

INSIDE AURORA: E-Changing Times

By Scott Johnston

Yet another Christmas tradition appears to be biting the dust.

It may not have been the most fun ritual, but it was a holiday staple; the trip to the mall.

You know the story.

You hop in the car and slide along in the dark through the sleety wet snow, kicking yourself with your figurative oversize winter galoshes, because you kept delaying that appointment to put on your snow tires.

Eventually you make it to a large mall like Yorkdale or Upper Canada, or a collection of big box stores. Then you circle endlessly in the parking lot, jockeying for an elusive space.

Eventually, you resort to stalking people leaving the mall, creeping along behind them, until they dump armloads of presents in their car trunks. Then, instead of leaving and allowing you to take their spot, they frustrate you by heading back into the mall for another round of purchases.

Finally, you give up and park in the furthest reaches of the lot, so far from the mall that you can't even see it over the curvature of the earth.

Then you get inside, immediately sweltering under all of your layers, and start pushing through the crowds. Elbowing your way through the entire population of the region, you make it to your destination store, only to find it as packed with humanity as a Tokyo rush hour subway train.

Of course, nothing you were hoping to find is available through all the picked over shelves, and all of the staff who you desperately need to assist you are either trying to deal with people insisting on using expired coupons from other stores, or hiding in the back questioning why they haven't called in sick until December 27.

You finally find something ? anything - and join a queue of people that snakes endlessly through the store like a line for a Disney theme park ride (?only 40 minutes to the front of the line!?).

By the time you get to the stressed cashier, you can barely hear him through the fake cotton snow you've grabbed from a display and stuffed in your ears to try to block out the 38th repetition of the reggae version of ?Frosty the Snowman? that's been looping on the static-laden store speaker system since you got there.

Checked out and purchase in hand, you step out of the store and immediately second-guess that your sister wanted a red scarf, not the blue one you picked up. But since you forgot to get a gift receipt, anyway, it's a moot point, so you breathe a sigh of relief?.

Then a sigh of despair as you realize you still have twelve more stores to visit in three other malls.

But all of that has changed.

Now, all of your seasonal shopping is just a click or tap away on your favourite electronic device.

Relaxing in your favourite chair in your PJs with a refreshing beverage, the world of retail is at your fingertips. A casual perusal of sites, a few clicks, and the purchases will arrive at your doorstep in a day or two. You can even have them wrapped and delivered straight to the recipient, so you don't have to bother with all that pesky face time.

I expect we'll soon be at the stage where kids will watch old movies of shoppers staggering between stores under armloads of presents, and ask ?what are they doing? Why don't they just go to Amazon??

But it's the 21st century, and times are changing. Sure, shopping online is convenient. Sure, it saves time. Sure, it's here to stay.

But without at least one instance of the chaotic mall experience, it just doesn't seem like Christmas.

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