

# My most perfect present

By Stephen Rusiniak

*"Even in the semi-darkness I spied all of the wrapped presents but something else immediately caught my attention..."*



I suspect that it was the anticipation that awoke me. The house was quiet and aside from the nightlight in my bedroom, it was dark. Naturally, I did what any other eight year old under similar circumstances would have done—I went to have a peek under our Christmas tree. Even in the semi-darkness I spied all of the wrapped presents but something else immediately drew my attention: a bicycle! I went in for a closer look. Unable to make out the name on the gift tag attached to the bike's chromed rear fender, I carefully removed it and brought it back to my bedroom for a closer inspection.

It was there, under the soft glow of my trusty nightlight that the words I saw leaped right off the tag: "TO STEVE FROM SANTA." I was beside myself with joy! After carefully reattaching the tag back onto the fender and right after gently caressing the bike's leather-textured seat once or twice, I went back to bed—now basking in the knowledge that Santa had brought me my most perfect present.

Of course, my anticipation now knew no bounds, and to this end, I simply couldn't sleep. In desperation I gathered my pillow and blanket and camped out on the hard oak floor just beyond my bedroom door—a mere three steps down the



**Not my bike but one that looks exactly like it. It's even out in the snow!**

the

stairs and then a couple more across the living room to where my bicycle was waiting.

Later that morning, when my family finally arose, I learned that my new bicycle was a Hercules three speed with “motorcycle-style” handlebar shifting and real hand brakes! Despite the cold, and later that afternoon, the snow, we became better acquainted as we toured the neighborhood.

We remained faithful friends for years to come—that is until the day when I received my driver's license. Only then did my mom's Malibu station wagon become my new bestest buddy!

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### ***the backstory:***

The older we become, the more then we tend to look back on the times and events that have been contributing to our dusty memory files. A couple years ago, around the holidays, and while fondly recalling my own childhood memories of Christmas, I remembered one special gift, my *most perfect present*, (and you know what that was,) and so I wrote a small piece about it.

Like many of the pieces that I write, once completed, my *perfect present* remembrance was tucked away into my files where it remained for a little while—only to reemerge as an online offering. It seemed like a *good fit*—that is until a *better fit* came long.

While sitting in my dentist's office, (my thanks, Dr. Trip,) I noticed a magazine, **Reminisce**, that claims to take its readers on a sentimental ride while sharing their cherished memories. I thumbed through this magazine and realized that my *perfect present* piece was a good fit for this publication, and after submitting it for consideration, the editors thought so too. And while they changed the title to *A Hero on Wheels* (why—I don't know,) my piece is otherwise unchanged and is now officially published!

### ***an interesting note:***

The editor asked, if possible, could I also submit a photo of myself from the third grade—the same year in which this piece took place. A strange request, I thought, however, a copy of my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade school portrait was located and now graces the pages of this magazine along with my holiday remembrance!

A copy of the magazine article appears on the following page.



## A HERO ON WHEELS

Mighty Hercules was waiting under the tree.

**A**NTICIPATION WOKE ME that Christmas Eve of 1963. The house was quiet and, aside from the night light in my bedroom, quite dark.

Naturally, I did what any other 8-year-old would do under similar circumstances: I went to sneak a peek at the array of presents under the Christmas tree.

Even in the unlit room I could see all the wrapped gifts, and an unwrapped one that immediately drew my full attention: a bicycle!

Going in for a closer look, I saw a gift tag on the bike but I couldn't quite make it out, so I carefully removed it and took it back to my bedroom for inspection.

There, under the soft glow of my trusty night light, the words leapt right off the tag: "To Steve from Santa."

I was beside myself with joy! I carefully reattached

the tag to the fender and caressed the bike's leather-textured seat a couple of times before going back to



**LIKE ANY SELF-RESPECTING** third-grader, Steve peeked under the tree on Christmas Eve.

bed, basking in the knowledge that Santa had brought me my most perfect present.

Of course, after that I couldn't sleep. Desperate for daylight to come, I gathered my pillow and blanket and camped out on the hard oak floor just outside my bedroom door—from there, it was a mere three steps down the stairs and then a few more across the living room to where my bicycle was waiting.

Later that morning, when the rest of my family finally got up, I learned that my new bicycle was a Hercules three-speed with motorcycle-style handlebar shifting and real hand brakes.

Despite the cold and, later that afternoon, the snow, the Hercules and I became better acquainted as we toured the neighborhood.

We remained faithful friends for years—that is, until the day I got my driver's license. Only then did my mom's Malibu station wagon become my new bestest buddy. ●

**STEPHEN RUSINIAK**  
WAYNE, NJ

Miss Pond, a nice lady in my neighborhood, told me I was her favorite helper and asked what I would like. My eyes lit up. A bike, I told her. I chose a 26-inch red Schwinn. That was in the 1960s. I still miss the best bike I ever had, and I still remember Miss Pond and her kindness.

**GILBERT ROMERO** • KETCHIKAN, AK