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winterplay!

Gay & Lesbian Winter and Holiday Annual 2007

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From the Publisher



After 18 years of serving our community faithfully, *The Pink Pages* was offered up for purchase and when we got the phone call

here at INspiredcreative, we accepted with delight, thankful for the opportunity to carry on the torch for what has become a community institution. The call certainly came in at a time when I was starting to have the desire to work again on a community driven publication, and you now hold in your hands the realization of that desire.

So, welcome to *winterplay!* (formerly called *Holigay!*). Re-launched this November under *The Pink Pages Directory* umbrella—the guide that you’ve come to love and depend on and which will continue to be Toronto’s go-to book for gay and lesbian welcoming businesses. With our re-launch comes a fully renovated online directory residing in a new home at thepinkpagesdirectory.com. Our growth plans include branching out to the suburbs—yes we’ll finally be available to you desperate housewives.

The new vision and spirit you will notice in *The Pink Pages Directory* and its sister publications (*winterplay!* every November and *summerplay!* to come out in May) is related to my own experience over the last 3 years of living and running a business in the ‘burbs.

After living and working in the advertising and publishing industry for years within the downtown boundaries of the Church/Wellesley neighbourhood—and loving it—I picked up and moved to the 905 area code for a change of pace and to see what else is out there. I was pleasantly surprised. We really are everywhere!

I’ve met so many wonderful men and women who live out here and who are a vital part of the growing gay and lesbian presence in communities all over the GTA. So, for our part here, we’re going to think a little broader when we plan, when we write, and when we choose themes for articles in our publications. Our vision is of a large and far-reaching community that includes the downtown crowd, the suburban guys and gals, the drag queens, the transsexuals and the leather men and women, but from the perspective of the one thing we all have in common—being human. So we proudly present you with a fun, informative, and entertaining guide to winter and the holidays.

Thank you to the team and to our very supportive advertisers. There could have never been a more exciting way to step back into the print publishing world within our community, than with a new issue that I am so thrilled to have worked on with such a group of amazing and talented people.

I’m left with very little space to highlight what you will find in this issue, so I will leave you to do the discovering. But we promise many treats. Our editor and writers have put together an issue that is filled with travel spots, shopping ideas, holiday recipes, inspirational thoughts, and things to get out and do. So enjoy!

Seasons greetings to all of you...

Antoine Elhashem



winterplay!

Gay & Lesbian Holiday
and Winter Season Annual 2007

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Published by

INspiredcreative
inspiredcreative.ca

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In this issue

12 Making a list and checking it twice

Scott Cheslock

21 Gay Christmas in a small town

Jeff Harrison

31 Cherished Holiday Recipes

Jennifer Yang

41 Claire for Christmas

Troy Brooks

47 Do you Cruise?

Manny Machado

53 Winter in the City

Amy Pearl

Regular Features

60 From the Heart

Michele Gill

62 Looking back

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From the Editor



When I was first coming out, picking up Church and Wellesley's answer to the Yellow Pages opened my eyes to the gay neighbourhood waiting just outside my door.

So when Antoine approached me with the offer to head up the editorial team for his re-launch of *The Pink Pages Directory* and its sister publications *winterplay!* and *summerplay!* I leapt at the chance.

Gay friendly businesses can now be found everywhere and it seems that our pink dollar has really helped pave the way to widespread acceptance. We no longer need to remain exclusive to our little corner of the city and as attitudes and minds continue to change we are realizing there is a big gay world out there waiting for us.

And that's what we hope to expand upon within the pages of our future publications, starting with this issue of *winterplay!* Church and Wellesley will always remain the heart of the city for us, but there are so many other queer communities popping up all over the map, we look forward to including them as *The Pink Pages Directory* extends its coverage.

Now winter has never been my favourite season, too cold, too damp, and too dark. Only Christmas with family and friends, followed by at least a week away somewhere tropical, has been the only way I can make it bearable—and I know I'm not alone feeling that way. But as I worked with my talented team on pulling this issue together, I was reminded

of all possibilities winter has to offer. Probably Port Hope and Elora are to gay tourists. I grew up in a small town and couldn't wait to get out of there soon enough, but these quaint towns, known for their antiques and artisans, would make the perfect getaway for a weekend of relaxed holiday shopping—think of the unique gifts you'll find!

Nestled deeper in our pages, some of Toronto's hottest culinary experts share their most cherished recipes for you to wow family and friends with during the holidays.

And if you can't manage the luxury of escaping the snow as we suggest in our travel getaway, then be sure to check out our guide to all the diverse and exciting entertainment our city has to offer this season. I'm sure you'll happen upon something fun to take the chill out of your winter blues.

So as you scramble madly around during the holiday season buying presents, juggling schedules for work and festive parties, take a moment out to relax over a robust cabernet or a soothing hot cup of coffee and curl up with our holiday story or thoughts from the heart.

Stay warm, enjoy your read and feel free to drop us a line to tell us what you think.

Happy holidays and we'll see you in the spring!

Jeff Harrison

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Making your LIST and checking it twice.

by Scott Cheslock



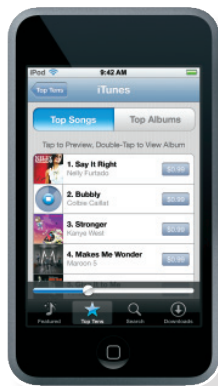
The tradition of gift giving has always been a heartfelt way to express the way we feel about all the important people in our lives.

It is the season once again and what is easily one of the happiest times of the year can sometimes be less

jolly with the stress of finding the time to shop and buy the perfect gift. What better way to raise your spirits than roaming around town with sexy and fearless performance artist 'La' Donnaramma and her friend. In her bestest holiday outfit, we hit the town all in hopes of making this season that much easier for you by providing holiday gift suggestions, with details on where to get them and why exactly they make the perfect gift.

First on our list are Ma, Pa, sis and the twins. Family will always love your gifts no matter what, they're family, right? But why not surprise them with something they won't actually exchange?

Your nieces and nephews look up to you and expect the latest in innovation. This year's must have is the **iPod Touch**. The first ever Wi-Fi iPod is the newest item in the iPod line of products where state of the art and sexy mix, allowing you to listen to music, watch videos, and surf on the net. This cool gadget also lets you take pictures. The touch screen interface allows you to control everything using only your fingers while previewing music and downloading the latest Madonna tune, all the time keeping in touch with family and friends by email. You can find iPod Touch at **Bay Bloor Radio located in the Manulife Center downtown at 55 Bloor Street West, 416.967.1122, baybloorradio.com.**





Arm and belly warmers
(Haramakis)

Clothing is always a must have on the holiday wish list. Looking for the perfect gift for the girl who consistently inspires others by her individuality and uniqueness? You need **YOGAGURL!**

Offering a unique line of products comprised of the handiwork of local artists, they have a large variety of cotton tops, bottoms, leg warmers, arm warmers, Bamboo T-Shirts (new arrival) and accessories sure to make her the envy of all of her friends. What's hot? Inspired by Japanese design is the **Haramakis** (belly warmers, silly). They have been around for years but these are revolutionary, as they warm up or cool down your body temperature. Simply peel off when it gets hot. **Visit them online at yogagurl.com or by calling 416.818.9642.**

Pooling together for the grandparents or for the siblings who just moved into their new place? **Kuda** furniture offers a unique shopping experience. The selection of furniture and home-wares from around the world makes it one of the most interesting stores in Toronto! They have a large selection of gifts and stocking stuffers, a gift basket selection complete with gourmet goodies and erotic carvings. Sales are frequent so items like candle holders and other small home decorating items are always affordable. **340 Dufferin Street, 416.463.4805, kudafurniture.com.**

Mom is going to love this one! The hot new **Pasquini Livietta** is a powerful yet compact espresso/cappuccino machine offering commercial features unlike any other machine on the market. A dual boiler system allows you to quickly and easily brew perfect espresso shots and steam creamy hot milk **SIMULTANEOUSLY**. It takes less than 2 minutes to make 2 perfect lattes or cappuccinos with continuous steam power! Beautiful stainless steel body is only 12.5 inches tall! Home barista training is available. Sold exclusively at **Zuccarini**—the source for serious coffee lovers for over 50 years.

**1335 Davenport Road
just east of Dufferin,
416.537.3439,
zuccariniltd.com.**

Of course this is also an ideal gift for your own "chosen" family for that perfect start of the day.



Family includes our four legged or feathered children (or a pet Walrus such as *Donnaramma* has in her bathtub), so why not spoil them for the holidays and make them feel part of these festive times?

From pet greeting cards to home-baked natural pet treats, reindeer antlers and Santa hats, collars, gift baskets and much more—**Perry's Pet Mart in Mississauga** has it all. **Located at 1310 Dundas Street East, 905.273.9611.**

Not able to make it to Mississauga? **Pet Value at 339 College Street West, 416.944.0314, petvalue.com** is around the corner and offers a similar selection with similar pricing. Unique to Pet Value is a bakery section designed especially for your dogs. Intended to have the feel and look of an actual bakery, their cookies and cupcakes are all natural and presented in appetizing arrangements complete with doggie sprinkles! The perfect stocking stuffers for your pooches!



Your darling sweetheart or potential loved one requires a little more time and thought, and what a great way to show how you feel than pulling out all the romantic stops? A private spa treatment, selected wine, chocolates, and sensual bath products, a sure way to create those holiday memories to be talked about for years to come.

