

TUNE IN THIS CHRISTMAS!

a holiday story for friends and family
by Bo Wilson

c. 2016 by the author

“... and with another traffic scan coming up in seven minutes and news on the eights, you can rest easy knowing we’ve got your back, you’re listening to ninety-six point five on your FM dial, and com--“

No, I’m not, thinks Roger, and a neat twist of his wrist kills the happy voice in mid-syllable. He smiles a tight little smile at the totality of his rebuttal, and then he turns his key, shutting off the car and leaving him in the kind of quiet that only a thick blanket of snow can give the world. The roads are clear and his driveway is clear, but everywhere else the wish for a white Christmas seems to be a mortal lock-- it’s the 23rd today, and even June-level sunshine would have trouble melting this much snow in two days. And anyway, it’s cloudy.

Which suits Roger’s mood to a T. He’s been feeling cloudy ever since he heard the first Christmas music playing in Costco three weeks *before Thanksgiving*, with all the inflatable lawn decorations and shiny silver-pink “trees” decorated at the entrance. All he’d wanted was that special three pound bag of peanut M&Ms they sell. He’d nearly turned around and marched out of the store, but what would that have accomplished? The whole world was Christmas crazy.

He wonders, for the hundredth or the thousandth time, what’s changed. Where had Christmas gone? He knows all the standard complaints: that it has turned into a corporate greed-fest, that it’s simply a reflection of the soullessness that has so indelibly marked the new millennium, that people are sheep who need to be told how and when and what to celebrate... but none of those answer feel real, somehow. There *had* been Christmas. It *had* been special. Truly special. A span of fifteen or twenty days each year in which so much had seemed possible; a time when normal practicalities were set aside, when wishing was encouraged, and when hope lived upon each smile.

He reflects that it’s a little bit like dressing up. There had been occasions in Roger’s life when he’d had to wear a tuxedo, once even with tails... and on those evenings, things had felt special. The men in semi-regimented finery, the women sheathed in shimmering lengths of silver and crimson; it was as if magic had been pumped into the very air, a simple force of will, creating something special. It had been decreed: “This night shall be unique”... and somehow a bow tie and a couple of cuff links had made it so.

Now, here he sits, fifty-eight years old, and any glamour long since packed away in mothballs, living alone in the small bungalow he’d inherited when his mother had passed away. Unmarried, childless, and sick to death of a world that insisted on donning its Christmas clothes two months of the year. How could anything remain special when everyone was so determined to wear it morning, noon, and night, until it was a threadbare memory of what once had been?

Once upon a time, he’d known that the Grinch or *A Charlie Brown Christmas* had been scheduled for a particular time on channel six or channel eight, and if you missed it, that was it. He’d begged his mother to let him watch, and been told that only boys who finished their homework were allowed to watch television, so he’d flown through his

assignments (which were themselves little Christmas celebrations, a letter to Santa for composition class, a map of the north pole for Geography) and then he'd run down the nine stairs into the den, where his mother had popped corn special for the occasion, and they'd turned off all the lights except for those on the Christmas tree, and huddled together on the sofa, snug and happy in the twinkling greens and reds and the thrill of that special music beneath the announcer telling us that CBS was proud to present a very special telecast.

Now you can get practically any show you want any time you want, as long as you're clever enough to know how to work the remote. Wanna watch *Rudolf*? Just click "rent now" and, for a buck fifteen, you could relive the magic. Except you couldn't, of course, Abundance might feel good, but it's the opposite of magic. Abundance has nothing to do with longing, and of the two, longing was so much, much sweeter. Maybe that's what's changed, he reflects. There's nothing left to wish for. Christmas doesn't mean anything when it's around for two months and everything about it is just one click away.

He notices that he's feeling cold, and can see his breath in little puffs inside his eight year old Hyundai. Just sitting in the driveway, drifting away on memories like someone in a nursing home. He shakes his head crossly at himself and opens the door, setting his foot carefully on the asphalt of his driveway, all too aware of the black ice that lurks everywhere. The ground feels solid enough, so he eases himself out of the car, closes the door, its THUMP louder than normal in a world cushioned by several feet of white in every direction. That's nice, at least. The snow. The quiet. The sight of lights from other houses, even the ones that aren't decorated, shining their quiet domestic beacons into the world. His own house was empty, but he felt a shade less lonely in the sight of so many lives, so many lights in the darkness.

