

# IT's A Wonderful Life

**Right. Let's get some things straight from the start. This story's written in black and white, okay? So if you're looking for festive greenery, twinkling multi-coloured Christmas lights or red, red robins bob-bob-bobbing along, you're in the wrong place. All right then.....**

George rested his arms on the bridge and peered down through a curtain of snow into the darkness. If he wasn't so miserable, it might have struck him as funny to think back on those nights on the helpdesk when he'd wished he could *get* a life.... He sighed and hoisted himself up onto the railing.



"Oh bluddy'ell. Where've I fetched up now then?"

"Waaaaaaaah!!" George lurched sideways and grabbed the upright to steady himself. Only a second ago he'd been on the railing by himself; now there was a man perched there. And he didn't appear any happier about it than George was.

"Where'd you come from?!" George gasped.

"Ha, good question boyo. But more to the point," the man said, peering around, "where am I to?"

"What?"

The man rolled his eyes. "Watch my lips, lad. Where. Am. I. To?"

George gaped at him. "N-N-Newport," he stammered.

"Newport. Bloody marvellous." The man glared skywards.

"Oh yes, thank you *very* much."

"Wh-who *are* you?" George asked.

The man spat out a snowflake. "Guardian angel, see?" He held out a hand which George absently shook. "Name's Emlyn. And I'll tell you right now, bach, you don't want to be doing this."

George started to say it was none of his business, when the penny dropped. Guardian angel. Ohhhhhh.

"Ri-i-ight. Of course," He nodded eagerly. "You're going to tell me it's a waste, and life is still worth living and the world will be a poorer place without me." He looked at Emlyn expectantly.

"Er... no-o-ooo..." said Emlyn slowly. "No, I was going to tell you the tide's out, see? Jump now, and they'll still be able to chalk an outline round you when the sun comes up."

His hopes dashed, George buried his face in his hands.

"Oh God! I can't do anything right!!" he wailed.

"Well now, there you are! Let's just give this up as a bad job and you toddle off home then. Duw! That was easier than I thought." Emlyn looked at his watch. "I should make it back in time for the second half."

George blew his nose. "But.. it's just.... well... I mean, what's the *point* of it all?" he asked miserably.

Emlyn groaned. He wasn't good with this existential angst stuff. He'd had a tidy job lined up in New Zealand, with that lad from Llatiddos who'd got his international tickets pinched. And what happened? *You got it into your daft head to play poker with Clarence, that's what happened*, he reminded himself. *So now he's probably basking in a hot spring, you're stuck in Newport in the middle of the f... freezing winter, and you're missing the annual Seraphim v Cherubim rugby match.*

"How long have you been my guardian angel?" George asked.

"Oh, not long," admitted Emlyn. *Pretty much from the time I tried to put a full house up against a royal flush, in fact.*

"Well... does everyone have one?" George asked.

"Ah, no, not *everyone*. We've got to earn our wings, see?" George was looking blank, so he tried to explain. "Well there's no point in being a guardian angel to some Happy Harry, is there? Nothing to work with, but. We need people with potential."

George shook his head. "I don't understand."

"People who spend a lot of time at the end of their tether.

In stressful jobs, like," said Emlyn.

"I'm in IT support," said George dolefully.

"Well then! Custom-made for a guardian angel, you are,

boyo. Job like yours, you just want to hit the bottle at the end of a shift. Or hit someone else with it."

"Oh, that's IT support all right. So, you're saying that every time a computer blue-screens, an angel gets its wings?"

"Be serious, lad. It'd be standing room only up there."

Emlyn glanced at his watch again and hissed through his teeth. Half-time was nearly over. Wincing like a man about to face a prostate exam, he turned to George.

"So-o-o-oo," he began. He was hopeless at this empathy business.

"Besides the fact your job is thankless, mind-numbing, soul destroying and migraine-inducing, is there something particularly bothering you?"

George blinked. As redundant questions went, that had to rank up there with 'lottery wins - would you like one?' or 'shark wrestling - fancy a go?'