Whisk them away on an adventure to Niagara on the Lake! Romance is always in style and this would allow you the time to just focus on each other. Find the perfect place for the perfect getaway

and rent your own private accommodation for a really special time! Choose from four fantastic properties (Amberlea House, Simcoe Pines, Aylesbury Manor, and Avalon). Call Anglo or Kerri at 905.639.8861, or visit niagara-on-the-lake-vacation-homes.com. These homes offer luxury accommodations with features such as swimming pools, fireplaces and beautiful private gardens.



Wanting spice and feeling naughty instead of nice? Surprise your male muffin with gifts that keep on giving. Make a one stop shopping spree at the **Stag Shoppe** which offers a huge varied selection of videos, magazines, erotic calendars, leather wear and books. A truly overwhelming selection of lubes all in bright fun colors available by the tube or by the barrel. A must have is the boy butter personal lubricant or the gun oil sure to ignite the necessary sparks while keeping it hot and sexy. **Located at 440 Church Street, thestagshop.com, 416.323.0772**

For the female love of your life with an adventurous spirit,

a must have conversation piece certain to trump any old board game awaits you with the "peek-a-boo" dancing kit at

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Embrace her wild and crazy side with this unique and perhaps kinky gift sure to put a smile on both your faces. The complete package to start your career as an amateur pole dancer comes with a chrome-plated extendable dance pole guaranteed to get the party started in and out of the bedroom, all the while keeping fit SUPER HOT! Invite your whole family to the next event and watch grandma go.



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You can never go wrong with chocolate, especially gourmet chocolates from around the globe. Put some decadence under the tree by visiting **Adam and Eve Chocolatier** where chocolate is imported from all over. The best is the sampling! Try their exquisite chocolate covered and light candy coated almonds and fruit in bright happy colors and finish your shopping with cocoa covered almonds—only the finest! They are **located at 97 Maitland Street and can be reached at 416.962.2326.**

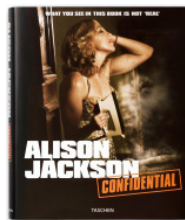
If you are in the east end you may want to check **That Chocolate Shoppe By The Lake, in Ajax.** They make the most amazing chocolate treats, novelty cakes, and our favorite indulgence: chocolate dipped soft marshmallows on a stick decorated for Christmas, or a specific theme or colour that your sweetheart may enjoy. Call Margaret at **905.427.7366**, or check out **thatchocolateshoppe.com**

So who's next on your list? Your BFFs (or in Donnaramma's case, her back up dancers). Friends are always there for you in the good days, and the not so good ones. Your buddies deserve only the finest so get them what they really want, while accentuating your very own holiday cheer...booze!

The Wine Rack offers only Canadian products which include a selection of VQA wines from Inniskillin, Jackson Triggs, as well as sparkling wines, ice wines, and coolers. Open late for the convenience of hard working individuals who can't always make time during the holiday madness. **Located at 77 Wellesley Street East, right by Church Street.**

For the intellectual who yearns for some quiet time by a warm fire to journey to the other side of the world, without the flight, there is always a book! **Glad Day Bookshop** at **598A Yonge Street, gladdaybookshop.com**, and **This Ain't the Rosedale Library** at **483 Church Street, thisaint.ca**, are small businesses specializing in gay and lesbian literature. Magazines, fiction, humor, travel guides, history, health and lifestyle publications cover the walls. The hot title this season is Alison Jackson's 'Confidential'. A hilarious book in which the author has photographed the Queen of England on the toilet, George Bush and Tony Blair chatting in the sauna, Mick Jagger doing gymnastics, and Monica Lewinsky lighting Bill Clinton's cigar. The subjects are all look alike...but are damn good ones!

Friends deserve to be spoiled, so head to a **Lush** store near you. With rich wonderful scents that excite the senses, all made from the most wonderful products with top of the line ingredients, Lush truly has an outstanding selection of soaps, fragrances and hair care products. They guarantee all of their products and their staff is happy to gift wrap all of your purchases. This is an ideal place to pick up some stocking stuffers for everyone on your list or to put a beautiful gift basket together to spoil your sweetie. **Visit lush.ca to find a store close by.**



Now, what to buy for the impossible to please on your list? PROPAGANDA, 686 Yonge Street, 416.961.0555, propaganda.bz, has the best selection of unique gift ideas in Toronto!

And just in time for the holiday season are **Damned Dollies (damneddollies.com)!**

A far cry from your traditional "Barbie", this rare and innovative new line of dolls will add excitement and conversation to your stocking stuffer list. The dolls are hand made in Montreal and are offered in a variety of shapes, sizes, and without a doubt are visually unique. They express anger, frustration, craziness, and even wield knives. Subliminal messaging perhaps to that dreaded co-worker whose name you picked during secret Santa?

What's left to do? Package it all together of course! Drop by Flatirons, where you can find cards and wrapping paper, party supplies, and balloons, all for that unique and upscale gift ornament. A vast array of specialty items with a price range to fit every budget for the holiday season and throughout the year.

Flatirons has 2 locations for your convenience, **95 Maitland, 416.968.9274** and

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416.365.1506. This year's

ticket item, Gorilla head tree

ornaments. Be the one who gave the gift no one else thought of! Made from hand blown glass,

these ornaments can double as earrings (Donnaramma's suggestion, not mine) and are certainly the main attraction on the tree.

And last but certainly not least, treat yourself! One of the best parts of

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your best drag queen pal

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Now with all of this said and done

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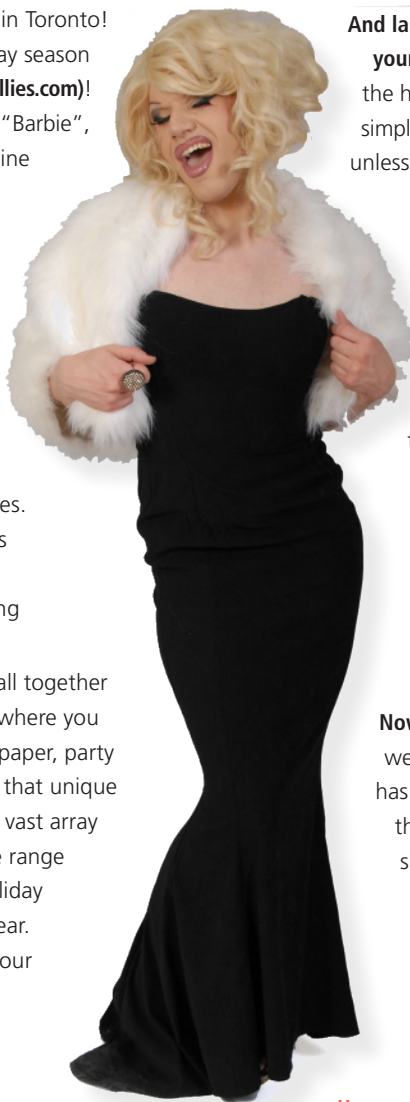
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Photography Donnaramma & Michael's photos by Christine Ward

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Gay Christmas in a Small Town

by Jeff Harrison

While many of us grew up in the rural setting of a small town, it was no easy place to fit in throughout the difficult years of coming out.

We ran away the first chance we got to the more cosmopolitan big lights of the big city. But now as we settle down and look to unwind on the weekends, we find ourselves drawn back to the tranquillity of the country for antique shopping, winery tours and relaxing spa getaways.

For those of us who still have families in small towns, we know there is no better getaway, nor any place else to find quality artisan craftsmanship at bargain basement prices. As the holidays fast approach, escape to the picturesque towns of Port Hope and Elora for unique gift shopping or a weekend away from the commercial craze of Christmas in the city.

Port Hope

Port Hope is celebrated for having one of the best preserved 19th century streetscapes in Ontario. Originally named "Ganaraske" by the native Iroquois Indians of the region, it later became known as Smith's Creek after a former fur trader once the United Empire Loyalists settled in 1793. Believe it or not it was being renamed Toronto, before finally becoming Port Hope in 1817 in honour of Colonel Henry Hope, then lieutenant governor of Quebec.

Stroll the quaint Victorian streets and visit the cafes, galleries and antique shops as you search for the perfect gift for that hard to buy person on your list.



Be sure to catch the **Annual Santa Claus Parade** December 1st from 1–2pm. Floats and bands and traditional pipers piping will march down Walton Street

to Memorial Park heralding the arrival of everyone's favourite man in red. (Contact 905.885.2004 or 1.888.767.8467).



Eleven Pipers Piping



Christmas Tree in the Morning

The Kinette Christmas General (905.884.9476) **Store** at the Knights of Columbus Hall has late night holiday shopping from November 30th until December 2nd and features crafts, home baking and the annual Christmas Tile.

Take the kids shopping for toys at **Little Lords and Ladies** (905.885.8215, 78 Walton St.) and stop for a treat at their traditional ice-cream parlour.

And for all Santa's little helpers who just can't seem to find enough time to get all their shopping done, December 7th is the traditional **Downtown Moonlight Sale**—inject a little holiday romance into your frantic gift purchasing.

After dinner join the **Port Hope Carolers** on November 30th at 7pm, as they make their annual **Candlelight Walk** while singing festival holiday songs. Then watch as the town has its official **Lighting Ceremony for the Candlelight Christmas** in Port Hope Memorial Park.

The Municipality of Port Hope Historical Society hosts Wassail Bowl, a traditional Victorian Christmas celebration with punch, hors d'oeuvres and holiday readings at Dorothy's House Museum, Garden Hill December 9th, 2pm–4pm. Be sure to reserve early. (Contact 905.797.2625)

Once shopping has been finished and dinner is happily being digested, wander over to one of Ontario's most impressive—and probably little know architectural wonders—Port Hope's restored **Capitol Theatre** (905.885.1071, 20 Queen St). Along with the Lido Theatre in The Pas, Manitoba, it is Canada's only surviving operational "Atmospheric" theatre.

