

## Broken cherished ornament sends Auroran on 'Secret Mission'?



Catherine Rossi believes in getting a head-start on her holiday preparation.

Each year, she sets an end-of-November timeline for her and her family to get their Christmas tree up and ready, and last year was no exception – to a degree.

As she and her husband were just about to finish trimming their evergreen with one special ornament set to take pride of place, fate had other ideas.

'Last Christmas was a very busy time for us. We had a new grandchild who was born November 1, so we were busy and stressed, then we both got COVID for the first time after avoiding it for all those years, and it took a lot of effort [to decorate the tree] when we were both feeling not-so-great,' Rossi explains. 'We struggled through and we got up, and the last ornament to go on the tree is a really treasured one my parents gave to us the first year we were married.'

'It's always the last one to go up, and I carefully unwrapped it from the bubble wrap in the box and, as I headed towards the tree with the little gold filament of thread you hang it on the tree with, somehow, as I was just about there, my finger missed it and it smashed to the floor.'

The ornament that had meant so much to her was in pieces and her husband helped sweep it up.

'It was so incredibly sad for me, personally, because I just lost my dad a few years before that and it was a reminder of all the Christmases past,' says Rossi, who thought her husband threw all he'd swept up into the trash.

But that wasn't the end of the story as Rossi relates in 'Secret Mission,' one of 101 stories in the new book *Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Spirit of Christmas*.

*Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Spirit of Christmas* is billed as a book 'celebrating all the joy, gratitude, and humour of the entire holiday season, from Thanksgiving to Hanukkah, to New Year's.'

This is the second story Rossi has had published as part of the popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series in 12 years.

'It's a story of perseverance because it's taken me 12 years to get another story published,' says Rossi with a chuckle. 'It's not as easy as people might think it is. They get between 5,000 and 10,000 submissions for every title they're going to publish and they do somewhere between eight and 12 books a year.'

When asked what made 'Secret Mission' click with editors, Rossi says it's reminiscent of O. Henry's Gift of the Magi, a perennial favourite during the holiday season. She was 'thrilled' it was selected to be a part of this year's volume.

'I knew it was a good story ' I don't really know what the difference is in what they pick, because I feel that all my stories resonate with a lot of people, and I was relieved after all those years of trying,' she says. 'I was really on the verge of saying, 'You know what? I'm done. I'm not going to submit anymore.' All of the stories that get submitted to Chicken Soup have to be true-life stories, and it's just your everyday family life. I'm a big believer in looking for signs the universe gives us and I really hone in on those feelings. You just know when a moment is really special and it gives you that catalyst, that spark, to write.'

Speaking to The Auroran at the start of the week, Rossi says most members of her family have not yet read 'Secret Mission,' but one reader so far has been her 92-year-old mother, who gave her the ornament at the heart of the story in the first place.

'She was absolutely thrilled [and] it's a really nostalgic moment for the family, and it's bittersweet for me knowing that my dad's not here anymore with us,' she says. 'The whole book contains 101 stories and mine is just one of those 101, but I sat down and read the book cover to cover ' I kind of used it as an advent calendar this year reading a few stories every day ' and some of them made me smile, some of them made me laugh, and some of them I definitely had tear in my eyes when I read them. It's the human experience and the holidays are a special time of year.'

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter