

BY DON STEINBERG

# APOCRYPHAL TALES REVISITED

*Stories of the Season*

## SILENT CAL

President Calvin Coolidge was widely known as a man of few words. At a Christmas party for Washington VIPs, a young couple saw him and devised a wager.

The couple approached Coolidge. "Mr. President," the woman said, "I just bet my husband \$50 that I could get you to say three words."

Coolidge looked at her and said, "You lose."

The woman laughed. "How disappointing!" she said, extending her hand. "My name is Eleanor Roosevelt, and this is Franklin. Could you tell me where to find the ladies' room?"

Coolidge opened his mouth, then realized the woman's gambit. Slowly, silently, he raised his middle finger.

Franklin laughed.

## YOUNG GEORGE WASHINGTON

When he was only six years old, George Washington received a hatchet as a Christmas present. He put it to use by enthusiastically chopping down his father's prized cherry tree.

Washington's dad was furious. "Who did this?"

"I cannot tell a lie. I did it with my little hatchet," George confessed.

"You *what*?" the elder Washington said. "Chopping down a tree single-handedly is difficult even for a grown man. We should enter you in some kind of competition."

## THE PICASSO NAPKIN

In Paris in December 1934, an older gentleman and his companion were having lunch at a restaurant when a young man approached.

"I'm sorry to bother you," the young man said, "but are you Pablo Picasso?"

The older man smiled thinly, accustomed to the interruption. "Yes."

"Oh my," the young man said. "I'd never bother you, but my wife is your biggest fan. She's very ill and doesn't have much longer to live. It would mean so much to her if you could draw her a picture, even on a napkin."

Picasso sighed and put down his utensils. He fished in his

jacket for a pencil and spread his napkin on the table. He quickly drew a series of shapes that resembled a woman's face, signed his name, and pushed the napkin toward the young man. "That'll be \$1,000," Picasso said.

"\$1,000? It only took you two minutes to draw!"

"Yes," Picasso answered, "but it took me forty years to be able to draw it in two minutes."

The young man sighed. "Forty years, what a gift. My poor wife is not likely to make it even to Christmas. It would cheer her so much to get a free drawing from Pablo Picasso."

Picasso laid his hand over the napkin drawing. "I'm sorry to hear that you are being so frugal about your wife's dying wish."

"How about three hundred?"

Picasso agreed and handed over the illustration for \$300.

The young man rejoined his own dining companion. He grinned across the table and spoke in a low voice. "I just got a signed Picasso for three hundred bucks!" he whispered.

Back at the other table, the old man's lunch date gave him a quizzical look. "Why

did you do that?" she asked him.

"Everybody thinks I look like Picasso," he said. "Why not make something off of it?"

## THE CHURCHILL INSULT

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was famous for his withering insults. At a Christmas party he was behaving boorishly when a woman approached him.

"Winston, you are drunk, disgustingly drunk!" she proclaimed.

Churchill slowly removed the cigar from his mouth and scowled.

"My dear madam, you are ugly," he said in his stentorian voice. "In the morning, I shall be sober, and you will still be ugly."

The woman smiled.

"Thank you," she said. "I bet Coolidge over there \$50 that you would insult me."

Churchill laughed. Franklin laughed. And Eleanor, smiling at Coolidge, silently raised her middle finger. **B**



**SANTA COOLIDGE:** "Ho ho."

# DON STEINBERG

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