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Members of The Free Press staff write their impressions of Christmas this week as we stand on the threshold of another festive season.

Gramma, I miss you!

by Helen Murray

Christmas has changed in the past six years around my home.

The first change, in 1972 was the addition of a brother-in-law. The next year, not only had we acquired a sister-in-law but, only a few weeks before Christmas, a baby came onto the scene, giving three extra hearts to share our festive day.

Two years later, there was another addition—another baby. The family was indeed expanding. By the next Christmas, there was one more addition, and so far the last—my husband Gord.

However, that Christmas also marked the first Christmas without our grandmother. Never had we had a Christmas without her. She was always there Christmas Eve and the next morning, ready to share a happy laugh or wipe away a disappointed tear.

Through the year we shared her with cousins, but on Christmas, she was all ours—every year—and in a way, every year to come also.

It is only my brother, sisters and I who get to share memories of the sprightly old lady. So many times she would fall asleep, sitting at the top of the stairway, guarding the only way down to the Christmas tree. What she didn't figure on was that we were young and agile, and able to slide down the bannister to get past her. What we didn't know was that she had one eye open,

watching us. You see, she knew our mother was sleeping on the bottom step which, because of our short little legs, we had to use to get off the bannister.

So many times, Gramma would sit on the edge of the bed Christmas eve and tell us not to be disappointed if Santa didn't bring us what we wanted. The important thing was that we were altogether. It was something I don't think I fully understood until she died.

Christmas morning, it was always Gramma who held us back from the tree to allow Mom and Dad to have a few extra hours sleep. After all, she used to say, it was only 4 a.m. However, soon Mom was up and we were pleading with her to wake our father.

In the early years, the gifts from Gramma were always the same thing—a pencil case. It was treasured until the next Christmas. By the time I reached college, however, I preferred something else. The pencil case turned into cash which was my gas money from Collingwood, back to school in Oakville.

Now that Gramma is gone, and I'm approaching my third Christmas without her, I long for the plastic pencil case, the stern "get back to bed"

I wish she could hear me say "Merry Christmas Gramma. I miss you."

Give Santa his own day . . .

by Eric Elstone

Christmas. You love it, or you get through winter without it, but you can't hate it.

I don't dislike Christmas, but then again I can't ignore it either this time 'round because my editor, bless Mr. Coles' Grinch heart, gently coerced his subject into inflicting upon you my thoughts, feelings and impressions of Christmas.

Many folks, city and country, admit to themselves and others Christmas is one of the most enjoyable seasons. Here is my admission—that Christmas is THE most enjoyable season, though there should be some improvements.

This edition of Christmas is going to be a special one for me and family. Mrs. Elstone, my Mom, retired a couple of weeks ago so next Monday will be one of the few in the past 21 years when one of us has not had to go into work. Mom worked for C.N. Telecommunications in Toronto, and more often than not there seemed to be some job interference with Christmas.

One of the big plusses about Christmas will be being home, and seeing friends that I normally meet once a year.

Something that contributes to the renewed ties with family and friends is the unusual sense of time I detect. About Christmas Eve time seems to start to float. (No, I have not been drinking!) The clocks still hum away, but we can afford to spend more time with each other, get to know each other better, if only to discover what someone else has been doing for the last 364 days.

Advertising, though it pays my rent, falls into the minus column. Much of the advertising—radio, TV and newspapers—that assaults me throughout the balance of the year, I can get by without. That is something to be lived with. But most Christmas advertising turns my heart. Commercial is not another way to spell Christmas. I don't want to find a camera in the first present I

open, and Hi Karate deserves the chop. I suppose most of my revulsion stems from the knowledge that none of the ads are spontaneous. Every detail is geared to sell you something you don't want.

There is very little spontaneity about Christmas music either, but much of it is pleasing. Like the advertisements, radio stations start airing carols and lesser forms of Christmas music sometime in November. But the music of the season is finished so quickly. In the opening moments of Boxing Day, or the day after at the latest, it's back to Sannantha Sang, the Bee Gees and Elton John. The sudden jolt is too much.

Another plus is the sensuousness of Christmas. In the home, it's warm, and outside it's cold. The scent of the cedar tree, aroma of home-cooked chicken dinner with all the trimmings of course, flare the nostrils. The gold, silver, red, green, blue and yellow decorations gleam in the eye. And the music fills the ears.

One of the other points I like about Christmas is the efforts by some churches and families to put Christ back in Christmas. Against what often must appear to be overwhelming odds, there exist some dedicated folks who would very much like to inject a significant dose of religion into the 25th of December.

And that's alright by me. This time of year was once marked as Christ's Mass. That was long before Santa started bellying out the scene. Giving the man in the red suit his own day, say December 6, would make a clear distinction between the secular and religious parts of the season. In the generations which pride themselves in their skills in coping with changes, this is one I think we can handle. Besides, the churches deserve at least equal time with the department stores.

The family is together

by Robin Incoe

Christmas is a time when families are together.

For as long as I can remember my grandparents have joined us in celebrating the festive season, with the exception of our last Christmas.

