

We Are Now Pottersville

By Dennis Kelly



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Every year during the Christmas Season my wife and I watch the classic "It's a Wonderful Life" with Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. As often as I've seen it, it never fails to bring a tear to my eye and a lump in my throat when it seems the entire town of Bedford Falls is singing "Olde Lang Syne" after coming to the financial rescue of George Bailey, Jimmy Stewart's character. The movie, released in 1946 is now considered to be one of the greatest films of all time and rightly so in my opinion.

If you've seen the movie then you know the story. It takes place in a quaint little town called Bedford Falls, New York which in this case one could think represented how America was back then. It was a time when decency and virtue prevailed in the hearts of most Americans. A time when only radio was the main source of news and entertainment. Long distance communication between people was a wall mounted telephone. There was no television. These were simpler times when everyone knew everyone. Even the local cop was your buddy of all things.

Well as the story goes George Bailey didn't want to stay in Bedford Falls tied to his father's Building and Loan business but wanted adventure, to travel to far off lands and see the world. But every time he was about to make his escape, something would come up to hold him back. You see George Bailey cared about others and would always put others before

himself. When George's father suddenly passed away from a stroke, George sacrificed his dream and took over the Building and Loan operation, essentially keeping him stuck in Bedford Falls with his wife Mary (Donna Reed) raising his four children.

Now there is a villain in this story by the name of Mr. Potter who owned the big bank in town. He'd be equivalent to perhaps J P Morgan Chase. Potter was a ruthless man and cared for no one, especially the little guy, the riff-raff who went to Baileys Building and Loan to do their banking and apply for loans. Potter despised George Bailey and even tried to trick him into running his bank. George was tempted but quickly saw through the scheme and turned him down flat.

The Bailey Building and Loan also employed George's simple minded Uncle Billy who was responsible for making a large deposit of \$8,000 (\$125,000 today's dollars) but through a series of blunders, he inadvertently winds up placing the cash in Potter's lap hidden in a newspaper. (yes, it's preposterous)

Uncle Billy doesn't realize what he did with the money and only Potter discovers this stupid error. This all occurs on the very day the Government State Examiner is there to audit the books! With the State Examiner breathing down his neck, facing arrest and possible jail time for Mortgage Fraud, poor George goes off his rocker trying to figure out where the money went. Potter, knowing full well what has taken place, keeps his mouth shut and enjoys watching this catastrophe unfold.

George finally goes home in utter despair to face his family where his wife and children are cheerfully preparing the home for Christmas. He can't bring himself to confess his situation to his wife Mary and angrily unloads on his children. In a crazed fit of anger, he also insults his little daughter's teacher who had telephoned in the middle of this scene. Out of

frustration George storms out of the house seeking any possible relief and finds himself groveling before Mr. Potter asking him for a loan to cover the eight grand. When Potter asks for collateral, George shows him a life insurance policy worth \$500. Of course, Potter laughs at him and points out George is worth more dead than he is alive, throws him out of his office threatening to call the sheriff.

The next scene in the movie is one of the most powerful and moving performances of this film by Jimmy Stuart. George is sitting at the local bar where he plans to drown his sorrows. He is writhing in utter despair and says these words, "Oh God, Oh God, Dear Father in Heaven, I'm not a praying man but I'm at the end of my rope. Show me the way. Show me the way Oh God." He then looks at the Life Insurance policy still in his coat pocket. Immediately after this he gets punched in the face by the husband of the school teacher he had insulted who happened to be drowning his sorrows too. George gets up and says, see what happens when you pray? You get punched in the mouth!

Just as Mr. Potter is the villain in this story, there is also a hero coming to the rescue. His name is Clarence and is George's Guardian Angel sent from heaven on a mission to save George from himself. If successful, Clarence will be promoted and earn his wings.

After being punched in the face George leaves the bar in a blinding snow storm and crashes his car on his way to the bridge where he plans to jump into a raging river. Just as he is about to leap to his death, Clarence the angel jumps into the frigid water ahead of him, flailing and shouting for help. A startled George dives into the water and rescues Clarence the missionary angel.

As they are warming themselves and drying their wet clothes in the Bridge Master's office Clarence divulges that he is indeed George's Guardian Angel sent to prevent George from taking his

own life.

George of course is having none of it and in the discussion states that he wished he'd never been born. Clarence admonishes George for saying such a thing but then suddenly changes his mind and grants George his wish saying, as of this moment it will be as if you were never born. George dismisses the comment and heads out into the town taking Clarence with him.

