

GOD WITH US STORY 50: PAUL LOREI | "Green Ghost!" (Special Adventmass Story)

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GREEN GHOST!

BY PAUL LOREI

This story was originally shared at a first Presence for Christmas in 2010. Since then, it's become legendary. View Paul telling the original [here](#).

I didn't have a lot to brag about in third-grade. Some kids had Batman lunch boxes and walkie-talkies and new Schwinn bicycles. I did not. They would tell me about all the shows they watched on TV. Not me. All I had to brag about was seven brothers—three older, four younger—and two sisters on backorder. Nobody brags about their brothers, at least not when you're eight. Brothers are a mixed bag. They're good for a

joke and a laugh and a punch. But just about the time they have got you wrapped in a headlock and are grinding your forehead into the rug, you begin to wonder about the whole concept of brothers. But, like everything, I suppose, there is an upside.

Growing up, I never wore hand-me-downs. I wore third-me-downs and fourth-me-downs. When I carried my lunch to school, there were no surprises: it would be tuna fish, peanut butter, or baloney. I remember seeing my mother asking the butcher for a pound of bologna...sliced thin. He'd slice a piece, hold it up, and say, "How's that?" My mother answered, "Thinner please." He sliced it again...and again. When she could see her fingers through the slice, then she'd say "That's fine Mickey, I'll take a pound."

You know we got to drink pop twice a year. I thought the stuff was liquid gold. We got to eat at a restaurant, a *real* restaurant, once a year. We'd pile into the Chrysler station wagon and push through the doors. My dad would slap three dollars down on the counter and order thirty hamburgers. There was nothing like seeing the manager's face blanche when the Loreis showed up for 10 cent burger night at McDonalds.

The other thing that happened once a year was a certain holiday, you know the one, right before the end of the year. I was really looking forward to it. All the other kids in school would brag about all the toys they got for Christmas, maybe a new bicycle, or a Johnny Quest lunchbox. I remember one kid got a large plastic dragon with glowing eyes that shot red plastic fireballs from its mouth. I was so jealous. I always wondered why God made me a Lorei. There were so many other families he could have dropped me into. I could have done really well. Oh, the toys I would have gotten. For me, every year it was about the same as the last. Hope dashed on the rocks. Christmas: the big disappointment.

Every year I got socks and a coloring book, a cheap roll-up sled... and maybe a new shirt. I hated getting clothes. They weren't a gift, they were an obligation—a way for parents tricking their children into looking nice. I knew what I wanted for Christmas. But there was no chance. I saw the ad on TV. It was an ad for a board game called Green Ghost, except when the announcer said the name, a chorus of spooky voices haunted out "Greeeen Ghoooooost." It was a board game unlike any other. It was glow

in the dark with an elevated, two-tiered board. You moved your players, little ghosts around the treacherous path. If you landed on the wrong space, your player would fall through a hole in the board down into a dungeon.

I thought, "Wow, if I had Green Ghost, what joy would fill my life." My mom asked me what I wanted for Christmas and I knew she had some sort of connection with Santa but I didn't quite have it figured out. I said I wanted Greeeen Ghooooost. She had no idea what it was so I showed her the Sears catalog. If you remember the Sears catalog, it was full of toys, every toy imaginable. We opened to the page with Green Ghooooost. Her eyes got a little wide. Most board games were five dollars, the expensive ones were ten, Green Ghooooost was twelve. My mom said, "We'll see." That meant it was out of our price range and "Don't bet on it buster." Santa, at the Loreis, was always on a budget.

That didn't stop me from dreaming about Greeeen Ghooooost. I thought about playing that game, how much fun it would be. I imagined going into school after Christmas break and bragging about Greeeen Ghooooost. I knew my brothers and I would play Green Ghost day after day, month after month. We wouldn't fight anymore. Everyone would be happy. It would lift me up and out of the challenges of this world. Life would be wonderful.

Christmas finally came around and our family went to midnight Mass. I remember walking in the door and the entire church was filled, all the seats. We had to make our way around to the far side where they set up folding chairs for the overflow crowd, a place near the choir, right under the large crucifix. When we sat down, I got to see our parish in a whole different light. So many were dressed up in long coats, jackets, ties, the ladies in their Christmas dresses.

