

# possibilities

unleash your imagination

## Discovering Christmas in my pajamas

My childhood was spent in the 60s, and among the many things of note that occurred during that decade was the introduction of some of our most enduring animated Christmas specials. Rudolph was first out of the gate airing for the first time in December of 1964, followed by Charlie Brown in 1965, the Grinch in 1966 and finally Frosty in 1969.

Television was much different back in the 60s, and it was important – no, critical – to know exactly when each of these specials would air on one of the few stations that we were able to receive. Schedules were booked around each show. If you were unable to watch – due to something utterly unavoidable like receiving a Nobel Prize or something – there was no second chance, no DVD or tape to buy, no way to record and watch later. It was simply gone until next year. And Christmas just wouldn't be the same.

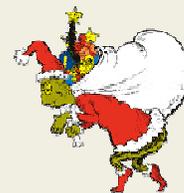
What's remarkable is the staying power of these simple stories – in particular “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” and “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.” With their first airing these shows became, and consistently remain, an integral part of the collective Christmas experience – earning a spot along side such stories as Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” and the classic “It's A Wonderful Life.” Go into any store at this time of year and you will find wrapping papers, cards, decorations, books, magazines and various other paraphernalia bearing images of the Peanuts gang, the Grinch, and Cindy-Loo Who, and somehow, nothing could be more Christmassy.



No doubt this is in part a “boomer phenomenon.” I am, after all, not the only child who sat cross-legged on the living room floor in the 60s giggling in delight and bursting with enthusiasm at the thought of yet another Christmas. The largest group of children *ever* to populate our fair country was right there with me. And our unending attachment to those carefree and happy days of youth keeps us returning to these stories year after year.

But there's more. These stories teach us something. Something we want to learn, something we need to understand, and something that during the rest of the year we often forget about.

First of all, the Grinch *can't* steal Christmas. It's hard to believe, but true. I might not get everything I want – including who-wonkers, can-tinkers, and wom-whompers. Loved ones may need to be far away. There may not be any snow. And yet Christmas will come, just the same. The Grinch, and all of us, learned a most valuable lesson in 1966: perhaps Christmas means “just a little bit more.” Still, we are left vaguely uncertain as to what that “something” really is. Love, I suppose, is ultimately the reason that it's hard not to shed a tear as the Who's of Whoville form a circle holding hands with nothing more than the clothes on their backs to cheerfully and joyously welcome Christmas once again.



But where the Grinch leaves a space, “A Charlie Brown Christmas” fills it in. Charlie Brown, frustrated with the commercialism he sees all around him cries out, “Isn't there

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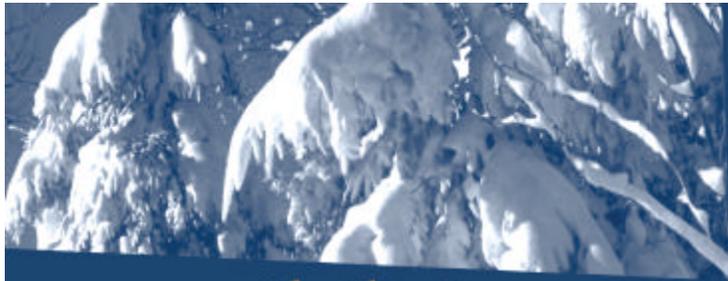
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## ... Discovering Christmas (cont)

anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" In what I contend is the most dramatic moment in any cartoon *ever*, Linus responds. With blanket in tow he struts to centre stage in the school auditorium, asks for "lights please," and recites from the book of Luke:

*"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.*



*For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and singing, glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men."*

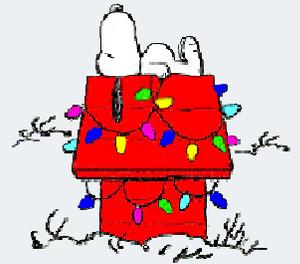
He then casually walks back to the group, standing in silent anticipation, and in the climactic moment proclaims, "And that's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

And there you have it. Everything you need to know and understand about Christmas presented by cartoon characters in under an hour. I did attend Sunday School, and I did read countless other stories and had many lessons bestowed upon me by adults, but in truth, everything important I know about Christmas, I learned in my pajamas.