He looks for his crashed car up the road where he left it but it isn't there. Clarence explains, there is no car George you were never born. They then stop into the bar where he was punched in the face a couple of hours earlier but nobody knows him and is filled with rough characters and loose women. In short order both George and Clarence get tossed through the door into the snow. George still not understanding what has taken place, Clarence calmly explains to him that the life he had no longer exists, that he has no identity. Clarence tells him, you see George, you've been given a great gift, a chance to see what the world would be like without you. Again, in disbelief George tells Clarence that he's crazy and starts for home to his wife and children who of course are not there.

As they head into town George notices the sign entering the town no longer says, Welcome to Bedford Falls but instead says, Welcome to POTTERSVILLE!

Pottersville is a very different city than the quaint wholesome community of Bedford Falls with its soda fountain, ice cream stores, movie theater, local hardware and such. As George and Clarence run through the downtown they pass pool halls, strip clubs, liquor joints, dance halls, pawn shops and the like. George stops in front of a boarded-up storefront and asks a passerby, hey what happened to Baileys Building Loan? and is told, that place folded up years ago when old man Bailey died of a stroke. Clarence tries to tell him that since he was never born none of the things he knows and remembers

ever occurred.

In a panic George runs to his parents' home where he was raised which is now a seedy boarding house run by his mother who is now a withered hag who doesn't recognize him because George was never born. There are several examples in the movie showing George a world without his kindness and caring. His wife Mary is now a spinster librarian and runs from George thinking him a mad man. None of his children exist. His buddy the cop tries to arrest him. You see without George Bailey, old man Potter, the twisted, corrupt, self-center Banker was able to buy up the whole town resulting in a much different community than good old Bedford Falls. George eventually turns to Clarence his Guardian Angel and pleads with him asking, tell me what is happening?

What was happening is, George's desperate prayer to God while back at the saloon was playing out before him. He had asked God for help, to be shown the way and sometimes God chooses to use a two by four between the eyes in order to get our attention (I can speak from experience). George had wished he hadn't been born and God showed him what that world would be like. Clarence told him it was a great gift. George finally grasps what he has done and races back to where it all started, the bridge where he was going to throw his life away. It is there that he cries out, please God, let me live again! Let me live again!

If you know the story and I think you do, not only does God let him live again but He restores George's former life and family. When he goes home, he is surrounded by his loving wife and children. That ugly city called Pottersville is gone. The whole town of Bedford Falls comes to George's rescue. The misplaced money has been returned tenfold. Not a more joyous occasion could have been brought about. And of course, Clarence the Guardian Angel did earn his wings.

It is here that I have to ask the question, are you having a

Wonderful Life in today's America? Unless you're a billionaire without a care in the world, I think the answer is no! It struck me that, we too have been given a "great gift" and we are doing nothing with it. Like George Bailey, are we not as Americans witnessing a declining nation play out before us? Have we not rejected the guidance of a loving God? Let's look closely at our nation as it is today. Through our legal system marriage is no longer defined between a man and a woman. We've allowed our nation's leaders and judges to strip every idea of a Creator out of our institutions of learning from K through 12. A college education leaves one with a mountain of debt and a useless degree heading nowhere. The Ten Commandments are no longer allowed in the public square. Crime abounds throughout every city. Human trafficking is a daily term in the news. School shootings are commonplace. Drug addiction is rampant. Children are viewing porn on their laptops. Young men are no longer interested in dating young women. Pink hair, nose rings, bodies covered in tattoos.

Transgenderism, a term no one heard of a few years ago is an accepted lifestyle. Judges cannot give a definition of a woman. Abortion on demand. Filth and violence in entertainment and music. Corrupt leaders constantly involving us in wars, corrupt courts, corrupt bankers run our lives. Our money is worthless paper created out of thin air, yet we're taxed for everything. The insanity we hear about and witness on the black screen every day is mind numbing. Those with ears to hear and eyes to see understand we really are living in the Zombie Apocalypse. We rejected God and our once great nation is now POTTERSVILLE. There is a solution however. If we truly want a Wonderful Life for our once great nation and ourselves, then we must do the same as George Bailey and ask, Oh God, Oh God, Dear Father in Heaven, show me the way, show me the way oh God. And then prepare for the two by four between the eyes.

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[BIO: Dennis was born in 1952; one of ten children raised in a Catholic Irish home in the Detroit Area. He navigated his way through High School graduating in 1971. He served active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps 1971-1973 during Vietnam. He is a husband and father of three adult children. He made his living as a Sales Rep. in the Automotive Industry retiring in 2006. Dennis is a seeker of truth who prefers spirituality over religion and has a great working relationship with the God of his understanding. He and his wife live in Florida with their Blue Heeler, Buster and their 15 lb. Havanese named Abbi who manages their household. Contact email: denniskelly1227@gmail.com]