When the depression hit in 1929 Famous Players closed the doors of the **Royal Theatre**, formerly the Grand Opera House. However, manager Stuart Smart refused to accept being out of a job and eventually convinced his employers to convert the theatre into Canada's first movie house designed expressly for "talkies."

“Atmospheric” theatres were specifically designed to give the illusion of whisking the crowd away to some exotic romantic destination and the Capitol was unique with its façade of a Norman castle, complete with leaded glass, diamond-paned windows a marquee that emulates a drawbridge with heavy chains and a courtyard of forested trees. A wonderful destination, the theatre always has something entertaining showing for the whole family.

Nuncrackers, an outrageous adaptation of Nunsense runs November 8th until the 25th. Just in time for Christmas is their annual pantomime, this year’s story being everybody’s favourite rags to riches tale of **Cinderella**. Cheer her on as she tries to win Prince Charming’s love all the while dealing with her incredibly ugly step-sisters. Perfect for the kids, it runs from December 7th until the 23rd.

Musical entertainment for the adults includes the **John McDermott Christmas Show**. The man who croons “Danny Boy” sweet enough to make you swoon sings live December 10, 8–10pm, tickets are \$47. And **George Fox**, one of Canada’s foremost country music stars (next to Ms. Lang, of course) plays his Christmas Show December 14th, 8–10pm, tickets are \$31.

Also, running the entire month of December at the theatre is the **Capitol Christmas Festival of Lights & Trees**. Come view the theatre decked out with thousands of lights and a wonderful array of beautifully decorated trees all available to be won by raffle—the perfect gift to your busy self as you run around with hectic holiday plans. (Contact 905.885.1071 or 1.800.434.5092 or capitoltheatre.com).

Friends of Music present the **Exultate Chamber Singers** features Dylan Thomas “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” December 8th, 8–10pm at the **Port Hope United Church**. (Contact 905.885.1071 or 1.800.434.5092 or porthopefriendsofmusic.com).



There is no better treat after a full day of shopping and an evening of bustling about the town than to retreat to the luxurious splendour of a period bed & breakfast.

Penstowe Bed & Breakfast is a Victorian-style inn, each guest suite uniquely decorated to capture the spirit of the times. Choose the boudoir of your favourite romantic couple of yore with the Romeo & Juliet Suite, the Antony & Cleopatra Suite, the Freddy & George Suite, the Napoleon & Josephine Suite, or the Browning Suite. (Contact 905.885.4317, 98 Ontario St, penstowe.com).

The Manor on Walton is a beautifully restored 1852 Victorian townhouse, situated in the heart of the Heritage District of Port Hope, steps away from the theatre, shops and restaurants. Complimentary afternoon tea is served in our cozy Tea Room, as are delicious hot breakfasts. Sleep like royalty in the King Edward Room, Queen Victoria Room, Queen Elizabeth Room, or the King George Room. (Contact 905.885.0155, 127 Walton Street, themanoronwalton.com).

Hill and Dale Manor, a sumptuously restored two-story house built the early 1850s, lies tucked away in the heart of historic downtown Port Hope on a beautiful wooded four-acre enclave. (Contact 877.238.9132, 47 Pine Street South, hillanddalemanor.com)

Elora

Nestled amidst towering pines and glacial rock formations, Elora was founded in 1832 by Captain William Gilkison, a British officer recently returned from India. Elora is well-known for its 19th century limestone architecture, its artistic community, and the breath-taking Elora Gorge.



Many different structures have spanned the Gorge at this location beginning in 1819 with an old Indian log bridge. In 1848 David Foote, John Cattanoek and Sailor James Gairns built what was heralded as the first cantilever bridge in North America—the **David Street Bridge**. The magnificent pier which supports the present bridge was built in 1868 by Charles Lawrence, one of Elora's early stonemasons and has recently been beautifully restored. You can walk there along the Elora Gorge Trail or drive by vehicle over the bridge.

Winding peacefully through Historic Downtown Elora is the Grand River. Soak up the atmosphere of historic limestone buildings,

extraordinary craft shops like the **Elora General Store** (519.846.2600, 15 Mill St. East) and the **Grand Gourmet** (519.846.5771, 42 Mill St. West), perfect for gift-giving ideas. Catch a matinee at **The Gorge Cinema** (519.846.0191, 43 Mill St. W.), Canada's oldest continually running repertoire theatre or check out galleries such as the chicly designed **Styll** (519.846.9222, 5 Mill Street East, styll.com).

Elora eagerly embraces the festive season with a Santa Claus Parade, a Tree Lighting ceremony and later store hours for last minute shopping. (Contact Elora Tourism at 519.846.9841, elorafergus.ca).

Follow the river to the **Elora Mill and Tooth of Time**. After a fire in 1870, an imposing eight-storey limestone mill was constructed, along with a warehouse, making this the largest flour mill west of Montreal. Perched on verge of the Grand River the dining room overlooks the tumbling waterfalls better known as the Tooth of Time. (Contact 519.846.9118, 77 Mill Street West, eloramill.com).

The Dalby House/Gordon Block is another cozy dinner retreat featuring live music. The impressive flat iron building at the intersection of Metcalfe and Geddes Streets was erected in 1865 by Andrew Gordon, a harness maker and business leader on the north side of the river. (Contact 519.846.9811, 143 Metcalfe Street).





Christmas in Elora



The Spa at Log Cabin

Winding down after a full day of hiking, shopping and sightseeing has never been easier or more decadent. **Log Cabin Heaven** is a secluded, five acre hilltop country spa retreat, offering one private luxurious guest suite accommodation for the ultimate in pampering. Offering spa amenities and gourmet dinners, directly across from the Elora Gorge, it features an indoor heated pool, waterfall and cedar sauna in our quarry stone spa. The Great Room offers a 20 foot ceiling with stone fireplace and 7 foot marble dining table, where you will enjoy a continental breakfast or full breakfast prepared by our resident Blue Ribbon California chef. (Contact 519.846.9439, 7384 Middlebrook Road, logcabinheaven.com).

Wiggitt Hall was originally built in 1891, as a doctor's home and office, later becoming the Notre Dame Convent and schoolroom. In 2004 the red brick Victorian was converted into a cozy bed and breakfast. Stay in William's Room, the suite named after the original master of the house; Florence's room, William's wife and incidentally the first woman in Elora to drive a car; or Marion's room named for the daughter of the house. (Contact 519.846.0024, 249 Geddes Street, home.cogeco.ca/~wiggithall.



Day trip to Fergus

A mere five minute drive away from Elora and its postcard perfect gorge is the farmer's market of Fergus—a perfect day trip. Start at the Fergus Market, originally a foundry erected by Beatty Brothers 1878. A fresh food farmer's market for the longest time it's now lined with artisan and craft shops.

After exploring the historic downtown, head over to The Fergus Brewhouse in the village centre. The limestone structure was originally built as the home of Thomas Watson, the proprietor of the Webster Tannery. After Watson was forced to claim bankruptcy, Dr. Abraham Grove purchased the tannery and converted it into a flour mill. Later it became his electrical generating plant when Dr. Groves installed two generators & steam boilers. One provided direct current that was used for the arc lights on Main St. & the Doctor's hospital. The other gave 60-cycle alternating current to *The News – Record*—the local paper. When the presses were ready to roll, a member of staff had to run down to the power house & tell them to turn on the alternating current. Dr. Groves extended the electric system to Elora in February 1900. As far as is known, he was the first man to transmit electricity between two towns in Ontario. Now a pub serving excellent food, they also have a couple of cozy rooms to rent out for those wishing to stay the night. (Contact 519.843.8870, 170 St. David Street S, fergusbrewhouse.com).

Just around the corner and down the main strip is the Breadalbane Inn, one of the finest examples of Scottish architecture in the area. Built in 1860, by one of the founders of the town, this charming stone inn features ornate ironwork, high ceilings, walnut banisters and an imported marble fireplace. Enjoy gourmet dining in the stunning glass conservatory or retreat to one of their opulently appointed Victorian suites. (Contact 519.843.4770, 487 St. Andrew St W, breadalbaneinn.com)

Built in 1850, **Drew House** is distinctive for its fine architectural details such as the wrap-around porch with its hand-carved bric-a-brac trim, cathedral windows and 18-inch limestone walls. Drew House not only offers six private rooms in the Coach House but also Gourmet Cooking Classes, a series of courses featuring the talents of your host Roger Dufau, a noted food expert and chef. Originally from the Basque region of France, Roger strives to use the freshest organically-grown products whenever possible. (Contact 519.846.2226, 120 Mill Street, drewhouse.com).

The **Grand River Guesthouse** is a spacious, picturesque three-level Country home on the banks of the Grand River. Visit Mennonite farmers' markets, hike or ski the Elora Gorge trails or just relax in the idyllic surroundings. (Contact 519.846.5980, 94 Water Street, grandriverguesthouse.com).

All the B&B's listed will be happy to help you arrange for theatre tickets, reservations at excellent restaurants, winery tours, or treatments at luxurious spas—all of which are close at hand.

JEFF HARRISON is a Toronto based freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Xtra!*, *Eye Weekly*, *fab* magazine, *Gay Guide Toronto.com* and *Instinct*. His friends keep wondering about his novels in progress and the top-secret comic book project...while he hasn't forgotten them, he's having a hell of a time fitting them into his constantly hectic schedule.