There's something magnificent about midnight Mass with the darkened stained glass windows, the beautiful music, the incense and the candles. As lovely as it was, all I was thinking about was Christmas presents, and one in particular. I kept devising ways in my head to speed the mass up. I thought they could sing a few less verses, cut out a couple of readings, shorten up the homily, and, if they really wanted to save time they could really speed up communion. They used to sell a little toy gun that shot small plastic discs about the size of a quarter. I thought, if the monsignor would just fill that little shooter with the communion wafers and say "Body

of Christ” and the congregation would open wide their mouths and say "Amen." He could aim and fire... ping, ping, ping. Communion is over. I kept that idea to myself. Finally, the Mass really was over. We went home. I couldn't sleep. It was like a month of Mondays. And, finally, it arrived.

When you get up on Christmas morning in the twilight and come down to the tree and there are all those beautiful lights around the tree and you see the snow outside. You smell the fresh cut pine of the Christmas tree. And there, the presents are awaiting. It's the magical moment of a childhood. That is the moment when all those presents can be anything you wish for. I remember all of us boys waiting there until my parents gave us the sign. When the moment finally arrived we fell on those presents and ripped them open like jackals on a fresh antelope. Wrapping and ribbons flew everywhere. Faces were filled with fever and expectation.

When the dust finally settled I got a pair of socks, a coloring book, a pair of underwear, a roll-up sled and a GAF Viewmaster with a story about a lost world. I didn't get Green Ghost.

I looked around at my brother's presents. One of them got the game, Operation, somebody else got Lincoln Logs, another one got a boomerang. So, I could sort of enjoy what they got too. But it was one more trip down Disappointment Road. When I got back to school I wouldn't have anything to brag about. Fortunately I could drown my sorrows in Christmas cookies and, if I was lucky, a long drink of cherry pop.

With a big family you've got a lot of kids and lots of godparents. Every year either we'd make the rounds to the godparents house, or they would come to ours. That year was our turn. They would come to our house. My godparents came over a couple days after Christmas. I wasn't thinking about anything else... as I had already given up on this Christmas... maybe next year.

Well, Jim & Marion Nies, my godparents, popped in the door and one of their kids put a present in my hands. I looked at it and my small heart skipped a beat. I thought "Oh my gosh, it's the right size. It's the right weight." I shook it gently. It had the right sound. There is both hope and danger hidden in an unopened present. I did not want to be crushed again. All the while I said to myself, "Please God, Green Ghost!" I paused, then peeled back the wrapping, bit by bit. I saw the green and black colors. I saw the spooky letters. I read the box, "Green Ghost." I cheered and

cheered as I went tearing around the house 13 times, "Greeeen Ghooooost!"

Beside myself with glee, I couldn't be happier. I figured everybody would want to play. Everybody. I started with the adults but they were busy talking. So I asked my older brothers but they were busy with their own toys. Finally, I corralled a couple of my younger brothers and one of the Nies kids. I said, "Let's play Greeeen Ghooooost! This is going to be soooo cool!"

The only problem was, it is supposed to be played in the dark, and both the board and the ghosts were supposed to be charged under a lamp for an hour so they could glow in the dark. I turned the lights off in the den but of course it was the middle of the day and we had no window shades so the whole glow-in-the-dark thing didn't work. At all. I did manage to set up the elevated board but, so zealous was I to get started, I hadn't read the directions. As I was trying to figure things out, there was a lull in the action.

One of my brother's got up to get a Christmas cookie. He never came back. Another brother took off, and then another. Pretty soon it was just me staring at one of the Nies kids. We were looking at each other and I realized this was not going to work. "We'll have to play... another time... when it's dark." He looked relieved. I packed up Green Ghost, took it upstairs and put it under my bed.

There was this profound sense of disappointment. The players were smaller than I expected. It wasn't as cool as I expected. It just didn't seem that fun. I felt hollowed out. I thought I don't have anything to brag about to the kids back at school. The only thing I have to brag about is seven brothers, two sisters on backorder, and a mother and father that love me, and godparents that were very generous and a little child in a little manger a long time ago who proved that for Christmas is not what you get, but what you give.

[**WATCH: PAUL LOREI** shares this story at Presence for Christmas](#)

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of

Peace."
Isaiah 9:6



PAUL & GRETCHEN LOREI

are parishioners of St. George Parish in Erie, PA. They have been married 35 years and have been blessed with five children and five grandchildren. Paul is an award-winning photographer & portrait artist ([GO](#)), story-teller & author ([GO](#)), theologian/philosopher & friend.

Bio above from Greg, additionally adding: Paul and Gretchen have been beloved, engaged and influential Catholic leaders on many fronts in the Erie community and beyond. Our youngest, Dominic, is named after their child who passed away days after birth. We discerned to date at little Dominic Lorei's funeral on June 19, 1996.

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