

## SHELL SHOCKED

### It's a Wonderful Life, Part Two

By Art Stevens

Do you remember the time worn movie “It’s a Wonderful Life”? It’s shown on television every Christmas season. That’s the movie where the character played by James Stewart, having sunk to rock bottom, decides to do himself in. But Clarence, an angel second class needing one good deed on earth to get his wings, is given the assignment to save the Stewart character and turn his life around.

The character’s name is George Bailey and in a moment of deep despair he decides to jump off a bridge believing he is worth more dead than alive. But before he has a chance to jump, Clarence jumps off the bridge himself and Bailey instead winds up saving Clarence. While they’re drying off in a nearby sanctuary, George exclaims that he wishes he had never been born.

Clarence has an idea and looks up to the heavens for encouragement, gets it, and proceeds to demonstrate to George Bailey what life for all those close to him would have been like if he had never been born.

Well, something similar happened to me. Things hadn’t gone well for me for a period of time and I hit rock bottom when I lost ten dollars in a

poker game. I simply couldn't take anymore. I decided that my lovely wife and family could do without my presence any longer and sat in my car with the motor running in my garage and breathed in carbon monoxide fumes.

I was beginning to doze off when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned around and saw a small, puffy little man. "Who are you?" I shouted.

The little man was wearing a blue blazer, a tie decorated with harps and halos and a black fedora. "Well you needn't shout at me. I'm Cornelius, your guardian angel."

"Spare me the theatrics," I said. "I don't need a guardian angel. Why don't you just leave me alone and let me do my deed. I wish I'd never been born."

And, sure enough, Cornelius' face lit up like an exclamation point. He looked up at the ceiling of my garage and said, "Okay, you were never born. Want to see what life is like for the people close to you if you hadn't been born?"

Before I had a chance to say anything I felt myself being lifted and transported. Suddenly I was standing on the street of the town where I had been born and raised. I saw a distinguished looking gentleman wearing a marine uniform with various ribbons pinned to his shirt. As I took a closer look at him I thought I recognized Finnegan, the boyhood bully of the block.

But the Finnegan I remembered had turned out to be a petty criminal spending most of his adult years behind bars. I expected to see a broken down bum panhandling on the corner, which was how I remembered Finnegan. “Finnegan, is that you? I thought you spent years in prison. How could you be a Marine colonel?”

Finnegan eyed me up and down and said, “Mister, I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing but I never met you in my life.” And he walked away.

Cornelius, who was suddenly at my side, intervened. “You see, you weren’t there to ruin his life. You weren’t there to be beaten up by Finnegan and as a result he led an exemplary life afterward. Since you were never born you didn’t have a ruinous effect on his life.

“I don’t believe this,” I said. “I’ve kept in touch with Finnegan’s family and they told me he turned out to be a drifter and a bum.

“Oh, but he didn’t” said Cornelius. “You weren’t there to ruin his life.”

“Oh, this is nonsense. I don’t ruin people’s lives. I make their lives better,” I said. “Take me to where my wife is. I want to see her.”

Cornelius sighed and said, “Okay, but you’re going to be very surprised.

I felt myself being whisked away again and found myself in front of a Broadway theater. The marquee said Eva Sandberg starring in “A Streetcar Named Desire.” I felt my breath being taken away. “That’s my wife’s maiden name,” I said. “She gave up her acting career when we got married.”

Cornelius looked at me as though I were a slow learner. “But you never met your wife. You were never born. She married Steven Spielberg and he made her an international movie and stage star. Don’t you get it yet? You weren’t around to ruin her life either.”

“I still don’t believe you,” I said. I saw a glamorous blond leaving the stage door of the theater. There must have been a hundred back stage Johnnies waiting to get her autograph. I pushed my way to the front of the line and said, “Eva, it’s me. Don’t you know me?”

She looked at me for a long time and finally said, “No, I don’t know you. But I’ll be happy to give you my autograph.” But by that time the crowd had pushed me out of the way and was waving playbills at her to sign.

“What have you done to me, Cornelius? This can’t be happening. My own wife doesn’t even recognize me.”

Cornelius merely sighed. “But she’s not your wife. She’s never met you because you were never born. And because you weren’t born you didn’t ruin her life either. She’s had a great career.”

What was happening to me? There was one more person to see. He would vouch for the fact that he’s my brother. “Take me to my brother Ralph, Cornelius. He’ll squash this whole thing in a second.”

“As you wish,” Cornelius said with a heavy sigh. And once again I found myself being lifted and transported. When my feet were planted once again I found myself in front of a sports stadium. And then I saw my brother coming out wearing a New York Yankee cap and jacket.

Cornelius said, “Your brother is the manager of the New York Yankees.”

My eyes almost bulged out of my head. “You’ve got to be kidding. Ralph loved playing baseball when we were kids but when he broke his hand he went into marketing. This is impossible.”

Cornelius gave me another of his impatient glares. “But you weren’t around for your brother to protect you and eat up all his time fighting your battles with neighborhood bullies. And because you weren’t there he never broke his hand during one of those fights.

“Since you weren’t born that incident never took place so you couldn’t ruin his life either. He spent all his time playing baseball and became a major league star and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. After his playing days were over, he became manager of the New York Yankees and has led them to ten consecutive World Series victories.”

I ran up to Ralph. “Ralph, you know me, don’t you? I’m your kid brother. You know me, don’t you?” I stammered. Ralph stared at me. There was no recognition. He simply ignored me and kept on walking. I was stunned. I’d had enough. “Take me back, Cornelius. I want to be with my friends and family again. I want to continue ruining their lives. I want to live. I want to be me again. Please, Cornelius, please.”

And the next thing I knew I found myself sitting back in my car with the garage door open and the engine off. My wife entered the garage from the connecting door from the kitchen. I jumped out of the car.

“Eva, don’t you know me? Please say that you know me.”

She gave me a strange, long look. “Know you? Yes, I know you. You’re my husband who forgot to take out the garbage last night.”

I screamed for joy and looked around for Cornelius. But he was nowhere in sight. And someone was ringing our doorbell.

As my wife went to answer the door she turned to me and said: “Did you know that whenever a doorbell rings, an angel gets his wings?”

I looked toward the heavens and winked. “That’s right,” I say.  
“That’s right.”

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