



AUTHOR'S NOTE

FIRST HEARD ABOUT the 1914 Christmas truce from a backstage janitor at a Birmingham, Alabama concert hall in 1984. I was so taken with this woman's story, I wrote the entire song "Christmas in the Trenches" during the intermission of my concert that night.

Though the story is true—there really was a Christmas truce, in fact, there were many of them in 1914 and again in 1915—I made no attempt to be historically accurate. I invented the main character in the song, named him Francis Tolliver, decided that he should be from Liverpool, England, and placed him in the trenches that freezing December night in 1914. I simply tried to tell his story so anyone listening would feel that they were there with him. The song almost wrote itself.

I first thought I would only sing the song and tell the story during the Christmas season. I soon learned it deserves—no, needs—to be told 365 days a year.

I knew all along that this was more than a story about peace breaking out in the middle of war. But why, I wondered, does it touch people so deeply? Was it because it also conveys a lesson about being human in a most inhumane situation? Because it demonstrates that bravery is about more than facing danger? Because it illustrates the power of our similarities rather than the division of our differences?

Wars don't start on battlefields. They begin in people's hearts. And that is where wars can be ended.

I believe we need to begin learning how to wage peace at a very early age. Every child is the beginning of a whole new world. Children learn about wars and generals in their schools almost from the first day. However, many programs teaching the skills of nonviolence, conflict resolution, and peacemaking are available for schools, youth groups, and families. I will keep an ever-updated list of some of them at this website:

http://folkmusic.com/f_peace.htm

What can one kid, one family, one classroom, one group of people do? One starry night nearly a hundred years ago one lonely soldier thought of home, of Christmas, and sang a carol from his trench in a muddy field. His buddies heard and joined in. Across that muddy field their enemies added their voices to the chorus. And all these years later we still have a chance to listen...and to join in.

Shalom, Salaam, Frieden, Peace!


John McCutcheon