

# A Christmas Carol

Ken Hekman, MBA



LIVE WELL. DIE WELL. GRIEVE WELL.

From humbug  
to humility

I love watching A Christmas Carol in December each year. The 1984 movie with George C. Scott as the irascible Mr. Scrooge is a timeless tale by any measure. This year I watched it with an open heart, and gleaned lessons I hadn't noticed before – lessons worthy of attention for transforming community attitudes and practices surrounding death and dying.

The central theme of Charles Dickens' classic novella is the personal transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly, miserable and usurious loner, into a wise and caring employer/philanthropist. The spark for his reclamation comes from visits by the ghosts of Christmases past, present and future who offer him an opportunity to re-frame his life's purpose and realign his behavior with his values.

I have virtually memorized the story, but this year I observed something different, sensitized, perhaps, by my efforts to transform culture through Trillium Institute. The turning point for Scrooge came by **facing his mortality head on**. When the Ghost of Christmas Future shows him how he might be remembered, he is completely broken. The crust of selfish avarice is crumbled into submission, and he vows to live differently, to "keep the spirit of Christmases past, present and future" all at once.

When morning comes, his transformation manifests itself immediately. His generosity to his employee, Bob Cratchit, is followed by a philanthropic pledge that "includes a great many back payments, I assure you." Then, by reconnecting with his extended family, he launches Scrooge 2.0, a newer, better version of humanitarian kindness.

Scrooge learns  
to live well, die  
well, and grieve  
well

It strikes me that Scrooge learns to *live well, die well, and grieve well* through his harrowing experiences with the ghosts. He engages life with more fullness and less fear, and embraces joy along with the sorrow. It also strikes me that his transformation is not his alone. It is contagious enough to transform others such that Tiny Tim does not suffer an imminent death, and nephew Fred and

his wife are able to forgive their Uncle Ebenezer and embrace him after years of mistreatment and “humbug.”

The key lesson for those who would transform community attitudes and practices surrounding death and dying is simply this: Facing mortality honestly points the way to live well, die well, and grieve well. We don’t need ghostly visitations to be transformed. We need simply to be open to the fact that death is a part of life to fully appreciate life’s exquisiteness.

Ken Hekman is the Executive Director of Trillium Institute.  
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