



# The Christmas Shoes

*Donna VanLiere*

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## **The Christmas Shoes** Donna VanLiere

Sometimes, the things that can change your life will cross your path in one instant-and then, in a fleeting moment, they're gone. But if you open your eyes, and watch carefully, you will believe....

Robert is a successful attorney who has everything in life-and nothing at all. Focused on professional achievement and material rewards, Robert is on the brink of losing his marriage. He has lost sight of his wife, Kate, their two daughters, and ultimately himself. Eight year old Nathan has a beloved mother, Maggie, whom he is losing to cancer. But Nathan and his family are building a simple yet full life, and struggling to hold onto every moment they have together. A chance meeting on Christmas Eve brings Robert and Nathan together-he is shopping for a family he hardly knows and Nathan is shopping for a mother he is soon to lose. In this one encounter, their lives are forever altered as Robert learns an important lesson: sometimes the smallest things can make all the difference. *The Christmas Shoes* is a universal story of the deeper meaning of serendipity, a tale of our shared humanity, and of how a power greater than ourselves can shape, and even save, our lives.

## **The Christmas Shoes Details**

Date : Published November 9th 2001 by St. Martin's Press (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9780312289515

Author : Donna VanLiere

Format : Hardcover 132 pages

Genre : Holiday, Christmas, Fiction, Christian Fiction, Christian

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## Book Concierge says

1.5\*

I'm sure you've heard the Christmas song about the little boy who wants to buy a special pair of shoes for his Mama on Christmas. She's dying and he wants her to feel special when she meets Jesus.

Well, VanLiere expands that song into this novella. The writing is trite and the story line, melodramatic and manipulative. There are a few redeeming qualities. I really did like the interactions of the Andrews family: Nathan, dad Jack and mom Maggie. I also really liked Nathan's teacher and the ways she tried to help this small boy deal with the sadness and stress of his mother's illness. But I was totally turned off and unbelieving of the great turnaround that Robert makes. I knew the story was headed there (I have heard the song numerous times), but didn't feel that VanLiere made it believable.

Final verdict: Call me a Scrooge or a Grinch; I grew to hate the song and the book isn't much better.

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## Julianna says

Reviewed for THC Reviews

I had recently been lamenting the fact that I hadn't read a true tear-jerker yet this year. I have been known to get a bit misty-eyed at certain scenes, but it is a rare book that makes me actually shed tears. *The Christmas Shoes* did exactly that and more. It made me cry buckets both while reading it and afterwards while merely thinking about it, and again while trying to write this review. There is a profound and beautiful message packed into this simple short story. It may have been difficult to read at times, evoking many deep and heartfelt emotions, but it was worth every moment. I have been left thinking about it long after turning the last page, which is what I hope for every time I pick up a book to read.

My favorite movie at Christmastime is *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *The Christmas Shoes* reminded me of it in some ways. Both stories are about the serendipitous nature of life and how each of our lives are important, intertwined with the lives of others, and can affect anyone with whom we come in contact in unexpected ways. It may not seem like some small thing we've done even mattered, but it's possible that it was the thing that utterly changed another person's life, all by us merely being in the right place at the right time. The meeting between Robert and Nathan in *The Christmas Shoes* was very brief, but during that short encounter, Nathan gave Robert a much-needed wake-up call, while Robert opened his heart enough to fulfill Nathan's Christmas wish for his dying mother. It all makes me wonder in what mysterious and unknown ways I might have affected the life of someone with whom I've come in contact, over the forty years of my own life.

I believe that *The Christmas Shoes* is the first book I've read that alternates between first and third person perspective. Robert's scenes are written in his first-person voice, while the rest of the book is written from the third-person point of view of various other characters. I didn't really have any difficulty following it, but it did take a little getting used to. Overall, I think this style worked well. Robert was the character whose life seemed to be the most affected, so it made sense to have his part be in first person. No matter what voice they were speaking in, all the characters were vividly brought to life in a touching and realistic way.

In the beginning, Robert is difficult to like. He is a rather selfish workaholic attorney who has become very materialistic and cynical (think shades of Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*). His life is about to fall apart with his wife asking for a divorce after Christmas, but he still can't seem to figure out what he truly wants in life or how to make it happen. He also isn't very nice to some of the other characters in the story, and never really spends any time with his family. Once I came to the realization that Robert is a man who has lost his way and doesn't comprehend what is truly important in life, I was able to feel more sympathetic toward him, but real change doesn't come for him until he meets up with an eight-year-old little boy while doing last minute Christmas shopping on Christmas Eve.

