

# Bring in the New Year with an Old Song

**Shirley Whittington**



## A Song for the New Year

The following carol was written in 1642, to be sung to the tune of 'Greensleeves'. We've left out the verses specifically addressed to "Jack Tom Dick, Bessy, Mary and Joan" which plead for even more good cheer, but we hope the verses printed below will go straight to your heart. Sing it, if you wish, to the Greensleeves tune. Away you go...ta da, ta da, da da da da. Wonderful!

The old year now away is fled,  
The new year it is entered;  
Then let us now our sins down-tread  
And joyfully all appear:  
Let's merry be this day,

And let us now both sport and play:  
Hang grief, cast care away!  
God send you a happy New Year!

And now with New Year's gifts each friend

Unto each other they do send:  
God grant that we all our lives amend  
And that the truth may appear.  
Now, like the snake your skin  
Cast off, of evil thoughts and sin,  
And so the year begin:  
God send us a happy New Year!

And to all of you, a happy safe  
healthy and prosperous New Year  
from all of us here at Rotting Hall.

# A pair of Christmas skates I'll always remember

ONCE upon a Christmas time, there was a little boy with a skinny freckled face and big solemn blue eyes. He was old enough to know that there was something called The Depression and that he and his family was right in the middle of it.

The Depression was somehow connected with the fact the pea soup and homemade bread were very often the staples for supper; that he had to wear his big brother's trousers, cut down; that his Dad came home so often looking very tired; that on rare and terrible occasions, he would come in and find his mother, who was afraid of nothing on earth, sitting at the sewing machine, with her head down on her arms, crying.

But none of this bothered him too much. Small boys are very tough little characters, for the most part. They can adapt to almost anything. The only things that really bother them are the things that go on in their heads.

And that was this kid's trouble. For two years now, he'd been wanting a pair of skates.

Oh, he had skates, but he'd got so sensitive about them he wouldn't even wear them any more. They were an old pair his mother had worn when she was younger. They had long tops, almost up to his knees. He had to wear three pairs of socks to fill them. His ankles wobbled badly in them. And every time he showed up at the pond, somebody would yell: "Where'd ja get the girl's skates?"

What he wanted was a pair of real skates, tubes, they called them in those days, hockey skates, they're called now. He had a hockey stick. At the first game of the year, when the seniors were playing, he'd had a real stroke of luck. After climbing in the window of the rink, in the middle of the second period, with some other kids, he'd wiggled his way right down beside the player's box.

He was just nicely settled, and trying to peer around a large, violent hockey fan in front of him, when one of the players dashed up to the bench with both parts of a broken stick, and threw them to the coach. The latter

## Bill Smiley

looked around, straight into a pair of beseeching eyes, and said: "Here, kid, here's a stick for you." With the help of his Dad, who spliced the stick, and some tape, he had wound up with a dandy stick.

But no skates. He'd tried to earn money for a pair, by shovelling snow. The first time out, he'd asked an old lady if she'd like her snow shovelled. She said yes. He shovelled like a little demon for an hour. He knocked on her door, red in the face, and told her it was done. She said: "and I have something for you, for your trouble." And handed him a cookie. That soured him on snow shovelling and nice old ladies for some time.

All his other sources of income: empty beer bottles, scrap iron and old tires, were covered by snow. He spent an hour and a half siphoning the money out of his penny bank, with a knife. There was only 13 cents. His kid brother's bank yielded only another 8 cents.

As the days went on, and the other kids played hockey on the pond, while he had to pretend he didn't want to play, the desire for skates became more and more of an obsession. A hundred wild schemes went through his mind, to raise the money. All sorts of stories, like the one in which he sprang out and stopped the runaway horse, and the covering driver, in gratitude, gave him five dollars, ran through his head.

It was Christmas Eve. He'd delivered on his sleigh a basket of food his mother had sent to a family that was down and out on the other side of town. He'd done it, sullenly, his inner eye seeing nothing but those feverishly desired skates. He was walking home, down

the main street, looking in the bright store windows with envy and despair in his heart, and kicking viciously at chunks of frozen snow.

Suddenly his foot struck something that clinked. He bent and picked it up. It was a change purse. Excitedly he opened it: There were two two-dollar bills and some coins in it. There was also a receipt. It bore the name of a woman he knew well. She had a useless bum of a husband and a backyard full of kids.