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Cherished Holiday Recipes

by Jennifer Yang



The tree may be the symbolic centerpiece of Christmastime, but it's the dinner table that people gather around most during the holidays.

To make your Yuletide spread special this year, we asked five of Toronto's most knowledgeable food and drink experts to share their favourite Christmas recipes.

Their contributions, ranging from Quebecois comfort food to a mother's English trifle, weren't nearly as exalted as one might expect from the culinary elite. Instead, they were meaningful, down to earth and close to the heart—just as all things should be when it comes to holiday celebrations.



Jamie Kennedy and his Tourtière Strudel

Every year come Christmas, worldly flavours coalesce on Jamie Kennedy's holiday table.

"I put on the lens of our multi-ethnic city when I go to create," explains the culinary boy wonder. "It takes living in a place like Toronto to have this kind of inspiration. The kind of cooking we do at the restaurant often comprises many different cultural influences."

One of his favourite recipes for a Christmas lunch or dinner is his tourtière strudel, a hearty dish from la belle province with an added European twist. Because tourtières are essentially a no-frills "dish for the people," Kennedy says they can look a little frumpy on the plate. So to dress the tart up a little, Kennedy outfits his in a strudel shell instead of the typical pie pastry.

"This takes influences from German cuisine and clashes it with the French Canadian," Kennedy explains. "And," he adds, "it's a little sexier."

Even after the makeover however, Kennedy's tourtière still proves to be a practical dish for the season. It can be baked several weeks in advance and stashed into the freezer, ready for serving even at a moment's notice. "People drop over and you want to be able to give them something nice," says Kennedy. "This is a comfort dish and it's good to be comforted at Christmas."

Jamie Kennedy Wine Bar, 9 Church Street.
416.362.1957. Open for lunch and dinner,
Monday–Saturday. Open for brunch and
dinner Sundays.

Jamie Kennedy's Tourtière Strudel

Serves six.

Filling:

- 30 ml (2 tbsp) butter
- 1 Spanish onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 227 g (½ lb) ground pork
- 227 g (½ lb) ground beef
- 2 eggs
- 1 cooked potato, cut into brunoise
- 1.2 ml (¼ tsp) roughly chopped sage
- 0.6 ml (1/8 tsp) ground clove
- Salt & fresh ground black pepper to taste

Strudel:

- 1 recipe for strudel dough (see below)
- 120 ml (½ cup) melted butter

Garnish:

- 240 ml (1 cup) pickled jardinière vegetables
- 20 ml (2 tbsp) roughly chopped Italian parsley

Melt butter in a large frying pan on medium heat. Add onion and garlic. Stir then add ground pork and beef. Sauté for five minutes. Transfer to mixing bowl and add eggs and potato brunoise. Mix in sage, ground clove and seasonings. Mix well and refrigerate.

Pull strudel dough (see below). Paint melted butter over surface of dough. Place filling along one edge of dough and roll. Paint melted butter onto finished strudel. Preheat oven to 175 C (350 F). Bake until golden brown.

Presentation:

Slice into bite-sized pieces for hors d'oeuvre or into larger pieces as a first course. Garnish with pieces of jardinière vegetables and sprinkle with parsley.

Strudel dough recipe:

360 ml (1 ½ cups) all purpose flour

180 ml (¾ cup) water

5 ml (1 tsp) fresh lemon juice

45 ml (3 tbsp) melted unsalted butter

Pinch of salt

Combine ingredients in a stainless steel bowl. Transfer dough to a smooth surface. Knead dough vigorously for 10 minutes or until texture is satiny smooth. Cover dough with plastic wrap and allow to rest for 4 hours at room temperature.

Anthony Rose and The Drake Hotel's Sticky Toffee Pudding

Anthony Rose has a bit of a love-hate relationship with his sticky toffee pudding. As much as he loves the dessert, it's also become a source of mild annoyance for Rose, who is executive chef at The Drake Hotel. "We cannot take this thing off the menu and I hate that!" Rose gripes jokingly. "I love the dessert but I'm not one of those chefs that likes to keep things the same. I like to constantly evolve."

Drake denizens just can't seem to evolve past this delicious morsel however, and every time Rose tries to sneak it off the menu, his customers sing a chorus of complaints.



As for Rose himself, he can't really seem to get enough of the tasty dish either, at least not around the holidays. He's made it for dessert every Christmas and Hanukah since his pastry chef, David Chow, developed the recipe two years ago. "It's honestly the best one I've ever had," Rose insists. "You taste it and you're like 'Ah! I feel better now.' There's a lot of love in that dessert."

The Drake Hotel, 1150 Queen Street W.
416.531.5042. Open for dinner Monday–
Sunday. Open for brunch and dinner Sundays.

The Drake's Sticky Toffee Pudding Date Cakes

(yields 30):

1 lb dried pitted dates, chopped

3 cups coffee

1 cup water

2 tsp baking soda

1 cup butter

4 cups icing sugar

4 eggs

6 cups flour

1 tbsp ginger, freshly grated*

1 tsp salt

2 tsp baking powder

*Easier to grate if frozen first

Boil dates in water and coffee until somewhat soft (approx. 10 minutes). Add baking soda to date mixture and let sit until cool. Purée.

Cream butter and icing sugar. Add eggs to butter mixture one at a time. Add date purée to butter mixture. Add remaining ingredients and stir just to combine. Pour into a 9"x13" pan lined with parchment. Bake, covered with tin foil, in a water bath at 350 F until firm to touch (approx. 1 hour).

Brown Butter Toffee Sauce

(yields approx. 1.5 L):

1 lb butter

5 ½ cups brown sugar

1 L 35% cream

2 tsp salt

Splash of vanilla

Brown butter in large pot. Add cream slowly (watch for splatter). Add brown sugar and salt. Boil. (If mixture boils too long, it will separate; if this happens, re-emulsify with immersion blender).

Candied Pecans:

Untoasted pecans

Maple syrup

Honey

Cinnamon, cayenne, ginger, salt, pepper.

Toss pecans with just enough maple syrup and honey to coat. Add spices to taste. Roast in 350 F oven. Stir often until toasted. Let cool and chop coarsely.

Crème Fraîche

(yields approx. 4 L):

3 L 35% cream

1 L buttermilk

Splash of lemon juice

Put ingredients into container and leave at room temperature for 2 days until thickened. Strain through cheesecloth for a few hours until desired consistency is reached.

Cut cakes into desired size and poke holes in cake with a wooden skewer. Ladle toffee sauce over top and garnish with a dollop of crème fraiche and a scattering of pecans.

James Chatto & Mrs. Chatto's Christmas Trifle

With a vocabulary every bit as refined as his palate, James Chatto has become a preeminent voice in the world of food journalism. Nobody can dissect a dish or turn a phrase quite like Chatto, and the award-winning writer has been a fixture in Toronto Life's food pages since 1987.

When asked for his fondest Christmas recipe, his English mother's trifle immediately sprung to mind. "It is a standalone thing of beauty," says Chatto. "It's a highlight for the children especially but even the adults, who are absolutely stuffed by dessert, tend to succumb to the trifle."

The trifle recipe is a family heirloom—Chatto's grandmother gave it to his mother who, in turn, passed it along to her children by having them help prepare it, year after year. For Chatto, the trifle is the crowning moment of Christmas Eve dinner but it also makes for a brilliant Christmas morning breakfast—that is, if the bowl hasn't already been licked clean. (Making two trifles, by the way, is Chatto's trick for ensuring leftovers).

"It's so wicked," says Chatto. "We eat it out of the bowl with a spoon leaning out of the fridge—it's for that sort of secret Christmas breakfast."

Mrs. Chatto's Christmas Trifle

1 box ladyfinger cookies
1/2 cup cream sherry
2 packets lemon or raspberry jello
2 tins apricots
2 tins sliced pears
2 cups fresh or frozen raspberries
4 cups stiff custard
2 cups 35% whipping cream, whipped with sugar and a dash of vanilla essence until it forms stiff peaks
Toasted slivered almonds.

Break sponge fingers in two and place in bottom of a cut glass bowl to form lowest layer of trifle. Anoint with sherry. Prepare jello, using juice from tinned fruit instead of cold water. Pour over sponge fingers and allow to set. Arrange apricots and pears on top of jelly. Scatter raspberries evenly. Pour on custard and allow to set in refrigerator. Spread top layer of whipped cream on top of custard. Scatter with toasted almonds. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until needed. Serves 8.

Christine Sismondo and the French 75

For mixologist Christine Sismondo, there's simply no time like Noël for getting down and fizzy with it. "Everybody likes champagne around the Christmas holidays," insists Sismondo, Toronto's doyenne of the mixed drink and author of *Mondo Cocktail: A Shaken and Stirred History*.



"For some people, it's the only time champagne gets brought out. And I think champagne should be brought out all the time!"

But as much as Sismondo adores the bubbly, cocktails will always be first and foremost in her heart. That's why during the holidays, Sismondo sips on the French 75—a blissful marriage between her two liquid loves. Named after a World War I field gun, the French 75 is a champagne cocktail invented by Raoul Lufbery, a swashbuckling French-American flyboy who thought champagne wasn't potent enough. According to Sismondo, after adding a cube of sugar, a squeeze of lemon and a hefty dose of cognac, Lufbery declared, "Now that's more like it! That makes you feel as though you've been hit by a French 75."

"I don't know about you, but champagne alone gets me plenty drunk," laughs Sismondo. "This is just the classic cocktail though—perfect for the holidays. The sweetness of the champagne and the tartness of the lemon perfectly balance off the punch of the brandy."



