

Latter part of century saw Vancouverites holidaying in Hawaii, getting used to multiculturalism

Continued from page 6

Dec. 24, 1976 focused on the desertification of Africa, imperiled Kenyan wildlife, the comeback of the wood bison in B.C. and pot-head whales that had beached themselves near Halifax—a headline that must have elicited chuckles from dope-smoking readers.

In one story, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau criticized Quebec Premier Rene Levesque's decision to hold a referendum, dismissing it as "just another Gallup poll."

"If he loses his first referendum then later he'll hold another one. My view is that Quebecers are better off within Canada," Trudeau was quoted as saying.

Also in the news was the \$1-billion deficit from that year's Summer Olympics in Montreal. That city was personally on the hook for \$214 million of the shortfall.

By 1976, Vancouverites had developed a taste for spending Christmas in

Hawaii and for Boxing Day sales. All of the big clothing and furniture stores held sales, many with opening and hourly specials. So, too, did record and electronics stores like A&B Sound on Seymour Street.

Some of the more popular albums, selling for \$3.49 and up, included those by Jefferson Starship, Eric Clapton, Bim, Boz Scaggs, Janis Ian, Stevie Wonder, the Eagles and Led Zeppelin. All were on vinyl or cassette—or on eight-track cartridge.

A DECADE LATER, Boxing Day sales were an even bigger event. The *Vancouver Sun* of Dec. 24, 1986 contains advertisements that run for four pages per advertiser.

By the 1980s, it was possible to buy someone a microwave or a video recorder as a Christmas present, or perhaps even a Zenith "portable" computer with 256K memory and two drives, selling for just \$2,499.

Over in the Middle East, the Iran-

Iraq War was raging and Muslims in Beirut had kidnapped two British journalists. The Cold War had yet to thaw; one story reported how two Canadian CF-18 fighters had "deflected" two long-range Soviet military aircraft they'd intercepted off the coast of Newfoundland.

Closer to home, Canada Customs seized magazines destined for Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium, a Vancouver-based gay book store. It was the second seizure that month.

"It means it's going to continue," said store co-owner Jim Deva. "It's crazy."

In Ontario, Rick Hansen continued his Man in Motion cross-Canada odyssey. In New York, hospitals struggled with cocaine-addicted babies. Over in China, the pro-democracy protest started gaining ground.

THE CHRISTMAS OF 1996 was predicted to be "the snowiest in the past 60 years." By then, snow-

fall was measured in centimetres, rather than inches. The *Vancouver Sun* of Dec. 24, 1996 reported that up to five centimeters had been expected the previous night, with another eight to 15 centimetres predicted for Christmas Eve day.

Thanks to immigration from Asia in the previous decade, Vancouver had become a much more multicultural city. One story focused on Charles Dickens elementary school, whose 500 students came from 23 different countries.

Other stories reported that Israel was close to removing troops from the West Bank city of Hebron, that refugees from the Rwandan genocide were returning to their homes and that Sikh moderates and fundamentalists had clashed at a temple in Surrey.

Sales that Christmas season were "so-so," retailers reported. Skis, outdoor clothing, books and CDs were the only strong sellers; high-end apparel had taken a "nosedive" while

sales of consumer electronics were "not as robust."

The quirkiest news story that Christmas involved a British genetics professor who was trying to provide a scientific explanation for the "virgin birth" of Jesus.

The professor—"a committed Christian who believes in miracles"—postulated that Mary might have had both X and Y chromosomes, a condition that can produce someone who appears female but lacks a uterus and is sterile. What if, he mused, something had triggered parthenogenesis in such an individual and the resulting child—which would normally also be female—appeared male.

"I must emphasize that there is no certain record of parthenogenesis in humans, nor of a male being conceived without fertilization by a Y-bearing sperm," Professor Sam Berry added. "My point is that the possibility is not completely outside the realms of biological imagination."