While Robert's lifestyle is one of wealth bereft of human connections, Nathan's family has lived very simply, barely making ends meet on his father's salary as a mechanic, yet they have a home that is brimming full of love. His mother, Maggie made it that way, but now she is dying of cancer. I thoroughly admired Maggie's strength and dignity in the face of death. She didn't complain or ask "Why me?". She chose to live her final days giving as much as she was physically able to her family. Maggie and Jack had a tragic romance to be sure, but one that was filled with more love in the seemingly short time they had together than some couples experience in a lifetime. That love was obviously passed on to their children, especially Nathan who was thoughtful enough to want to give his mother a very special present for her last Christmas with them and in doing so opened the eyes of a man who was lost to help him rediscover his way in life.

Death can be a very difficult topic for some people, and even I have to admit to being a former death phobic. I have slowly been challenged in my thinking on the subject, first by the death of both my parents more than ten years ago, and more recently by the death of two beloved pets who, through their final moments, taught me some very important lessons. It may seem strange to some, but I found a certain peace and beauty in these creature's passings and know that I wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else but helping them to make that transition. I mention these things, because I absolutely loved the way Donna VanLiere handles death in *The Christmas Shoes*. She treats it not as something to be feared, but as something that can be very beautiful, a mere step into the afterlife. I also greatly admired the way that Maggie and Jack handled the subject of her impending death with Nathan. It is my fervent opinion that in cases like this, kids should be treated intelligently and allowed to make their own decisions, which can lead to a better sense of peace and closure for them.

Even though *The Christmas Shoes* was printed by a mainstream publisher, I have seen the book categorized as Christian fiction, and I suppose in some ways it is. The author is a Christian, and the characters talk about God, heaven, and how Christmas is the celebration of the Christ child's birth. Still, I think that the messages about love, life, death and how the choices we make can affect others, are universal ones that can be appreciated by anyone. In my opinion, the story is never preachy, nor does it seek to advance any sort of religious agenda. It merely tells an inspiring tale, leaving it up to the individual reader to discern the deeper meaning contained within its pages, which to me is the best kind of story, Christian or otherwise. In fact, I lost count of all the characters who were behaving in, what to my way of thinking, was a truly "Christ-like" manner which was very impressive to me. Although several main characters were shining beacons of light too, I was particularly taken by the kindness of some of the secondary characters like Nathan's teacher, Mrs. Patterson, the hospice nurse, Sylvia, and the anonymous lady who merely washed dishes and cleaned the kitchen the day after Maggie's death. They became a humble and sometimes silent expression of the real spirit of Christmas by showing God's love in service to those in need.

*The Christmas Shoes* is the first book in the *Christmas Hope* series. There are currently five books in the series, and the next one, *The Christmas Blessing*, follows Nathan as a young man dealing with new challenges in his grown-up life. I may not get a chance to read *The Christmas Blessing* this holiday season, but I will definitely be reading it at some point in the future. For anyone who isn't aware, *The Christmas*

*Shoes* is based on the song of the same name recorded by the group NewSong. I've heard it on the radio at Christmastime a few times, and it always makes me cry just like the book did. There was also a made-for-TV movie adapted from the book which aired on television a few years ago and is now available on DVD. While recently shopping, I chanced to find a copy at Target even though I wasn't specifically searching for it, and I am now looking forward to watching it soon. Overall, *The Christmas Shoes* is an amazing book that made me cry like I don't think any other story ever has, but also left me with some very profound food for thought. Enjoy isn't quite the right word for such a heart-wrenching read, but it was a beautiful and utterly moving experience that has touched my heart and mind in inexplicable ways with its pure and simple expression of the true meaning of the holiday season. I highly recommend this book to all readers. Just be sure to have a box of tissues handy for the inevitable flood of tears.

**Note:** This book has no objectionable content, so in my opinion, would be suitable for teen readers and possibly even pre-teens as long as they wouldn't be bothered by the highly emotional nature of the subject matter.

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### **Becky says**

This book was a huge tear jerker. I think I cried through almost the entire book. Thank goodness it was only 140 pages. :) But the story was great and it was a real heart felt book. Made you think about what's really important in life and the true meaning of Christmas.

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### **Karlyflower \*The Vampire Ninja, Luminescent Monster & Wendigo Nerd Goddess of Canada (according to The Hulk)\* says**

#### **2.5 Stars**

I've never been much of a seasonal reader. I believe 2014 was the first year I read any books set at Christmas time during the holidays (other than children's books), but when I saw that my 2015 PopSugar challenge had such an entry, I knew 2014 wouldn't be the last year I did it.

