

CHRISTMAS LISTS

of a feminist past-
and present

by Kathy Shaidle, 20,
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

■ Last Christmas was a memorable one, and not because of the gifts I received. There was, for example, the record I already had from the ex-boyfriend I never wanted to see again, a glamorous flannel-covered heating pad from Aunt Maude, and that old standby from Mom: underwear. No, without a doubt, the highlight of last Christmas was a surprise visit from my older sister from Ottawa, whom I hadn't seen in six years.

My sister and I were delighted to find out how much we had in common. We were both college freshmen, although at nineteen, my age was closer to the norm for college students. At age thirty-two, Christie was studying law and political science, having quit her job to continue the college education that

she'd cut short when she'd gotten married. After a while, it also became clear that the two of us had, quite separately, become ardent feminists.

We talked for hours about novelist Alice Walker, actor Alan Alda, and astronaut Sally Ride, until Christie announced that she had to be on her way. I sat on alone by the Christmas tree, surrounded by decorations, and began to think.

My sister's experiences in the work force had made her politically aware, but my case wasn't as clear-cut. I wanted to discover just how I'd become as independent as I had. But how? I had little evidence to work with—no diaries, no scrapbooks. Snapshots would be useless. Looking at my new gifts beneath

the tree, I suddenly hit upon a solution: Christmas lists. What better way to observe someone's growth than to find out what she had wanted—or had thought she wanted—for Christmas in years gone by?

So, like Scrooge, I embarked on a journey through Christmases past. If my Christmas lists were still around, I think they'd look something like this:

Christmas '78
Typewriter
Flute
Clothes
Money
No underwear



the tree, I suddenly hit upon a solution: Christmas lists. What better way to observe someone's growth than to find out what she had wanted—or had thought she wanted—for Christmas in years gone by?

So, like Scrooge, I embarked on a journey through Christmases past. If my Christmas lists were still around, I think they'd look something like this:

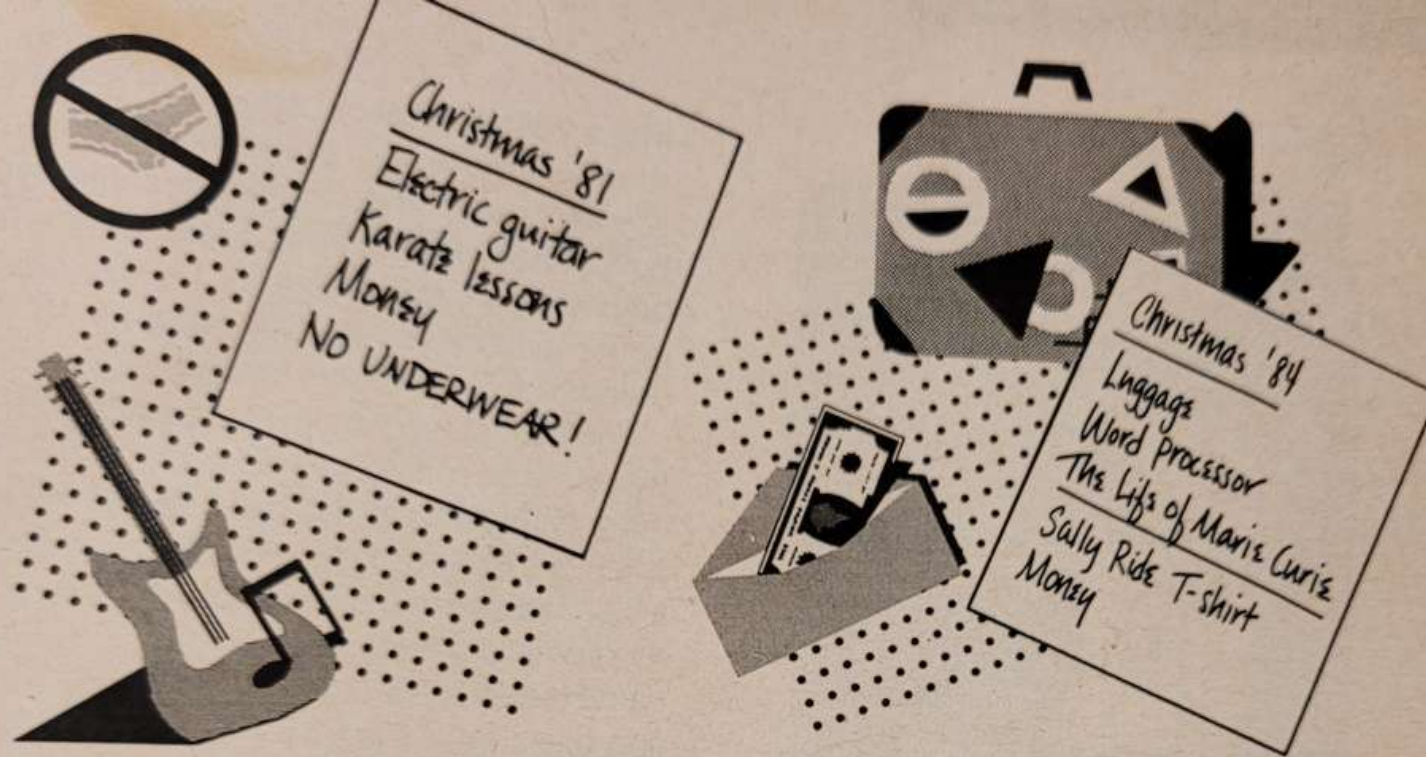


■ Admittedly, this list is a bit on the dull side: I was a pretty dull fourteen-year-old. Still, all the gifts I asked for said something about me.

The request for a typewriter was an announcement to my family that I had made up my mind to be a writer, having decided against my once steadfast career choice of paleontology (I was too fond of indoor plumbing and money). I was also getting the message from my teachers that girls just weren't supposed to be scientists, and I bowed to their greater wisdom.

The flute was my chosen instrument. I liked to imagine myself with long hair and a peasant dress, skipping through meadows of daisies, tootling away. . . . Obviously, I had a long way to go in the consciousness-raising department. At fourteen, my idea of fashion was frilly dresses and snug sweaters that I hoped would enhance my underdeveloped chest. Those garments seem ridiculous to me now, speaking as a student of the Albert Einstein School of Chic.

"No underwear." All bra-burning jokes aside, I just wanted more exciting gifts. Like a typewriter. It's pretty clear from this list that I wasn't an adolescent Cagney (or even Lacey), but I was on my way. That year, I also received, unsolicited, *Little Women*, read the first chapter, and decided that Jo and all the rest were, in the vernacular of the day, nerds. But even my reaction to that book could not have foreshadowed the Christmas list I made at the age of seventeen:



■ Look at me then! The electric guitar had replaced the flute when it became clear that most punk rock bands didn't have wind instruments. And, yes, my long, flowing hair had been shorn off into neat spikes, even though the cut made me look more like Mia Farrow than Johnny Rotten. Singers like Siouxsie Sioux and Poly Styrene dressed to please themselves, not the boys, and sang about being a girl, a subject mostly still ignored on the airwaves. And even though I never did take karate lessons, that request at least showed a healthy regard for my safety and dignity. To think it all started with a few inspiring offbeat records and a new haircut!

Finally, my latest Christmas list, made for this year's December 25:

■ I've changed a lot in the last couple of years, and I think it shows in this list. I've given up the idea of being in a band and have rediscovered my earlier chosen career of writing, as the request for a word processor shows. I'll never forgive my teachers for discouraging my interest in science, but at least I'll be able to live vicariously through the great Madame Curie. There isn't much hope of getting the Sally Ride T-shirt, since they're a bit hard to find, but the money will be appreciated, as usual. The luggage, though, is probably the most essential item I asked for, since I will soon be taking my first steps out into the world. But some things about a person don't change. Which reminds me—Mom, if you're reading this, don't forget: No underwear.

RICHARD OSAKA