The French 75

½ oz cognac

Wedge of lemon, squeezed
in (about ½ tsp) Sugar cube,
drop in and allow to soak

Fill a flute with champagne
Garnish with lime wedge.

Jeff Sansone and his Santa's Little Helper

Mixologist Jeff Sansone has been a part of our city drinkscape for over 20 years now, 12 of which he's spent helming the bar at Canoe, one of Toronto's premiere destinations for elevated dining.

And as a seasoned cocktail designer, Sansone always looks forward to Christmas, which he says is the easiest time of year for designing drinks. "You get away with more," Sansone explains grinning. "I'd never dare garnish a drink with candy at any other time of the year but at Christmas, it's OK."

Two years ago, Sansone invented the Santa's Little Helper, a tangy concoction of vodka, cranberry and tangerine. It also features a dash of vanilla liqueur, which infuses the drink with holiday spirit and lends the flavour some lovely velveteen undertones.

For large parties, Sansone recommends preparing it in a big punch bowl, which can also double as a beautiful table centerpiece—just float some star fruit slices and throw in some frozen cranberries, dipped in edible gold flakes (these also serve gorgeously as natural "ice cubes," says Sansone).

"It's sort of like Christmas in a glass," he remarks, asserting that not even his own mother (who is usually impartial to wine) can resist Santa's Little Helper.

Canoe Restaurant and Bar, 54th floor,
66 Wellington Street W. 416.364.0054.
Open for lunch and dinner Monday–Friday.
Open Saturday–Sunday for private events.



Santa's Little Helper

1¼ oz vodka

¾ oz tangerine juice

¼ oz vanilla liqueur

1½ oz cranberry juice

Mix, shake and serve. Garnish with "festive kebobs" (kumquats and cranberries on a skewer).

JENNIFER YANG is a journalist living in Toronto. Writing about food makes her both very happy and very hungry.

Photography Jennifer Yang

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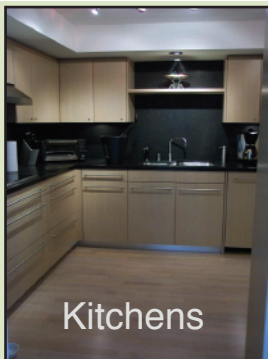
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Claire for Christmas

Story and illustration by Troy Brooks

"Mom, I'm not a drag queen!"

"Well alright dear, but you do dress up in women's clothes."

Alan pulled his cell phone away from his ear and looked at it, contemplating throwing it out the window of the cab. "I'm a celebrity impersonator, mother. Drag queens can barely lip-sync."

"But you were such a handsome young man when you had eyebrows, dear. You really should let them grow back because if you pluck them long enough you know, they won't ever come back. You don't want to be an old man without eyebrows do you dear?"

"Mom, I'm almost at the theatre, I've got to go. I'll call you next week to let you know when I'm coming home for Christmas."

"Well that's why I'm calling, Alan." She said under a heavy breath, "Christmas is complicated this year, sweetheart. You see, your sister, Cherie, has to be in Switzerland for a work opportunity she absolutely can't pass up and it turns out your father and I will be in Montreal with Aunt Dela. She's not well, she can't travel and she'll be all alone for Christmas so your father and I are staying with her for a while. We would like you to watch Claire. It's only for a few days and she asked if she could come stay with you."

"You mean we're not spending Christmas together at all this year?" said Alan, confused. She cleared her throat, trying to camouflage her



own disappointment. "We'll plan a nice visit after the holidays but these are special circumstances. Would you dear? It would mean the world to Cherie. It's hard being a single mom and Claire just worships you and Paul. I know it's not an ideal situation and Cherie feels terrible, but I insisted we ask you because Claire doesn't really want to go to Switzerland and I thought you two would have a fabulous time together."

Alan let out a small whimper. "Was that a yes, dear?" she asked loudly.

He sank into the back seat, curled his face into a pout and groaned, "Come bearing gifts."

As the cab pulled up to Buddies In Bad Times Theatre, he handed the cabbie some cash and he threw his feet into a snowbank. "'Tis the friggin season," he cracked as the snow made it's way to his socks. He raced past the ticket booth, kicking flakes like sparks off his heels against the walls.

Once inside his dressing room Alan shrugged off his long camel coat and draped it over a pink satin hanger. He sat before a blazing bulb framed mirror lined with old movie star photos, popped open an old plastic tackle box full of make up and went to work on his face.

Alan Dean's show of female impersonations, Double Take, had been a big hit all through the club circuit in Key West and now he'd brought it home to Toronto for a Fall/Winter run in so he could spend the holidays with his family and his partner Paul, whom he hadn't seen for 3 months. It was a constant struggle trying to make room for a relationship between two busy careers but they truly loved each other and tried to make the necessary compromises to keep it together.

In this show Alan did nothing but the classics. Judy, Peggy, Marlene, Katharine, Bette and a Garbo that brought the house down. He joked on stage about how surprised his family was that his creepy obsession with these women turned out to be so lucrative. Some of his more garish impersonations were, as *Now* magazine wrote, "like seeing these women pulled back from the grave by the hairpins of their wigs."

The lights surrounding Nathan Phillips Square illuminated a snow fall that glittered like silver sequence against the night sky, Alan sat close to Paul on a bench overlooking the ice skaters and bitched.

"Don't get me wrong, I love her and she's a great kid. But what do I know about entertaining 10 year olds on Christmas day?"

Paul smiled and put his arm around Alan. "Are you kidding me Al? What could be better for a little girl than to play dress-up in the closet of a drag queen?"

"Did you just use the D word in my presence you nasty bitch?" piped Alan in his best drunken Bette Davis.

"Look," said Paul, turning to face Alan, "she's never been to Toronto and she's a great kid. You two are gonna have a blast." "What do you mean *you two*?" Asked Alan. "What happened to the three of us?"

"Well," squirmed Paul, "I can join you guys for a bit on Christmas night, but you know I have that big deal going through the day after Christmas. This is a big money client."

"Oh great, you're gonna ditch me too, huh? And who the hell buys a house the day after Christmas, anyway?" Barked Alan. "Don't you think it's a bit pathetic that we can't even make time for each other on Christmas?"

Paul planted an exaggerated kiss under a thin slice of guilt on Alan's cheek and leaned into his shoulder. They sat and stared at the lights for a while in silence.

"I guess I should hide the lube," Alan deadpanned.



As that old familiar green Chevy pulled up to 91 Wellesley Street on Christmas Eve morning, Alan stood out front, bundled in a charcoal grey double breasted woollen peacoat and a matching Borsalino cap.

"Dear," wheezed his mother as she peeled her heavily bundled self from the front seat, "Are you dressed warm enough?"

The backseat door flew open and out popped a round little rosy face framed by a fuzzy poof of flame red hair. "MAME!" She screamed as she tumbled out of the car to wrap herself around Alan's legs.

After watching Auntie Mame together when Claire was 4, Alan was, in her eyes, forever more the title character. "Hey there, baby doll," yelled Alan sweeping her up off the ground and squeezing her. "I've missed you." Alan always did get a jolt of excitement when he saw Claire and how happy she was to be near him.

"Oh Mame, it's gonna be so much fun!" She said out of breath.

Alan's father came marching around the car with his arms stretched out for a bear hug. "How's my famous son?"

"Dad, I'm hardly famous. But don't let that stop you from spreading the rumor."

He kissed Alan square on the cheek and stared warmly into his eyes for a moment before turning to open the trunk. He took out a big garbage bag full of gifts and said, "You two open these tomorrow and have a ball. Sorry about all this."

Alan's mother yanked up the collar of his coat.

"We would love to come in for a coffee but we came inching up the QEW and now we're late. You two have fun!"

Alan ran his hand through Claire's curls and they both waved goodbye as the car pulled out.

"Did you know that you have THE most fabulous hair in Toronto, Dahling," croaked Alan in his Tallulah Bankhead as they turned to go into the building.

Claire ran into the living room of Alan's apartment while he took their jackets and threw them over a big red velvet armchair in the corner.

"Are you hungry at all, Claire?"

"Will you do Marilyn for me?" She squealed.

"Don't you wanna see a bit of Toronto," asked Alan.

"OK, dress up as Joan Crawford and take me for a walk." pleaded Claire. "Mom and I watched Mildred Pierce last week on TV and she said you do her."

Alan paused. "I don't know if that's who I should be while walking a little girl down the street," he said. "Someone's libel to call child services."

"Oh please," she begged.

Alan puffed on an imaginary cigarette and moaned, "Maybe when it gets a bit darker, dear." Hours later, after a box of lady fingers and laughing through a two hour makeup session, they made their way south on Yonge Street as people giggled and nudged each other.

"Did you scrub the bathroom floor today, Tina?" Quipped a voice in the distance. Alan ignored them. He simply pursed his rounded red lips, lifted his heavily painted caterpillar brows and patted Claire's head.

"You asked for it," he said dryly.

That night they made pizza from scratch and watched Wizard of Oz in seaweed face masks and pajamas. "Mame, I wish I lived with you in Toronto," said Claire as Alan painted her toe nails.

"Claire, I don't even live here half the time and Cherie would be heart broken if she heard you say that."

"Mom talks to me like a kid, but you talk to me like a friend."

Alan smiled warmly and wondered why he had been so nervous about Claire coming to stay in the first place.

"Is Paul the man when you go to bed together?" Claire asked. Alan inhaled, froze and couldn't

seem to unglue his eyes from Claire's toenails. After what seemed like a small time warp, there came a knock on the door.