I don't know how familiar you guys are with the song "The Christmas Shoes", I know I've heard it and the general message is one that I know pretty well but it's not a favourite or anything. So imagine my surprise when I was scouring my shelves looking for a Christmas book to complete this entry and saw this slim volume tucked in there... I actually have no idea where it came from, oh well.

The Christmas Shoes follows two different families, one which is falling apart due to illness and another due to a lack of effort. The two families cross paths on several occasions (some pleasant and some not so much) but never converge. It's a fairly accurate reality for most people who live in the same community. And truthfully some of the most impactful moments in my life will probably never be understood by the seemingly random people who were present.

For me this book is pretty religious, which I actually don't mind seeing as how it is set at **Christmas**, and it does a lovely job of tightrope walking that line and never becoming actually preachy. I appreciate that; preachy

prose is one of my least favourite things in literature.

Probably my biggest disappointment in this book was the text itself; it gives a whole new meaning to the term “bland”. With all the heart-string pulling ammunition available in this story (and a fabulous message to boot) you would think it would invoke some feelings in me. It didn’t. It was sweet and a bit sad but overall it just sort of felt like regurgita of the same message that is in pretty much every holiday book; people are more precious than gifts.

And THAT is a message I completely agree with. However, this book bored me overall.

**Category: A Book set at Christmas.**

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## **Haley S says**

Pardon me while I cry my eyes out.

This book was so good but so sad. I definitely cried more than once while reading this short and sweet little story. For anyone looking for a Christmas story, this is it. All of the plots and characters in it were amazingly written out. Donna VanLiere is a great author. As soon as I finished this story, I decided that I wanted to read the next book in this series, The Christmas Blessing. This second book in the series is about Nathan.

However, he is grown up now and not a little eight-year-old anymore.

The size of the book is perfect for the type of book that it is. It wasn’t too slow-paced, but it wasn’t too fast-paced. It was just right.

The cover is sweet too. My sister first read this book and when I saw the cover and read the synopsis, I knew I had to read it. 5 stars to the front cover!

Wow! I don’t even know how to finish this review. Of course, this book deserves 5 stars. This story is a good reminder of the importance of being thankful for what we have. We shouldn’t go on about life simply wanting more. This story made it clear that we all need to stop, take a breath, and be happy for what we have. That is how we get into the Christmas spirit.

Title: The Christmas Shoes

Author: Donna VanLiere

Author’s Website: <http://www.donnavanliere.com/>

Reading Resolution: #26

This review is written in my own opinions and words.

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## **Camilla says**

3.5 stars.

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### **Dana says**

It's been awhile since I have read a tear jerker this book is simply heart wrenching yet absolutely wonderful. Love the message of it just beautiful and highly recommend

It to anyone who wants a good book with a good message that is an easy to read wonderful Christmas book! And PS make sure A. You aren't sitting in the dentist office while reading as they might think you are crying from tooth pain and B. Have a box of tissues handy

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### **Latha Viknesh (betweenthecovers\_sg) says**

I would give this book a 2.5.

Touching book with a nice message but not my cup of tea. Story lacks character development, maybe because it's based on a song of the same name. People reviewed it as a tear-jerker. I didn't tear but some parts were heart-warming.

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### **Kate says**

3.5/5

A light and easy read. One of those heart-warming books about how a single event can alter the course of someone's life. I found that it jumped back and forth between narrators in a way that was not always easy to follow.

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### **Sandra Baši? says**

Sadness and pain mixed with warmth and gratitude. Right book at the right time - Christmas time! Christmas is not only decorations and gifts underneath the tree, Christmas is love, family and faith. Books like this one are here to remind us that, over and over again. Don't celebrate holidays for material causes, stay still for a moment and be grateful - for life and for persons beside you.

All of us have something to believe in, so have faith and BELIEVE!

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### **Laura says**

Yes, this is a teary eyed read, but I am not ashamed to say that I really enjoyed it. It reminded me a lot of the theme expressed in Jimmy Stewart's movie, It's a Wonderful Life. It will remind you of what's really important in your life. I know, while I was reading it today, I blew up my husband's phone with random text messages telling him how much I loved him. I like books that inspire me to love my family more and to appreciate them and this book did exactly that. I look forward to reading the rest of this Christmas series.

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### **Simply. Sarah says**

I had to take breaks from this book just so I could cry.

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### **Lizzie says**

LOVED this book! So heartwarming and such great messages! Most people have heard the song, but the book is even better! Completely recommend!

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### **Caitlyn says**

This book is 132 pages of sadness. I hate cancer! I hate it! I hate it! I was upset when reading The Fault in Our Stars, but I cried reading this book.

