

## Christmas Shopping in the 60's

First published December 7, 2017

In the weeks leading up to Christmas highschool kids in the 60s were all preoccupied with studying for exams which left us no time for shopping. This, along with an always tight budget, created a last minute panic. We had to cram it all in on Saturday and cheaply, exactly a week before Christmas.

The morning was frosty with a high wind. Karen and I set out early and it wasn't long before our ears were red and our fingers freezing. We would never think of wearing any kind of uncool hat, toque or mitts. Some of the people from school walked around with their jackets unzipped in any kind of weather trying to look relaxed and not show how cold they actually felt. We stuffed our hands in our pockets.

Our first destination was Beamish's on Wellington Street near Holland. There we could find a variety of candy and little toys for all the cousins who would land in at my house on Christmas day, and for Karen's younger brother and sisters. We loaded up with puzzles, tiny dolls, Silly Putty, colourful mitts and bubblegum hockey cards. In the candy section we found miniature boxes of chocolates, and hard candy with pictures of flowers and fruit in the centre. Loaded down with two big bags each, we headed for Karen's house to drop off our loot before continuing on.

We still had presents to buy for our parents and some of our friends, so we decided to walk up to Westgate. Our first stop was Toy World. They had a good book selection, and I had decided to buy a book for each of my best friends, Karen and Judy. But one look at the price told me that books wouldn't fit into my thin budget. They would have to settle for a couple of Betty and Veronica comics.

At Freiman's we were distracted by the display of transistor radios in the record department. Shiny and modern, transistor radios would allow us to have music wherever we went. How modern and convenient. But Freiman's was a little pricey for high-schoolers and we found no gifts we could afford. At Throops Drug Store, Karen bought a little box of colourful assorted soaps for her mom.

By lunchtime we were both starving. We debated whether to stay at Throops' lunch counter for one of their delicious cheeseburgers, or to catch the bus all the way to Carlingwood.

"Simpsons Sears has a good cafeteria. Let's go there," Karen suggested, so we headed for the bus stop outside Freiman's. Simpsons' crowded second-floor cafeteria had a tempting array of sandwiches, salads and desserts, and was filled with hungry shoppers and noisy children adding to the spirit of the season.

"I can't waste my Christmas shopping money on lunch. I think I'll just have a hotdog," I decided. Karen agreed.

After lunch we wandered through the various departments of Simpsons looking for inspiration. A box containing three plaster of Paris chipmunk faces caught my attention. "Look, aren't these cute?" I called to Karen. "I'm going to buy them for my mom to hang in the kitchen." After all, who wouldn't want the faces of three such famous singers as Simon, Theodore and Alvin, hanging in their kitchen?

Finding something for my dad proved a little more difficult and Karen was having the same problem.

"Let's try Tamblyn's", she suggested. On our way through the store we passed shelves full of vitamins and tonics. "Hey look", I said. "Ironized Yeast. My dad takes one of those every day."

"Why don't you get him some for Christmas?" Karen asked.

"Are you kidding, he'd kill me. Let's find the after shave. That's always safe."

"Here's some Hai Karate," I showed Karen. It was the latest new scent and widely advertised on TV and radio.

"No, my Dad's not the Hai Karate type." So we both decided on Old Spice gift sets, knowing that while they were not the most original gifts, they would be put to good use.

On our way out to the bus stop, we passed the Carlingwood Restaurant. In front of the cash register was a display of chocolate bars. Among them were little gold net sacks of foil-wrapped chocolate coins and we bought two each, to top up our shopping. We headed out into the swirling snow, elated with our success and feeling excitement starting to build as we looked toward the holidays just a week away.