"Thank you," chirped Alan in his Streisand voice as he jumped up to answer it. Paul came bounding in with an arm load of presents, a small carrot cake and red wine.

"Uncle Paul!" screamed Claire.

"Don't move, Claire," gasped Alan, "or you'll make that atrocious nail color part of my decor." Alan hugged Paul and anxiously tore off his jacket like he was a Christmas present. "I thought you couldn't join us until tomorrow."

"Yes, well I can't stay," said Paul, "I just wanted to see Claire and bring you two your gifts. Make sure he doesn't open that until tomorrow morning, Claire."

They opened the bottle of red, made Claire a frozen virgin Pina Colada and played one of Alan's vintage 70's board games. Claire talked about school and how lonely she felt there sometimes and how much she wanted to be a make-up artist when she was older. Finally, a little after 11, she fell asleep on the fold out sofa.

Alan took the quilt at the foot of the mattress and gently draped it over Claire, tucking in the sides around her little shoulders down to her ankles. He and Paul gathered up some paper plates around the room and tiptoed into the kitchen.

"I didn't know you two were so close," said Paul. "Neither did I, really," said Alan quietly.

They both sat down at the kitchen table and looked at each other for a few minutes, tingling with a renewed sense of gratitude for one another.

"Thank you for putting everything aside to be here," whispered Alan.

"Well," said Paul quietly as he leaned in closer to Alan, "I was going to stay for half an hour tops, but after I saw you two I just couldn't make sense of going back home to do paper work."



Paul took Alan's hand and brought it over to his lap and said in a slow deliberate tone, "I think this will be a Christmas that you both are going to remember for the rest of your lives," he glanced over at Claire, "and I guess I wanted to be in those memories."

Alan ran his free hand down the side of Paul's face and said, "You know, spending today with Claire—and seeing how fast she's growing up made me think about us and our priorities. "Alan brushed a few crumbs off the table with a sweep of his hand and continued, "I don't want to look back and see that I put more energy into dressing up as crazy dead women than I did the people that I care about."

"Sounds like a good resolution for both of us," said Paul as his eyes welled. They locked eyes and smiled at each other in silence for a few minutes, until a voice piped up from the fold out sofa.

"Are you kissing?"

TROY BROOKS is a freelance writer, artist and musician living in Toronto. You can check him out at troybrooks.deviantart.com.

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Atlantis Do You Cruise?

by Manny Machado

As I walked on board my first Atlantis cruise, I really had no idea what was in store for me, after all how different could it be from a regular cruise? Suddenly from a distance I heard the distinct sounds of what I could only make out as “coochy-coochy.” There before my eyes stood the infamous Charo amidst a crowd of her endearing fans, lapping up all the gay love her enormous bosoms could handle. All at once, the difference became quite apparent and I kicked myself for not packing a pair of gold lame heels!

Nowhere else is it evident just how much fun 3,000 gay men and some women can have than on Atlantis' yearly "Largest Gay Cruise" (Jan 19th–26th 2008). The biggest of its kind and perhaps the most unique vacation you'll ever enjoy, this tour always attracts people from every single continent. Some travel as couples, some as groups and some come on board truth to tell, by the first port of call, no one's

the last one standing to win a complimentary vacation on next year's cruise.

Stroll the decks and soak up the sun, or be adventurous and try the rock-climbing wall, or surfing in the jet powered wave pool. There's even an on board skating rink with open ice times for all guests wanting to get in out from the sun. Don't poop yourself out from too many day activities though, because you'll need your energy for the long nights ahead.



really solo anymore. Among the daily activities planned during the seven day cruise, are specific events for singles—dinners, parties, lounges and meetings—all geared to help even the shyest wallflowers meet new friends.

People watching has never been as much fun, especially when groups of strangers meet on the top pool deck to play crazy pool games, like Survivor. Individual participants include gamut of bears, twinks, gym boys, average "joes", drag queens and lesbians collaborating and competing to be the next Richard Hatch, all in hopes of being

The entertainment is top notch with Royal Caribbean's cast and crew of singers, dancers, skaters and performers. Atlantis also ups the ante with their own line up of guest entertainers. Past celebrities have included Kristine W, Joan Rivers, Deborah Cox, Rosie O'Donnell, Jennifer Hudson, Mario Cantone and Margaret Cho working alongside world renowned DJ's like Victor Calderone and Manny Lehman all set to lead you through unbelievable dance events under the night sky until early light of morning.

The choice really is up to you as to how much fun you can handle. If you're feeling overwhelmed by all the options, Atlantis offers relaxation and meditation classes taught by celebrity hypnotist and life coach Bruce MacDonald. Bruce also performs a hypnotism session in front of a live audience. As a past participant this was a personal highlight for me and all I can say is—WOW! What a life changing moment that was, free from all my inhibitions to truly enjoy myself and my life.

And for those of you who really like to be pampered I must not forget to mention the full service spa and gym facilities offering everything from one-on-one sessions to group Pilates and yoga classes. Book your spa appointments early though, as they are almost always sold out by day three.

With all the fun on board you may not want to get off the ship, but Atlantis does a great job of keeping things fresh year to year, by rotating and adding new ports of call. Past destinations have included San Juan, Puerto Rico, Cancun, Mexico and St. Maarten. Two years ago marked Atlantis' graceful return to the Cayman Islands (Atlantis



was turned away several years before) to be the first ever all gay chartered ship allowed to dock in the Caymans. Atlantis also offers many cruises throughout the year, with destinations like Brazil's Rio Carnival and European destination like Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Copenhagen to Stockholm in 2008.



One of my favorite destinations during the "Largest Gay Cruise" is Labadee, Haiti. Royal Caribbean leases this private island exclusively for its guests and for one day a year it really becomes the gayest beach in the world, with thousands of gay men frolicking in the sand and surf.



I wish I were back on the ship...

As the final destination before heading home, it's the last chance you and your new found friends have to enjoy one another before heading back to reality.

The itineraries may be different, but the purpose remains the same, traveling with groups of your closest gay friends and family on your very own private cruise ship. By gay family, I do mean lesbians, fag-hags/girlfriends and their boyfriends as well, specific events are planned to welcome the girls among the activities. Those we love—no matter who they are—are welcomed on board, so if you can convince mom and dad to join in on the fun, **BRING THEM ALONG!**

Atlantis is diligent in ensuring all your needs are met, where every activity and event offered on board is meant to help you not only relax and enjoy yourself, but to inspire you to meet new people and create new friendships. High-end traveler or budget vacationer, it makes no difference as everyone is treated as equals and granted the same access to enjoy the same areas as everyone else.

It's mandatory for each staff member to have been a previous guest and now in turn, they

are there to ensure you have as much fun as they had and are still having. Maybe you too will want to join the Atlantis team and share your own story of how a cruise changed your life with a future Atlantis guest.

Having the opportunity to experience both sides of the cruise as guest and Atlantis staff member, I can honestly say that each year I look forward to the cruise and each time (4th trip this year coming) brings a new level of enjoyment and self-awareness. Leaving all the stigmas and clichés behind of being a gay man or woman, we can truly enjoy each other camaraderie by allowing the best in all of us to shine. With just the simple act of greeting every stranger you see, who knows who might become your new best friend, lover or more?

Urban space stylist and designer of Elbowroom Studio, **MANNY MACHADO** has been involved in RBC's The Living Large Seminar, the new model suites presentation at One King West and as lead designer and co-host on MTV Canada's "Budget Cribbs," a design segment aired during MTV LIVE. This is Manny's first foray into freelance writing, but definitely not his last. elbowrooms.ca

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Winter in the City

by Amy Pearl

If you're like me and can't seem to stock up on enough President's Choice hot chocolate mix and unfurl from the addictively warm womb of the comforter to place a toe on the ice cold floor in the winter months, then visualize yourself in puffy down jacket with cashmere mitts and scarf, ears snuggled inside a fat-knitted toque, out enjoying the best Toronto has to offer this winter to keep you entertained if not warm.

Festivals & Events

Winter City Festival

Jan 25–Feb 7

Free

This is a two-week long festival of local artists showing their skills on stage at venues such as Nathan Phillips Square, with tons of family friendly performances for the kids to enjoy.

toronto.ca/special_events/wintercity/about.htm

Winterlicious

Jan 25–Feb 7 2008

\$20–30 per person

Winterlicious is part of the Winter City Festival and involves more than just snow cones. Over 120 of Toronto's top restaurants offer up a prix-fix motif so you can eat something other than sushi. \$10 or \$20 will get you a three course lunch or \$20 or \$30 for a dinner. Tip and tax not included.



(Restaurants will accept reservations for Winterlicious beginning January 11. toronto.ca/special_events/)

Winter Events at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre

(416.585.8120 255 Front St W
mtccc.com)

Whole Life Expo 2007

Nov 23–Nov 25

Exhibit Pass

\$8/Lecture Pass \$15

Because we're used to curing our colds with prescriptions and chicken soups,

it may come as a surprise to hear how the winter flu-bug is your body's way of releasing "issues." Put away that bottle of Tylenol and grab your amethyst crystal and head on down to investigate holistic treatments, products and information guaranteed to bring balance and a varied approach to your wellness routine. (wholelifecanada.com)

The Clothing Show

Dec 14–Dec 16

\$8 advance/\$10 door

If you are tired of the Winners shmattah search, this is the place to check out local designers showcasing fantastic street wear and casual clothes, boutique items and sample sales, true vintage and retro—lots of creative ideas to revitalize your wardrobe during the blah winter months. (416.596.9859
theclothingshow.com)



Metro Home Show 2008

Jan 14–Jan 21

Adults \$12/Seniors and Kids \$10/

Children under 12 Free

Interior decorating is a great way to distract you from the winter doldrums. If you are tired of staring at the same four walls, just run to this show and get brilliant new home ideas from many a style guru. (416.585.8000 metrohomeshow.com)

Try Something Different....