He notices, when he glances toward his porch, a parcel of some sort, waiting on the welcome mat, and that's nice, too. He mounts the two steps of his front stoop and does a brief juggling act involving his briefcase, his coffee cup, and his keys, but he's quickly inside. He sets everything down on the small mail table just inside, reaches back while holding the door open with one foot, and picks up the package, bringing it inside and letting the door close behind him. He inspects it briefly. He's not expecting anything, and he's already gotten this year's cards from the three friends who still send them out every year, with their newsletters about their kids and their vacations. Pictures from Jackson's Hole. He can see them across the room right now, a lonely little trio of holiday images, standing watch from his mantle.

He sets the parcel aside for the moment, which is a long-running habit of his. When anything is fun--or even just diverting-- he draws it out as long as he can, as though it's some sort of dessert meant to come only after the plate of everyday life has been thoroughly cleaned. He takes off his parka, and his boots, switches on a couple of lights, and bends to pick up the mail that came through the slot earlier (on Saturdays, the sudden clank of that slot and the sight of two or three anonymous fingers still makes him jump.) He sorts the real mail from the junk; half of the world wants to give him a credit card, and the other half wants him to buy insurance (so there'll be money left to pay off the cards,

he thinks wryly) and there's also a power and light bill, and a flyer for a homeowner's association pot luck, happening this very night in about two hours, down the street at the rec center. "Cookies, punch, caroling, and the joys of the season!" Huzzah.

Now the package is all that's left. He studies it; the address is in black marker, neat block letters in a hand he doesn't recognize, "Mr. Roger Moffet, 422 Clark St., etc etc," yup, that's my name, don't wear it out.... He hefts it, trying to puzzle out all the things it might or might not be... and there's a sudden push of sense memory, of being a young boy and holding up packages that have been neatly arrayed beneath the tree and trying so hard to divine what they might be, knowing that most of them would be sweaters or scarves or pajamas but also hoping, desperately, that one of them might be the Operation game or the model rocket kit. He smiles, and is aware of the barest flicker of hope, something along the lines of "Maybe Christmas isn't *all* the way through with me," then he's carefully peeling the packing tape away from the brown paper.

Inside is a shoe box that's seen better days, its edges worn, and its top featuring a slim housewife whose silhouette is straight out of *Mad Men*, smiling with a dialogue balloon saying "So light, you'll forget you have them on!" but whatever is in this box isn't *that* light, and it's a good thing, too, because if someone had anonymously sent him a sixty year old pair of ladies' slippers, he'd be more than a little irked. He lifts the lid and....

... what is this?

Beige and light yellow plastic, with dark brown highlights, it's not modern plastic either, it's that older stuff, what did they call it, *bakelite*, that's the word. It has little fins along its side, like the old cars did, back when it seemed like everything had fins, because we were fast, we were on the move, we were *going places*, and in the upper left corner, a name, *TransTravel* with all the serifs of each letter swept as though by the wind of its velocity, and there in the bottom corner is a knob, and in its center a larger black dial...

It's a radio.

It's the kind of radio his dad had always had on in his workshop before his heart attack, smoking his pipe and listening to the ball game on a Saturday afternoon. Except it... well. It looks *old*, for sure, but it doesn't look *used*, if that makes sense. Extremely low mileage on this baby. The previous owner only used it to listen to sermons on Sundays....

He shakes his head, to shut it up, and he lifts the radio carefully out of the box. There are a few pieces of newspaper packed around it to keep it snug, but there are no clues there. They're classified ads, and although they appear to be old, they're light on the kinds of detail that would really tell him anything. The plastic box trails a heavy-feeling black cord, about three feet long.

Plug it in.

He glances around for an outlet, and realizes that he wants to be able to sit and really study this thing before he takes any further steps. There's an outlet next to the small kitchen table where he takes his meals, so he carries it in there, holding it carefully in both hands. He lifts his left elbow to flick the light switch up as he passes it, and crosses the small kitchen in five steps, setting the *TransTravel* gently onto a placemat stained by dozens of perfect circles from his coffee mug. He's hesitant to plug it in; he's not quite sure why. He doesn't really think it's malicious, nor any kind of prank (what kind of prank would it be anyway? he wonders. Plug it in and it screams "MERRY CHRISTMAS!" while red and green smoke comes out of the back?)

He decides it's more about not wanting to do anything that can't be taken back. Right now, he could return with it to the front hall, repack everything into its boxes, re-tape the brown paper, and it'd be like nothing ever happened. There's a comfort in that. If, on the other hand, he plugs it in... well, he's providing power to something, and whatever it is, whatever it does once it has power might be something you can't just take back.

Better to take your time. To study.

And study he does, although there's not much to study. He turns the box every which way. He finds a few slots in the bottom, probably to allow the sound to escape from there as well as the front, and he finds "MADE IN U.S." stamped in one corner in very tiny letters.

Other than that... well. It's a radio. It's a fairly cheap, mass produced item of the sort that lived on thousands and thousands of dressers, work benches, refrigerators, desks, and bedside tables all over the country, all over the world, probably. Common in a world where "digital" meant "of or relating to the fingers," a world in which computers filled entire rooms and took an hour to do what his phone could now do instantly. An analog antique, tuned by hand, with the most painstaking care to find the peak of the signal, to locate that sweet spot with the most sound and the least static.

He leans in a little closer to look at the tiny numbers around the dial....

Well, this is weird.

The dial is a disk, inside a semi-circle of numbers etched onto the plastic; the disk has a knob in its center, and it has a little arrow pointing toward the numbers, so you can see what station you're tuned to, at least roughly. So far so good. But the numbers themselves....

Roger was used to seeing FM tuners that started with something in the high eighties, (eighty eight, maybe?) and then went up by ones to something like one-oh-eight. Of course, the real work of tuning an analog radio waited in the spaces between those numbers, where you found ninety-eight point five or one-oh-two point seven, and so on. There's a part of him that's kind of excited to tune something the old fashioned way, to

really *zero in* on the signal, with a precision that digital tuners could never replicate. Except....

Well, these numbers are a little goofy. For one thing, they don't start at eighty eight, they start at *fifty* eight. For another thing, there are these apostrophes before every number. At least, they sure look like apostrophes, but he doesn't know what they'd be abbreviating. The ring of numbers, so tiny and official, makes its way around the tuning knob: '58, '59, '60... a *lot* more numbers than any FM radio he's ever seen before, but that's not all. Where it ought to roll smoothly from ninety-nine to one hundred (or, he supposes, '99 to '100) it instead says '000 and then '001. All the way to '020.

It's the weirdest tuner he's ever seen.

Of course, there are a million reasons why it might be like this. At the time that this thing was apparently made, consumers were nuts for the latest technologies. The space-race had been in overdrive, and if it was new and scientific, people wanted it. This dial was probably an abortive attempt to display the FM spectrum in some chic new way. Maybe ads for it had said "Just like the astronauts!" Maybe the dial was intended to represent some kind of international format, some kind of metric system for radio. Who knew?

Still. Weird.

Roger looks at the thing for another moment, and finds nothing else out of the ordinary. It looks like the many dozens of radios he's seen and handled in his life... and of course, that means there's nothing left to do but plug it in and turn it on.

He scoots the table away from the wall just enough to reach down with the cord to the outlet, and after a quick beat of hesitation, he slides the plug smoothly into place. Okay. No sparks, no explosions, no announcers jumping out to tell him he's been on a hidden camera. He wonders for a moment whether it's warming up, but then he remembers, no, that was the tube kind, this is the transistor kind, the kind that turns on the minute you turn the little knob.

That little knob right there. The one that says "Off" to one side and has a curving arrow with the word LOUDER in the middle, with the pointer toward clockwise. The very same hand that had so neatly silenced the guy on ninety six point five in his driveway could bring this new box to life. Wouldn't it be funny if the same guy popped back on? Boy, the last laugh would be on him. Just to make sure, he turns the tuner all the way to one end, to '58. Mr. Loudmouth isn't likely to be down there.

Okay. And.... on.

Again, nothing unusual. No smoke, no flames out of the back. Just that crackly, almost-white noise you get when you're tuned in to absolutely nothing. He wonders, briefly, whether he's going to need an antenna, but if he does it'll just have to wait for another time. Let's see what we can find....

The little arrow is set all the way to the left, at '58. Roger makes sure that the volume knob is a little less than halfway turned, and he begins to slowly, oh so slowly, turn the tuner. He hears static and is probably not really aware of the slight smile he's wearing, to be using a simple skill dormant for the last couple of decades; he resembles nothing so much as a safe-cracker. Come on.... what's out there.....he slides past what sounds like a newscaster's voice. and something about Moscow, but when he tries to get back to it, it's not there.... patience... another crackle, and then, loud and clear, Brenda Lee's musical smirk, bopping out "Rocking Around the Christmas Tree." The dial seems to be just a hair past '63, and maybe when the song is over he'll hear someone give a call sign that will let him calibrate this old tuner with more current settings.

