



Is it December already?

It's hard to believe that the holidays are here again and that 2011 is almost over. When we were little kids, a year seemed to last forever; now it just flies by. That time seems to go faster and faster the older we get; it seems like a cruel joke. It should be the other way around. Be that as it may, my 30-plus years as a letter carrier have brought me, as I'm sure it has most of us, many special December memories.

I was hired as a letter carrier in mid-November 1978, so I was barely out of orientation when my first Christmas season in the Post Office hit. Those early days at the Santa Barbara Main office, where I was initially assigned, are mostly a blur. So much to learn, so much to remember, all the while being deathly afraid that I might do something, or forget to do something, that would get me fired during my probationary period.

Of course, way back in those days, there was no DPS or FSS, so every last piece of mail had to be cased and people sent out a lot more Christmas cards than they do now. I can remember as a child watching my mom sit for hours at the kitchen table in early December with many boxes of cards and a long list of names and addresses that my dad brought home from work. My job was to seal the envelopes across the back with Christmas Seals. Remember those? We would send out and receive at least 100 cards every year, and that was fairly common. It's what people did in the '50s and '60s and even the '70s. Some still do, but not as many.

With all those cards to case, it was not uncommon for carriers to start as early as 4:30 a.m. stuffing their cases with dozens of letters per one inch separation. As a newly minted PTF, I was probably more in the way than much of a help. So when the veteran carriers weren't having me search the office for the "case-stretcher," I would arrive early in the morning, load up a ¼-ton jeep with as many parcels as I could and start delivering them before the sun came up. I remember being a little worried walking

up to dark porches (in my pre-uniform allowance civvies) and ringing bells or knocking on doors, knowing the patrons were probably still asleep or getting ready for work. To my surprise, I discovered that most people were very happy to see me standing at their door with a package.

I guess some of that could be explained given the season, but I also sensed that most of these people actually liked seeing the mailman, even at that early hour, even when it wasn't Christmas. We were the ones bringing them things they wanted and appreciated—messages and gifts of love. A letter from Grandma, a note from a child away at college, a birthday gift, a holiday greeting.

I have to admit that every time I walk out to the street to get my own mail, there is a tiny spark of hope that there will be something special mixed in with the advertising,

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unsolicited credit card applications and bills that seem to proliferate inside my mailbox. And when I get a postcard from my grandson, a thank-you note from a neighbor or a holiday greeting from an old school chum I haven't seen in years, I'm reminded of how wonderful this thing called mail is and how honored I am to play a small part in making it happen.

It angers me to think that there are forces in the country who are trying to destroy this awesome thing. We cannot let this happen. We must stop these people. We can do that by contributing to COLCPE, contacting our representatives in Congress, and making our voices heard. Give yourself a present this year: Sign up for automatic payroll deduction to COLCPE. If you are already signed up, contribute a little bit more. And then sit down at the kitchen table and send out 100 Christmas cards. ✉