"Boy, will she ever be glad to get this back", mused our hero, immediately making himself the central figure in a Christmas Eve drama in which he returned the poor woman's money as she sat keening with her ragged children in their freezing shack.

His spirits lifted, he shoved the purse in his pocket and was off like a shot to return it. He was tearing along, his sleigh banging his heels, his whole body tingling with pleasure. Suddenly he stopped in his tracks. There, in his mind's eye, was a picture of himself gliding over the ice on a new pair of tube skates, with the rest of the kids trying hard, but unable, to catch him. And in the same second came the realization that he had enough money in his pocket to buy them.

He walked on, for another block, very slowly now. He was sick with temptation. He came in sight of the woman's house. Satan was whispering. He got to the door. Twice he raised his hand to knock and dropped it. Then he tiptoed down the steps and ran like a rabbit back to the hardware store, bought the skates, white-faced, and ran all the way home, heart thumping, stomach sick.

He sneaked in the back way, and was hiding

the skates in the woodshed. His mother and father were talking in the kitchen. "That was foolish, Dad," she was saying. "You know we owe grocery bills, and there's fuel to buy, and we all need clothing." His Dad answered: "I don't care if we're all starving by spring. I know what it's like to want something that badly."

The boy went around to the front door, came in quietly and crept off to bed, after murmuring goodnight to his parents. He didn't get to sleep for a long, long time.

In the morning, his kid brother excitedly dragged him out of bed, to go down and look under the tree. He was feeling wretched. He knew there'd be nothing under the tree but some nuts and candy, and an apple, and maybe a new suit of long underwear, wrapped in gift paper. That was The Depression.

When he saw the new skates sitting there, his insides gave a lurch. He knelt beside them and saw the card: "To Bill, with love. Mother and Dad." When his parents came down, he was still on his knees, the tears streaming down his face. His Mother thought he was crying for happiness, and loved him up. His Dad tried to joke him out of it, talking about the great hockey star he'd be.

It would be nice to end the story by saying he told them the whole story, the skates he'd bought with the found money were returned, the woman got her money, all was forgiven, and he never stole anything again as long as he lived.

But that's not the way it was. He took the skates out of the woodshed that night, ran with them to the river, and threw them over the bridge into the black water. He played hockey every day. When summer came, he stole apples, and grapes, as he always had. He planned to save all his money and give it to the woman whose money he'd stolen. But he never got around to it. He planned to do something wonderful for his parents, and never got around to it.

But he'll never forget that Christmas as long as he lives.

Jan. 7  
Midland District Camera Club club competition on the subject of sunsets. Bob Whittam will show pictures on transistoring animals.

This Week in Canada  
On Jan. 5, in 1805, the first issue of the Quebec MERCURY was published, and in 1874, Winnipeg held its first civic election; 331 votes were cast, although there were only 308 on the voters' list!

## Only 69 centimetres of snow here

A total of 147 centimetres (57.87 inches) of snow had fallen on this area by this time last winter. So far this season only 69 centimetres (27.16 inches) of snow has blanketed the Gateway to the 30,000 Islands.

## Sally Ann's bubble was used as hamster's cage

That Midland Salvation Army bubble, stolen from its moorings in downtown Midland several weeks ago, was returned to the local Sally Ann's on Sunday, reports Lt. Ray Braddock.

It seems it was found in Midland and had been used as a hamster's cage.

An estimated \$70 in the bottle at the time it was stolen in broad daylight in front of a downtown Midland store has yet to be recovered.

No arrests have been made in connection with the daring robbery.

## North Simcoe Newsbriefs

### It was a very green New Year's

Here in North Simcoe we went from a White Christmas to a Green New Year's. Weekend rain several days ago was enough to

melt most if not all of the snow that had fallen on North Simcoe this winter.

However, don't despair, there's more snow on the horizon.

### IYY plans well in the works

The year 1985, throughout both Canada and the rest of the world, has been set aside for International Youth Year.

### Ontario's banana belt enjoyed record 'highs'

Many parts of Ontario basked in 85-year record high temperatures over the weekend.

Saturday, the mercury reached a high of 15.6C (59F) breaking a record first set in 1899.

Sunday's readings were much the same throughout central and southwestern Ontario.