He sits, his hand resting atop the little box, tapping in rhythm with the tune, which has always seemed like a good Christmas song to him-- it has the whole nostalgia thing going for it, with those quick-strummed electric guitars, and he remembers smiling even as a little kid at the idea that whoever made this record must have thought themselves to be pretty cool cats, cousin. But if his ancient memory is to be trusted, the song had somehow managed to sound like an oldie even when it wasn't really that old.

He has apparently tuned in late in the number, because now Brenda is winding it up with those sustained notes: "neewwww... old faaaashioned waaaaaaaaaayyyyyyyyyy," and see, even there, in the lyrics, "new old fashioned," that's exactly the way the song had seemed to him even when he first heard it. Now he leans forward, listening intently, turning up the volume a bit... but there's no deejay yet, just a beat of silence and then, is this even *possible*, was that the sound of a *needle* dropping onto vinyl? Roger feels himself grunt a single laugh ("Huh!") as the silence gives way to Bing Crosby, singing "Do You Hear What I Hear?"

He has to stand up; he's so pleased that he has to move. He had become as curled as a question mark, hunched over the thing when tuning it, and now he stands, grinning at it as if it's an old friend who showed up unannounced with a couple of t-bones and a six pack. This is great! It must be some novelty station, maybe a Christmas-only deal, maybe even off the books, a little pirate station somewhere with an old turntable and some records from a flea market, just doing their bit to spread a little Christmas cheer.

He listens to Mr. Crosby's patented velvet voice, and is suddenly struck by a very powerful memory: his mother and his father, hanging ornaments on their tree, letting him hand the ornaments up to them one at a time and them taking turns placing them, arguing good naturedly about whether that red one should go here or *there*... and this song, in the background, with his mother singing along and his father chiming in loudly for only the title phrase, "*Do you hear what I hear!!*" and his mother rolling her eyes and giggling, telling him that yes, sweetheart, people can hear him all over the neighborhood.

His eyes have filled flowing over onto his cheeks, but it's not melancholy, it's a good memory, it's strong, as strong as the music itself, undimmed by time. He remembers having read somewhere that smells and music trigger memories more fully than any other

sensation can, and he finds that yes, they're bound up somehow, for not only can he remember the scene and the song perfectly, he can almost smell his mother's hairspray mingling with his father's aftershave and the evergreen scent of the spruce they'd picked up from the hardware store the day before.

The song is ending, and he sits again, wiping his face absently, more eager than ever to learn where these wonderful memories are coming from.

“Ho-ho-ho, that was Bing Crosby with his latest hit just in time for the Holidays, and before that we had Brenda Lee and her boys with “Rocking Around the Christmas Tree” that sweet tune had it's fifth birthday today, so let's hope Brenda had a little party for it, now let's keep Christmas coming, this is Mister Andy Williams with his newest number reminding us all that these few days in December, this, right now, is “The Most Wonderful Time of the Year.”

The song comes the speakers, carried by Williams' voice which could probably go croon for croon with old Bing, but Roger isn't really paying attention just now, stuck on what the announcer had just said. “Latest hit?” Brenda Lee's holiday classic only five years old? Was this entire *broadcast* an oldie, something that had been recorded for posterity long ago, and now stored on some kind of chip inside the box, the act of tuning mostly for show? It had to be. *Had* to be. Or maybe it was some kind of digital gizmo, maybe that accounted for the numbers being so screwy... on the other hand, he didn't have wi-fi in the house, and he sure didn't subscribe to any satellite radio services. Maybe it was some kind of come-on, they'd let him listen for another couple of minutes and then fade out to tell him that if he'd like the sounds of Christmas Classics all year long, he only needed to call their eight hundred number and have his credit card ready.

He felt the slow burn of anger then, a sense of having been tricked into a feeling and then having that feeling sullied. Was the whole *world* devoted to making a buck off people's desire that Christmas be special?

But... nothing has really been sullied. At least not yet. Maybe he's wrong about the come on, maybe it *is* a simple chip with a few dozen songs and an old deejay, programmed to start thirty seconds after you turn it on. Maybe he's imagining things. That memory of his folks though, the power of it-- that had been real. Then he wonders: is there a bright line delineating where imagination leaves off and memory begins? Maybe you *need* imagination to really remember things fully and completely. Maybe that's what music triggers-- not some old switch in the back of your head, but the one right up in the front, the one that says “picture this.”