If you celebrate Christmas, may you remember the true meaning, and find that all important "something more."

And may everyone experience the peace and goodwill of the season.

**Bill**



## Employee Benefits Bulletin: Strategic Alliances Make Us All Stronger

At Bell Financial, we are proud to count group services as one of the cornerstones of our practice.



We have built strong partnerships with our employee benefit and group retirement clients by offering a commodity that has become increasingly rare: a relationship built on trust and respect, which we earn by delivering on our commitments to creative, thorough and timely advice and service.

Bell Financial is fortunate to have at its disposal a wealth of in-house knowledge and expertise to help our group clients design, build and manage programs that can effectively attract, retain and reward valuable employees. We recognize, however, that in order to best serve our clients we must also look outside to organizations

like Employer Benefits Advisors Inc. (EBAI) for creative solutions and support.

Bell Financial is one of approximately 40 member firms across the country; EBAI member firms manage over 3,300 employee benefit plans and over 700 group retirement plans.

Membership in EBAI allows smaller firms like Bell Financial to leverage the combined strength and market intelligence of the collective, without compromising the strengths that have drawn our clients to us in the first place: our hands-on, intimate and caring approach.

For more information on how Bell Financial and EBAI can take your company's group plans to the next level, please give us a call.

**Laurie**





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## Giving and Receiving

We have two wonderful daughters - Madison is 2 ½, and Autumn is 1. Needless to say, Christmas now comes with a whole new level of excitement – especially from Madison who is starting to understand the whole concept of Santa.

For the first year of Madison’s life she did not use a soother. But after a few sleepless nights just past her first birthday, we decided to try one, and to our amazement she latched on and slept soundly through the night and into the next day. It was a revelation, but it quickly became apparent that the soother, or “Sucky” as it would soon be called was going to be a permanent fixture in our lives.

For the most part, the sucky did its job, allowing all to get some much needed rest. There were the occasional problems – like when Madison would wake in the middle of the night screaming for it. Blurry eyed, we would quickly go on the hunt, eventually finding it in the pillowcase, on the floor, or in the safari of stuffed animals that adorned her bed.

We knew, however, that this dependence must one day end, and we began looking for an opportunity to “lose” it. But the mere mention that it might be missing would send Madison scurrying up to her room. On finding it she would have a couple of hauls off it like a smoker who had just found a cigarette after a prolonged search. Recently however, Leann came up with a great idea, if not slightly devious.

Leann’s brother, who lives in Alberta, recently announced that they would be having a baby next March. Playing on Madison’s motherly nature (that’s the devious part) we told her about the pending arrival of a new cousin and asked Madison if she would

be willing to send her suckies out to Alberta by courier for the baby.

Without hesitation Madison volunteered to give up the little treasures that had provided her with so much security and so many hours of wonderful sleep. She did throw in the proviso that she would have one more nap before she would allow them to be packed up.

Needless to say we were sceptical. True to her word though, Madison had her afternoon nap and last Thursday she and Leann packed all the suckies into a box for shipping. The “shipping” consisted of hiding them on top of the fridge in case of emergency, which is much more convenient than sending someone to Alberta to pick one up. Monday came around and there had only been two very brief moments of panic but our little trooper pulled through. Leann and I were both a little surprised that it had been so easy. I know if someone had asked me to give up my golf clubs or skates there would have been many more tantrums and tears.

We were so proud of Madison for making this sacrifice for a little baby that had not even arrived yet that we decided to reward her. The new Sears Christmas Catalogue arrived and we told her that she could pick anything she wanted out of the catalogue and we would buy it for her. This was a pretty safe offer financially speaking because right now her biggest joys in life are puzzles, books and Dora the Explorer. And what was her choice? She told us, with confidence, that she didn’t even need to look in the catalogue because she already knew what she wanted.....a new sucky!