We, as humans, become so focused and stressed during the holidays that greediness tends to get the best of us. We are never necessarily satisfied with 'having enough' during the holidays, but simply wanting or needing more.

This book not only places the reader in another individual's tragic situation, but also makes the reader realize that just being able to breathe around the holidays surrounded by family and loved ones should be enough for us, without being overly greedy.

Some may say the story is a coincidence, but personally, I believe the individual in this book served as an angel for this eight-year-old child. I could go on and on, but to make it simple, it's the little things that we definitely take advantage of.

5 stars, hands down.

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### **Jennifer says**

This book was beautiful! I read it so quickly, and I couldn't stop thinking about it. I want to read the sequel but it may have to wait till next year. I am going to watch the movie.. I might cry like I cried whilst reading the book.

Please read the book, it's a beautiful story with a beautiful message.

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### **Elizabeth says**

This novel follows two different characters during a difficult Christmas season: A boy, Nathan, learns that



his mother is dying of cancer, while a hard-working lawyer, Robert, realizes that he has become distanced from his wife and children. When a chance encounter brings the boy and the lawyer to the same department store check-out line, Robert learns something beautiful about the true meaning of Christmas.

I was not expecting this book to be the Great American Novel. I was expecting it to be sappy, saccharine even, and it was, and I don't have a problem with that. Sometimes I'm in the mood for something schmaltsy, and that's fine. If I hadn't wanted to read something sappy, I'd have quit after the first few pages. I was not expecting it to be Christian fiction, although that doesn't really surprise me. What did surprise me was this book's knack for making me angry.

First of all, the mom has been very sick for some time. She's tired and getting weaker. She's on hospice. She knew from the very beginning that she probably wouldn't make it. She's already done the chemotherapy, and she's got a hospital bed for her living room. She's come home to die. So I want to know why in the heck she and her husband wait **until the day she dies** to tell their eight-year-old son that the mother won't get better. Up until that day, he thought she wasn't seriously sick. I understand the parents wanting to protect the child, but they can't save the mother, so he's going to have to face this tragedy anyway. The least they could do was be honest with him. Moreover, during the mother's last hours of consciousness, the father and grandmother sit with her, read to her, talk to her. When she's safely dead, they decide it's okay for their son to come in and say goodbye. He's eight. He's not a baby. He's certainly old enough to understand what's going on, and they have robbed him of something he'll never regain. But Nathan is relieved, because apparently his father almost waited until the next day to tell the son. So hey, it could have been even worse.

Most of the cancer plot is done well enough. It's sappy and a little predictable, but that's okay for this style of book. There were even some things that I liked. For instance, I always thought shoes were a sort of strange gift to give to someone who could no longer walk, so I was wondering how VanLiere would introduce the idea. It turns out that Nathan heard his teacher saying that her favorite Christmas was the one on which she received, as a present, a new pair of shoes. So Nathan, who only just learned of his mother's impending death, dashes off to buy the only thing he knows of TO buy. It makes sense, and it's both sweet and sad. That said, the teacher character isn't all that well-written: in 29 years of teaching, she's never had a student whose parent had died. Really? 29 years' worth of students all came from happy, two-parent homes? VanLiere did not have to make Nathan's surroundings artificially cheery in order to make his situation, which is intrinsically tragic, seem sad.

What really steamed me about this book is the other plot, the lawyer who has a chance encounter with the boy. He had a nice job. He bought a nice house. This, apparently, makes him a bad guy. His wife thinks that he works too many hours, and she wants a divorce. She doesn't suggest trying to reconnect, nor does she want counseling. No, the first indication that he has that she is in any way dissatisfied is when she says that she wants a divorce, which she then tries to justify with the flimsiest rationalization I can imagine: "Let's face it, you left this family a long time ago." Are we even supposed to like the wife? It's not that she's mean. In fact, outside this one scene (a page and a half), she doesn't really have any personality. What did he do that was so wrong? He embezzled! No, wait, that's not it. Maybe he had an affair? No? Did he just get drunk and make a pass at his mother-in-law? No? Really? You mean he only worked hard and lived honestly? Heck, I'd divorce him too.

But like I said, there isn't enough of the wife in the book to like or dislike her. She's just kind of there. Robert's mother, however, has a personality. Not a great one. She's nosy, arrogant, judgmental, mean-spirited, and she's one of the story's heroes because it was she (and not the wife) pointed out to Robert the error of his ways. She cornered him, and even though he did not want to discuss it with her, he listened to her ~~sermon lecture~~ conversation. But did it have to be so much like a catechism? What is the problem in your

marriage? I'll tell you. You are the problem in your marriage. Why are you the problem in your marriage? And on. And on. The mother seems to have been endowed with the ability to know exactly what's troubling her daughter-in-law without ever having discussed anything with her, but is she psychic? No! Turns out she can speak for all women. Joy!

