

# *The Brightest Star*

*By Stephen Rusiniak*

***They had spent precious little time together since marrying, but in truth, this was all a part of their plan.***



It had been two days since they had last been together and two more would come and go before they would see each other again. On this particular morning and after his overnight tour had ended, he returned to the small studio apartment that they shared.

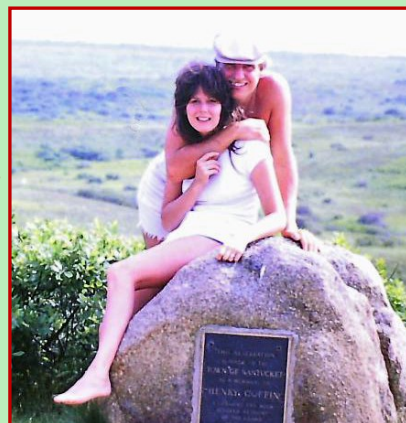
As he was preparing to catch a few hours rest before heading out to his next job he was surprised when he found that her side of the pullout sofa bed was still warm from where she had recently rested—reminding him ever so gently and as he drifted off to sleep of how much he was missing her. Much like two ships silently passing in the night, their paths had come ever so close to crossing on this early December morning, and they would have if not for her departure just a few moments before his arrival home from work.

They tried to keep in touch as best they could during these times apart, but their attempts to converse were often hampered by the resulting restrictions that were too often dictated by time and circumstance. Whenever they found that rare opportunity when they could talk via telephone, albeit briefly, they would, as the sound of their voices helped each to sustain, and with a renewed sense of purpose, the reason for which they willingly suffered so many and all too frequent days apart.

But while time and circumstance might have hindered their in-person conversations, they still communicated, the old-fashioned way, with pen and paper and with notes left for the other posted on their refrigerator door. It had been this way since they had returned from their honeymoon six months earlier—notes that sometimes shared the highlights of each other's day, copies of their schedules, and various other pieces of important information, but every time and somewhere within these posted pieces of paper could always be found numerous little messages of love—always endearing and always heartfelt, and without a doubt, the most important postings left on the door.

But on this morning, she left for him a posted suggestion for what they might do together on that rarest of times when each had, surprisingly, the very same day off from all of their various jobs.

They had spent precious little time together since marrying, but in truth, this was all a part of their plan. They were earning and saving every penny they made in the hopes of buying their own home, sooner than later. And, to this end, she had her career—a special education teacher



**The honeymoon couple—the last time they spent more than a few days together for almost a year.**

who worked another two jobs as well—as a tutor helping students in need of additional academic support and as an aide working evenings at a local nursing home.

He too had a full-time job as a police officer which offered him extensive overtime opportunities as well as a plethora of police-required side jobs—even more now with the approaching holiday season.

But on this one day when incredibly neither had a job scheduled, they treasured the opportunity to sleep in sans setting any wakeup alarm, enjoyed a leisurely breakfast, and lingered over a couple cups of coffee before setting off to find their first-ever Christmas tree as a married couple. They quickly found one at a local church lot selling holiday trees and wreaths. It certainly wasn't the biggest tree for sale by far—not much more than a five-footer but its branches were thick, and it was well-rounded and full. Afterward, they bought a small tree stand and a couple strands of colored lights.

Once home they quickly set up their tree—its fragrant scent quickly filling their small apartment. He strung the lights while she hung the homemade ornaments made for them by their talented sister-in-law and artist.

When they were done they admired their sparsely decorated little tree and agreed wholeheartedly that even though it lacked an abundance of hanging holiday decorations, it was, just the same, absolutely perfect and beautiful—the best Christmas tree that either of them had ever seen!

But then he noticed a glaring omission. A Christmas tree needs a Christmas tree topper—maybe a simple ceramic angel, or something as elaborate as a handblown glass ornamental nativity star. Whatever the answer might have been, their little tree lacked it and suddenly it wasn't nearly as perfect or as beautiful as it had been just moments before.

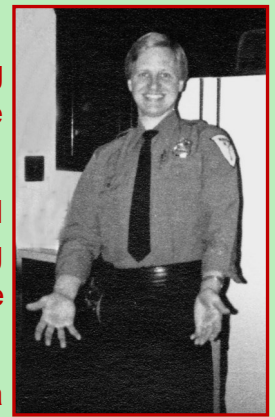
Suddenly he came upon an idea that could restore their little tree's lost perfection. From within their apartment's sole closet, he found an old shirt box. With a pair of scissors, he snipped from its top a not-so-perfect, kind of irregularly shaped five-pointed star. He then wrapped the cardboard cutout with several small pieces of silvery aluminum foil, and then, with one more, he affixed to its back a hand-rolled foil loop. And when he was finished he placed his foil-covered creation atop their tree—the strings of lights suddenly reflecting their sparkling colors so brilliantly upon this, now, the brightest star. And once again, their little Christmas tree was nothing less than perfect and beautiful as now would be all of their Christmas yet to be.

Within a few years, they saved enough money, and they bought a house. Repair and refurbishing projects quickly commenced. Children and puppies soon followed and suddenly their house had become their home. And after four decades, it still is.

Not surprisingly and to this very day, a not-so-perfect irregularly shaped five-pointed foil-covered star has been placed atop every one of our Christmas trees for the last forty-plus Christmases. And you know, I suspect that it always will.



The teacher, early in her career



The young officer



The Brightest Star, atop our tree, now 40 years and counting



## ***the backstory:***

For many years several of our holiday guests have noted the homemade makeshift silver star resting atop our decorated Christmas tree. Some have inquired as to its origins—probably wondering why something so obviously homemade, (or maybe they were thinking, *cheap*) was topping our tree. When this happens I happily share with them the story of its humble beginnings and then of its lasting longevity.

But one time, more recently, as I was reminiscing with someone about my memories of the earliest days of my marriage. I shared how Karen and I were often apart due to the various jobs we were working, and how we communicated primarily through little notes lovingly left upon our refrigerator door. (Cellphones weren't commonplace just yet.) Somehow, and I don't recall how but I guess my recollections brought me around to our first Christmas together as a married couple, and to the origins and the continued use of our foil-covered tree topper. My audience of one responded in such a way, (Thank you, Tiffany), that I realized I needed to memorialize these memories—which is just what I did later that very same day.

Like so many of the pieces that I have written, this one, after its creation, spent some time residing in my files with its first and only appearance here on my webpage. But, you never know. I kind of think that this one may one day turn up in a book, magazine or newspaper in the future. You never know! Ho, Ho!

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A few of the other decorations, some homemade, received over the years that always find a place on our tree



40-plus years and counting,  
the brightest star, rests high atop  
another of our Christmas trees.

*I suspect that it always will.*