**Chad**

## Great Minds, Great Thoughts

*I once wanted to become an atheist, but I gave up -- they have no holidays.*

Henny Youngman

*Lucy: Beethoven's birthday is December 16th Shermly! Have you decided what you're going to get me?*

*Shermy: Yes! I'm not going to get you anything!*

*Lucy: What kind of a holiday is it where you don't give girls presents?*

Charles Schulz, Peanuts

*"Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love."*

Hamilton Wright Mabi

*"Once again, we come to the Holiday Season, a deeply religious time that each of us observes, in his own way, by going to the mall of his choice."*

Dave Barry

*Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."*

John Wesley

## Adolescence Through the Rear-View Mirror

I woke up this morning and noticed that my fourteen year old son had grown at least six inches overnight, or so it seemed. His sudden lankiness, combined with a mane of long, wild curls and strong jaw offered more than a hint of the handsome young man that he was quickly becoming. I lamented that the old adage of time speeding up as one ages was, in my case, proving to be true. Ethan had leaped headlong into adolescence in an instant.

A couple of hours later, while walking through our neighbourhood I couldn't help drifting back to Montreal in 1974, a period in which time moved far less quickly, when bell-bottomed jeans, long hair and Led Zeppelin were the rage (the more things change...) and I was transitioning into manhood. Through the filter of hindsight it would be easy to categorize this period of my life as one filled with wonder, growth and expectation. Of course, it was nothing like that. It was, as it must have been for many of my peers, a torturous time. Anxiety swirled constantly around me, with a sudden and profound interest in girls at the centre of the vortex. High school had plunged me into a social world that, mere months ago, I didn't realize existed. Girls who looked far more mature and sophisticated than me (and they were!) were suddenly everywhere. They seemed so confident and self-assured; they filled the classroom when they entered, always in gangs of six or more, pushing me to the margins of their world.

I felt small, I *was* small, much shorter than the Amazons seated on either side of me in English class. Unlike many of my male peers, I had not yet begun to shave, which no doubt contributed to the unfortunate nickname "babyface" that stayed with me throughout high school. I became self-conscious, suddenly acutely aware of my perceived shortcomings. I remember scrutinizing everything about myself, taking inventory of what was not cool and resolving to make changes.

Near the top of my list was my hair. Puberty was conspiring to make my previously straight hair curly, and I tried in vain to mount a counter-attack with the blow dryer. It took me two years to realize that this was a battle I was doomed to lose. Instead of allowing it to curl as nature had intended, I fought to straighten it each morning, only to end up with a pronounced wave by lunchtime.

The state of my complexion also left a lot to be desired. It was awfully difficult to impress a girl when welts the size of a dime made my nose their home for weeks at a time. None of the creams

or ointments advertised on T.V. by clear-skinned, bikini-clad girls worked, so most days I sat in class, a hand strategically cupped over the offending area in such a way that it looked as if I was sharing a secret with the student next to me.

One of the few things that made grade nine bearable was athletics. I was reasonably skilled in many of the playground sports; better than most of my peers, in fact. However, my aptitude did not extend to skating and skiing, and, in Montreal anyway, the arena and the ski hill were where fourteen year old boys congregated to strut their stuff and impress the girls.

While there was nothing impressive about my skating ability, I nevertheless resolved one fateful Friday evening to meet friends at the local arena for the "social skate." The ice surface was mobbed, with most of the boys who played on hockey teams flying over, under and through everyone else. Naturally the cutest girls gravitated to the skilled daredevils, with most of the rest of us spending the balance of the evening trying not to get run over.



At the conclusion of the social skate, my friends and I packed up our stuff and left the arena, not especially looking forward to the long walk home. Instead of going the long way around to reach the main street, many of the "cool" kids were taking a short cut by climbing the rather tall fence that encircled the arena's parking lot. I was tired and not in the mood to climb, but, as was generally the case at that age, I followed my group

without protest to the base of the fence. I was the last to go. I reached the top without incident, but when I began to jump down to the other side (it was definitely *uncool* to climb down), my bag caught the top of the fence and, since the strap was wrapped around my wrist, I was left hanging for more than a minute until my bag was freed. Self-conscious fourteen year old boys generally do not want to draw attention to themselves when placed in embarrassing situations, and yet I had managed to do just that, in spades.

As the grown up version of me rounded the final corner of my walk, I found myself wishing that I could have whispered in the ear of the teenaged me, assuring me that, before I knew it, my skin would clear up and I would grow taller, stronger and wear a five o'clock shadow by three-thirty. Of course, even if I could have done that, the younger me would have dismissed my assurances, because, after all, what could a grown-up know about the pressure-cooker of adolescence? Nothing, and everything.

*David*

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