

## The TV Ghosts of Christmas Past

Years ago during Christmas, television would feature movies with a 'Christmas' theme. These were classics or their remakes, and we became so familiar with them that they defined the arrival of that special day for reflection and family get-togethers. One of these was the original 'Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street' (1947). It starred Maureen O'Hara as the harried mother and Macy's Department Store events manager, John Payne was the lawyer and her beau, a young Natalie Wood was Maureen's daughter and lastly, there was Edmund Gwenn as Kris Kringle. This is actually a very subtle movie which you can interpret on many levels (the struggle of a single mother in a stressful career, truth versus business profits or just a post-war feel good story) and it is one that leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

Let me remind you of the plot: the character Kris Kringle manages to generate a lot of publicity for Macy's as a Santa Claus but there's a problem; he actually claims to be Santa Claus for real – his name 'Kris Kringle' is the German form for gift-giver or 'Christ Child'; people are outraged at his claim and he is eventually put on trial, defended by John Payne and is found to be Santa Claus. Is he really who he claims to be? Is he just a well-meaning eccentric who happens to make people happy at Christmas? Does the truth matter?

The movie ends with the ambiguous final scene where the now married Maureen and John are in their new house embracing while her daughter is playing in the back yard. They spot in the corner, a red cane, just like the cane that the character Kris Kringle has but was without all Christmas day. Maureen thinks it may not be his but left by the previous owners of the house. John, who argued in court that Kris was not crazy, says: 'Maybe... and maybe I didn't do such a wonderful thing after all...' There's a close up of the cane and a fade-out. End of movie.

Was it Kris Kringle's cane or just another cane? If it is his cane, then how did it get there? Did Santa Claus really pay a visit after all, leaving his calling card? And what does John's final statement mean? That he got off someone not in fact Santa Claus or does it mean he did not do such a great job because the real Santa Claus (Kris Kringle) did not actually need his help because truth is its own best defender. See what I mean about ambiguity?

The whole period of Christmas is magical, especially children for whom the realities of adulthood are mercifully still far away. Whether you believe in Santa Claus or any divine beings is up to you but the essence of the movie's message is to be good and compassionate. It qualifies as a reasonable New Year's Resolution as well.