only one week away! Songs such as "Silent Night," "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," "Joy to the World," and others would fill the air that morning; letting everyone know that the spirit of Christmas had truly come as the songs tell the story of why we celebrate this blessed time of year!

Within the congregation was a lady by the name of Esther. She was an older lady that had been a part of Pinetown Church all her life. Her husband passed on 12 years ago, and her daughter lived in another state with her husband, so Esther lived by herself. Of course, she had people at the church who would check on her once and a while, including the church's pastor as he had opportunity, and its deacons too. As many know however, Christmas can be a lonely time for some, and Esther was no exception. Not only was this the case at Christmas for her, but pretty much year-round. Sadly, over the years a bitter spirit grabbed hold of Esther because all she could see in her world were the four walls of her home. Even though she did get out to go to the market, go to doctor's appointments and such, she became a recluse of sorts. She began isolating herself from the people of this loving little town and her church family. Even so, she attended church each Sunday morning as she had done religiously all her life.

On the Sunday before the Christmas cantata at Pinetown Church, the bitterness and loneliness had taken its toll on Esther. As she sat in church that morning, she began to think to herself as she had on occasions before, "Who in the world do these people think they are? They run around all week pretending to be Christians and not a one of them has even bothered to check on me!" It seems that Esther had forgotten what it was like to raise children, make sure they were ready for school each day, make sure they were fed and clothed, and on top of all of that to hold down a full-time job as well. "Also," she exclaimed, "what does that preacher of ours do all week long? Sits at home gets paid for it and only preaches for us on

Sunday morning?" As the offering plate went by her, she flung her head high toward the usher and coldly glared at him! When it came time for communion, she refused to participate. In her mind, that would show others just how discontented she was!



After the service was over, Esther left in a huff. As she walked by other members of the church, she did not speak a word to any of them. When she got to the door to where Pastor Tim Brown was standing, he stretched out his hand to shake hers. She just looked at him and walked away coldly.

After she left, many of the members, including Pastor Tim were scratching their heads, wondering what was wrong with Esther. She had always been cordial to everyone in church, even if she did sometimes seem somewhat distant.

Over the next week as Esther saw people in town, she did not speak to anyone, especially if they attended Pinetown Church. The temperature was averaging about 40 degrees this December in her Midwestern town; however, when Esther walked by, the wind chill felt like it was 50 below zero!

