

## Troubled

A song sung by Faith Hill in the blockbuster movie *The Grinch* asks: “Where are you, Christmas? Why can’t I find you?” Well, sometimes the Christmas spirit is like a misplaced sock—you find it when you aren’t looking and where you’d least expect it to show up.

I found it at a quarter past one in the morning.

On my way home from work, I stopped at the neighborhood doughnut shop. After parking in its ghost town of a parking lot, I was headed toward the door when I spotted trouble.

What lit a warning light on my intuition radar was a group of teenagers—three boys and a girl. Understand, I wasn’t alarmed by their tattoos (the girl included) or their earrings (boys included—eyebrows as well as each of their ears). Rather, it was the extremely late hour and the fact they loitered on the sidewalk in a semicircle around an elderly man sitting in a chair. Wearing a tattered flannel shirt and barefoot, the man looked positively cold and probably homeless.

And in trouble with a capital T.

Against my better judgment, I went inside the store and ordered three doughnuts—while keeping a worried eye on the group outside. Nothing seemed to be happening.

Until I headed toward my car.

Something was indeed “going down.” As ominously as a pirate ordering a prisoner to the plank, the teens told the old man to stand up and walk.

*Oh, no*, I thought. *Capital tee-are-oh-you-bee-el-ee.*

But wait. I had misjudged the situation. And I had misjudged the teens.

“How do those feel?” one of the boys asked. “Do they fit?”

The cold man took a few steps—maybe a dozen. He stopped, looked at his feet, turned around and walked back. “Yeah, they’z about my size,” he answered, flashing a smile that, despite needing a dentist’s attention, was friendly and warm on this cold night.

The teens, all four, grinned back.

“Keep them. They’re yours,” one of the boys replied. “I want you to have them.”

I looked down. The teen was barefoot. The kid had just given the cold-and-probably-homeless man his expensive skateboarding sneakers—and, apparently his socks, as well.

The other two boys sat on their skateboards by the curb, retying their shoelaces. Apparently, they, too, had let the man try on their sneakers to find which pair fit the best. The girl, meanwhile, gave the cold man her oversized sweatshirt.

With my heart warmed by the unfolding drama, I went back into the shop.

“Could I trouble you for another dozen doughnuts?” I asked, then told the clerk what I had witnessed.

Christmas spirit, it seemed, was more contagious than flu or chicken pox. Indeed, the cold night got even warmer when the woman not only wouldn’t let me pay for the doughnuts, but added a large coffee, too.

“These are from the lady inside. Have a nice night,” I said as I delivered the warm doughnuts and piping-hot cup. The old man smiled appreciatively.

“You have a nice night, too,” the teens said.

I already had.