

**James Cihlar**

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## **My Mother Believed in Christmas**

If my mother did not believe in the food pyramid,  
orthodontia, and sobriety, she believed in Christmas.  
If my father mailed me a check, my mother  
read the Sunday supplement from Holiday,  
the gas station on 13th where I would later buy  
my first album, Creedence Clearwater Revival,  
and choose a present from the wall of shelves  
stocked with Fisher Price imitations  
of the accoutrement of maturity. Faux radio,  
sham television, and phony telephone  
whose jangly ring disappointed with a null receiver.  
Were they homage or mockery of adulthood,  
the narrowing in of perception,  
items limited only to their intentions,  
when what I loved were the clash of colors—  
powder blue handle against snow-cone  
white body, sunburst yellow speaker—  
the hollowness and stiffness of inflated plastic,  
and the slight hint of formaldehyde?

My mother believed in Christmas presents  
just as she believed in staying home sick,  
eating what you want, and watching television.  
If my father believed in Chevrolets,  
she believed in Fords.  
If he believed in Nixon,  
she believed in McGovern.

They both believed in  
stationary disease—  
their definition  
of couch potato syndrome—  
and cigarette smoke  
as a cure  
for  
ear  
ache.