My grandparents were in the process of moving back to England last year and were out of the country at Christmas. It was the first time they had not been with us over the holidays and they were sadly missed.

The morning tea was not the same without them and the table looked bare with only four plates instead of the usual six. Not only was it the thought of not having them for Christmas, we knew that we had

probably seen our last Christmas with them as they were retired and would not likely to be travelling back and forth.

We were wrong! This Christmas when we wake to the sweet smell of the turkey they will once again be with us. They arrived three weeks ago for the festive season and will help make another Merry Christmas in our home.

The table will once again be surrounded by six plates for Christmas dinner and as far as I am concerned that is what Christmas is all about, togetherness and sharing. A time when the family gets together to thank God for their good fortunes and life itself.

Countdown on Christmas

by Hartley Coles

For some reason we always tend to look at Christmases of the past for inspiration for another one. I suppose we glamorize and embroider their forgetting about the rush, anxiety and other frustrations we experienced.

We complain we will never be ready. Christmas cards haven't been sent. Turkey prices are sky high. We can't get colored bulbs we want for the strings of lights to hang up, but haven't had time for yet. The list is endless.

So on we go on that headlong rush for Christmas. By the time the feast day arrives we're completely tuckered out with the stampede getting ready for it.

Idiotic, isn't it? Don't you envy people so well organized they don't have that frantic last few days? They have cards sent out in the first week of December. Their turkey is ordered or in their freezer. The tree is up and beautifully decorated, presents wrapped and stowed

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The Free Press Back Issues

10 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, December 18, 1968.

Santa Claus can come long, short or tall but the comeliest of the lot was Zenith Armstrong, dressed as Santa for the Tyler Christmas party. Miss Acton Fair distributed gifts to the large crowd at the music centre.

A survey conducted by Grade XI students suggests a need for an indoor swimming pool in Acton. Roger Haggert, Bill Field, Nigel Spicer, Rae Swackhamer and Dave Broostad conducted the survey under the direction of vice-principal Joe Bray.

James W. Singleton was appointed director of education for Halton county. Mayors, reeves and deputy-reeves of Halton will meet with Minister of Municipal Affairs Darcy McKeough to discuss regional government.

The Slim and Trim class at the Robert Little school, with Mary Golem as instructor, splurged with a Christmas party.

Mrs. Eleanor Donaldson celebrated her 93rd birthday.

A tableau was part of the C.G.I.T. vesper service, with participants Mary Laughlin, Sandra Patterson, Bonnie Jones, Linda Perry, Carol Masales, Martha Long, Carol Pickles, Barbara Reid and Mary Ann De Haan.

The Y's Men's annual turkey draw was held at their bingo on the Y Saturday. Ed Leatherland and Mrs. White were two winners who were present.

Caroline Nurseries opened a new addition, which doubles the size of their facilities.

20 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, December 23, 1958.

Over 400 children greeted Santa Claus at the Beardsmore Christmas party at the Robert Little school auditorium on Friday afternoon. Prior to Santa's appearance, the parents and children were kept entertained by acrobats, puppet show and trained horse act.

Hundreds of people braved the below-zero temperature on Saturday morning to view the colorful Santa Claus parade sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. The parade included Acton Citizens' Band and Acton Junior Pipe band, eight floats and a float bearing Santa himself. After finishing the three mile route the procession finished at the high school where Santa handed out bags of candy. Mrs. K. Alger as Mother Goose and her school class were on one float. Lorraine Tyler and Dolores Tyler dressed as Eskimos with George Barbeau as Sgt. Preston. Katherine Higgins and Shirley Cohen rode on the Jack Spratt float. Brian Robertson and Patricia Scanlan were Peter Pumpkin Eater and his wife. Acton firefighters appeared on the Good Ship Lollipop.

Over 500 children from the Robert Little and M. Z. Bennett schools took part in a Christmas program. G. Banks, music teacher, and D. Copeland of the teaching staff directed the choir.

Santa had a busy time at the Legion when he handed out gifts to children of veterans. Bob Loutlet entertained dressed as a clown.

Agricultural representative Earl White-lock is retiring.

50 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday evening, December 20, 1928.

A couple of suggestions from Hill's, Mill St. 30-piece set of dishes \$3.25, 46 pieces \$8.95.

On Monday evening the scholars and their officers and teachers of the United Sunday School joined in a Christmas tea. Taking part in the program were Kitty Savage, Isabel Switzer, A. T. Brown, and H. P. Moore, superintendent emeritus.

Dufferin school room was filled to capacity for their concert. The pupils showed their ability in choruses, health exercises, the Norwegian Mountain Dance, pantomime, recitations and dialogues. Jack and Mona McGeachie excelled themselves in their Scottish dancing, accompanied by Jim McGeachie. Splendid tenor solos were sung by Mr. S. Gisy accompanied by Nellie Lane. Santa Claus distributed many treats. Miss Hall is the teacher.

100 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday morning, December 26, 1878.

We hope our patrons will excuse us in issuing only a half-sheet this week (two pages). A larger number of country papers do not issue at all Christmas week.

