

## Steve Robinson - This I Believe

This I believe: Christmas is a place. Stretched out on the shag carpet of the suburban living room where I grew up, I first discovered this place within the imaginary city I built of packages beneath our shiny aluminum Christmas tree. Driving my Matchbox cars down the ribbon streets of this city, the rotating color wheel illuminated a place that was Christmas. Christmas was not in the packages; it was the spaces between.

A few years later I would find Christmas while sitting with a girl at the school holiday play. The play itself did nothing for me because my mind was so occupied with wanting to hold her hand, though I couldn't summon the courage. When she grabbed my hand instead, it was all suddenly Christmas -- the room, the play, the girl.

Christmas is rarely where it is advertised directly, but often nearby. I never found it at Rockefeller Center, for instance, but once, just a few blocks away, it was there in the red taillights of the cabs when snow fell so hard those lights were all you could see.

I even found Christmas in a bathroom doorway one year. There on the hard pink tile my wife turned toward me with a shocked look in her eyes and held up a small stick turned pale blue, telling us we would be parents the next year.

Nowadays I find Christmas every year, though never more than once or twice, and it rarely lasts an hour - sometimes just seconds.

But the seconds are enough. Last year I found it in the time it took to walk down the narrow aisle between two choirs on the way to Communion -- the choirs and supporting instruments so loud that my body felt the vibration of their collective voice. Christmas was the place of that voice.

Christmas is a place, and I don't have a map to give you, though I wish I did. I certainly won't test your patience by naming all the false places that Christmas obviously is not. It helps to look sideways. It helps to look for a particular quality of light. Mostly, I try to keep open to it and hope that it finds me.