

# A Christmas miracle on ice

It was rock-splitting cold. For two weeks, the furnace ran continuously and groaning cars didn't want to start. The bottoms of your sneakers got hard as soon as you stepped out the door and all the ponds were frozen two feet thick.

My mother and I were members of the Sachuest Skating Club, which used the outdoor rink on the hilltop at St. George's School. As we got off the ice, we rushed into the "hot house" to take off our skates and snuggle into our shoes. Pulling out of the dirt parking lot, my mother said, "Do you want to go look at Christmas lights?"

Of course I did. Back at home there wouldn't be much to do. TV had only three channels back then. Plus we could cruise around in our new Pontiac station wagon.

Well, not completely new, but new to us. It had originally been custom made for Count Reventlow, who lived on the Ocean Drive, and when it appeared on the used car lot at Bove Chevrolet, my father, a car aficionado, snapped it up immediately.

It was a gorgeous two-tone navy blue and cream, the roof and hood and lower half of the sides cream, the upper half of the doors and the full tailgate navy. It had whitewall tires and an impressive amount of chrome. The inside upholstery was also cream and blue and the radio was tops.

We took the usual route around Washington Square Park, then

we rumbled down the cobblestones of Thames Street, magical beneath swags of colored lights and displays in the store windows. We turned up Mill Street and climbed the hill to the stately houses around Touro Park, where the Old Stone Mill sat in the center.

From there it was down Bellevue Avenue past the Art Association, the Redwood Library, the bright white Muenchinger-King Hotel and the big brick Hotel Viking, then a right down Kay Street.

We were having fun. The heater was blasting and WBRU out of Brown University was playing the Beatles. Instead of turning onto our street, we continued along to Kay Boulevard and up the hill to Bliss Mine Road.

"Drive My Car," came on and my mother said, "That's appropriate." I took that as a sign I could crank up the volume.

Bouncing up and down on the sumptuous bench seat, unfettered by seatbelts (which had yet to become standard equipment), we turned on Green End Avenue and barreled down the hill, singing, "Baby you can drive my car."

"But whose car is it? His or hers?" asked my mother in a raised voice.

"What do you mean?" I'd never thought of that before.

"It's not clear whose car it is," she said.

And it was just at that moment taking a curve that we fishtailed and flew right into the driveway

of my mother's former piano teacher, Pearl Stevens, who had to be at least 90. She was reading in front of her Christmas tree, oblivious as we spun by the side of her house, missing it by inches.

My mother cut the wheels and hit the brakes, which only increased our speed and we propelled down Pearl Stevens's sloping backyard toward Green End Pond.

"Whooooaaa!" cried out my mother, sounding like a teenager. I held my breath as we slid over the embankment onto the pond, whizzing across it like a hockey puck, finally coming to rest in the middle.

My mother lowered the radio and looked at me. The moon glistened off the ice. It was so pretty.

"Are you OK?" she gasped.

"Yeah," I said. "That was cool!"

Slowly she drove across the pond to the low embankment just below my grandparents' lane, then gunned it to make the grade and the tires caught some of the rocks and we were up.

"Wait'll Dad hears about this!"

"No, sweetheart. Dad doesn't need to hear about it. He might think I hurt the car. Do you think I hurt the car?"

"Nah. It's fine. Where to now?"

"Straight home, sweetie. We've had our Christmas miracle."

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