

## Christmas '96

It was a Christmas just like any other: I wrote a letter to Santa, alongside my wiser and more controlling sister. And by wrote, I truly mean pen to paper, for this was a time when Santa didn't have an email address; he actually responded to all the boys and girls of the world in handwritten letters and glitter covered envelopes. The letter read—I'm certain—something to the effect of:

*Dear Santa,*

*You are pretty great. For Christmas though, Jess (the wiser and older sister, respectively) would like many books, some movies, some toys and perhaps some new clothes. Rachel (the egregious younger sister) would maybe like something too.*

*Totally optional.*

*Love always,*

*Jess...and Rachel*

Upon finishing the letter—and watching the Santa Doppler 3000 make his way to New York City—Jess and I went to bed, awaiting a magical day of presents, mom's once a year breakfast casserole, and unlimited playtime with the new items that awaited us.

Jess and I awoke the next morning and quickly made our way down the hall to the now candy-cane-covered Christmas tree. Red and green presents covered in silver and gold bows rested beneath the tree's artificial pine. It was truly an idyllic Christmas morning. We quickly sat down and started clawing our way through the colorful paper. A few rips and tears later, I found who would soon become my best and most loyal friend: my beloved Cabbage Patch Snack Time doll. She was a lovely doll that mimicked eating

chips and veggie strips. She was also, unbeknownst to me, about to become a memorable technological fail of 1996.

Rachel Jr.—I named her with a humble creativity—followed me everywhere; I took her to Christmas dinner at my grandparents, trying to feed her actual food at the dinner table, but soon to be scolded for attempting to allegedly destroy her. She watched movies and celebrated naptime with me as I fed her at regular intervals, fascinated by the chomping noise she ate while eating food. I was in awe that she not only *ate* the food, she somehow digested and returned it to her tiny purple backpack. I stared for hours on end into her tiny mechanical mouth, convinced that there was some profound answer to how the food made it through her body and back out again. I was enamored by her magical qualities.

It was, however, a quick friendship for Rachel Jr. and me, as news broke out on December 30<sup>th</sup>: this popular new Christmas toy was accused of not only devouring her plastic treats, but also the hair of children as they slept. Rachel Jr. was considered a hazard to parents and children on a global scale. Rachel Jr. was on every news channel; she caused a three-year-old girl in England to go completely bald in one simple night, and in a similar but more traumatizing instance in Indiana, Rachel Jr. caused a young girl to be hospitalized.

Once Rachel Jr. was recalled off the shelves, I was still given visitation rights, but only under occasional, supervised visits. My parents feared that Rachel Jr. would mistakenly confuse me for one of her past victims and attack me as I slept.

It was a devastating blow to both the New Year and my childhood, but even further than that, represented the start of a new era: the failed technology that would

come and go throughout my life. In this technological day of never-ending new gadgets, trends, and social platforms, we've transitioned from running the 40 foot cord from computer to phone outlet, to getting the car with the best features (on repeat), to seeking the latest iPhone over and over. We've been overwhelmed, excited, disappointed, and resilient.

That's technology.