Like this song right now, this Andy Williams thing. He remembers it more as a sound, the sound of that one sentence, and he remembers agreeing with it whole-heartedly, thinking that yes, this *is* the most wonderful time of the year. He can remember hearing the song from the den as he secretly rummaged under the tree, trying to figure out what the wrapped gifts might be. He remembers the way his feet would sweat inside his footie pajamas, and the way the spruce needles would stick to the flannel, evidence of his

spying that he would have to carefully sweep off. He was five, and the thing he wanted more than any other toy was an Etch-a-Sketch, Nick Morton had one and he would sit watching Nick painstakingly try to write his name with it, but when he asked to try Nick would just turn it over, shake it to obliterate the evidence of his failure, and then put it away, refusing to give Roger a turn. If he could have his own, he could play with it anytime he wanted, and he'd be able to write his name way better than that idiot Nick, maybe this one.... it was the right shape... and it made the right kind of sound when you shook it....

The song ends and Roger extricates himself from the memory almost as a physical act, shrugging himself out of it as though it were a coat he no longer wanted to wear. He smiles in the empty room, a little self consciously, damned near to blushing. It *had* been an Etch-a-Sketch, and he'd been so happy when he'd opened it. In truth, it was the kind of toy he (and most of his friends) grew quickly bored with-- drawing anything was far less fun than the upside down shake which annihilated the effort; breaking the thing open to reveal its co-joined rods had been more fun still. Nevertheless: The pleasure of peeling back wrapping and seeing the logo of the thing you've been hoping for? Nothing else like it. Nothing like being five years old. A lot of water over the dam since then. Nineteen sixty---

Hang on.

Elvis is singing "Santa Bring My Baby Back to Me" but Roger barely hears it.

Five years old. Nineteen sixty three. That's when he'd been five. And he'd bet all his chips that it was the same year the Bingster had released "Do You Hear What I Hear." And that weirdo dial....

It's sitting just a hair past '63.

So that's it.

He's smiling an odd smile that's half satisfied and half sad. As puzzles go, it hadn't been a bad one, but that was thing with puzzles-- once they're solved, they're solved forever. You can't do yesterday's crossword all over again and expect to get much satisfaction from it.

Still, let's make sure. Let's jump ten clicks, up to '73, I was fifteen, so let's see....

He turns the knob so slowly that it almost feels like regret, listening as he moves through ripples of static and thin beams of music from-- he suspects-- the intervening years, and then goes even more slowly, as he approaches '73, and he feels a sense of accomplishment when he arrives perfectly in the middle of The Carpenter's "Merry Christmas Darling," and he almost grimaces, could you *be* any more schmaltzy seventies than The Carpenters, and yes, the grimace is also driven partly by embarrassment because good lord, hadn't he had the *biggest* crush on Karen Carpenter, that honeyed alto voice

and those long legs, and she'd been a *drummer*, how cool was *that*, he had actually cried when she'd died, gone to his room and closed the door and cried his eyes out....

... but curiously, he's not really thinking about Karen Carpenter so much just now... he's remembering, with a pleasant and startling tingle, another Karen, Karen Esterhaus, who had sat in the desk immediately in front of him in tenth grade English, giving him ample opportunity to lose himself in the perfect shine of her long, dark hair. Mrs. Portman would be up front droning on about Nathaniel Hawthorne and he'd be gazing into the back of Karen's head, imagining what that hair would feel like if he pushed both hands into it, this warm waterfall of black silk... and then the memory is full upon him now, oh jeez, of *course* this song brings her to mind, *they slow danced to this song!* In Tony Ellis' basement, a Christmas party, and Tony'd had a radio playing, and Roger never danced but Bev Merchant, who had always been a trouble maker, knew the place Karen occupied in Roger's fantasy life, and had shoved them together saying "Happy Holidays!"

And so he'd stood, on that horrible orange shag carpet, with the fake wood paneling and the low ceiling tiles, his arms around Karen Esterhaus (and hers around him!) with his hands linked firmly at the small of her back, swaying and taking tiny steps that only count as "dancing" for a brief time in your life, smiling apologetically at her, feeling the way she simply looked at him, as though willing to consider anything he might offer, and the clumsiness he'd felt about having nothing to offer at all beyond "I like this song" and it not even mattering, *nothing* mattering, not his C in geometry, not the Tyco car and train set with which he'd been consumed until this moment, nothing mattered except for gazing into Karen's deep dark eyes, and the feel of her forearms brushing his neck, and the sense that he could enfold her completely.... and then the song had ended.