Traditional Polar Bear Swim in Toronto

January 1 12:00pm.

Sunnyside Beach, off Lakeshore Blvd,
south of Parkside Dr

Free

The Toronto Polar Bear Club will be holding its second annual Dip into Lake Ontario to raise money for Habitat for Humanity, an organization that helps build houses for families in need. Join me as I cover myself in Vaseline and stick to my New Year's resolution to "grin and bear it" by taking the frigid plunge into Lake Ontario. (torontopolarbear.com)

Holiday Festivities

Cavalcade of Lights

Nov 24, Dec 1, Dec 8, Dec 15

Nathan Phillips Square 100 Queen W

Free

Tis the season for traditions and one of the best is the lighting of the big 50 foot tree that takes three days to decorate by four talented crew members. Over 100,000 pretty, tiny lights along with a fireworks display is sure to bring out the kid in all of us. Expect "The Magic of Light" performers to show off their acrobatic, dance and music skills for the entire family.

Irving Berlin's White Christmas

Nov 20–Jan 5

Sony Center for the Performing Arts
(formerly the Hummingbird Center)

\$37–\$100

If this time of year means crooning, "I'm dreaming of a white..." then it's time to satisfy the musical theatre aficionado inside with a show your parents or grandparents are sure to enjoy. Set in Vermont, song and dance take you back to a traditional heartwarming holiday season. (416.872.2262 1 Front St. E. ticketmaster.ca)

The Nutcracker by the National Ballet

Dec 8–Dec 30

The Four Seasons Centre
for the Performing Arts

Adults \$41–\$110/Children \$31–\$99

Enjoy the classic in a new venue where there isn't a bad seat in the house. An architectural marvel to enjoy at night and within walking distance to Nathan Phillips square, this is definitely a must for a night out in Toronto. Better yet, make it a theme night with the gals and all dress up as sugar-plum fairies with pre-drinks at the cozy Queen Mother Café (208 Queen W) before hand. (416.363.6671 145 Queen St W fourseasonscentre.ca)

Santa Claus Parade

Nov 18

12:30 pm (lasts about an hour)

Free

A Toronto tradition since 1908, it's got marching bands, cute elves, and maidens in dresses—so what exactly distinguishes this from the Pride parade? Trade in your water pistol for a Santa cap and bundle up for your chance to see the man in red himself. Get there early so the little ones have a good view. (thesantaclausparade.ca)



Opera

Puccini's *Tosca* by the Canadian Opera Company

Jan 26–Feb 17

The Four Seasons Centre

for the Performing Arts \$60–\$275

Ticket special: on Jan 19th all tickets are \$20

Box office 416.363.8213

A tempestuous tale told the way Italians do it best. This is the perfect time of year stir up your primal emotions and engulf yourself in a passionate over-the-top performance. (416.363.6671 145 Queen W coc.ca fourseasonscentre.ca)

Theatre

Sweeney Todd

Nov 1–Dec 31

Princess of Wales Theatre

\$37–\$84

Picture yourself screaming as the demon barber of Fleet Street wields his shears at the necks of unsuspecting patrons in Stephen Sondheim's thriller musical. May not be appropriate for the little ones. (416.870.8000 300 King W. mirvish.com)

Peter Pan

Nov 22–Jan 6

Elgin & Winter Garden Theatre

Adults \$54/Children \$49

Ross Petty Productions presents the tale of the boy who wouldn't grow up. Come back to never-never land and gasp as Captain Hook threatens to ambush the lost boys, clap to prevent Tinker Bell from dying and watch three-time Olympic figure skater Kurt Browning soar across the proscenium arch at the architecturally awesome Winter Garden theatre. (416.872.5555 189 Yonge St rosspetty.com)

The Rhubarb Theatre Festival

Feb 7–Feb 25

Buddies In Bad Times Theatre

\$15

Now in its 29th year, come and see some fantastic queer Canadian originals. (416.975.8555 12 Alexander St buddiesinbadtimetheatre.com)

Toronto's best kept hidden theatre bargain...

The following theatres in Toronto offer pay-what-you-can (PWYC) 2:30 Sunday matinees. Box office usually opens around 1pm, but call ahead for specific hours.

Tarragon Theatre (416.531.1827 30 Bridgman Ave. tarragontheatre.com)

Factory Theatre (416.504.9971 125 Bathurst factorytheatre.ca.)

Theatre Passe Murille (416.504.7529 16 Ryerson Ave passemuraille.on.ca)

CanStage *Mondays (416.368.3110 26 Berkley St canstage.com)

Comedy

The Second City

Tues–Thur, Sun 8pm. \$20

Fri–Sat 8pm and 10:30pm. \$28

(416.343.0011 51 Mercer Street secondcity.com)

Yuk Yuks

Sun–Thu 8:30 pm.

Fri–Sat 7:30 & 10:30 pm. \$2–\$17

Entrées \$13–\$22

Featuring top-name comics from around the world along with the best local comedians. (416.967.6425 224 Richmond W yukyuks.com)



The Laugh Resort

Wed 8:30 pm. \$7 Thu 8:30 pm. \$10

Fri–Sat 8:30 & 10:45 pm. \$15

(416.364.5233 370 King W laughresort.com)

Spirit's Bar and Grill

No cover stand-up every Wednesday night.

(416.967.0001 642 Church St spiritsbarandgrill.com)

Karaoke

Fox and the Fiddle

Saturdays, 11pm

Free

Consider this a comedy listing as well with all the clowning around that goes on during their Saturday night Karaoke. Host Pete is clever, quick on the draw, and plays a great variety of songs. (416.966.4369 280 Bloor W foxandfiddle.com)

Gladstone Hotel

Every Thursday–Sunday, 9pm

Free

Easily a Toronto favorite, join hipsters and wanna-be Canadian Idol as they belt out their favourite tunes. Now you can take home a CD of your performance for only \$10—the memories and hangovers are priceless. (416.531.4645 1214 Queen W gladstonehotel.com)

Karaoke nights near you...

toronto.com/karaoke

Culture

Royal Ontario Museum

Adults \$10/Children \$5

Explore Toronto's exciting, multi-faceted architectural wonder. With upcoming exhibits such as Age of Dinosaurs and Mammals, the Middle East and South Asia and Textiles and Costumes of the Ages, there is something to satisfy the curious. (416.586.8000 100 Queen's Park rom.on.ca)



Complete Listing of Art Galleries in Toronto:

arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/canadian/
Toronto-Artists-and-Art-Galleries.html

Outdoor Adventures

Downhill Skiing and Snowboarding

locally in Toronto

Love to shooosh down the slopes? Then head to these nearby hills to satisfy your slalom needs. Or check out Toronto Gay Ski/Snowboarding Club at tgsc.ca where you can join in a ton of chartered downhill and cross country ski trips where your transportation and lessons are part of fantastic weekend package deals.

Centennial Park Ski Area Snowcentre

Downhill Skiing & Snowboarding

Rentals & Lessons Available

(416.33.TOSKI 256 Centennial Park Rd Etobicoke)

North York Ski Centre, Earl Bales Park

(416.395.7934 4169 Bathurst St)

Uplands Ski Club in Thornhill

With 5 Slopes, rental equipment, beginner area and snow school. (905.889.3291 46 Uplands Ave, Hwy 407 & Yonge)

Cross Country Skiing

Not into breaking your neck and prefer to keep your slopes flat and safe?

Cross Country Skiing at the Scenic Caves

\$25 day pass

Enjoy the fresh, white carpeting of a northern Ontario snowfall on a suspension foot-bridge during over 126 meters of pure cross-country skiing goodness. (705.446.0256 Collingwood, On sceniccaves.com)

North Toronto Ski Club

Whether you ski or snowboard this popular club allows you to take a charter trip up to the ski resorts that aren't TTC accessible, as well as learn from the pros. Don't be intimidated if you're a novice, as there are others who are ready to fall on their snow-bunny-butt's with you. (416.763.9016 106–214 Merton St Toronto, ntsc.ca)

High Park Ski Club

(416.537.7669 1669 Bloor W highparksclub.com)

Ice Skating Rinks in Toronto

All rinks are free and open until February 27th
(416.338.RINK toronto.ca, outdoor.com)

Nathan Philips Square (416.392.1111 100 Queen W)

Harbourfront (416.973.4000 235 Queens Quay W)

Dufferin Grove (416.392.0039 875 Dufferin
dufferinpark.ca)

Giovanni Cabato (416.338.7465 1369 St Clair W)

High Park Colborne Lodge (416.338.7465 1873 Bloor W)

Hodgson (416.392.0747 276 Davisville Ave)

Hockey and Curling

Women's Hockey

Learn to skate and get hockey lessons too! (416.392.0745
779 Crawford whct.ca and hockeytoronto.com) Need gay
men's hockey league in here.