"I'm just so *tired* of it all," he sighed. "You know, if you could find even a little bit of proof that I haven't wasted the last fifteen years of my life, I'd be happy."

Emlyn pursed his lips. In fifteen *years* of support? There had to be something. He hopped off the railing and faced George.

"We'll just have to look harder then," he said resolutely, and snapped his fingers. A thick leather-bound volume appeared in his hands and half-moon glasses popped onto his nose.

"What's that?" asked George.

"George Bailey, This Is Your Life!" Emlyn proclaimed. "Always wanted to say that," he chuckled. "Actually it's a collection of all your support tickets from over the years." He opened the book at the first page and started to read, his lips moving occasionally. After several minutes, he peered over his glasses at George.

"A lot of people seem to want to speak to your supervisor after they've talked to you."

"Oh, well, that'd be because I'm a rude, incompetent idiot, you know?" said George, sarcastically.

"Ah. And according to this caller, a blanking-blanking son of a blank."

"Some people have a hard time accepting that their Solitaire won't come out."

Emlyn took a deep breath. "Right, what about this one then? Ethel Dunggody. Looks like you helped her a lot with posting photos online. What's she doing now?"

"Eighteen months."

"What?"

"Possibly twelve with time of for good behaviour. She bought herself a telephoto lens and turned into a career extortionist."

"Oh." Emlyn flipped over some more pages. "Ah! Now,



what about Harold Waxman? Lost his final year thesis and you helped him restore it. Well now! He might never have graduated without you! Might never have become such a fine..."

"VAT inspector," growled George.

"O-kaaaay, and moving on...." Emlyn read quietly for a few minutes.

"Here, what happened with this Charlie Croker, but? Was struggling to fit a new power supply? There's a note here to see Appendix A." Emlyn turned to the back of the book. "Ah, here we go.... Oh."

"What do you mean 'oh'? What's Appendix A?"

Emlyn swallowed. "Er... it's entitled 'Disciplinary Actions - Pending'."

"Look," snapped George, "that was the end of a really long shift, okay? I mean, I just assumed he'd have switched the computer off first! It wasn't my fault he's an idiot! Anyway, the burns weren't serious."

"Right, right." Appendix A seemed to occupy more than half the book. "Then there's Mr McSweeny, but. He was having trouble with his wireless connection and he says you refused to help him."

"Oh, yes, minor point there," said George, "the help he wanted was to hack back into his neighbour's connection after they changed the password on him."

"And this chap here complained when you refused to help him get rid of spyware?"

"Mr O'Driscoll, right? Thought so. That was his fourteenth call. Yeesh. He doesn't have *spyware*. He thinks aliens spy on him through his PC. Ha! Bet it doesn't mention that his cat and him both wear tinfoil helmets, does it?"

"Er... no. Mr Woolstone? Said you shouted at him."

"*Shouted* at him? He's lucky I couldn't reach through the phone and throttle him! Twenty minutes I spent, trying to get him to type in a web address. Twenty minutes!! And then he finally says, 'oh by the way, my 'w' key doesn't work so I've just been typing two 'v's instead - does it make a difference?' Well, gosh, I dunno. How has typing [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) been working out for you sir?"

"Yes, I see where that could be annoying.... Whoa! Walter Pringle? You talked him through synchronising his emails with his iPhone, and he suffered two cracked ribs and a concussion?!"

"He didn't tell me he was driving at the time!!"

Emlyn knew he wasn't going to find any happy-ever-after moments here, but Appendix A held a kind of car-crash fascination (no offence to Walter Pringle).

"Mrs Plunkett ...wanted help with her new PC. Said you were rude and condescending...."

"She wanted to know how to open the cardboard box."

".... Mr Collier.... computer couldn't see the printer?"

"He turned the screen around to face it. Apparently he thought that was enough. God forbid he should plug it in."

"Mrs Arbuthnot? Printer wouldn't print yellow."

"Yes it *would*. And if she'd mentioned she was using yellow paper, we might've discovered that forty minutes sooner."

"Mrs Crabbe. Said you didn't know your way around a keyboard."