Just as it does now.

Roger takes a shuddering breath, and the Ho-Ho-Ho deejay tells him what he's been listening to, but he already knows, he's been listening to his past, he's been listening to *himself*, and it's frankly a little bit exhausting. He's proven his theory. It's some kind of pre-recorded thing, set to play back at least a few of the Christmas hits for each of the years that the dial indicates....

.... except. The obvious question. What about the years *after* this year? What's been put onto the chip for that?

He discovers he doesn't necessarily want to know.

Then he discovers he can't stop himself.

Feeling like Scrooge reaching for that headstone, he takes the knob between thumb and forefinger one more time, turning it quickly through the seventies, the eighties, the nineties and the oughts (though he does feel fleeting curiosity about what memories might be sparked by any or all of those settings) and arrives on '016. This Christmas. Right now.

He tunes slowly, very slowly, through what initially sounds like static but then backing up because no, it's not static, it's a crowd. It's the sound of a small gathering, not a crowd, really, maybe two dozen people. There's music coming from somewhere and people are laughing and the pitch of their murmured conversation is happy, and Roger nods at it, smiling himself. People, having fun together, simply by *being* together. It's the oldest and best kind of celebration, really, and it occurs to him that the common denominator of all the memories he's experienced through this odd device is the presence of others. He has hit upon no memories that involve him alone in an apartment or house. Perhaps memories are made out of other people.

He stops himself in the middle of this thought because something is familiar, he *knows* that voice. That's Bill Cutshaw, and he's asking the room for quiet, and the music gets turned down, and now he's thanking everyone for making the evening so nice, and then he proposes a toast to the 2016 Neighborhood Christmas Party, and from a half dozen voices come variations on "Hear, hear!" and the one voice, louder than the others calls out "God Bless Us Everyone!" and there's laughter

and Roger switches off the radio with a blind jab of his hand.

That was him. That voice had been his voice. Was. Would be.

He pushes himself away from the small table, staring at the little brown and yellow box as though it were a snake that might bite him. He backs away carefully, reluctant to take his eyes off it, and then he turns and stumbles back to the table by the front door where he'd put the mail.... and there it was, the flier for the Neighborhood Association Pot Luck, happening at the Rec Center down the street. Bill Cutshaw, President.

Starting in one hour.

He looks back at the radio, sitting patiently in its pool of light on the tiny table. The little box that knows his past and claims to know his future. He breathes deeply. Steady. What are you afraid of?

He'd thought of Scrooge, but it hadn't really been an accurate thought, had it? Scrooge is saved from what, from *himself*, from his own sins of grasping greed, Roger is innocent. Well. Innocent of *those* kinds of things, anyway.

But hasn't he been a miser in other ways? An emotional miser, hoarding the coin of feeling and keeping it even from himself? Avoiding his neighbors, making no friends, just..., existing. And then he had the nerve to complain about the absence of Christmas?

Wasn't Christmas other people?

He didn't know his neighbors. Well, so what? Tonight he could start. The world was bursting with people. You didn't have to know them to share the spirit of the day with

them. The rec centers, the soup kitchens, the churches, they were all *bursting* with people, with new and wondrous memories-in-waiting. He need only reach out.

He takes another deep breath, one last glance at the radio, and then moves resolutely toward his bedroom to put on something a little more festive. He'll bring the pumpkin pie he bought last night. He'll introduce himself. He'll smile.

And when Bill Cutshaw makes his toast, he knows exactly what he'll holler out.

Grinning, he begins rummaging for his reindeer sweater.

POSTSCRIPT:

The next day, Roger buys a few simple Christmas decorations and puts them around his house while listening on the TransTravel to Christmas, 1974 and Christmas, 1988, and Christmas, 1967.

On the evening of January 6th, known to some as Twelfth Night, his radio cuts off in mid song. (Dan Fogelberg's "Same Old Lang Syne.") He struggles with his disappointment, reminding himself that it has given him many gifts, and that too much Christmas had been part of the problem to begin with. He packs it carefully back into its shoebox with its timeless crumples of newspaper. It eventually lives in his attic, with his other new decorations.

On the evening of December 4, he unpacks it, plugs it in, and turns the dial to '67, and when he hears The Beatles singing "Christmas Time (Is Here Again)" he weeps with gratitude.

Because it is. It truly is.