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# FAMILY

the HERALD  
Home Newspaper of Halton Hills - Established 1868

## SECTION

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### Terminal illness: Medical treatment is your own choice

By ANI PEDERIAN  
Herald Staff

What are your rights and privileges if you have a terminal illness?

In Ontario, they're pretty straightforward, according to Georgetown's Dr. A.W. Ashenhurst. Dr. Ashenhurst was the guest speaker at the Georgetown Public Library's Achievement group discussion Friday afternoon.

If you're mentally competent and completely understand your situation, you can deny any medical treatment suggested to you. It's up to you, ultimately, to decide what should or shouldn't be done for you.

If you're in a coma or mentally incompetent, it's your privilege to appoint somebody as proxy who understands your wishes. Often that's your spouse or next of kin. Dr. Ashenhurst said arguments may arise, however, if doctors feel a decision being made isn't in your best interest.

If you have a terminal illness, Dr. Ashenhurst says you should ask your physician the various treatments available to you and how you can die comfortably.

When it comes to minors, babies and the unborn, the law hasn't been established and it's a fuzzy area.

Dr. Ashenhurst told the story of a baby boy born with breathing difficulties in 1976. After the first few days, the baby developed meningitis which is an inflammation of the brain and spinal cord.

It progressed to water on the brain, and the child had to be operated on, with doctors putting a tube to the brain to relieve the pressure. Critically ill, the boy was put into an institution for the chronically ill.

There was no improvement, so he was transferred to a foster home where his condition became worse and required that he be returned to the institution.

Totally blind, the child barely responded to stimuli, had cerebral palsy, continual convulsions, couldn't speak and was incontinent.

"He was as much a vegetable as you could imagine," Dr. Ashenhurst said.

A second operation to relieve growing pressure on the child's brain was required. After much consultation with doctors, his parents decided they didn't want surgery for their son.

Stepping in, the Children's Aid Society said he should have the surgery and took the case to court. The parents won. However, it was appealed to the Supreme Court of British Columbia and the first judgement was overturned. Doctors were told to do surgery on the seven year old.

"The chances of his ever recovering to a normal life are virtually nil," Dr. Ashenhurst said. "It became an ethical problem as to what do you do in this situation. The court said yes, the child must have surgery, but the judge doesn't have to take care of that child for the next 40 years."

In 21 American states, you can write a will which states how you wish to be cared for if you have a terminal illness. It's legally binding and doctors must honor it, Dr. Ashenhurst said. There's nothing similar in Canada.

"I resent feeling some wretched government can come along and say, you, Esmee Ball, have got to live, when I've already decided thank you, I don't want to," discussion participant Esmee Ball of Georgetown said.

### Christmas tree ritual part of many cultures

What would the holiday season be without a Christmas tree? Part of the enchantment of childhood memories is the recollection of the family tree, gaily bedecked and surrounded by temptingly mysterious packages.

It is thought that the Christmas tree originated with the Alsations. We know for a fact that Prince Albert introduced it to Victorian England but interestingly enough, America had it before then - thanks to her German settlers and the Hessian soldiers who fought in the Revolution.

Today it is one of the most popular Christmas symbols.

Here in Canada, popcorn and tinsel, ornaments and electric lights, artificial snow and icicles decorate trees in homes and offices.

In Italy, the Christmas tree is not really a tree; rather, it is a pyramid of shelves, called a ceppo. At the base of this wooden frame, there is often a manger scene, a presepio. Other tiers in the pyramid hold candy, fruit, small gifts and gilded pine cones. Lighted candles are placed at the corners of these shelves.

In Denmark, lighted candles are placed on the tree, along with Danish cookies, confections of marzipan, and heart-shaped baskets of colored paper, with pieces of candy tucked inside. Celebrants dance around the lighted tree, singing "First we'll look at the tree, later we'll eat it," a traditional Danish song.