George held up a finger. "Correction. I didn't know my way around *her* keyboard. She didn't like the standard arrangement, so she prised all the keys off and put them back alphabetically."

"Mmmm.... And her sluggish mouse?"

"She hadn't taken it out of the plastic bag!" George scowled at him. "D'you know, I think I *am* feeling differently about this since you came along."

"Really?" Emlyn brightened.

"Yes, I'd like to throw you off this bridge as well."

"Can I count that as a result?" asked Emlyn hopefully.

"Only it was 24-21 at half-time and ...."

"I said 'as well', not 'instead'."



"Buzzer." Emlyn reluctantly pulled his nose out of Appendix A and returned to trawling through the support tickets that hadn't managed to send George off his onion.

"Jeffrey Winthrop..."

"... used the Recycle Bin to store his documents and then wondered where they'd gone."

"Clarissa Dogtooth..."

"...thought her keyboard was dirty so she soaked it in the bath overnight."

"Tristan Nightsock?"

"Ha! Yes, I asked him to send me a screenshot of his problem." George shook his head "I got a polaroid in the post five days later."

Emlyn was getting desperate. How could George touch so many lives and rebound off them all?

"Hmmm. This one rings a lot. Blodwyn Jones?"

George went slightly pink. "Oh. Well. She hasn't actually got a computer, but I have to put something in the log. Mostly we.. ummm.... we just have a bit of a chat."

"Oh ho!" Emlyn clapped his hands.

"Oh ho' what?" George frowned.

"Someone has a bit of a crush on Miss Blodwyn Jones!"

"Nothing of the kind," mumbled George. "Known her since school, that's all..."

Emlyn grinned at him. "I'm still going with 'oh ho!'," he said. "Nice, is she?"

"Well... I mean...well ..." George stammered.

"Good enough!!" Emlyn barked. He hauled George bodily off the railing, straightened his tie and smoothed down his hair. "Right. Chop-chop. You get yourself over to Miss Blodwyn Jones' house. No!" he corrected himself. "Stop and get her some flowers first."

"But... but it's five in the morning!"

"Get her an Egg McMuffin then!" Emlyn knew he'd missed the second half, but he could still catch the highlights on Cloud Sports if he got back soon. He turned George around and nudged him - hard - towards town.

"But..." George was a bit rattled by the sudden turn of events. "Well ...okay, I admit I like her, but what if she doesn't like me?"

Emlyn slung an arm round his shoulders. "George," he said patiently, "she rings a premium rate number to talk to someone on an IT Support helpdesk and she hasn't even got a computer. She's either besotted or demented. Get along with you now."

George's face ran the gamut of emotions from doubt to surprise, giving way briefly to doubt again before hope shone faintly. Then happiness elbowed them all aside and took over.

"Gosh. Gosh!!" George shot off towards town, skidded to a halt at the end of the bridge, ran back and pumped Emlyn's hand furiously. "Thank you! Thank you!! Oh! This is just going to be the best Christmas ever!"

Emlyn watched as George sped off, full of bonhomie. He continued to watch as he attempted to hug, variously, a policeman, a milkman and a stray cat. One breathalyser, two black eyes, one split lip and multiple bleeding scratches later, George wove his way unsteadily to Blodwyn's front door. Emlyn hovered anxiously nearby in case it should turn out that love was not, in fact, blind, and worse, might be inclined to look askance at a face that appeared to have collided with a cheese grater. But in the event, he had nothing to fear....

**Ting-a-ling-a-ling!! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!!** Ah! Every time a bell rings! Emlyn smiled. **Ting-a-ling-a-ling!! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!!** Okay, it didn't need to keep *on* ringing, he got the picture. It wasn't till he noticed a decided lack of weight in the shoulder department that he realised it was his phone.

"Hello?.... Oh hello Gabriel....Yes, fine, fine... What? Only one set available? But... well all right... Yes, I see... who? Oh. Clarence. Damn.... No, no, I said it's *damp* here.... Well I'll just head back then... No, I missed the match but I was going to watch.... **No!! DON'T TELL ME THE SCO....** 40-21, ah..."



The End