

## CHRISTMAS and NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS 2021-2022

### A Christmas Gift from the Tiny Village of Bethlehem, Tobago

By Jane Hamilton-Merritt



The above image reminds me of a wonderful surprise blessing that came my way this winter. In my mind that is “me” reading something I’ve written that might be important to others. Little did I know that being interested in a young girl from Tobago so long ago would result in this Christmas blessing.

She wrote: “I’m writing this story because it has been an integral part of my life since I was a young girl, the second of nine siblings. I lived in the tiny village of Bethlehem, worked as a maid at the Amoco Guest House in Tobago. The guest house hosted people from abroad.

“My family was very poor, and I walked from my village to the guest house. It was a long walk. I drew my inspiration from the beauty around me. I wrote tons of stories. My desire was to become a writer, but I didn’t think it would ever happen. I didn’t recall knowing a writer or how to become one.

“I continued to write many stories and poems. These I would tell my brothers and sisters since I had no other outlet. Story telling was a living art in our culture. Frustrated, I prayed and asked God to let me meet a writer, it would be a sign for me to continue writing.

“One day, new guests arrived. Days later, a nice lady came up to me and we began talking. I was always anxious to meet people from across the seas to learn about places beyond my tiny island. She was kind and gentle, I forgot my shyness. I told her of my desire to become

a writer. She told me that she was a writer. One of her books *“Boonmee and the Lucky White Elephant”* was used to teach English to children in Thailand. She graciously gave me a signed copy of that beautiful book. I was very grateful. She was such an unassuming, sweet lady that I never forgot her. God had answered by prayers.

“I was anxious to share my treasure with my friends and family. I would often boast that the book was given to me by a real writer. I used it to teach my younger siblings to read. It was kept in my family for many years. Years later while moving to Trinidad I lost it. But I never forgot the kind lady who took the time to talk to a scared person and offer me her book. I still remember to this day the calmness of her spirit, how she spoke to me as if I really mattered. I felt that she saw me for who I was. I never forgot her or the name of that book. I always wanted to thank her for acknowledging me, for being so gracious. To let her know that because of her I stuck to a dream.”

Her name is Kathleen Mcghee. She continues to write and now lives in the U.S. She found me through the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame which forwarded her letter to me. I was moved when I read Kathleen’s story. I responded with a letter and a signed copy of *“Boonmee and the Lucky White Elephant.”*

Three days before Christmas, I received another letter from Kathleen. “This morning I was telling my daughter that writing requires lots of patience. I went to the mailbox and there was your book. Again, it is a sign for me to continue with what I love best. I love the words you wrote in it. I cannot help but remember the day you gave the first copy to me. I still recall the words you wrote. It was ‘for Kathleen, like Boonmee may all your dreams come true.’

“As I turned the pages of the book, the pictures, and scenes brought memories of a time long ago in Tobago when I read the story of Boonmee weaving the magic of your words to my sisters and brothers. They were so quiet, seated on the floor of our little house, listening with rapt attention.

“Today, I presented your book to my eight- year- old granddaughter. I had long told her the story about you. She is going to read it and enjoy it as my siblings did so long ago. You will be forever in my heart and prayers.”

This once shy young girl from Tobago and the tiny village of Bethlehem has given me a most precious Christmas gift.