



# The Xmas Files

Some of our favourite writers tell us about their Christmas rituals. Pour yourself a mug of cocoa, settle in by the fireplace and enjoy their stories.

## The White Sofa

BY CHRISTINE LANGLOIS

**As a child growing up with an artist mother who painted mostly northern Ontario landscapes, but who saw painting opportunities everywhere, I knew Christmas was just days away when I walked in from school to find the old sofa had been given a fresh coat of white paint.**

The small sofa in question sat kitty-corner to the newer couch at one end of the living room. It was covered in fake leather fabric that my creative and resourceful mother somehow discovered could be made to look like

new with a quick coat of latex whenever it got dingy. This was a good thing, because raising six kids on one income meant her decorating budget was always tight.

Mom particularly loved to primp the house for her and Dad's annual Boxing Day/anniversary party. It was a fancy adult affair—the women were in cocktail dresses and everyone drank rye punch. So as close to Christmas Day as she could cut it (any earlier and some errant child would destroy her handiwork), she'd take paint and roller to the old sofa. Then the ceiling-grazing balsam would go up in front, with its multicoloured lights nicely set off by the sofa's gleaming

ILLUSTRATED BY ANNICK POIRIER

whiteness. (The tree placement was an added precaution to keep anyone from actually sitting on the sofa. Regular visitors knew better, but every year some new and unsuspecting guest would make the mistake, only to leap up at the sound of paint cracking beneath her, the backs of her nylons hopelessly snagged.)

By December 27, Mom would relax the sofa rules and my brothers would be back to racing their Dinky cars across its cushions, causing fissures and chipping along the piping. But for a few short days, the sofa glowed as a beacon of pristine glamour and our own version of a white Christmas. And to this day, a whiff of latex paint in December spells sweet anticipation.

## ▶ The Harris Ball

BY RONA MAYNARD

**For me, the first day of Christmas** falls whenever I unpack the ornaments from their layers of crumpled tissue. Out come my treasures, each one recalling a Christmas past. Paper birds, pocket-size wooden angels that once charmed our son, a freckle-faced karate kid to mark the year our grandson took karate.

And every year in a careless moment, I drop an ornament or two. The boxful of jewel-coloured birds with spun-glass tails has shrunk to just a handful. And the clear glass ball with the hand-painted stripes is now the sole survivor of a set we used to call the “Harris balls,” after the elderly

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