

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

Is Anybody There?

I'm the proud owner of several size-small grandsons. And they all, without exception, are full of bright ideas. But one of them demonstrated EXTRA initiative recently when he dialled the emergency number: 111.

He was faced with a crisis, you see. He needed help from someone bigger. And, unbeknownst to his parents, he called POLICE, AMBULANCE & FIRE.

When the alert lady on the help-desk asked him to describe the emergency, the child put it as simply as he could:

"My brother's being naughty!"

"Your brother's being naughty?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied. "He's being mean!"

"You dialled 111 to report that your brother's being mean?"

"Yes," he agreed (hoping, no doubt, that she would reach down the phone and give his brother an overdue thrashing).

"Well, thank you for calling," said the kind lady, "but I think you'd better go and tell your mum ..."

"Okay," he replied (wishing, no doubt, that she had offered a far more exciting solution). And, with a mutual goodbye, they signed off.

Ahh, yes – never a dull moment when kids are around! And another funny story for the memory books.



HANGOVER: THE WRATH OF GRAPES.

But wait, there's more! I detect a Christmas connection here. I think I know how my grandson felt – needing someone bigger. 'Cause the truth is (between you and me), I also have moments when it gets too much.

No, it's not my brothers. They stopped being mean to me years ago. But my world often feels unfair ... my head's often out of control ... I can't always get it together ... I sometimes feel out of my depth ...

and, once-in-a-blue-moon, it would be nice to have a little bit of help from someone bigger and stronger.

Wouldn't it?

I mean, I don't have all the answers. And I bet you don't either ...

Maybe, like E.T. we're homesick? Maybe, like Star Wars, we miss the Force? Maybe, like Lord of the Rings and Narnia, we're restless for something better ... hungry for something beyond?

And maybe that's why the Christmas story keeps getting under our skin – by touching an empty place deep down in our guts that we long to have filled?

"Silent night ... holy night ..."

It happens each year like clockwork: we splurge on lights and pinetrees ... turn all generous and jolly ... start humming Christmas carols ... and get all kind of religious. Jesus, suddenly, is EVERYWHERE – and for a few weeks in December he's pretty hard to ignore. He rides on red-nosed reindeer, lurks in corny cards, adds meaning to season's greetings, and puts grins on the faces of kids.

Ours is the visited planet – that's what Christmas claims. And although it doesn't pop everyone's cork, that story keeps inspiring millions to live and love more fully than they otherwise might.

"Away in a manger ... no crib for his bed ... the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head ..."

Things soon get back to normal, of course. From December 26, the lights come down, the trees turn brown, the half-price sales begin, the credit card bills arrive, and the magic slowly fades.

So, perhaps, this Christmas, we shouldn't rush. And perhaps, for the moment, we should tread softly. 'Cause who knows? Each step may bring us closer to the man that baby grew up to be.

"Hello? 111? Is anybody there?"

The answer just might be yes ... ❁

JOHN COONEY HAS BEEN GRAPEVINE'S EDITOR SINCE BEFORE THE TELEPHONE WAS INVENTED. ALTHOUGH HIS GRANDSON FINDS THAT HARD TO BELIEVE.

THORT



"As the evening sky faded from a salmon color to a sort of flint gray, I thought back to the salmon I caught that morning, and how gray he was, and how I named him Flint ..."