

13. *Christmas Branches* (2019)

November 26, 2020

In keeping with the spirit of the season and the fine, fitting work of one Jack Kline, late-bloomer raconteur extraordinaire, I'm going to condense a review from my thecoffeecoaster.com site of *Christmas Branches*.¹ Then I'll resume my politically incorrect personal musings, with as light a touch as possible in our covtardian² times.

Jack has assembled thirteen short stories from his imagination and family experience that capture the essence of Christmas... and its intertwined holy day and 'holiday' aspects. [Christmas Branches](#) is a welcome addition in our time to the classic literature of the season.

Kline's writing career was presaged by the first story he ever wrote, as an assignment in the ninth grade. It was about Santa Claus saving a man from frozen death in a Christmas Eve blizzard... which became, in 2008, "Only a Christmas Story." That piece came one year after he wrote "Naming Christmas," a splendid resolution of Jack's recalled insensitivity, as a 13-year-old, to his dad's feelings about "not getting the right tree," for the family occasion.



"The bug had bitten. Each year since I have gifted my family a new story. A few have since been published, including "Christmas with the Pack" in the United Kingdom's *Prole* magazine. All of them up through 2018 are included in this collection.

"Why *Christmas Branches* as the title?"

"Decorated evergreens were originally part of pagan celebrations of Winter Solstice. Gradually, particularly during Queen Victoria's reign in England, evergreens became integral in the Christian observation of Christmas. Each story in this volume is intended to be a branch of the overarching Christmas story—a story of joy, giving, faith, and love.

"I hope readers feel how much I love Christmas and the magical feeling it engenders, both religious and secular. Some of these stories do not directly relate to the reason for the holiday, but they show warmth and generosity that are part of the season. And some reflect more directly on the birth of Christ, including an unusual visit to Bethlehem at the time Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth.

"May these stories enhance your joy of this most special season.

"Merry Christmas,

"Jack"

From start to finish each of the Branches' stories leads the reader on a cockle-warming voyage of self-discovery, evoking from one's own memories similar events and their deeply personal meanings. Yes, Christmas is for children and parents, but also for young lovers, older marrieds, and even end-timers taking one last, languid walk down nostalgia lane...

...including a Hallmark Moment train ride, maturity coming to a Chicago man in a fortune cookie, Golden Christmas remembrance of a loved one, a Phil Morris (*But Not for Me*) Christmas story with Jill, and a lonely soul looking for a comeback. Thirteen stories in all. Place *Branches* on your bed stand or into the hands of another—wherever you want tasty chestnuts to be roasting this Yuletide season.

¹ Jack's other works are exceptional reads as well, in sequence, *Blowing Carbon* (2009), *But Not for Me* (2017), and its sequel, *Rhapsody* (2020). Search for reviews on my thecoffeecoaster.com.

² Sorry, it keeps coming up. Refer to Stonebeams 1-3 footnotes for a definition. AKA the Naked Emperor Affliction.