

Holiday retrospection taken from years of experience

Call me sappy, call me sentimental, call me a sucker for slick marketing mavens, I just can't help it, I love Christmas.

So I was flattered when one of the news editors asked me to do a holiday column for this supplement.

Great, I thought. The paper finally appreciates my sagacious writing skills, my proficiency as a pundit, my witticism, my razor-sharp tongue, my cutting-edge style...

"We want you to write a piece about how Christmas has changed over the years," he continued.

... my age.
The smile froze on my face — along with the crow's-feet. My ego deflated and my mind faced reality: The editors want you because you're OLD, not because you can write, but because you're the OLDEST writer they've got.

They want you because you can remember Andy Williams crooning, "Sleigh bells ring, are ya' listening," the original Easy-Bake Oven and life before video games.

They want you because you're from an era that predates color photography, camcorders, compact discs and Cabbage Patch dolls.

They're just jealous, I reasoned, because you got to experience the first wave of Troll dolls, Lite Brite, Mystery Date and Creepie Crawlers, and all they got were cartoon show spinoff dolls like Rainbow Brite and the Smurfs. They can't stand the fact that you were a first-grader when Twister hit the streets in 1966 and they weren't even born yet. They're envious of that mood ring Santa left in your stocking in 1973. (See, nothing has really changed: They had plastic, gimmicky, pseudo-toys in my day, too.)



Cindy Lange-Kubick

They want you because in your youth, grandmothers actually did don aprons and spend half of December making peppernuts, fudge, peanut brittle and 25-course holiday dinners.

My editor smiled up at me — a wrinkle-free smirk, without the stress lines that come from deciding whether to buy a real or artificial tree, whether it's sexist to purchase a Barbie doll for my daughter and Super Soakers for my sons, and whether my three little ones should be told the truth about Santa Claus. (And the Easter Bunny, the

tooth fairy and Newt "Gingrich ...") Once I was home I sifted through old photo albums for inspiration.

There I was in 1962, crying on Santa's lap — nothing new here. Forcing toddlers onto the belly of an obese, bearded, red-suited stranger is a time-honored American tradition.

1967 found me dressed to the nines in blue velvet and black patent leather standing in front of my grandparents' silver-flocked tree. Thank goodness some things have changed.

By 1972 things were decidedly more casual, even hip — and the photos were in color. Even the wrapping paper was chartreuse and fuchsia. And although people were still making fruitcake, fewer were actually eating it.

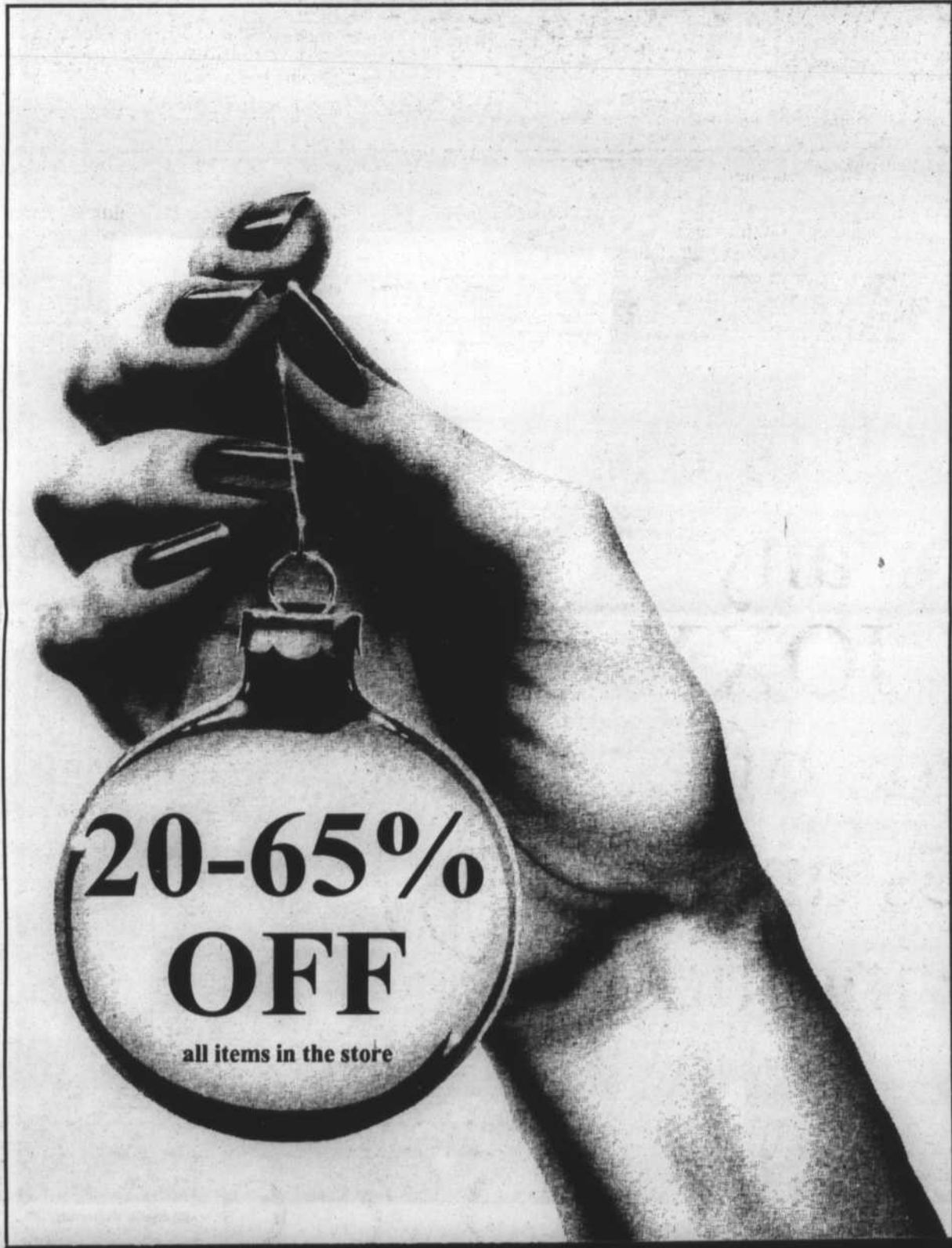
A decade later the camera caught me posing proudly with my firstborn. Two years later I had his sister in tow, and another three years found baby

brother Joseph captured by the Instamatic. Talk about change.

It's Christmas Eve, and I am surrounded by familiar faces and filled with wonder, anticipation and longing. Longing for the company of those whose faces are no longer present at my Christmas table. Anticipating the dreaded ritual of opening January's Visa bill. Wondering if the feelings of peace and goodwill can remain past the last refrain of "Silent Night" and into the coming year. Longing for a world made whole — as cliché as it may sound. (Told you I was sappy.)

It happens every year.
Some things never change.
Merry Christmas.

Lange-Kubick is a senior news-editorial and sociology major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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