

## The Gift

*By Dan Hardesty*

Many, many years ago around the turn of some century or other a gift was given to some town or other that ran along the banks of the river. I don't remember which river it was but I do remember some big gray building that sat right at an elbow of the river and right across from it stood something that may have been a cathedral in times past. But there was a problem. And it started way back when the river was only four or five feet deep in the middle and only a long stone's throw or so wide so that there was some coming and going across it.

Now the folks that built the gray building had never been accepted by the townspeople across the river because they had just meandered into the area from the north. At first they just stayed during the warm months and lived on small game and what they could forage in the land north of the river. When the cold set in they bundled together what little they had accumulated and worked their way back to the main village.

One season about a hundred of them settled near the river and stayed. When they went near the river the townsmen on the other side heaved stones at them attempting to drive them away. Now to shorten the story I'll tell you that in time the newcomers became quite prosperous but the Othersiders never accepted them as neighbors even though they had become dependant on them to a greater degree than they realized. This bothered the Nearsiders more and more as time passed. One time they even tried to win the Othersiders' respect by building the imposing cathedral but it was considered untouchable so it had stood unused except by young vandals. The Nearsiders gave up on the Others after that and just took care of themselves, ignoring the ever worsening conditions across the river.

Just a few years ago there came a time when the Othersider children began lining the riverbank and just stared day after day at all the activity of the Nearsiders. At first they were not even noticed and then they were ignored and then a few Nearsiders became nervous. They wondered what was going on across the river. Well they had a council and decided to build a high wall and they would build it on the bank in front of the gray building so when they wanted to get away from the staring children they could get behind it.

Now wouldn't you know it? The last boards were finally attached to the top of the wall and it began falling ever so slowly right across the river. When it landed it formed a perfect bridge just as though it had been planned. It wasn't too many years later that the towns were completely merged and the holiday celebrating the Gift of the Staring Children's Bridge was celebrated on the first day of every spring.