**Christmas Entertainment**

**Charles Dickens wrote his classic story A Christmas Carol between October and November of 1843, and by Christmas day he had already sold 6,000 copies. (Noel Botham, in The Amazing Book of Useless Information, p. 18)**

**When Frank Capra’s It’s a Wonderful Life was released in 1946, it was dismissed by critics as sappy and sentimental; by the 1950s it was largely forgotten. In the mid-1970s the movie’s copyright lapsed and nobody remembered -- or bothered -- to renew it. That made the film “public domain” -- i.e., legally, TV stations could broadcast it for free. That’s why so many stations started showing it every holiday season, which is what turned it into the “Christmastime classic” it is today. *(Uncle John’s All-Purpose Bathroom Reader, p. 34)***

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**“Hot cockles” was a popular game at Christmas in medieval times. It was a game in which the other players took turns striking the blindfolded player, who had to guess the name of the person delivering each blow. “Hot cockles” was still a Christmas pastime until the Victorian era. *(absolutetrivia.com)***

**As a kid I played a game where you threaded string through your fingers. It was called cat’s cradle. Where did it come from and when did it start? That’s an ancient children’s game found in cultures around the world. Most sources say the name comes from cratchcradle, or manger cradle, possibly referring**

**to the manger where Jesus was born. The name may describe one of the common string patterns. Cratch became cat’s just because the words sound similar, according to The Henry Bolt Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins. *(Rocky Mountain News)***

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**I have two versions of the poem “The Night Before Christmas.” In one a reindeer is named Donner, in the other it's Donder. Which is correct? Genevieve. First off, the name of the much-loved poem, which helped define Santa Claus for us, is “A Visit From Saint Nicholas.” It was written by Clement Moore in 1822 as a Christmas gift for his children. The reindeer's name is Donder, though it's not clear where it comes from, considering Donder's stablemate, Blitzen, and the German expression, Donner and Blitzen, which generally is translated as “thunder and lightning.” *(Rocky Mountain News)***

**Clement C. Moore was a teacher of classical languages. In the course of his career, he published a Hebrew dictionary and was a major benefactor of the General Theological Seminary in New York City. But it is not for the seminary or his dictionary that he is remembered. It is for a set of verses dashed off in 1822 in an hour of yuletide inspiration--verses that he stuffed away as if of no importance. The magic lines begin: “Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house.” They never brought Moore a penny, but they did bring him immortality. *(Dale Turner, in Reader’s Digest)***

**A friend told me recently that seeing a movie I made more than 40 years ago is a holiday tradition in his family. That movie is It’s a Wonderful Life, and out of all the 80 films I’ve made, it’s my favorite. But it has an odd history. Frank Capra said the idea came from a Christmas story written by Phillip Van Doren Stern. Stern couldn’t sell the story anywhere, but he finally had 200 twenty-four-page pamphlets printed up at his own expense, and he sent them to his friends as a greeting card. *(Jimmy Stewart, in Guideposts)***

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