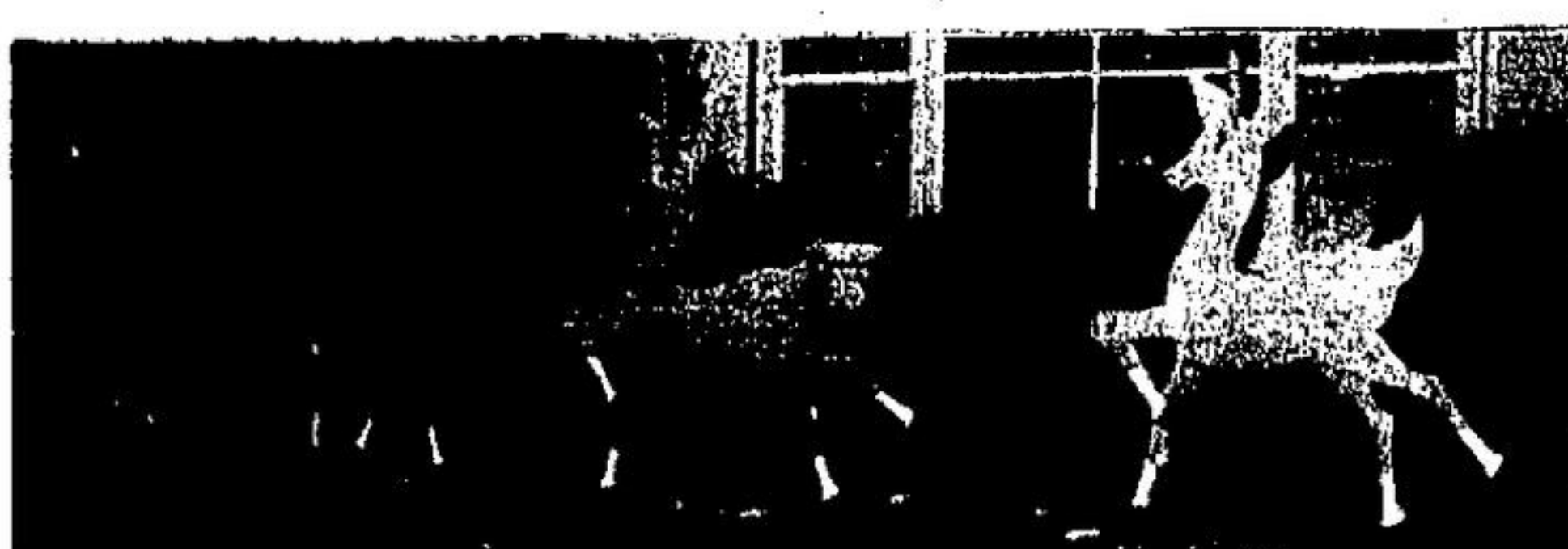
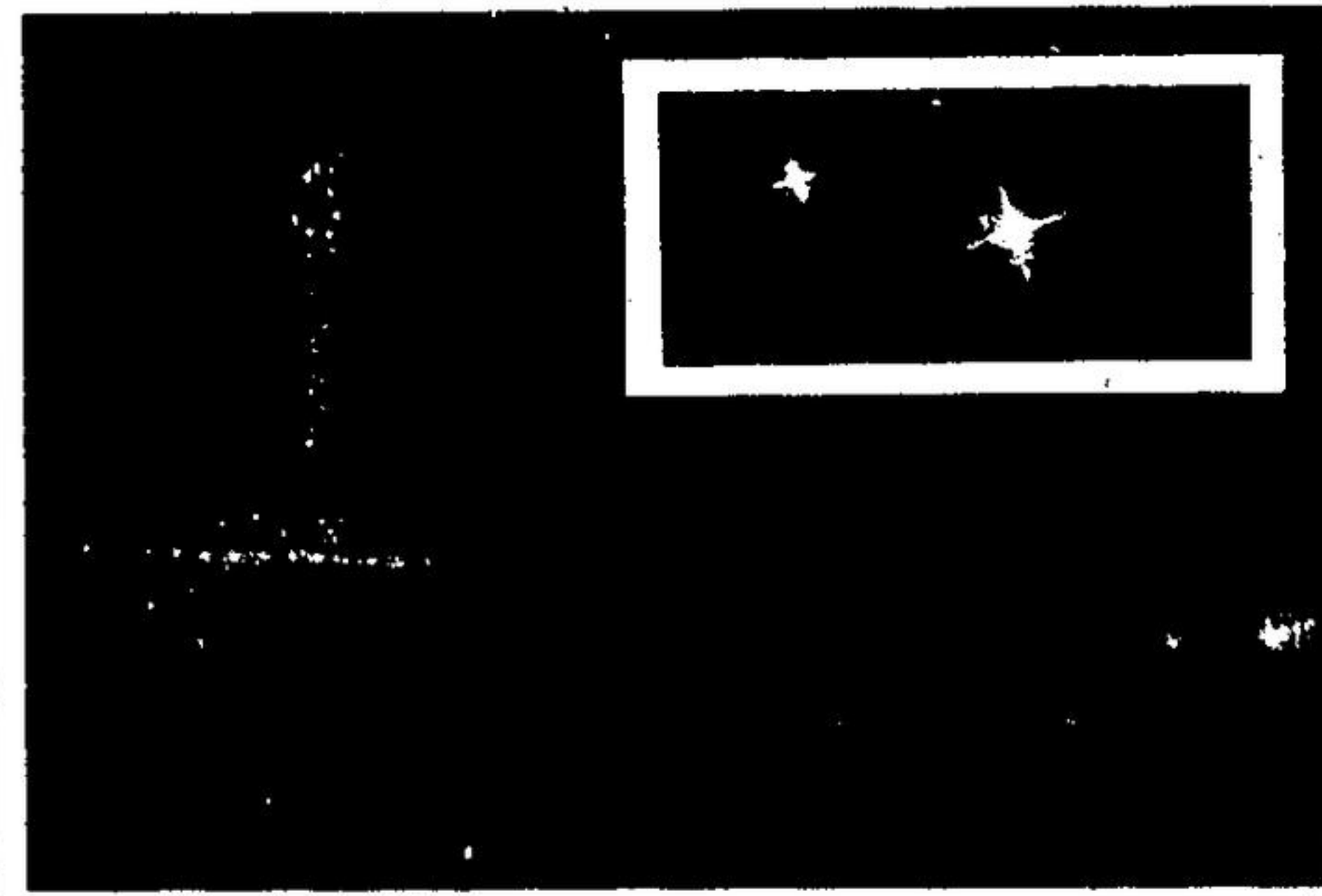
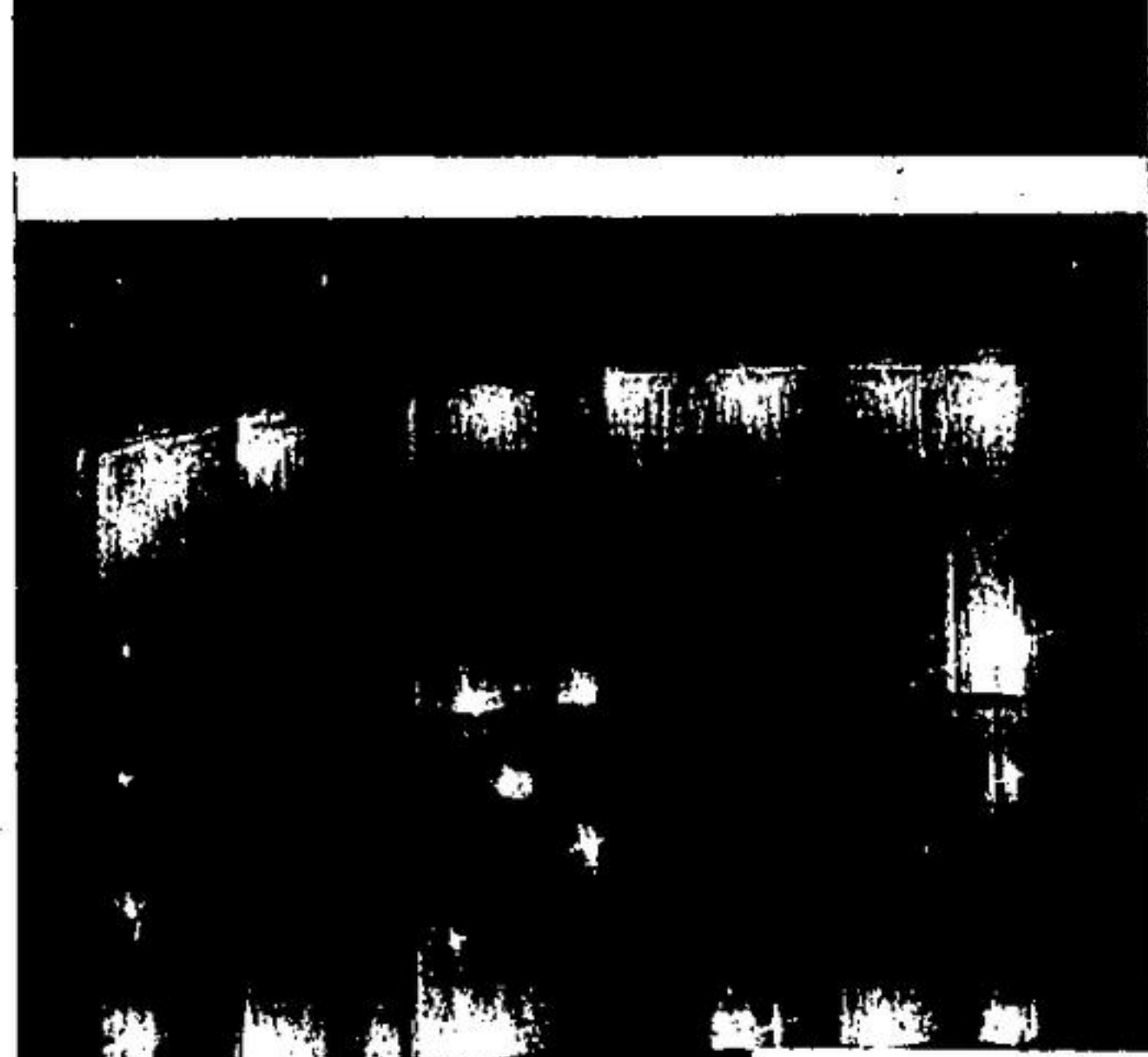
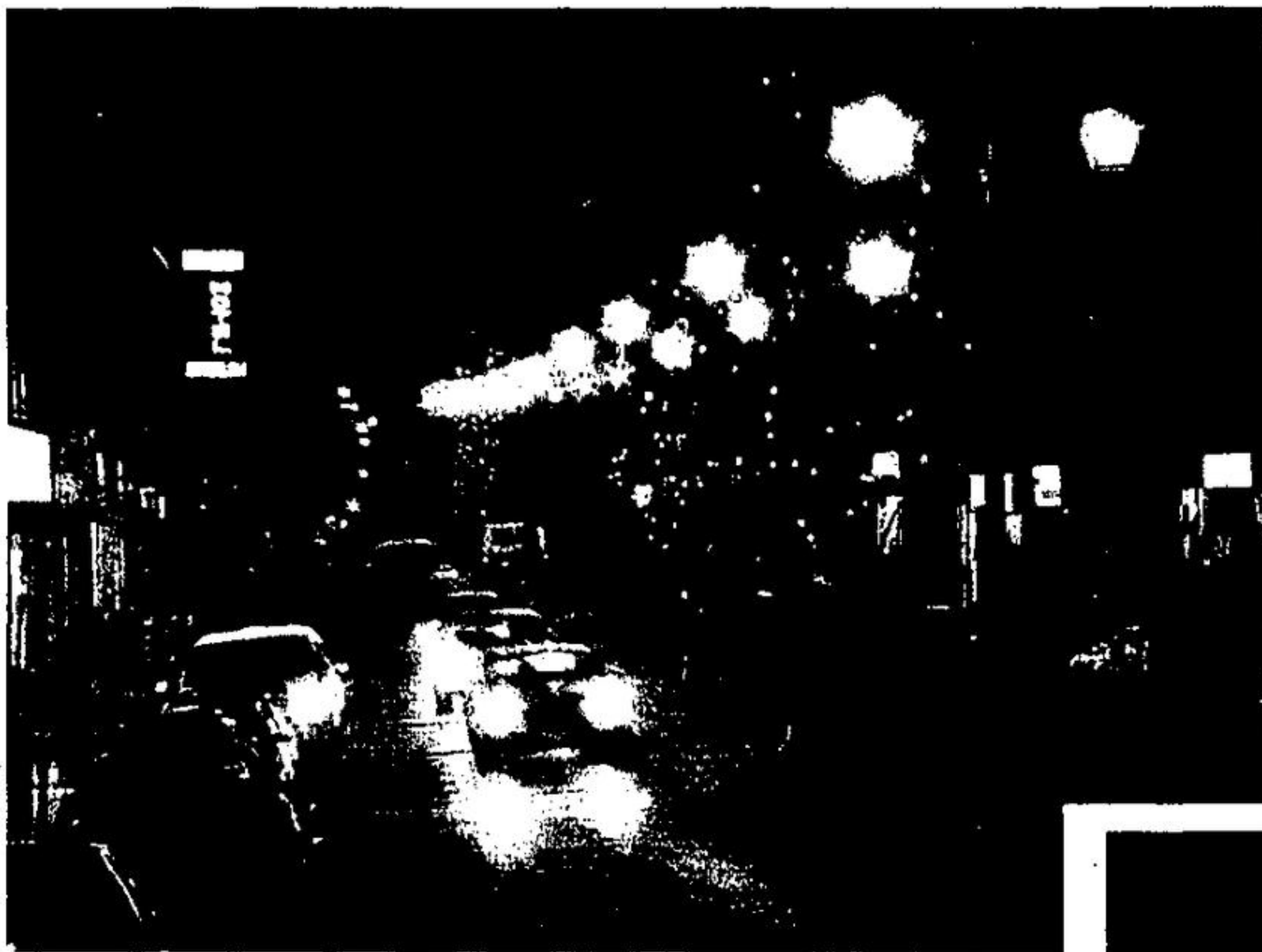
Although the Christmas tree may vary from country to country, wherever it is used, it is a symbol of joy and expectation.

### Santa says thank you

Atop his North Pole villa somewhere in the Northwest Territories, Santa relayed a message to the staff at The Herald.

"Tell all my little friends from Halton Hills that I was so glad to receive their letters," he said. He reminded the staff to tell residents that the deadline has now passed for Santa to write letters back to the children. The last of his letters will be printed in The Herald's Dec. 19th edition.

## A beautiful promise of Christmas ...



HAPPY HOLIDAYS