

Christmas Eve 1967

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My mom was delighted when I passed my drivers' test. Suddenly, I would run any errand at any time. When she ran out of wrapping paper on Christmas Eve, I was already in the car, happy to head up to Clouthier's or Beamish's on Wellington Street. I picked up my friend Karen and we decided instead on Westgate, Ottawa's first "Shopping Centre."

After choosing the wrapping paper and ribbon, we wandered down to the Freiman's toy department where Santa Claus was doing a roaring business. "I asked for a SnoCone machine when I was little, and never got it" Karen said, patting the little machine sadly. "Get over it, I never got tap dancing lessons" I retorted.

Just then Brenda Lee's "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" came over the store's music system. Karen burst into giggles. I stared at her quizzically. "Don't you hear it? What's it sound like? What kind of pie was that?" I told her she'd lost her mind. On the way home, the song came on the radio, and suddenly I cracked up and laughed until I had tears in my eyes. I'd finally gotten her joke.

"What are you getting for Christmas?" I asked. "Maybe new skates and a few records by the Beatles, the Monkees and Paul Revere and the Raiders." Karen said hopefully. "Just 45's; my parents for sure wouldn't spend four dollars on an album. What about you?"

"I know one present I'm getting because it already came in the mail. It's a subscription to 'Calling all Girls Magazine' from my sister. Skates were on my list too, but Dad and I went over to Neighbourhood Services and found a nearly new pair for two dollars. The only other things I asked for are a Dionne Warwick album and Bob Dylan's Blonde on Blonde. Last year my cousins and I saw Bob Dylan at the Auditorium and he was fantastic."

After dropping Karen off I headed home through a light snowfall to help my mom wrap the rest of the little cousins' gifts before they arrived for dinner. Two aunts and two uncles came in the door, and in raced five little kids full of Christmas excitement.

They headed straight to the candy dish. My ten year old cat, with a wide-eyed look of alarm, hissed, puffed up to twice her size, and vanished to the basement for the duration of their visit.

Our raucous dinner was interrupted countless times to check in with NORAD, broadcasting directly through our radio station with updates on Santa's whereabouts. Thankfully he was still busy in Australia, so the kids had enough time to get home to bed.

After some last-minute cleaning up, our household went to bed too. On Christmas day our house would be pretty much a madhouse full of relatives stopping in for drinks and gifts, then staying for dinner.

Just before I dropped off to sleep, in my head I could hear Brenda Lee rocking around that Christmas tree. My dad yelled “What are you laughing at?” “Just feeling the Christmas spirit!” I called back.