St. Alban's (English) church in Acton has been, according to custom at Christmas time, festooned with evergreens. There are also a number of mottoes on the wall. The interior presents an exceedingly pleasant appearance.

On account of the entertainment in the Methodist church tonight, the skating rink will be closed.

The editor of the Milton News found it impossible to issue a paper this week. The mental strain would have been too much for him to stand. No doubt his readers will be gratified at thus being relieved, for one short week, of the trouble of trying to understand his pointless articles.

Who's for a Lastember?

by Bill Smiley



And then—bang!—you look out one morning, and there's December, in all its ugliness: a bitter east wind driving snow, and a cold chill settles in the very bones of your soul.

Winter wind as sharp as a witch's tooth sneaks in around uncaulked doors and windows. Your wife complains of the terrible draught from under the basement door. You investigate and find that one of the basement windows has been blown in and has smashed on the woodpile. You clamber up over the wood, knocking pieces off shins and knuckles, and jam some cardboard in the gap.

Creep cautiously outside, and nearly bust your bum. There's ice under that tar snow. Make it to the garage, and find that your car doors are all frozen solid shut. Beat them with your bare fists until the latter are bleeding and your car is full of dents. Finally get them open with a bucket of hot water and a barrel of hotter language.

December is a trying time. For one thing, it's so dang SUDDEN. There you are, tottering along a day at a time, thinking it's still fall and you must get the snow tires and storms on one of these fine Saturdays, and throw some firewood into the cellar, and get some boots and replace the gloves you lost last March. Christmas is away off there.

Sitlher and grease your way to work, arriving in a foul mood and with bare hands crippled into claws, bootless feet cold as a witch's other appendage.

It would be a good thing for merchants. They could have special Lastember sales of gloves and boots and snow tires and ear muffs and caulking guns and weather stripping and antifreeze and nose warmers, before plunging into their pre-Christmas sales, which are promptly replaced by their January sales.

It would be great for the Post Office, which could start warning us in June that all Christmas mail must be posted by the first day of Lastember if we wanted it delivered before the following June.

It would make a nice talking point for all those deserters and traitors and rich people who go south every year. Instead of smirking, "Oh, we're not going south until Boxing Day. Hate to miss an old-fashioned Canadian Christmas," they could really shove it to us by leering, "Yes, we thought we'd wait this year until the last day of Lastember, you know. Avoid the pushing and vulgarity of the holiday rush."

If nothing else, it would give us a break from the massive nauseating volume of pre-Christmas advertising, which begins toward the end of October and continues, remorselessly, right into Christmas Day.

Best of all, perhaps it would give dummiest like me a chance to avoid looking like such a dummy. Procrastinators, who flourish during a sunny November, such as we had this year, would have no more excuses. All their wives would have to do is point to the calendar and say, "Bill, do you realize it's only three days until Lastember. Isn't it time you did your Lastember chores?"

In fact, if that fearless politician who is going to introduce the Lastember Bill in the house wants some advice, here is a codicil for him. Somewhere in the Bill should be the warning, in bold type: "Procrastinators will be Prosecuted!" Jeez, why not? They prosecute you for everything else.

If such a month were added to the calendar—maybe we could start it with Grey Cup Day—people like me wouldn't go on thinking that Christmas is weeks away.

Instead, on the last day of Lastember, with all their winter chores in hand, they'd know that Christmas was practically on top of them, like a big, old horse blanket, and they'd leap into the proper spirit, lining up a Christmas tree, laying in their booze, tuning up their pipes for the carols.

As it is now, we know that Christmas is like a mirage. It's way off there somewhere, and no need to panic. Then, with that startling Suddenness, it's December 22, all the Christmas trees have been bought, the only remaining turkeys look like vultures, and the liquor store is bedlam.

Who's for a Lastember?

Victor Smith

OUR READERS WRITE:

Why not clean all sidewalks

Dear Sir:

I am writing to you because I was walking to the stores, not being able to drive, and just about fell and broke whatever. So I walked on the road and some nut just about ran over me.

My point is: If the town can take the time to clean the sidewalks downtown why can't whoever does them do side street sidewalks, too. After all, what about the elderly

people—are they to stay in all winter so they don't break their necks?

And if you have children who walk to school are they to walk on the sidewalks and break something? Or walk on the road and get run over by some nut?

Why doesn't the town or whoever does the sidewalks take a little more time and do the side streets, too. They could do the ones downtown a little better as well.

Name withheld

Santa's Claws

With equal rights to women And their Liberation stuff, They've taken "Bob" from Santa's Job, He wasn't good enough.

In a newly decorated booth, With children on her knee, Sits sister "Barb" in Santa's garb, As happy as can be.

Till Johnnie recognized his Ma, And being full of "Nick", He raised her skirt, so it would hurt,

And gave her shins a kick.

Then Mama grabbed him by the neck, And made his bottom bare, I understand from Santa's hand, He got his present there.

Now my hat is off to Santa Claws, Who gave just what was needed, A dollar earned, a lesson learned, Nothing went unheeded.

Victor Smith