

My Mother Believed in Christmas

If my mother did not believe in the food pyramid,
orthodontia, and sobriety, she believed in Christmas.
If my father mailed me a check, my mother
read the Sunday supplement from Holiday,
the gas station on 13th where I would later buy
my first album, Creedence Clearwater Revival,
and choose a present from the wall of shelves
stocked with Fisher Price imitations
of the accoutrement of maturity. Faux radio,
sham television, and phony telephone
whose jangly ring disappointed with a null receiver.
Were they homage or mockery of adulthood,
the narrowing in of perception,
items limited only to their intentions,
when what I loved were the clash of colors—
powder blue handle against snow-cone
white body, sunburst yellow speaker—
the hollowness and stiffness of inflated plastic,
and the slight hint of formaldehyde?

My mother believed in Christmas presents
just as she believed in staying home sick,
eating what you want, and watching television.
If my father believed in Chevrolets,
she believed in Fords.
If he believed in Nixon,
she believed in McGovern.

They both believed in
stationary disease—
their definition
of couch potato syndrome—
and cigarette smoke
as a cure
for
ear
ache.