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About 515 words

CHRISTMAS TUBA FESTIVAL

Next week is the annual Christmas Tuba Festival. Other towns have Christmas pageants and Christmas parades, with giant Santa balloons and dancing elves. Not us. We have the annual Christmas Tuba Festival. Because what could be more festive than the sound of a tuba? The deep, lifeless sound says Christmas to all of us.

In our town, that's Christmas spirit. And not just Christmas, we try to include everyone. We have non-Christian tuba players: a Rastafarian boy, a Hindi woman, and a Jewish man--he has a little menorah made out of little miniature tubas. We had a Buddhist, but she found enlightenment, and said it did not involve the tuba.

In nursery school they begin encouraging children to play the tuba. I liked the viola. When I was twelve, I rode the bus to the neighboring town. There it was, a place I'd only heard rumors about: a music store. They didn't just sell tubas. They sold clarinets and

drums and French horns, and violas. Lots and lots of violas. There was a bulletin board with information on lessons.

I saved my allowance, and each week I secretly took the bus out to the music teacher for viola lessons. Have you ever heard “Silent Night” played on the viola? It sounds much prettier than it does on the tuba.

My parents didn’t understand. They didn’t want a viola player. They wanted me to be like other kids, but I was different. I had to hide it from them. So that they wouldn’t suspect anything, I kept my viola in an instrument case for a tuba. One day I would come out to them, but not yet, I wasn’t ready. Maybe in college, during band week.

It bothered me, how different I was. Everywhere I looked, there were signs for the Christmas Tuba Festival. People bought tuba cookie cutters and decorated the cookies with red and green sprinkles. They painted tubas onto those shiny Christmas ball ornaments. They added a tuba to a statue of the Baby Jesus at our church. Everywhere I looked there were signs that I was different.

My town was backward, and I knew what I had to do. On the morning of the festival, all the tuba players gathered in the field in front of the church, warming up with songs like “Jingle Bells.” I snuck into the church, my backpack filled with surprises for the tuba players. I climbed to the bell tower and waited. The festival began with the usual praise for the tuba, followed by “Frosty the Snowman” and “Silver Bells.” When they got to

“Silent Night” I did just that. I opened my backpack and pulled out the grapefruits. One by one I threw them into the openings of the tuba. Wham! One less tuba playing. Wham! Another. They didn’t know where they were coming from. People kept looking around, trying to find the culprit. Smack! Another slam dunk. One by one, the sound of each tuba was blocked by a grapefruit. It was the best Christmas ever.