Meanwhile, the rich lawyer is contrasted with Nathan's family, where money is "tight," and they "can barely make ends meet." They bought a ranch house, put in a new roof, new floors, new carpeting, and new plumbing. And I don't mean they fixed a leak; they ripped out the pipes and put in new ones, and they made repairs to the foundation as well. They made it "the nicest" home on the block. Then, the wife went nuts buying all kinds of new plants for the garden. Meanwhile, her husband had a steady job, and she worked part-time. But, oh, by the way, they're so poor. The husband is kept awake nights feeling guilty for not being a better provider, and the wife consoles him by saying that there is a difference between wants and needs, and at least they have their needs. Heck, if a sprawling ranch house, remodel, and plants are needs, I'd hate to see their wants. Of course, by the end of the story, the lawyer learns how misguided he has been. He says, "We all have questions in this life. It's taken me a long time to figure out what the really important question are. Not *How am I going to make enough money?* [. . .] No, more like *What are flowers thinking beneath the snow?*" That about says it all, I think. Years from now, I can tell my own kids, "Aw, gee, Sport. I'm sorry you're having the seizures/chest pains/asthma attacks/allergies/near-sightedness/any-kind-of-ailment, but son, that's just not important. You should focus instead on the emotions of last summer's dead plants. That *really* matters." (I assume VanLiere meant "seeds" or "bulbs," not flowers, but it's a moot point anyway since neither dead flowers nor live bulbs possess an amygdala.)

That's most of what bothered me with this book. It was too shallow, the characters were unlikeable (except for the unlikable lawyer--him I understood). It tries too hard. It presents a moving scene, but then it spells out why it's moving, and then it has the characters narrate their own process of discovering the beauty/sorrow/love of the season. It's the kind of Christian book that gives Christian fiction a bad reputation, and I'm not even sure how Christian it is. I didn't appreciate VanLiere insulting Easter, the holiest of our festivals, just to make Christmas look better by comparison, nor did I enjoy her interpretation of the star that guided the magi as being the light at the end of the tunnel. Look at the light! Go into the star! It's a death star! Oh, please.

Life is too short to read bad books. Save yourself from this one.

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## **Antof9 says**

I'm not sure why I'd start reading a book like this on the anniversary of the day my dad died, but I started it yesterday. After sobbing through the first half, I put it down to finish it this evening. It's one of those short, heartwarming stories where a hardened workaholic learns the true meaning of Christmas, someone dies (actually multiple people die), and you really wish it was snowing outside. In short, it was lovely, and I cried all the way through it.

The perspective change throughout was a little confusing. Every time a chapter started and the writer said "I", I had to pay careful attention to which story I was reading. I swear I re-read the fake forward about three times (being confused about "Donna Van Liere" writing about her wife.

But it was still a great book, and I loved how Robert's mom yelled at him. I also loved her neighbors, and

Doris.

It's great for a good cry and a reminder of what Christmas is all about. And it's a quick read :)

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### **Nathan says**

This was given to me as a gag gift, and (spoiler alert!) it sucks. I suppose you could say that it is somewhat capably written, much in the same way that a high school essay takes a few scattered facts and stretches them out into a full research page paper. That's where the positives end. The book is filled with enough sugary schmaltz and false sentimentality to send cookie monster into a diabetic coma. The character development (if you could call it that) of secondary characters serves little purpose other than to push the plot forward to it's predictable conclusion. Protagonist is a jerk, everyone else is a good person, sick people die, lessons learned, the end. The book is basically A Christmas Carol without any of the badass ghosts. I've read Hallmark greeting cards with more interesting plot twists than this book. I've got to end this review for now; I have a copy of My Humps: the Novel that needs to be read.

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### **Sarah says**

4 Stars

I did enjoy this story a lot. It was inspirational and lovely and showed how just a little kindness can truly change someone's life.

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### **Manjushree' says**

A short, simple and touching book. I chose to read this book because of the numerous reviews here that said it's a tear-jerking book. I've never had a book that brought tears to my eyes and was both intrigued & skeptical that this book would be the first one to do it. So I went for it with a "Bring it on! Make me tear" attitude. Let's just say you don't want to be reading this book with mascara on cause you're probably going to start looking like a raccoon by the end of it. Loved the book!

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