Riverdale Curling League and the Rotators Curling League

For all levels of curlers including pro's as well. Both leagues
curl at the Royal Canadian Curling Club, offering a gay
friendly atmosphere, a licensed lounge, restaurant, piano
and large screen TV. (416.722.0111 131 Broadview Ave
gaycurl.ca/toronto.html)

Snowtubing and Tobogganing

Picture the inflatable tire donut that sits on the dock all
summer long shooting down a snowy hill and you've got the
activity that brings out the daredevil in everyone this winter.
You can get your snow-tube-tire at any Canadian Tire or
Home Depot. As far as sleds go for the more traditionalist
the plastic oblong ones and the round saucers are generally
the most popular choices at a mere \$20, whereas flexible
snow sheets can be rolled up for easy storage and are even
cheaper at \$10. Check out these great hills:

Christie Pits 750 Bloor W. at Christie

High Park 1873 Bloor W.

Trinity Bellwoods Park 1053 Dundas W.

Riverdale Farm in Cabbagetown 201 Winchester St.

For the Truly Adventurous...

Check outvoyagerquest.com for the perfect ski, snowboard,
or snowshoeing packages all at very reasonable prices. And
for something truly unique check out a 1.800.776.WILD or
visit algonquinparkadventures.com for their weekend
dog sledding packages.

Surefire Ways to Beat the Blahs...

Fireplaces in Toronto

Feeling nostalgic for the fireplace you grew up with and
starting to get cabin fever in your cramped flat? Take yourself
to the nearest hearth and warm your toes. Check out these
hot spots where you can enjoy a glass of scotch or snifter of
brandy as you peel off your booties and roast your chestnuts.

Drake Hotel: 1150 Queen W

Café Nervosa: 75 Yorkville Ave, 2nd Floor

Raq n' Waq: 739 Queen W.

Courthouse: 57 Adelaide E

Yoga

On a cold day nothing will make you feel better than a
downtown yoga studio. Try the \$20 One week unlimited
class pass for new students at the following studios:

Downward Dog

(416.703.8805 735 Queen W or 416.693.4088
1977 Queen E, 2nd Floor downwarddog.com)

Yoga Sanctuary

We all battle the winter blues, sunlight and heat deprivation
as we trudge to work, the gym and the grocery store. Why
leave your homes to go out at all as cable and internet make
for a secluded, simple night indoors? Because we are social
creatures, with outfits to show off and opinions to share!
Nothing uplifts the spirit more then getting together with
your friends at the nearby pub or café, so sniffle your way
into the slushy streets and prance around in powdery snow
to enjoy all that our cosmopolitan city has to offer. Suddenly
the long cold months won't seem so dreary. (416.928.3232
2 College, Suite 306 or 416.461.6161 95 Danforth Ave
Suite 301 theyogasanctuary.net)

AMY PEARL is a freelance Toronto journalist who loves her status
as the gaybourhood's top reigning freestyle-rapper. Hostessing and
bigging up the gay community of Toronto for years, she is honored
to be able to share her Winter Wonderland ideas in hopes that you'll
make a stellar appearance despite the below zero temperatures.

Photography Nancy Paiva

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FROM THE HEART

by Michele Gill



Join me as I snuggle into my comfy recliner chair with a fresh cup of lemon tea and my favourite ginger snap cookies. I'm waiting for "the magic" of what has now become part of my world each holiday season.

Looking down at the busy street below from my window I can see the snow gently falling onto the sidewalk, just enough to remind me of the weather yet to come. The holiday shoppers are busy this evening in preparation of assorted parties and gift purchasing. Colourful rolls of gift wrap poke out of the tops of shopping bags and parcels are being carried upright, as if not to spoil the contents of what's inside. The smell of fresh bread from the bakery fills the street, an invitation to come inside and warm up with a cup of hot coffee and perhaps a delicious pastry.

Young Timmy Perkins strolls alongside his mother catching snowflakes on his tongue without a care in the world, not knowing how his face, with eyes crossed as he strains to see the end of his tongue, is making me chuckle. This game is interrupted as the candy store down the street comes into eyeshot.

Though his mother can't really afford it, she rummages through her handbag for a bit of loose change which she gives to her son with a smile. Gladly accepting the offering, young Timmy races ahead to the sweet shop, slipping and sliding on the fresh fallen snow. He has me sitting on the edge of my seat as it appears his little legs are going to fall out from under him on the icy sidewalk before he makes it safely inside the shop. His eyes are so big in anticipation of the delicious treats that await and the grin on his face is so bright he could light up the street and I find myself cheering him on to make it before wiping out. In through the front door of the shop he slides as Mrs. Perkins hurries to catch up.

This random act of unselfishness from young Timmy's mother has truly warmed my heart. I can feel his mother's joy in being able to "give," no matter how big or small. Her action clearly reminds me of the importance of the simple things in life and how such a simple choice can bring so much joy to others.

The snow is falling a bit heavier now and I notice the accumulation on my walkway. My neighbours Don and Ted are out shoveling their walkway together with their dog Boomer, a full



grown Golden Retriever who loves nothing more than jumping into the snow banks, spilling snow back onto the areas just cleared. After 15 minutes of shoveling, not finding Boomers actions very amusing, Don gathers up a snowball and throws it at the dog in an attempt to move the dog out of the way. Not the best aim in town, the snowball impacts the side of Ted's hip. I let out a big laugh, covering my gaping mouth with my hand, wondering how this story is about to unfold.

Ted, having the wonderful sense of humour that he does, is quick to retaliate and fires a snowball back at Don. Here we go, let the games begin, I think to myself, not sure who to cheer for. Boomer appears to be happy playing what he thinks is a game of catch as he leaps back and forth between Don to Ted hoping to catch just one of those snowballs being tossed. Covered in snow and out of breathe after 5 minutes of combat, Don and Ted come to a truce, stopping to rest on their shovels, half giggling and half exhausted. Done shoveling their own walkway, they begin the walkway of their neighbour, an elderly lady unable to attempt such a task.

How fortunate, I think to myself, to have such wonderful neighbours. Don and Ted have taught me the importance of "truth within" by standing proud and showing the world their unconditional acceptance of self." There's nothing in this universe that could ever douse the light that shines so bright within them.

In this moment of feeling blessed with my circle of family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances, my attention is drawn to the

flashing lights of a van stopped across the street. Beyond the van through the storefront window bins are piled high with a multitude of children's toys and assorted clothing donated by various shoppers and passerbys. A small group of volunteers are greeted by the cheerful store owner who is pleased with the results of this week's donations and are quick to help load the contents of the bins into the van.

Acknowledging the intent of this act of "compassion and charity" leaves me with an enormous sense of gratefulness for all that I have. I'm grateful for the reminders that are so easy to see when I take the time to notice them, as they continue to teach me the importance of love and understanding and the effects that they can have on others.

Once again this holiday season has begun with another "magical moment" in my comfy recliner chair over a hot cup of lemon tea with honey, looking at the world through my eyes. Thank you for joining me and I look forward to sharing our thoughts and views in the issues to come.

MICHELE GILL has been a spiritualist for over 30 years and sits on the Board of Directors for the Eternal Life Spiritualist Centre in Whitby. She is an inspirational speaker, conducting, writing and participating in guided group meditations. Having completed the Reiki 2 course, she is currently working on her Reiki Masters Certification.



You can write to Michele at
fromtheheart@thepinkpagesdirectory.com



Looking Back

by Deb "Dirk" Pearce

The year was 1977.

I was in grade 3, and like my classmates, I was bubbling over with excitement as the Christmas holidays drew near. Between learning different songs on the recorder in music class and trying to get through math lessons, we all huddled to share our wish lists and letter to Santa. Most of the girls agreed that Barbie dolls, banana seat bikes and skipping ropes were on their lists. The boys, meanwhile, rhymed off the latest Hot Wheels cars, chemistry sets and walkie-talkies.

I, however, didn't add to the fray of excitement. Rather, I kept mum on the subject. I had much loftier hopes for my gift and didn't want to jinx it by actually voicing my greatest wish of all.

After helping my Dad put up all of the outdoor lights and assisting my Mom with unpacking all of the tissue wrapped snowmen, angels and Santas, the night before Christmas had finally arrived. I could hardly wait to finish my dinner and get ready for our annual tradition of setting up cookies and milk for Old Saint Nick and of course, leaving plenty of carrots out for his reindeer.

Christmas morning, my Mom ran around the house, ringing bells and knocking on all of our bedroom doors to wake us all up. Little did she know I had been lying in my bed, awake and attuned to every sound the house was making. Had Santa actually come to our house? Had he brought toys to my older sister and brother...and me?



I jumped out of bed and looked out the window for evidence that he had remembered our house. I saw my Dad shoveling the driveway and bolted down the stairs, put on my boots, ran outside and said "Dad! Dad! Has he been here?" My Dad pointed to the roof to show me, what could only have been, sleigh tracks. Two perfect lines that pushed the snow down so hard, that I could see our brown roof exposed. I ran inside to the tree and saw LOTS of wrapped gifts.

I unwrapped the usual socks, sweaters, puzzles and books, all the while wondering if my letter had actually made it to the North Pole, or had something happened to it? Of course I was thankful for all the presents that I was opening and uttered appropriate words of gratitude but, I am ashamed to admit, I felt let down.

When Mother asked me to go down to the fruit cellar to get the defrosting turkey for her I stoically obeyed. As I fought tears of disappointment, I opened the cellar door, pulled the string for the light bulb, and promptly let out a scream. Right there in front of me, in the middle of the damp, earthy room, there was—three wheels built for speed and two steering levers for hugging the corners—the greatest gift ever. A Green Machine!

DEB "DIRK" PEARCE is a comic, singer, gender illusionist and radio host on 103.9 PROUD FM. Christmas is Deb's favourite time of year—friends, family, food and presents!



My
11th Commandment is
“Relax, Refresh, Recharge.”
- Moses -



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